



# Young people,

PARTICIPATION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
IN AN URBANIZING WORLD



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## Young people, Participation, and Sustainable Development in an Urbanizing World

A Working Paper

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**Cover photos: Top**, In Afghanistan, young people have positively participated in the Reconstruction Process. © UN-Habitat.

**From left to right**: For majority of young people, employment may not necessarily provide an income sufficient to cover basic necessities, Bangkok, Thailand. © Worldbank. Equipping youth with necessary skills helps them improve their access to livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan. © UN-Habitat. © UN-Habitat. Youth trainees construct the Moonbeam Youth Training Centre, Mavoko, Kenya. © UN-Habitat. Young people's access to education is the most tool achieving sustainable human development in Tetouan, Morocco. © Alessandro Scotti/UN-Habitat

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## 1. Introduction

**N**early half of the people in the developing world and 30% worldwide are under 25 years of age. One in five people is between 15 and 24 years old (United Nations 2004). It is estimated that 80% of global youth live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (UN-Habitat 2010). However, there is a stark disparity in their geographical distribution within and between continents, regions, and countries as well as between rural and urban areas. Young people are the core of a nation's future, yet this significant stakeholder is rarely involved in poverty reduction strategies, environmental planning, and sustainable urban development. Despite the momentum in the rhetoric on youth activism for positive social change, little regard is given to the views, opinions, needs, and perspectives of young people. In drawing attention to the relative neglect of young people in the 2006 World Urban Forum in Vancouver, Canada, Chawla, Bartlett, Driskell, Hart, and Olofsson (2006) noted that of the total of over 162 panels devoted to urban issues, only a handful of networking sessions explicitly focused on young people and their urban environments. Youth, on the other hand, were well represented, with over 500 young men and women from 52 different countries. The implication of this missing population in addressing issues of sustainable development is dire (Chawla et al., 2006).

Projects in urban development rarely reflect the manifold ways in which youth interact with and make active contributions to the communities in which they live. The role young people play, or might play, in sustainable urban development is yet to receive scholarly and policy attention. Urban development projects make few references



**BELOW:** Young people's access to education is the most tool achieving sustainable human development in Tetouan, Morocco.  
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to youth that go beyond descriptions of child-oriented projects such as schools, day care centres, and playgrounds (Simpson, 1997). To mainstream the concerns, interests, and perspectives of youth in development—more specifically, sustainable socio-economic development—beyond mere acknowledgement of their needs remains a formidable challenge (Frank 2006; Chawla et al., 2006).

Recent decades saw movements towards incorporating young people's particular needs in urban development and planning. These movements are reflected in, among other things, the acknowledgement of children's rights by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1996. The launch of Children's Rights and Habitat (UN-Habitat, 1996) and the UNICEF Child-friendly Cities initiative are also important cornerstones. Although the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) does not directly refer to urban youth, it is an important framework within which states and international organizations operate. The UNCRC implicitly shapes many programs and activities that impact youth in cities. The recent recognition of urban youth as subjects of research is also the outcome of the remarkable growth in academic interest in children and youth in development contexts, and the body of academic research that intersects youth with policy issues is expanding (Chawla, 2002a; Driskell 2002; de Waal & Argenti 2002; Ansell, 2005; Aitken, Lund, & Kjærholt 2008; Panelli, Punch & Robson 2007; Hansen, Dalsgaard, Gough, Madsen, Valentin & Wildermuth, 2008).

Within international policy making circles, children and youth are gaining considerable attention. Paragraph 13 of the Habitat Agenda states that:

▼ *The needs of children and youth, particularly with regards to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account. Special attention needs to be paid to the participatory processes dealing with the shaping of cities, towns and neighborhoods; this is in order to secure the living conditions of children and of youth and to make use of their insights, creativity and thought on their environment. (UNHCS, 1996).*

Young people in different parts of the world are impacted by and respond to complex processes of urbanization and its challenges: shortage of housing, inner city decay, urban sprawl, environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure and utilities, inadequate health and educational services, increasing unemployment, and poverty (Chawla 2002a; Hansen et al., 2008; Yitbarek, 2008; Mahiteme, 2008). The challenges they face in trying to establish a decent way of living are perpetuated by what is commonly called 'development-induced displacement' (see UN-Habitat 2005; Pankhurst & Piguët, 2009). For instance, urban renewal and slum upgrading projects in many parts of the global south continue to dispossess poor urban dwellers of inner-city landholdings (Yitbarek 2008). Relocation of inhabitants because of revanchist urban development policies, expansion of business district, and middle class condominium housing are all too common (Swanson 2007; Langevang 2008). Indeed, youth in the developing world face different and more challenges and concerns than their counterparts elsewhere (Chawla 2002a). Whereas rapid population growth and rural to urban migration influence the opportunities and life trajectories of young people in the global south (Panelli et al., 2007; Punch 2004; Ansell 2005), young people's lives in the global north tend to offer possibilities for prolonged youth, usually through tertiary education. A comparative study of youth in three cities—Recife, Hanoi, and Lusaka—documents that the lives of young people in developing countries are

not always similar to the lives of young people in the west in terms of demographic transitions, adulthood, mobility, and livelihood strategies (Hansen, 2008).

The lack of infrastructural, economic, and human resources, combined with the increasingly globalized political economy, limits the opportunities of many youth who come of age and enter into adulthood (Katz 2004; Christiansen, Utas & Vigh, 2006, Jeffery 2009, Aitken et al. 2008). In many places in the developing world, the interval between the end of childhood and the assumption of adult roles is increasing. On the other hand, limited opportunities for upward mobility are extending the difficult experiences of youth (Hansen, 2008). Although the lives and experiences of urban youth within the global south are differentiated, many of the challenges they face in the context of urbanization are highly intertwined. The sheer size of the youth population and their social isolation are two of the most compelling reasons for planners and urban developers to pay greater attention to youth (Frank, 2006). Young people are rapidly developing—physically, psychologically, and socially—and public decisions about city design, economic development, social services, and environmental quality affect them to a large degree (Chawla, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c). Sustainable urban development (or the lack of it) has far-reaching implications for youth because they are the generation that will experience the results of the decisions the longest (Frank, 2006). Tonucci and Rissotto (as cited in Frank 2006) argue that youth are “sensitive indicators,” and that, if development were to focus on meeting their needs, the “needs of all will be heard and taken into consideration” (p. 375). Despite this, the emphasis of both academic and policy-related research has so far been on two distinct categories of human populations or phenomenon—children/childhood and adults/adulthood. There has not only been a remarkable silence on the complex politico-

economic contexts of young people, but there has also been an, what Caputo (1995, p.19) calls, unhelpful *ghettoisation of youth* within research as well as professional communities of practice.

The purpose of this working paper is manifold. It seeks to review current academic and policy oriented research on the interface between young people’s participation and sustainable urban development. The review also examines research on the lives, capacities, and agencies of urban youth and identifies significant gaps. In particular, it focuses on the political economy of youth-focused development in an increasingly urban world. By ‘political-economy’ we mean the processes that shape the material conditions of young people’s lives in ways that reflect the workings of social, economic, and political power. At the heart of the politico-economic analysis is the role of structural forces that not only result in young people’s disenfranchisement, but also explain the perpetuation of their marginal position in society. Few key readings concerning young people have both presented and called for a contextualized understanding of children, adolescents, and youth whose structural positions in society are not always clarified (Hansen et al., 2008, Aitken 2001; Aitken et al., 2008; Katz 2004; Ansell, 2005). In elaborating the structural contexts of youth participation, we will focus on the ways in which power and control over resources and position in state and society influence young people’s life worlds both in the immediate socio-cultural environment and the broader politico-economic frameworks of the cities within which their lives unfold.

The working paper has the following specific objectives:

- a) To examine current research on the social, spatial, demographic, economic, and political contexts of young people’s participation in the urban south;

- b) To document notable examples of regional and international research initiatives that focus on urban youth and sustainable development;
- c) To identify the challenges that youth in the developing world face; and
- d) To identify critical gaps for further evidence-based research on urban youth.

These objectives are achieved through a systematic review of academic, policy-oriented, and 'grey' literature in order to answer the following questions:

- What do we know about the lives, agency, livelihoods, and capacities of youth in the context of sustainable development and rapid urbanization?
- What gaps in/for research can we identify?
- How are we going to engage urban youth in generating evidence-based knowledge that informs urban public policy and practice?

### 1.1 SOME CAUTIONARY NOTES

It is important to mention the following conceptual and methodological issues related to the arguments presented in this working paper. First, there is no common definition of what exactly constitutes 'urban,' and nor is there a clear description of the difference between 'urban' and 'rural.' Many countries use a population threshold to distinguish between urban and rural settlements. This threshold figure varies widely from country to country. The criteria for rural/urban also depends on the availability (or lack of) certain social and infrastructural facilities. Secondly, rural and urban are not separate geographical entities. Urban economies are often linked to rural and other urban economies, including cross border economies, migratory labour, and transportation networks (Lynch, 2005).

There are 'rural' activities in 'urban' spaces and vice versa, each of which contributes to the changing interface between the two (Lunch, 2005). Such rural-urban linkages not only disrupt the dichotomy between rural and urban, and facilitate the flow of goods and people. Rural-urban linkage is a testimony to the young people who spread and maintain social networks across different geographical spaces. Thirdly, given the absence of historical and regularly updated census data for many countries, available statistics on urban population are often speculative and not particularly reliable (Satterthwaite, 2002). This poses formidable challenges to a comparative analysis and generalization about the degree and level of urbanization and, not the least, on the lives and problems of urban youth. Fourth, slums and unplanned settlements are the sites in which young people in particular navigate life in the urban south. As one of the fastest growing form of settlements globally, and anecdotally one of the youngest demographically, most of the literature reviewed here focuses on such disadvantaged neighbourhood within cities. However, information on this segment of the population too is hardly accurate. Fifth, most research conducted by scholars in the urban south is archived in local libraries rather than available in digitally accessible formats, which also poses challenges. Sixth, there is no universal definition of children and youth, or where one ends and the other begins. This makes comparative analysis of the cross-cultural literature on children and youth difficult or problematic. Finally, there is a methodological challenge in distilling the impact of urbanization on the lives of young people from those created by wider forces of development, social change, and globalization.

## 1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORKING PAPER

Although this working paper focuses on youth is based on the practices and definitions of the United Nations (15–24 years), ‘youth’ is a value-laden and culturally informed concept. Therefore the second part of the review discusses a range of alternative conceptualizations of ‘youth’ from relational, intergenerational, and life course perspectives by drawing examples from the developing world. Part two also presents dominant (and often competing) views on youth and discusses the implications of these views on participation of youth in urban planning and development. Part three discusses the historical origins of the paradigm of urban development by situating the debates at the heart of ‘sustainability’ and ‘community participation.’ A brief theoretical overview of the different forms of young people’s participation from a rights-based perspective is also presented. Part four examines the civic and political contexts of youth participation, exploring the literature on young people’s abilities

to engage in and influence community activities in urban contexts. Part five focuses on the lives and livelihoods of children and youth in street circumstances and how they navigate, seize, and contest their position in a rapidly changing urban landscape. In part six, the political economy of young people’s poverty and exclusion will be mapped, and the social, political, economic, and cultural processes that shape and are shaped by young people’s involvement in a range of activities and mobility practices examined. Important questions of youth marginalization, unemployment, migration, informal livelihoods, and living conditions in slum settlements are discussed. Part seven provides a brief summary of the implications of the preceding parts, identifies the gaps in knowledge and offers recommendations for further research. Each of the parts is also accompanied by reflections of the literature reviewed. Although the review does not claim to be all encompassing, it covers key literature on urban (children and) youth and addresses the complex ways in which they impact and are impacted by questions of urban development and sustainability.

## 2. Conceptualizing youth

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of youth has primarily been understood in the same manner as the concept of childhood: as trans-historical, trans-cultural, and universal. The UNCRC gives a universal definition of children as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (UN 1989, Part 1, Article 1). Following the near-universal ratification of the CRC, the above definition of childhood has been increasingly used by state parties and national and international organizations—regardless of geography, culture, or economic conditions. By the same token, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the World Plan of Action for youth in 1995, the definition of youth as the period between 15 and 24 became a global commodity (Hansen, 2008). However, chronological age or ‘calendar age’ is rarely a universal way of defining childhood or youth (Ansell, van Blerk, Hajdu, and Robson, in press). Ruddick (as cited in Hansen, 2008) remarked on the irony of the exportation of the west’s modern ideals of youth to places and settings that lack the socio-economic resources to realize these ideals. More often than not, the conceptualization of youth is shaped by the cultural politics of their time and place (Bucholtz, 2002; Montgomery, 2009; de Waal & Argenti, 2002), and reflects certain social, economic, and cultural competencies and, as the proceeding discussion reveals, the fulfilment of expectations and rites of passage in *relation* to other stages of the life course.



**BELOW:** In most developing countries, a number of young people work in the informal economy where they earn low wages and are often subjected to poor or even exploitative working conditions, Onitsha, Nigeria

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## 2.2 RELATIONAL YOUTH

There is a small but growing body of literature that untangles the ways in which the concept of ‘youth’ varies according to class, ethnicity, gender, religion, dis/ability, and other social variables (Durham 2004; Christensen et al., 2006; Utas, 2007; Hansen et al., 2008). While it is generally accepted that concepts such as ‘youth’ or ‘adolescent’ are culturally constructed (Durham, 2004; Montgomery, 2009), the idea of youth is still misrecognised. Both within academia and popular literature, youth is often constructed as a temporary stage of life between childhood and adulthood. Contemporary notions of youth are also a western construct, exported to the rest of the world through academia and international aid. Academic studies often take their subjects for granted and “study that groups of people who fit into the age category of youth in today’s western world without exploring who is considered ‘youth’ and when and with what implications” (Durham, 2004, p. 529). This working paper not only reveals a significant discrepancy on researching ‘youth’ (and ‘children’) as an independent—rather than interdependent and often fluid—socio-generational category, but also reveals the ways in which these categories are highly situational. Whereas academics often focus on children below 15 or 18 years of age, policy makers have been shy of studying the ever shifting category of youth (Argenti, 2002). This is unfortunate not only because of the intrinsic importance of young people, but also because they provide a bridge between younger children and adults from life course perspectives (Argenti, 2002).

Moreover, as opposed to childhood (studies), which is now a recognized generational category (and field of inquiry) in its own right (Qvortrup 1994; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998), youth (studies) occupy a rather ambiguous position in society (and social science research<sup>1</sup>).

Youth as a stage of life is seen differently in different societies. The social and cultural meanings ascribed to youth vary extensively historically and geographically. The most conventional but less acknowledged form is *relational age*—a generational category or age grade (such as those in many societies in east Africa). This ‘social age’ is a set of relationships—senior or junior than—in which authority, right, and obligation are achieved rather than being attained naturally (Bevan & Pankhurst 1996; Dahl & Megerssa 1997; Aguilar, 2011). A central aspect of age grade is the subordination of children and youth to the power of (male) elders or seniors. The subordination is expressed and played out at the local level by treating all social subordinates as children, or “social cadets” (Bayart, as cited in Argenti, 2002, p. 125). As Argenti argues, in many parts of Africa, young men were not classified as ‘children’ as a result of their biological age, but rather because they had not achieved the level of economic importance that would permit them to acquire wives, and become economically viable agents.

<sup>1</sup> To suggest that youth have been ‘missing’ in social science is not to argue that there have been no previous studies of young people. Instead, as Durham (2004) argues, it is to suggest that previous studies on youth, structural functionalism that emphasize social control over creativity, psychological studies that view youth primarily as universal rather than a social-cultural phenomenon, and cultural anthropology whose main problematic has been enculturation into local traditional practices—say nothing interesting to today’s theoretical developments and the complexity of youth as a changing social category.

In his paper on the concept of the ‘accomplished man’ Droz (2009) focuses on the importance of socio-cultural and ecological contexts that shapes young people’s position in relation to their elders as well as what constitutes social transition en route to ‘full personhood:’

*The Kikuyu conception of childhood is consistent with a representation of children that is common throughout Africa. This “childhood ethos” follows a few fundamental principles: First, a child is not a full person and slowly passes through the different rites of passage—especially male and female circumcision—which give him/her a status within the group. Second, a child does not exist in a vacuum, but belongs to a family and has to give back the “present of life” s/he received from his/her parents: his/her main duty is to beget grandchildren for his/her parents. Third, s/he has to pay respect to her/his relatives and must obey them. A child in short, is not an individual holder of rights, but an evolving person embedded in a web of social relations informed by respect for both rights and duties. (Droz, 2009, p. 2)*

The conceptualizations of children and youth is thus based on and intertwined with what one might call ‘social functioning.’ In this functioning, fulfilment of rituals like an initiation ceremony and circumcision are key markers. They define when childhood ends and adulthood begins (Montgomery, 2009). It is documented that among the semi-pastoral Hamar people of southwestern Ethiopia, a successful bull-leaping ceremony is vital in order to find a wife, own cattle, and have children (Strecker, Lydall, and Strecker, 1994). Moreover, marriage, the ability to set up and run an independent household and have children, is central in young people’s maturity into adulthood. In these contexts, both childhood and adulthood refer to a moveable position in a social hierarchy more than it does to chronological age. ‘Children’

become ‘adults’ when they accomplish certain tasks and ascend this hierarchy (Argenti, 2002). The intersection of socio-spatial factors like religion, maturity, gender, familial obligations, and rural/urban location further contextualizes who youth are. Ansell et al. (in press) stress that although increasing significance is attached to the completion of schooling as a measure of ‘successful’ youth transition in many African countries, the key moment in most African youth transition is still marriage. It represents an abrupt change in social, economic and, until recently, legal status. Marriage defines who is considered mature in many places of the developing world. The ability to marry also represents a remarkable step in young people’s pathways to attaining a ‘respectable adulthood’ (Langevang, 2008).

Gender is an important social variable that influences the context and character of youth transition. For instance, the social expectations and experiences of boys and girls in cities and rural areas are hugely disparate. A rural married woman—especially with children—is rarely considered ‘youth,’ yet a married father can retain that status (de Waal et al., 2002). Hence, the upper age limit of youth in Africa is very elastic for most men, especially in urban areas. On the other hand, although for many African girls youth is the brief interlude between the onset of poverty and marriage and motherhood, poor women are often considered youth much longer in urban settings—even if they bear children (Hansen 2008).

The position of children and young people in society is shaped by familial obligations and relationships of reciprocity. Abebe (2011) highlights that children’s membership into the family collective and the wider socio-generational system is a gradual process.

*Fundamental to the way family collectives in Ethiopia function is how children are incorporated into the wider social system. Children are seen as being 'born into families,' and it is often a (male) family member who mediates a child's access to and full membership of the clan. In turn, the clan bestows upon the child his or her rights regarding the utilization of physical, social, and cultural resources (e.g. land, dowry, inheritance, social security). In other words, children . . . are seen less as individuals and more as members of complex family collectives to whom they owe duties and obligations in return for the securing of their rights, existence, and well-being. In this web of relationships, they are dutiful to seniors because being an elder is vested with the power to exercise authority and control over the minors. (Abebe, 2011, p.6)*

In most parts of the global south, young people are often seen as 'maturing' earlier because of poverty, shorter education, and increased responsibilities inside and outside the household of which they are a part (Punch, 2002; Robson, 2004). Poverty and geographical location often intersect to accentuate this experience. Bringing 'youth' and 'the city' together allows for the examination of the fluid meanings of youth as a life stage, pathways to adulthood, class and gender differences among young people, and the nature of urban life (Hansen, 2008). Moreover, it enables us to analyze the double dynamic of freedom and constraints, inclusion and exclusion, which is at the heart of urban youth's experiences (Hansen, 2008).

The above African perspective of young people's social position mirrors those of other parts of the global south. Drawing on fieldwork in Bangladesh, White (2007) documents how social maturity is a pivotal measure of cultural age. White argues that in Bangladesh, along with material provisions, emphasis is laid on the development of mental, spiritual, and emotional maturity of young people. This is assessed by how far a child, a young man or woman can

'understand.' Training is given informally through teasing, chiding, examples, and guiding, and formally through tuition at home, school, or *madrassa* (Muslim religious school). In general, rather than biological age, the ability 'to understand' is a crucial gauge of qualification for membership of the adult society (White 2007).

From a legal point of view, different countries use multiple age thresholds in their national definitions of youth, and grant young people's different statuses en route to adulthood (Ansell, 2005). In Brazil for instance, the age of majority is 21, while Malaysia's Youth Council defines youth as those aged 15–40 (Ansell, 2005). This is a broader age range than the African Union's categorization of youth, which ranges between 15 and 32 years of age. The Ministry of Families in Bolivia uses an age classification for youth that encompasses the 19–24 age group (Merkle, 2003). In Ethiopia, the category 'youth' includes people between 15–29 years (MoLSA 2004). The Ethiopian criterion is different from post-apartheid South Africa where the 1996 National Youth Act defines youth as a person in the age group of 14–34 (Du Toit, 2003; see Hansen, 2008; p. 9-11 for details on comparative, regional constructions of youth in Asia, Africa, and Latin America), and the institutional age used by UN-Habitat is based upon the legal definition of youth of the African Union as ranging 15–32 years of age.

Youth is a subjective phase of the life course. Young people often adopt multiple age forms—biological, legal, lifestyle, or 'street' age—for different purposes, different social contexts, and different locations. In the absence of vital registration systems, many young people neither know their true chronological age nor act on the basis of that. Instead they understand their social position in relation to who the eldest or younger is in their family or community and the socio-generational hierarchy of the society they live in (Aspen, 2003). This

relative positioning not only affects the distribution of resources, but also of agency and roles and responsibilities within families, communities, and beyond (Abebe, 2011). As Skelton (2008) points out, “young people who do not consider themselves to be children anymore and in many ways are not perceived as such by the wider society, may feel that the right defined for children do not apply to them” (p. 166). What this suggests is that failure to acknowledge this complexity creates a “limbo, a sort of unrecognized in-between space between childhood and adulthood” (Sibley, as cited in Skelton 2008, p. 166).

Who is considered youth and in what context is highly contested and rapidly changing (Durham 2004). Youth are viewed and categorized differently in and by different institutional and political contexts. The position of young people/youth in society is also perceived in constricted ways. Although young people who are 15–17 year old fall into both categories of childhood (according to the CRC) and youth (according to the practices of the United Nations), studies of youth tend to focus on different aspects of life than studies of children do. Youth have mainly been studied in relation to ‘problems:’ sexual behaviour, pregnancy, drugs, and violence (Welti, as cited in Ansell, 2005; Butler 2009) or involvement in armed conflict (Utas 2005, 2007).

What the above analysis suggests is that local, regional, and national conceptualizations of youth may not necessarily reflect an understanding of youth that is predominantly used by institutions working with them or the way youth see themselves. “To call someone youth is to position him or her in terms of a variety of social attributes, including not only age but also independence-dependence, authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, responsibilities” (Durham, 2004, p. 498). This means youth is a relative social position rather than a fixed generational category. It is a category

used by different interest groups to define ever-shifting categories of people (Argenti, 2002). That said, the contemporary notion of ‘youth’ also derives its meaning from the interplay between historical and present-day popular imaginations. A once localized western construction of youth is imposed on the global south (Stephens 1995).

Writing on the legacy of colonialism in Africa, Argenti (2002) explains how the idea of ‘youth’ has historically emerged from concepts of childhood that prevailed in pre-colonial societies, and also from concepts of youth as applied and disseminated by colonial and postcolonial governments. He not only argues that our contemporary notions of youth as ‘problems’ have roots in colonialism, but also urges scholars to question the mere representations of youth as demographic group whose identity and experience can be taken for granted. Historicizing the concept of youth helps us to

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▼ *reveal the extent to which the ‘problems’ regarding young people . . . today are not simply the result of successive inexplicable ‘crises.’ Rather, they are the comprehensible results of important historical changes that have occurred . . . over the last few generations, so that the social systems that exist today have been substantially transformed from the local-level kinship-based systems that existed a century ago. The roles of young people have been dramatically and irreversibly changed, and, as often as not, young people are orchestrating these changes themselves. (Argenti, 2002, p. 124)*

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As pointed out above, a central reason for the relative neglect of youth in research and policy is that ‘youth’ is an ambiguous social category. The lack of conceptual clarity of ‘child’ and ‘youth’ is used by young people and their supporters: teenagers sometimes claim the label ‘child’ to win sympathy, whereas those who wish to denigrate them

may call them 'youth' (Boyden, as cited in Ansell, 2005). Many young people also self-identify and are viewed by peers or their families as 'adults' long before they legally are. Durham (2004) noted that people in their early twenties in large 'urban villages' in Botswana often claim to be 'just children,' ineligible to join the local youth associations, to have boyfriends or find girlfriends, to vote, or to speak effectively. The limitations of prevailing frameworks to address the complexities of youth's lives as a dynamic social category led some scholars to suggest the notion of 'young person/people' for such groups of children and youth (Ansell & van Blerk, 2007). This is helpful because, as Wadhams (quoted in Mayo 2001, p. 283) points out, "it may be more useful to focus upon the social space rather than the years between childhood and adulthood." For this reason, denoting 'child/ren' and 'youth' as 'young person/people'—and as individuals inhabiting a dynamic social space—not only "acknowledges the integrity of the person/people's lives and experiences in their own right but also registers that they belong to a particular 'young' age group" (Panelli et al., 2007, p. 3). In so doing, we question some of the conventional ways of thinking about the category of childhood, youth, or adulthood while serving to disrupt the adult-child conceptual binary (Aitken, 2001).

## 2.3 DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN YOUTH

Differing societal views on youth have an impact on the perception, approach, and mobilization of youth. This section brings together two dominant but interrelated—and often competing—perspectives on youth and the implications they have for the role they play in development within the contexts of urbanization. These perspectives are youth as a stage of transition and youth as troubled and/or troubling.

### 2.3.1 YOUTH AS A STAGE OF TRANSITION

One of the most common forms of conceptualizing youth in research and policy is as a transitory phase—a liminal stage—between childhood and adulthood. This view sees youth as being caught up between the immature stage of childhood and mature stage of adulthood. The reluctance behind recognizing the agency and capacity of youth primarily stems from this developmental perspective. Youth is seen as a transient stage and as having no significance in its own right except to serve as a bridge to the eventual stage of adulthood. This means youth is not viewed as a phase of life as such but rather as an essential pre-condition and an indefinite postponement of adulthood. "If youth is a state of 'becoming,' adult is the 'arrival'" (Wyn & White, 1997, p.11). In this way, youth are seen as both 'not adult,' and as a deficit of the adult state of being (Wyn & White, 1997). The view of youth as a temporary period assumes that youth are inadequate, and in a process of a 'continued becoming, a never completed maturing' (Archard, 1993, p. 36).

The above view resonates closely with the Piaget's (1953) theory of processual personhood. Piaget's stage theory of human development presents a series of predetermined stages from infancy through adolescence up to the eventual achievement of scientific rationality—adulthood. It not only elaborates the progression from an "undesired or lesser state towards full membership of a community" but also valorises adulthood over other stages of the life course (Hart, 2008a, p. 3). According to Hall (as cited in Hart, 2008a, p. 5) "the instability, anguish and intensity [of youth are] a necessary precursor to the establishment of adult equilibrium." From this perspective, adulthood is constructed as the superior and final stage of human development.

The view of youth as 'waiting-to-be-adults' further overlaps with the dominant models of economic development, which suggest a universal trajectory of 'maturity' and 'catching-up' (Rostow 1960, 2000). Modernization theory posits that countries go through linear stages, starting from traditional society, passing through pre-conditions for take-off and drive to maturity before they attain the final stage of mass consumption (Rostow, 1960, 2000; Bernstein, 1971). Like economic development, human development is seen as having a well-defined path with a beginning and an end. The metaphor of staged development suggests that like 'undeveloped' countries that are supposed to get their internal dynamics right, children and youth need guidance, nurturance, and expert attention. For this, expert intervention ensures that the movement and progress from a 'lesser' state of children to a 'better' stage of adults is conducted smoothly and 'correctly' (Hart, 2008a).

### 2.3.2 YOUTH AS TROUBLED OR TROUBLING

The second major perspective draws on the ways in which on the one hand society views youth as problematic—as troubling—and on the other how the problems faced by them—teenage pregnancy, school absenteeism and dropout, theft, street existence, prostitution—perpetuate the notion of youth as being troubled. Public opinion on youth gangs in particular is negative: they are viewed as trouble-makers (Merkle 2003). In a recent book *Youth and City in the Global South*, Hansen and her colleagues (2008) demonstrates how young people in four cities were depicted from a dualist perspective: "from a 'welfare angle,' which views them as dependent and immature, thus in need of protection and 'improvement' and from a 'problem-oriented' angle, which characterizes them as troublesome and therefore prone to problematic behaviour that needs controlling and curtailing" (Hansen, 2008, p. 10).

The growth of youth as a social category is closely associated with the interests of a range of actors that have defined their agenda in relation to youth in new ways (Durham, 2004). In social services, youth were presented as a problem for public health, education, and other governmental and non-governmental organization projects. Anxieties about youth behaviours are also commonplace in international policy and foreign diplomacy. Demographer Fuller (as cited in Sommers, 2010) long ago coined the term 'youth bulge' to describe a demographic phenomenon typical of many developing countries, referring mainly to the large number of youth relative to the adult population, but it also conjures up a sense of instability and has come to be associated with threat and danger (Sommers, 2010).

The theory behind the youth bulge is that youth, especially young men, are statistically predisposed to violence, which is brought about by poverty and marginalization. Youth in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region in particular and in Africa in general are seen as violent and as demanding political change. That way, structural violence is made synonymous with young people committing or perpetuating violence. Although an important implication of the youth bulge perspective is the tendency to look at youth as a political entity—as this is what is currently driving global youth policy in the developing world—it presents youth largely as a destructive force. It constructs them as 'other,' a problem, and a 'lost generation' (Howana & deBoeck, 2005). The MENA region in particular is uniquely associated with the youth bulge thesis because much of the analysis in relation to young people's political activism is done in terms of US foreign policy, specifically on how to deal with terrorism (Urdal, 2006). This is well reflected in the political approaches to much of the right wing policy think tanks targeting "terrorism" and "terror states" as well as recent political uprisings that were largely initiated and run by youth.

The literature on urbanization is also replete with and reflects an increasing concern over the 'youth bulge.' According to USAID (2005), "urbanization concentrates precisely that demographic group most inclined to violence: unattached young males who have left their families behind and have come to the city seeking economic opportunities" (USAID 2005, as cited in Sommers, 2010, p. 321). To juxtapose the notions of 'urban,' with 'youth' produces powerful images of young people 'at risks' or 'as risks' (Panter-Brick, 2004). As Stephens (1995) argues in discourses about urban youth, there is not only "a growing consciousness that they are *at risk*" but also "a growing sense of youth themselves as *the risk* . . . as people out of place and excess populations to be eliminated or controlled" (Stephens, 1995, p. 13).

Moreover, the perspectives of youth as 'risks' partly emanate from sensational representations of their lives in popular media and in academic research. The tendency to 'care' about young people rather than 'empower' them perpetuates the notion of youth as being 'troubled.' "Studies of youth are too often studies of deviance or of problems needing programmatic intervention, rather than studies of opportunities" (Argenti, 2002, p. 127). A number of scholars have commented how this view denigrates youth and gives limited regard for their capacity for positive social change. Finn (2001) writes about how approaching youth from a social work angle tend to reproduce what she calls the "adolescent pathology industry" (p. 167). She highlights that by emphasizing how to address the problems of youth; the public and institutions construct them as passive victims of dysfunction rather than as active and productive members of society. Similarly, Durham (2004) notes how problem-driven approach to the 'youth question' in contemporary Botswana reflects a startling familiarity to the US context:

▶ *Teenage sexuality . . . was most problematised. Youth sexuality was made the subject of repeated research projects and the focus of various programs, [although] female teenagers were assumed to form liaison with older men. Teenage pregnancy also led almost all of the lists in the mid 1990s followed by HIV transmission, school dropout, and crime. Unemployment was also often inserted into the list [because it was assumed that youth are restless and violent] when the notion of youth empowerment had become a catchphrase of NGOs and government youth programs. (Durham 2004, p. 598).*

Although young people in cities of the developing world are productive in a range of livelihood strategies that are usually an integral part of or are extensions to family/household livelihood strategies (Schildkrout, 2002; Abebe 2007, 2008a, 2009; Abebe & Kjærholt 2009; Boyden 2009), the focus on youth's survival strategies has been on their criminal activities or in livelihoods that transgress moral, legal, and social boundaries (such as theft, prostitution, and drugs, see Staples, 2007, for more details on this). Recent studies on how young people get by in urban contexts reveal that involvement in such marginal livelihoods is not only necessary to meet the daily requirements of food and shelter, but also, at times, the only available option (Tekola, 2005; Staples 2007; van Blerk 2008; Langevang 2008, Montgomery 2009, see the section on youth livelihoods in part six for detail). The paradox is that the resourcefulness of young people is often overshadowed by discourses that present the unemployed 'lumpen youth' as unruly and apathetic. A negative take on the youth bulge is problematic because a "'bulge,' after all, is feared to burst" (Somers 2010, p. 5).

Closely linked to the discourses of urban youth ‘as risks’ are the lives of young people on streets or in public spaces. As the globalization of childhood and youth based on western world ideals persists (Punch, 2003), the belief that children should at all times be in safe, supervised, and controlled spaces is increasingly gaining ground. Childhood is supposed to be played out within the realms of the home and family. In commenting on how hegemonic views on childhood pathologise street children, Ennew (2002) traces an ideational trend whereby the place for “‘normal’ children and youth is inside—inside society, inside a family, inside a private dwelling and inside school” (p. 202). Ennew argues that ‘domesticity,’ ‘dependency,’ and ‘protection’ constitute the core ideology of ‘modern childhoods’ as well as what Boyden (1998) sees as the “global model” (p. 91). This idealized model is exported to the developing world through research, popular media, and the works of charitable organizations (Ansell, 2005). By being present in public spaces, children and youth in cities contradict normative views that childhood as work-free and a care-receiving phase of life (Ennew, 2002; Ansell, 2005) as well as the hegemonic views of what it means to be a child in the modern era (Stephens 1995; Panter-Brick & Smith 2000). Similarly, by living outside a family home, street children and youth are believed to be ‘out of place,’ breaking fundamental norms regarding what is natural or normal for their development (Ennew, 2002; see also Beazley, 2003).

Although many governments in the developing world may tentatively sing the praise of youth as ‘the promise of the future,’ they tend to fear them just as much for their instability (Argenti, 2002). This is because youth are perceived as—and became—threats to a largely undemocratically elected government. However, this reality seems to not only marginalize them from inclusion into mainstream politics but also deny them legal opportunities for meaningful participation

(Merkle, 2003). The focus of popular media has been much more on violent (male) youth than on youth as productive members of society. Sensational news on destruction, mass protest, and conflict that hit the media spotlight shows youth as perpetrators of conflicts (while children and women are victims). Although youth, from the age of 15 years up to 24, 30, and even 35 years have been demonized for their participation in armed conflict, young women combatants tend to be seen as innocent victims (Utas, 2005, 2007).

### 2.3.3 CONTESTING THE YOUTH BULGE THESIS

However, the idea of adolescence as a troubled time is not universal. Studies indicate that in some non-industrialized societies youth is seen as much less problematic than it is in the western world (Tyyskä, 2005). Scholars have further contested the connection between youth bulge in cities on the one hand, and on the other the insecurity and instability that it calls for. Most nations in Africa with

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▶ *bulge populations have not in fact had recent civil conflicts; and when civil conflicts do occur in countries with youth bulges, the great majority of young men never get involved in violence. Yet what is so striking about most African cities is that they are not far from difficult, threatening and unstable. Nor does the youth bulge and instability thesis take into account other factors related to instability. The fact that virtually all recent civil wars in Africa have their origins in rural areas also calls into question the alleged connection between large numbers of unemployed urban youth in Africa and conflict. (Sommers 2010, p. 5-6).*

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A significant limitation of the above dominant perspectives on urban youth is that they have little scope for personal and collective agency. When youth agency is acknowledged; it is often what Jeffery (2011) calls 'negative agency.' A lack of balanced perspectives on youth does not recognize their capacities for social change and action. It positions them as "heroes and zeroes, innocent and guilty—the problem and the panacea" (Jeffery, 2011, p. 3).

Stereotypical representations of young people's lives have contributed to a limited understanding of their varied and complex experiences. Panter-Brick (2002) outlines several reasons why a one-dimensional approach on youth 'at risk' is problematic. She argues that the young people are "classified as coming from an abnormal family and constructed, through the language used, as deficient (having a need), weak (being needy), and a subject of charity" (Moss et al., in Panter-Brick 2002, p.155). This view leads young people to accept adult images of their deficiencies rather than viewing themselves as positive agents of change (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006). The term 'street youth,' for example, has a connotation of delinquent behaviour, although such behaviour is exhibited by a few, not the majority (Panter-Brick 2002).

*It neither gives consideration to the experience or testimony of the young people in question nor to other facets of their identity, which do not necessarily have any relevance to the street. Instead, it becomes a cause of discrimination and triggers or strengthens negative social reactions . . . In addition, the problem to be addressed is defined as essentially individual and psychological, not social, economic and structural. (Panter-Brick, 2002, p. 244).*

Ayers (1998) concluded that these young people are in a peculiarly precarious landscape—constrained of opportunities, marginalized and demonized as a threat,

they inhabit a cultural fault-line that is bumpy for all and fatal for some.

The World Bank Development Report (World Bank, 2007) advocated for a positive take on the youth bulge. The central argument of this report is that there are certain countries in the world that are youthful and have a demographic context that is conducive to rapid economic growth. These youthful nations are resourceful and have the important assets of the labour force necessary for rapid social and human development. The State of the Urban Youth Report (UN-Habitat, 2010) further addresses the need for human capital investment—proper education and training—to be given to youth to assure their own and their countries' economic development. According to the UN-Habitat (2010) urban youth survey, the education of youth, especially females, is a key driver in accessing opportunities that come with urban life and for taking advantage of them.

Although most youth related research is done on how to deal with youth problems—drugs, teenage pregnancy—some valuable insights in the area of resilience<sup>2</sup> and assets is derived from these literatures (Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Ragan, 2004; Ungar, 2005). These literatures not only highlight the agency, assets, and resilience of young people, but also the importance of programs that centre on young people's assets and competence. These perspectives have been at the basis of the design of several youth-focused empowerment programs in the developing world including the 'One Stop Centres' and the 'Youth Opportunities Fund' promoted by UN-Habitat (2007a).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, the International Resilience Project which is a study on the factors of resilience in youth in over 1500 youth in 11 countries on five continents (Ungar, 2006). The study found that resilience is both "an individual's capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways" (p. 55).

What the above discussion highlights is that the generational category of youth today has become a less clearly demonstrated and much more contested stage of the life course. Concepts like ‘youth bulge’ is useful when it attracts attention to nations with unusually large numbers of youth who require support, but the instability thesis is counter-productive when it incorrectly colours most youth as dangerous and inspires unproven assertions about how young people think and act (Sommers, 2010). Moreover, the youth bulge literature contains little data featuring the views of youth themselves (Cincotta et al., as cited in Sommers 2010, 6).

By presenting the above dominant perspectives—youth in problem and as problems—this report do not wish to gloss over recent conceptual and theoretical advancements in youth studies that have improved our understandings of the multiple and differentiated ways in which young people navigate their pathways to adulthood. This theme is explored below. But it is important to emphasize here that research and policy tend to reflect the above views, often taking their subjects for granted and devise program interventions that have long-term implications to a hugely differentiated group of people.

## 2.4 SITUATING YOUTH IN A BROADER CONTEXT

A long-term perspective of young people’s contribution to social, economic, political, and cultural life of society should help to take the above perspectives and paradoxes into account. A useful point of departure is to examine the social and cultural practices and values that shape ‘youthhood,’ and how these ideational systems lead to the recognition of young people as social actors (Hart, 2008b). This requires the need to move away a view of youth as a homogenous cultural entity in itself (Christiansen et al.,

2006) towards analyzing the historical and socio-generational processes within which the concept emerges, derives its meanings, and operates. The working paper outlines three useful, albeit interrelated, analytical perspectives that are important to conceptualize and ground young people’s lives in the context of rapid urbanization.

The first perspective draws on Durham’s (2004) notion of youth as a social shifter—a changing socio-cultural construct that not only gauges the dynamics of urban life but is also an integral part of broader socio-economic and cultural transformation. This view sheds light on ‘youth’ as a “relational concept, ...whereby age is socially constructed, institutionalized and controlled in historically and culturally specific ways” (Wyn & White, 1997, p.10–11). Showcasing agency, the perspective of youth as a social shifter calls for the need to move away from approaching youth as a rigid developmental life stage to acknowledging that it is a dynamic and changing social category. In addition to the *relational aspect*, (how youth position themselves within and are positioned by society and how they seek to move within and across the category) (Evans, 2010a), this perspective reflects two interrelated conceptual dimensions. These are the *intergenerational aspect* (taking into account young people’s embodied relationships with other members of society found in earlier (childhood) and later (adulthood) stages; and *life course aspect* (highlighting the importance of long-term engagement with young people to examine how their individual capacities and interests with communities and society changes over time) (Evans, 2010a).

Youth is both a social position that is internally and externally shaped and constructed, as well as part of a larger societal and generational process (Christiansen et al., 2006).

*We must . . . see youth as both social being and social becoming: as a position in movement . . . to illuminate the category of youth as socio-politically constructed, as well as the ways young people construct counter-positions and definitions. A dualist analysis of youth—which sees the social and experiential aspects of youth as inseparable—pays attention to both the meaning that young people create as well as locates them within the social landscape they seek to move. (Christensen et al., 2006, p. 11, emphasis in the original)*

The second perspective is recognition of urban youth life in its diversity and complexity, and to examine the socially and spatially differentiated experiences of urban young people. These experiences are the outcomes of the distinctive contexts that moderate their lives differently. Differentiated experiences are also manifestations of how urban youth are variously constructed, interpreted, and experienced in places that are dissimilar in relation to demographic composition, economics, livelihoods, kinship, social networks, and family circumstances (Panelli, 2002). Because young people's lives are socially and spatially moderated, it is imperative to consider the significance of urban environments, along with other intersecting factors like age, gender, and poverty. While acknowledging these markers of diversity, however, it is important to explore the commonalities and differentiations of urban youth—what unites and divides young people's lives in different urban contexts—in order to allow comparability and a certain degree of generalization. This perspective has two implications for policy-oriented research: first, to reveal aspects of the rural-urban divide, that is, how the lives of urban youth are distinct, and secondly, to examine rural-urban linkages because these indicate not only the structural similarities around which youth generally pivot, but also how their lives intersect and dissect across the rural and urban interface beyond a mere consideration of rural-to-urban migration.

Thirdly, research needs to firmly situate young people's lives at the heart of cultural, ecological, demographic, and politico-economic transformations. An important point of departure here is to examine the ways in which cultural constructions of youth conjure up with environmental, material, political, and social worlds. If we are to understand the marginalization (and empowerment) of youth, we must consider not only the cultural factors but also equally the political-economic processes. It is important to bridge the "distinction between 'life world' (the world as experienced and pursued within relatively informal aspects of life) and 'systems' (the relatively formal processes that function beyond the specific subjectivities of individuals, shaping their lives and opportunities often in unseen ways" (Hart, 2008a, p. 9). This is because youth marginality is the outcome of particular ideological perspectives or cultural values, ideals, and conventional practices but also mirror the institutional 'systems' that create the material conditions that inform these ideological structures (Hart, 2008a). The analytical relevance of the political economy perspective is discussed below.

## 2.5 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF YOUTH FOCUSED URBAN DEVELOPMENT

As the proceeding sections of the working paper demonstrate, poverty, unemployment, bad housing conditions, and social exclusion not only impact youth but also shape the type and degree of their civic, economic, cultural, and political participation. Youth marginality (and empowerment) needs to be situated within the changing macro-economic processes associated with rapid urbanization. This means that there is a need to take into account both the immediate contexts and the 'bigger picture.' As the diagram below (figure 1) shows, the contexts in which young people's life unfold include the socio-cultural contexts

and broader political-economic and spatial settings. These contexts not only shape the environments in which they exist but also constrain and or enable their life chances (Panelli, 2002).

The double concentric circles in the diagram (figure 1) represent the fact that academic and policy-oriented research need to examine children's immediate urban environments, while also including wider regional, national, and global processes. The diagram demonstrates that the immediate and broad contexts are equally important in shaping the experiences of young people in cities. The political-economic contexts are the macro-level economic and political processes in which young people find themselves. These include, among other things, development programs that affect both the explicit material conditions and work requirements of young people, and the wider economic (and cultural) processes that position them (Panelli, 2002). As Panelli explains, socio-cultural and demographic contexts are those factors and processes that shape the practices and values of young people in the immediate experiences. They include different religions, ethnicities, and forms of social organization (e.g. kinship obligations; household structure, lineage and extended family systems, and patriarchy) that shape and are shaped by young people's competence and life chances.

FIGURE 1: Situating young people<sup>3</sup>



Many children and youth in the urban south are active drivers of change, shaping the socio-economic life of cities within systemic constraints and often in the face of extreme hardship. As DeBoeck and Honwana (2005) argue, they are “important actors in redefining and restructuring existing models of kinship and moral matrices of reciprocity and solidarity . . . they are the ones who undergo, express, and provide answers to the crisis of existing communitarian models, structures of authority, gerontocracy, and gender relations” (p. 3–4). In order to explain these complex phenomena, we need to situate children and youth within their socio-cultural contexts and tackle the macro-scale, structure-based problems of childhood and youth as shaped by broad-brush political-economic transformations (Philo, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Panelli et al. 2007

Political economic analysis refers to the systemic macro-level forces that are key determinants in the construction of 'youthhood' together with structural processes and context that perpetuate young people's exclusion (Hart, 2008a). It provides a platform for a fuller understanding of the relationship between the interplay of ideology/culture, economy, and development that benefit or constrain youth. At the heart of the political economy analysis are resources, power, and interests (NORAD, 2010). By examining young people's social and political positions in society, the perspective brings to focus broader issues that reveal competing claims over power, rights, and resources in society.

The policy implication of youth-focused development is that it brings questions of poverty and marginality at the centre of political decision making. This is central because, as Boyden and Cooper (2007) argue, failure to do so diverts attention away "from state and other actors with the power and moral responsibility to intervene and bring about change, with populations living in poverty being charged with using their own resources to support themselves through crisis" (p. 5). The crux of the political economy perspective, therefore, is the articulation of global processes and the localised experiences of individual youth to re-introduce social reproduction as an important but often missing aspect of debates around urbanization, development and globalization (Robson, 2004).

Applied to youth-focused development, key areas political-economic analysis are:

- The interests, incentives, and power of different groups in society (political and economic elites, social classes, ethnic, tribal and religious groups, indigenous peoples, etc.), and how these generate particular policy outcomes that may encourage or hinder youth empowerment.
- Decision-making and the influence on decisions on development of formal institutions (e.g. in the bureaucracy, judiciary, parliament) and informal institutions (e.g. traditional leaders, traditional and sharia laws) that directly affect young people.
- The influence of social, political and cultural norms, values and ideas, including political ideologies, and religious and cultural beliefs on shaping young people's relations and interaction, and political and economic competition and the consequent influence on development. (NORAD 2010: p.7)



## 3. Youth and sustainable urban development

### 3.1 ORIGINS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

This part first explores the paradigms of sustainable development and their implications for young people's lives in the context of rapid urbanization. Then it discusses international treaties that affect urban children and youth, and further ties these to the debates concerning rights-based approach on youth-focused urban development.

Although the approach of youth participation in urban development fits in well with the debates in development studies of 'empowerment' and 'self help' (Chambers, 1997; Rigg, 2007), it has been argued that the theoretical inspiration for involving young people in participatory development comes from a rather different, but related source. Beazley, Bessell, Ennew and Waterson (2009) point out that rights-based approaches in development, drawing on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the participation rights of children (Article 12), have been instrumental to bringing (urban) children and youth to the forefront of international forums and policy circles. However, the focus on CRC as a tool for research and practice does not mean that the recognition of young people in participatory urban development is unconnected with the paradigm shift that took place in social sciences in general and youth studies and urban development studies in particular. Instead, it exhibits a shared heritage and set of influences associated with rights-based discourses of 1990s (Frank, 2006; Skelton, 2008).



**BELOW:** For majority of young people, employment may not necessarily provide an income sufficient to cover basic necessities, Bangkok, Thailand. © Worldbank



Twin global movements that emerged two decades ago—the UNCRC and sustainable development—are encouraging urban planners to recognize the needs and capabilities of youth (Frank, 2006). Both the CRC and the principle of sustainable development have recognized that a strong tool for serving youth is to empower them to influence civic affairs, including in the realm of community development and environmental planning.

▼ *The needs of children and youth, particularly with regards to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account. Special attention needs to be paid to the participatory processes dealing with the shaping of cities, towns and neighborhoods; this is in order to secure the living conditions of children and of youth and to make use of their insights, creativity and thought on their environment. (Paragraph 13 of the 2nd UN Conference on Human Settlement, UN-Habitat 1996).*

### 3.2 SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The question of sustainability is fundamental in shaping young people's life chances. The historical roots of sustainable development can be traced to the development debate of the late 1970s, particularly to the failure of the economic modernization theory (Redclift, 2000; Willis 2005). Modernization theory is characterized by top-down planning. Focusing on a 'Grow Now—Clean Later' approach, the priority of modernization is economic growth rather than, for example, the quality and sustainability of the physical environment. In this model, urbanization is seen as a predictable cycle that is characterized by dualism of the modern and the traditional (Willis 2005; Potter et al., 2004). This view posits that the urban development process is one endeavouring to change from what are regarded as traditional, rural, agrarian based societies

to so called modern, urban-industrial societies, following the model by European nations (Potter et al., 2004). In other words, modernization theory views urbanization in both the developing and the developed world as similar, but at different stages of a continuum (Burgess et al., 1997). Urban sprawl and peripheral squatter settlement were seen not only as places of migrant population but also as forces holding back the progress towards the other end of the continuum—modern cities (Yitbarek, 2008).

This linear view of urbanization has led to a view of most cities in the developing countries as backward, unregulated, and uncivilized compared to the cities of the west, a view that is manifested or translated in many contemporary urban planning and policies. Such view has led to the demolition and eradication of many slums and denial/lack of recognition for inhabitants' tenure rights, which happened in diverse urban contexts of the global south (Hardoy & Satterthwaite 1998, Yitbarek 2008). However, slum clearances do not improve the situation. The continued process of rapid urbanization as the demolition of inner cities has resulted in the generation of what is known as illegal/squatter settlements on the outskirts.

Against the backdrop of top down urban development strategies, there were popular movements since late 1980s among scholars and development organizations—bilateral and multilateral—for 'bottom-up,' 'people centred' approaches for solving the 'urban problem.' According to Martinussen (1997), among the earliest events that became instrumental for the emergence and consolidation of new agenda for development was a conference in Stockholm in 1972 on Human Environment and a seminar in Cocoyoc, in 1974.

► *The real breakthrough to normative theorizing occurred in the mid-1970s, as shown in the NIEO debate, the Cocoyoc declaration, and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation publication 'What Now?' where the concept of [alternative] development was born. The discussion ranged from world order issues to national patterns of development, in which normative concepts such as endogenous, ecodevelopment, self reliance, basic needs and participation were prominent (Hettne 1995, p. 175).*

Policies surrounding urban sustainability in 1990s have been primarily concerned with managing the effects of rapid urban growth on the living conditions of urban populations (Evans, 2002). They emphasized sustaining successes, or developing a series of policy interventions that support and enhance economic growth in an era of rapid urbanization, and rising levels of unemployment. This competitive agenda has been coupled with policies that aim to support social reproduction and urban liveability (Evans, 2002). Hence, a new priority is given to the creation of sustainable communities that focus on and meaningfully engage young people as agents of social change on issues of environment and development.

The Cocoyoc seminar held in Mexico brought together two major strands of the 'alternative development' thinking. The first strand is the 'basic needs approach,' which holds that highest priority should be given to satisfying basic needs for food, water, and shelter. The second strand is the 'sustainability approach,' which was primarily concerned with minimizing the destruction of the environment and the exhaustion of non-renewable natural resources (Martinussen 1997; Carney 1998; Friedmann 2002). Despite this split, increasing emphasis was put on processes that went beyond the satisfaction of needs to the empowerment of individuals and households through their involvement in environmentally, socially, and politically

relevant actions (Lund, 1994; 2008). Unlike in the mainstream development (e.g. modernization), the theory of alternative, sustainable development became focused on people, including youth, and their environment rather than on mere economic production, growth, and profits (Martinussen 1997; Carney 1998; Redclift 2000).

Nerfin (1977) outlined the central pillars of alternative development:

- Need-oriented—meeting human needs, both material and non material;
- Endogenous—stemming from the heart of each society, anchored in its values and the version of its future;
- Self-reliant—implying that each society relies primarily on its own strength and resources in terms of its members' energies and its natural and cultural environment;
- Ecologically sound—utilizing rationally the resources of the biosphere in full awareness of the potential of local ecosystems as well as the global and local outer limits imposed on present and future generations; and
- Based on structural transformation—so as to realize the conditions of self-management and participation in decision-making by all those affected by it, from the rural or urban community to the world as a whole, without which the goals above could not be achieved (Nerfin, 1977, p. 10).

Although there are many different strands of alternative development, these strands in one way or the other imply one or all of the 'pillars.' These pillars have direct implications for young people and the role they play in sustainable urban development. Translating them into youth-focused development means:

- a) An emphasis on young people's individual and collective participation (*structural transformation*);
- b) Utilization of young people's knowledge and value systems (*endogenous*);
- c) Inclusion of young people in planning and implementation of programs (for *self-reliance*);
- d) Empowerment and ownership of the process; and
- e) A consideration of young people's specific needs (*need oriented*).

These perspectives are critical cornerstones for youth-focused development because they not only move away from the view of young people as passive recipients of development outcomes (growth), they also recognize them as competent actors who can meaningfully contribute to the development of their environments.

A fundamentally new dimension of thinking about the role of young people in urban development came from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. In this conference, a new definition of development was adopted. Development—sustainable development—is one that balances economic growth with the protection of the environment so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations (UN, 1992). Urban sustainability is redefined as being about the future and quality of life of communities. Agenda 21 states that since human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development, they

are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature (UN, 1992). This principle highlights that simultaneous achievement of environmental, social, and economic goals should meet the needs of today's children and youth without compromising those of future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, as cited in Malone, 2001). Additional areas of concern emphasized in the Rio meeting were social equity and the eradication of poverty (Principle 5) and that environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens. Hence, it is important to recognize that youth's involvement in environmental issue is entwined with and inseparable from the need to involve children.

► *Sustainable development conserves resources for the future, and societies reach the future through their children. Children are not only a special interest group but also the care and opportunities that they receive during this period largely determine their chances of living a healthy and productive life and contributing to society for the rest of their lives. (Chawla et al., 2006, p. 538)*

Drawing attention to the relationship of the earth's ecosystem and the importance of managing consumption, especially of cities, Evans (2002) writes, the fundamental debate of sustainability—and sustainable development—is an urban issue because for all wealth concentration in cities, poverty is widespread in rural areas. It is in the large cities where most of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions occur, and where the demand for natural resources from metropolitan complexes uses most resources of the planet (ibid).

While the paradigm of sustainable development gained enormous popularity particularly among grassroots development agents—NGOs and civil society organizations—it is a loosely connected

approach to development (Pieterse, 2001). It is not clear what sustainable development entails and if it has matured to the level of a coherent theory and strategy for action. Pieterse (2001) asserts that although the premises behind sustainable development is that it is people-centred, that genuine development knowledge is people's knowledge, and that what counts is local rather than abstract, expert knowledge. In addition, there is no consensus as to who defines the environmental needs of societies in the urban south, not the least the environmental needs of children and youth. Nor should one assume that these needs remain the same over time and between different geographical contexts. Academics and policy makers alike have debated over whether, why, and how development shall be seen from ecological, economic, or sociological perspective (see, Evans 2002; Chambers, 2005). Redcliff (2000) highlights that sustainable development does not recognize the power imbalances in international politics over resource use and the environment. Sustainable development tends to pay inadequate regard to the role and power of external knowledge, factors, and processes in setting agendas for change in an increasingly globalized world. Despite an increased call for and recognition of the need to 'think globally act locally,' there is a tendency to neglect powerful imbalances in north-south relations for addressing global environmental challenges. How do global transformations in the environment and resource use impact young people's lives in real time and place across the world? How can one connect micro-level resources and actions with mounting macro-level problems and strategies? To 'act locally' without taking into account structural differences in economics and politics is problematic and a serious underestimation of the fundamental causes of present day environmental problems.

A key dimension to environmental sustainability is education, and successful transmission of local knowledge about the environment<sup>4</sup>. Environmental education requires knowledge of and sensitivity to care for the environment. Although most environmental programs focus on schools, the community and neighbourhoods are vital sources of learning informal knowledge. Katz (1986, 1994, 2004) emphasizes the importance of environmental knowledge of children that is rooted in everyday sites of economic production and social reproduction. Her research in Sudan highlights that children's environmental knowledge is closely entwined with their work as herders, in agriculture, and play outside the home, and that the gradual dissociation of children from these environments result in the loss of essential life skills. Few studies document that knowledge about ecology and environmental problems—the main content of school curricula and mass media messages—is not enough to produce responsible behaviour (Chawla 1992, 2002a).

Recently, there have been several attempts to organize children and youth into environmental clubs—especially at schools—and engage them in conservation programs across the developing world. This is partly to respond to the need to raise awareness of pupils about the link between human activities and the ecosystem, but also to collectively respond to the local manifestations of several global environmental challenges such as pollution, soil erosion, land degradation, drying of lakes, and deforestation. However, fundamental challenges remain, namely to link young people's informal learning about

<sup>4</sup> Instrumental examples in advancing children's environmental knowledge are the Children's Environment's Research Group of the City University of New York [http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/cerg/about\\_cerg/index.htm](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/cerg/about_cerg/index.htm)

the environment with knowledge from school curricula, up-scaling local, community level initiatives, and make it part of the wider national effort and strategy.

Closely tied to the question of sustainable urban development is that of translating individual knowledge into action. As Chawla (2002a) points out, effective education for the sustainability of the environment has three facets: education *about* the environment (information), education *in* the environment (time spent out of doors, in the community and neighbourhood) and education *for* the environment (learning how to act effectively) (Chawla 2002d). Chawla (1992) comments that commitment to environmental action depends on a combination of factors that are usually acquired outside school. The primary sources of responsible action originate in the home and community. To take action, young people also need a sense of empowerment (Chawla, 1992). Questions of central importance according to Chawla include:

- How do young people develop knowledge of and sensitivity to their environment?
- What kind of environmental education do children and youth get informally?
- How can the knowledge from schools be integrated with young people's informal knowledge and learning from everyday life?
- How can environmental research help to meet the goals of involving young people's knowledge about the environment?
- What are the activities needed to promote genuine participation in caring for the environment beyond mere sensitization about it?

### 3.3 INTERNATIONAL TREATIES CONCERNING YOUTH

The view that young people are active participants who should be involved in decision making processes on matters that directly affect them is found in international treaties (e.g. the Dakar Declaration on youth, The CRC, UN Habitat Agenda). Although the children's rights movement began as early as 1923—based on the work of International Save the Children Alliance, which the League of Nations adopted in 1924—it has never been fully endorsed until the ratification of the CRC in 1989 (Ennew, 2008). Over the past two decades, there have been considerable institutional reforms and a broadening of youth-led policy agendas to embrace previously neglected groups such as the girl-child, and initiatives to grant a political voice to young people and improve their social conditions (Annan, as cited in Chant & Jones, 2005). The establishments of children parliaments and youth assemblies at community, municipal, regional, and national levels in different parts of the world are key features of the global movement to celebrating young people's opinions in matters that affect their lives (for some recent examples see Sarkar and Mendoza, 2005 and Merkle, 2003<sup>5</sup>).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is notable for its comprehensive view of children's rights, including the right to participate in decision-making processes on matters that affect their lives, in accordance with their capabilities (Article 12). With near-universal endorsement, the CRC marked a change in the way children are viewed, namely, as holders of rights (Skelton, 2008). In addition to children's rights to protection

<sup>5</sup> See *Environmental and Urbanization 2002* article on "Exploring youth and community relations in Cali, Colombia" (p.149-156), by Asociacion Arte y Cultura, Asociacion Mision Mixta, Fundacion Grupo Experimental de Alternativas Culturales, Asociacion de Mujeres Activas Por un Futuro Mejor, and the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSAs) in Kenya, and Sports the Bridge in Ethiopia [www.sportthebridge.cn](http://www.sportthebridge.cn)

from abuse and provision of education, health care, shelter, and good nutrition; the CRC introduced a third 'P'—for participation (Kjørholt, 2004). A range of commentators have argued that this is the most radical contribution and has been part of a paradigmatic shift in thinking about children and young people in global and national contexts (Kjørholt, 2002, 2004; Skelton, 2008). That said, it remains unclear whether the profile of youth (and children) on the international policy agenda remains as high today as in the early 1990s and whether debates have lost some of their critical edge (Chant & Jones, 2005, p. 186).

Focusing on children's rights in the Caribbean, Borrow (2002) argues:

*The distinguishing feature of the CRC lies in its emphasis on the participation of children in decisions affecting their own lives. Previous declarations had adopted a restricted and paternalistic view children . . . The CRC, in contrast, acknowledges the autonomy of the child and the accompanying principles of social inclusion, self determination and empowerment. (Borrow, 2002, as cited in Skelton 2008, p.167)*

The connections between children's rights, participation, and sustainable development have formally been articulated in a number of global declarations and documents. As pointed out already, the most significant documents for participatory approach in sustainable development and environmental improvement include the Plan for Action that resulted from the World Summit for Children (UNICEF, 1990) and the Rio Declaration and the action plan of Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992), both endorsed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Agenda 21 of the plan of action that the assembled government endorsed identified young people as major group who must help to make the vision of sustainable development a reality.

*The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilised to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all. (United Nations, 1992)*

Agenda 21 of the Rio Declaration further reinforces the role of youth in sustainable development.

*Youth comprise nearly 30 percent of the world's population. The involvement of today's youth in environment and development decision-making and in the implementation of programmes is critical to the long term success of Agenda 21. (United Nations, 1992)*

Since the CRC focuses on children below 18 years of age, its incompatibility with the conceptualization of youth as people between 15–24 years has led to a number of related international conventions. In March 1996, the UN General Assembly adopted the *World Program of Action for the Year 2000 and Beyond* (United Nations, 1996). This plan of action encompasses commitments related to youth made by signatory governments, an issue that was reiterated in the World Youth Forum held in Dakar in 2001. Similarly, in the document *UNESCO-mainstreaming the needs of youth*, it is further argued; "the most ardent wish of young people is to participate, as full and equal citizens, in today's world" (UNESCO as cited in Skelton, 2008, p. 167, emphasis in the original). The UN Assembly endorsed the 'youth empowerment strategy' because 'acquiring productive employment and leading self sufficient lives' is seen as a key approach to surmount the diverse problems youth continue to face. If such a vision is to be attained, however, youth need to get access to relevant education, employment, affordable health; protection from abuse and delinquency; eradication of hunger and poverty, as well as full participation in the life of society (Ansell, 2005).

### 3.4 RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

What are the implications of international treaties for young people's rights to participate in urban development agendas? The sustainable development agenda of the past three decades, with its future orientation, has focused attention on youth as the direct heirs to the consequences of current environmental and social decisions (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). However, what is more significant is that these debates and international movements have shifted the approach in development studies away from 'needs-based' approaches that focus on problems to 'rights-based' approaches. In the latter, young people are recognized not only to have particular needs with respect to the environment, but to be well equipped to make a contribution to human settlement development (Ansell, 2005). These international policy instruments<sup>6</sup> further mean that young people need to be given due consideration not only because of their sheer demographic size, but also due to their immense potential in changing the future development trajectories of cities. Through participation in environmental projects, young people may also acquire a long-term interest in the environment.

Reflecting a relatively recent conceptualisation of 'development' in terms of human rights and freedoms, rights-based approaches recognise that welfare rights will not automatically follow economic development. The central commitment behind rights-based approaches is the fulfilment of basic human rights. "A fundamental human freedom is freedom from want. Poverty is a human rights violation, and freedom from poverty is an integral and inalienable right" (UN Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986 p.2).

<sup>6</sup> see Beazley et al. 2009 and Ennew et al. 2009 for detail on rights-based approach in research and programming affecting young people in the global South.

A rights-based approach incorporates the basic human rights of citizens in development planning and interventions. It is predicated on the ideology that when young people are effectively involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects that affect their lives, they understand the project's priorities, give in their input, and act as partners to accomplish project goals (Chawla 2002a, b, c; Ennew, Abebe and Kjörholt, 2009). A rights-based approach also takes its basis an inclusive perspective that emphasizes the rights of *all* young people who are excluded from key concerns of, for example, urban planning, poverty reduction, housing; sanitation etc. It focuses on questions like: who are excluded? Why?

In the context of youth-focused development, a rights-based approach is simultaneously:

- A tool for analysis that focuses attention on the global and local inequalities, inequities and discrimination which underlie poverty and social isolation of children and youth;
- A foundation for people-centred approach to development, based on a coherent framework of binding legal norms and accountability;
- A process that is holistic, participatory, inclusive, and multi-sectoral; and
- An outcome: the empowerment of young people to achieve their full potential, and the freedom to take up opportunities so that they might achieve their full potential. (Ansell 2010)

It is important to note that there is progression in perspectives from 'needs based,' to 'rights based,' to 'responsibility-based' approaches (Chambers, 2005). These shifts reflect the move from the recognition that youth have specific needs in society to one that underscores the importance of youth participation, to youth having both a right and responsibility based on their full participation as citizens and assets to their communities.

However, rights-based approaches do not address what concretely youth can bring to local, national, and international deliberations. Although youth participation in urban development can be seen as an inalienable right, like the rights of women, it also needs to move away from rights as a necessary component of sustainable development to an end in itself.

In summarizing recent findings from the multidisciplinary research into young people's Local Environments, Malone (2001, p. 10–11) points out that children and youth have nearly the same wishes no matter where they grow up in the world:

- They want clean water and enough food to eat;
- They want to be healthy and to have the space to learn, develop and play;
- They want friends and family who love and care for them;
- They want to participate in community life and be valued;
- They want to collaborate with adults to make the world a better place for all;
- They want peace and safety from threats of violence;
- They want access to a clean environment where they can connect with nature; and
- They want to be listened to and taken seriously. (Malone 2001, p10-11)

These perspectives of young people are key in ensuring their well-being from a rights-based perspective. Examining the implications of the CRC, UNICEF, and Save the Children Alliance (Bartlett et al., 2002) further identified what is known as 'children's environmental rights,' which are crucial for their survival and development. These rights incorporate children's protection from hazardous conditions and ensuring their involvement in education—especially for working children. In addition, children's environmental rights include adequate standard of living, a secure place to live, protection from injury and violence, access to nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation, health care, education, and places to play. The focus on urban environments also gave rise to the development of the Habitat II Agenda and, with children in mind, the *Children's Rights and Habitat* report (UN-Habitat 1996). Presented by UNICEF at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements at Istanbul in 1996, the *Children's Rights and Habitat Declaration* contained within the report draws attention to the important *role* children have in sustainable development: Children have a special interest in the creation of sustainable human settlements that will support long and fulfilling lives for themselves and future generations. They require opportunities to participate in and contribute to a sustainable urban future (UN-Habitat, 1996). There are also some recent developments. The United Nations Children's Fund devoted its annual report *The State of the World's Children 2003* (UNICEF 2002) to the theme of youth participation. Similarly, the successive World Urban Youth Forums, held biennially since 2004, stated clearly that youth are leaders of today, not only tomorrow.

## 4. Young people and civil and political participation

An important dimension that underpins the approach of sustainable development is that it offers young people opportunities for individual and collective change. The participation of youth is indispensable for a societal change and for deepening democracy (Merkle, 2003). It underpins the agency of youth who “are not a problem to be solved, but problem solvers themselves” (Rudolph as cited in Merkle 2003, p. 205). Youth participation can be conceptualized into two broad but interrelated ways:

- a) The role of young people in sustainable urban development, especially in social, economic, and political contexts and structures. These structures not only hinder or facilitate their empowerment but also shape their lives.
- b) Youth participation in research. In particular, exploring the mechanisms of effectively engaging them in different stages of the research process about urban issues.

This part of the working paper first focuses on the meanings, forms, benefits of, and barriers to youth participation by situating the discussion within the context of the role of young people in urban development. Next it critically contests and engages with the literature on participation, and elaborates on forms of participation that matters for youth in the context of urbanization.



**BELOW:** Young people should be supported to realize their potential to participate in decision making processes. World Urban Forum 3 in Vancouver, Canada. © UN-Habitat



#### 4.1 MEANINGS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation has become a catch-all concept. It appears to be “the word, concept and discourse to engage with when doing research or working with children and young people in the context of development. It is almost held up as a panacea for all the problems young people and children face in the south” (Skelton, 2008, p. 165). An appraisal of the literature on youth participation in urban development reveals that there is a range of contexts in which the term is used. Hart (1992) defines participation as “The process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is a means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured” (Hart, 1992, p. 5). In exploring the experiences of the involvement of youth aged 10–14 in India as part of the Growing Up in Cities Project (GUIC), Driskell et al. (2001) argue that participation is “A form of individual and collective self-realization that engages people in significant decisions making that, ultimately, challenges existing structures of authority and involves genuine transfer of power” (p. 78). While Hart’s definition focuses on the civic, political, and community engagement; Driskell et al. highlight the role of young people in questioning the status quo for lasting social change.

There is an already growing body of literature on the ways in which youth are involved in community and municipality level decision making processes (Guerra, 2002) with positive inputs to planning and solving local environmental problems (Cabannes, 2006; Bartlett, 2002). Civic and community level participation of young people seem to have a long standing tradition in some cities Africa (see Nieuwenhuys, 1997; Gaye & Diallo, 1997), but have recently gained international recognition (Bartlett, 2002; Cabannes, 2006; Merkle, 2003;

Borden et al., 2006; see also Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006, for more details on youth and community participation). In all these studies, participation is understood and used differently. For urban development projects involving youth, participation can be seen as:

1. The *voluntary* involvement of young people without their taking part in decision-making;
2. The *sensitization* of young people to increase their receptivity and ability to respond to urban development projects;
3. An *active process*, by young people in question taking initiatives and asserting their autonomy to do so;
4. The *fostering of a dialogue* between young people and the project preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in order to obtain information on the local context and social impact;
5. A *voluntary* involvement of young people in self-determined change; and
6. Involvement in young people’s in *development* of themselves, their lives, and their environment.

Recent years saw growth in critical perspectives on the concept of young people’s participation. In examining the conceptual application of ‘participation’ in development research and youth studies, Lund (2008) explains that:

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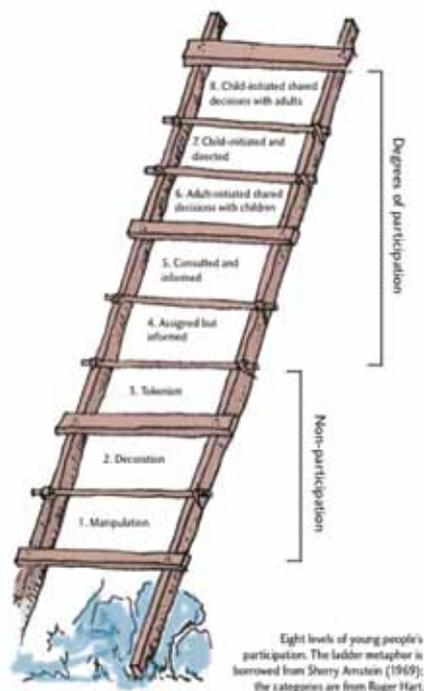
▼ *Participation . . . may be an end and a means it may be passive or active, inclusive or exclusive, forced or voluntary; it may be an enabling and liberating force and thus empower, or it may be a restrictive force and disempower. Furthermore, participation and empowerment is about sensitizing self and others, but it is also about organizing the capacity of the individual and the group. (Lund, 2008, p. 145)*

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Lund (2008) highlights that the meaning and significance of participation changes over time, pertaining to different scales and levels of abstraction. While initially the term participation was seen as a means to serve basic needs at individual and community levels, participation now is increasingly seen as a desired outcome of development to obtain individual and collective rights. In addition to practice oriented scope, participation has become part of a global discourse of development (Lund, 2008).

Over the past decades, scholars have produced models that explain the level and degree of young people in different kinds of development activities. Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Young People's Participation*, further developed by Hart (see Figure 1) provides a useful tool to analyze the approach and attitude adopted by the facilitators in community-led (including children and youth) projects. Hart (1997) identifies where young people are on the ladder by the power they exercise and the impact they have on the process. The 'ladder' allows us to see participation as ranging from one where children are on the one end of the a continuum—passive or mere tokens—to various degrees of participation, ranging from being a beneficiary to an active participating actor, where they have the power to partake in decision-making.

FIGURE 2: Roger Hart's Ladder of participation



### Forms of participation

1. *Manipulative participation*, where participation is pretence, young people's representatives have no power.
2. *Passive participation*, where young people participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It does not involve young persons' input.
3. *Participation by consultation*, where young people participate by being consulted. It does not involve decision making.
4. *Participation for material incentives*, where young people participate by contributing resources, for example, labour in return for food, cash, or other material incentives. Although this is a very common form of participation, young people have no stake in prolonging the practice when the incentives end.
5. *Functional participation*, where participation is a means to achieve project goals and objectives. It may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after a major decision has already been made.
6. *Interactive participation*, where young people participate in joint analysis, development of action plans, and the formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just a means to achieve project goals. When groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7. *Self-mobilisation*, where young people participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilisation can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. (Pretty, 1995, p. 6)

Hart's ladder has been used in contexts other than that of children's participation, including for understanding the place and position of youth in community activities. Others envision youth development as a horizontal continuum. For instance, Driskell et al. (2001) describe several steps in the process, from gathering information to program evaluation (see also Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006). Hart's ladder is interpreted differently in different contexts. Hart's initial model was criticized for developing the ladder as a progression—one step to the next with the highest level being either child supported action or child led action. He wrote a rebuttal to what he sees as the misinterpretation of the ladder and suggested that the children's rights community has created a model of child to youth development that ignores a child's development and gradual increase in agency (Hart 2008). It is incomprehensible to argue that youth-led participation is the final "rung of the ladder" because Hart leaves that possibility open. According to Hart (2008) there is no final level—young people led projects are not any better than adult/young people consulted participation if the former are not carried out properly. In addition, it is problematic to apply Hart's work for youth participation as the focus is more on children and, hence, there is a risk of 'infantilizing' youth-focused development when applying the model in the context of youth.

### 4.2 BENEFITS OF AND BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The benefits of youth participation are similar to those achieved through adult participation (i.e., public participation in general). It is argued that youth participation enhances civic capacity (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Hart 2008), thus enabling adults to gain a better understanding of youth (and vice versa). Participation advances the standing of young people in community and society's life (Checkoway

& Richards-Schuster, 2003; Skelton, 2008), and the benefits of participation to youth are amplified because youth are undergoing rapid psychosocial development and have had few opportunities for participation in the past (Frank, 2006). Youth participants directly benefit as a result of the educational, entertainment, or networking aspects of planning processes; they appreciate having a voice in public affairs and feel more connected to their community and the environment (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003; Checkoway & Gutierrez 2006; Driskell 2002).

Sustained involvement of young people in urban development projects can, for example, counter the epidemic of community disenfranchisement and allow communities—composed of youth and adults—to benefit directly from the project and policy outcomes (Frank 2006). Moreover, because youth act as resource and support for common values, their participation fosters social learning and indirectly facilitates benefits to the wider society. However, as Frank (2006) points out, there is little evidence that shows that youth participation leads to concrete community outcomes—this is a serious gap in the literature and in research. Available studies on participation do not view youth as resources (Finn & Checkoway, 1998), and much of it focuses on the merits of participation, that is, most of the research on participation is focused on the gains for youth, not on what youth participation can actually achieve.

### Growing Up in Cities (GUIC)

GUIC is a UNESCO-funded project that was first undertaken in the 1970s and revived in the 1990s: 10–15 years old in poor urban neighbourhoods around the world engage in research, action, and dissemination of their ideas. In the project, the ways in which children use local environments and how they evaluate local resources and restrictions are documented to better understand how the urban environment affects children's lives and to formulate indicators of enabling environments and child sensitive urban policies. GUIC has five objectives:

- Gaining an understanding of children's environmental interests and needs through participatory research;
- Applying this information to the design of programs and activities to improve life quality for children and their communities;
- Pressing for effective urban policies for children;
- Organizing public events to draw attention to urban children's rights and needs; and
- Increasing participatory research and action among academic researchers and staff of community based organizations (Griesel et al., 2002, p. 84)

Driskell et al. (2001) described the difficulties international agencies face when they are implementing action-oriented research projects with young people in low-income environments. To put into practice the principles of grassroots participation envisaged by GUIC, Driskell et al. (2001) point out that young people's capacity for participation in community activities often ignore their competence and wider fields of power and structure. The challenges also include coping with poverty and with environments that are impacted by violence or diseases. However, Driskell et al. also reveal the positive elements of young people participation in urban development activities. Participatory approaches enhance, for example, self-esteem and feelings of being valued. Involvement of young people in research and community projects also creates belongingness and knowledge about environment: "This is the first time someone has asked me what I like and dislike" (participant in *Growing up in Cities*, India, as cited in Driskell et al., 2001, p. 79.).

The above positive outcomes of participation are contingent upon how young people are involved in and mobilized towards certain causes. As Willis (2007) outlines, in its most radical sense, participation should mean that young people get to set the agenda about what projects should be adopted and how they should be run, in other words, when they are put at the heart of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development projects. It also means that young people are central in assessing the 'impact' of the project—whether the project in question has delivered what it has set out to achieve and how that has influenced them positively. In reality, however, such rights can often be very superficial, involving brief consultation along with contributions of labour and money (Willis 2007). In addition, the "big right"—but one often lacking in developing countries of urban South—in regards to engagement in urban decision-making is the ability to vote. However,

young people can't or don't vote, thus have limited influence on elected officials.

Although youth participation in urban development has been promoted for decades, it remains uncommon in comparison to adult participation, indicating that there are significant barriers to it (Checkoway et al., 1995; Adams & Ingham 1998). Planners often have limited knowledge of young people or experience working with them. Knowles-Yáñez (as cited in Frank, 2006) found that land use planning had little room for incorporating youth concerns and that the processes are legalistic, reactionary, and dominated by economic interests in which youth have limited bargaining power. Similarly, Porter and Abane (2008) highlight the lack of gender issues in planning of transport infrastructure. They argue that transport policy is commonly a male-dominated sphere and the needs of women and children are rarely taken into consideration in the planning of public transport system in sub-Saharan Africa.

The presence of adult-oriented institutions and powerful competing interests and adults' lack of understanding of youth combined with other political, economic, and cultural barriers restrict the occurrence and impact of youth participation (Frank, 2006). In other words, the reservations over youth participation originate with deep-seated societal views of youth rather than through reflexive practice (Frank, 2006). Frank identifies four dominant societal views on youth participation: the developmental view, the legal view, the romantic view, and the vulnerable view. These societal views have a fall out impact on whether and how the practice of youth participation is beneficial or practicable.

The *developmental view* sees young people as going through a period of early psychosocial growth and thus lacking the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours, and social connections of adults. This view questions whether young

people possess the capacity to participate in the demanding task of planning and sees adults as more competent to make decisions on behalf of youth and the community. The view directly undermines the capacities of youth. Frank argues that because the developmental view approaches young people as incompetent, they are passive recipients of development intervention and, accordingly, their ability to make meaningful contribution in planning, carrying out, and evaluation of activities in their environment is left for adults and external actors. Yet, from the developmental view, youth can be supported to become better citizens. Sabo's (2003) concept of pushing youth to be a "head taller" and giving them a platform for participation, and Kirshner's (2008) argument on guided participation and facilitation of youth activities provide useful comparative understanding of participation.

The second view that affects young people's meaningful participation in society is the *legal view*, which assigns youth partial citizen status because youth do not legally hold the full rights and responsibilities of adults, and treats youth as citizens-in-training. According to Frank (2006), the legal view questions the appropriate level of community decision-making influence that should be given to youth, supports the role of adults in providing accountability to the process, and focuses on the educational benefits to youth while discounting the opportunity for direct community influence (Frank 2006).

The third perspective outlined by Frank (2006) is the view of youth is as a period of relative freedom accompanied by free will, choice, and limited responsibility (see Saldanha 2002 for more on youth as a phase of identity formation). This *romantic view* of youth treats them as having values and capabilities that are distinct from, even superior to, those of adults. Youth, for instance, are thought to exhibit more creativity, curiosity, enthusiasm, and concern for community and

environmental well-being than adults. The romantic view privileges youth voices over those of adults yet insufficiently integrate the two in practice, thus leading to ineffectual youth participation. Perceived differences in perspectives, work styles, and languages leave both adults and youth unsure of how to interact with each other.

Finally, the *vulnerable view* of youth sees young people as less powerful than adults and therefore subject to abuse by adults or in need of adult protection. The vulnerable view questions the ability of youth participation to create meaningful community change because youth are perceived as not having the political muscle to assert their ideas and would instead, at best, be co-opted by adults (Frank, 2006). The vulnerable view also questions what evidence there is that youth participation indeed creates meaningful community change. Similar perspectives are presented by Chawla et al. (2005) and Hart (1997). They suggest co-optation of youth.

According to Frank (2006) the above four perspectives on young people reflect societal views that may hinder their meaningful participation in their communities. The focus of these views is restricted in the sense that they represent the practical work and policies of certain interest groups and agencies. This is perhaps one reason why there is a tendency to address the marginalization of youth in relative isolation. As Frank (2006) highlights, questions about impact and proper practice must be addressed before challenges can or should be made to political, economic, and cultural barriers. Structural contexts and constraints raise concerns about the impact of participation on youth since they could become disenchanted with the process when their recommendations are not heeded or when participation exposes youth to the rough-and-tumble world of politics. In addition, youth can be harmed when adults orchestrate youth participation opportunities to achieve adult ends that are not in the interest of youth (Frank 2006).

This leads to a situation where they become disingenuous. In this case, participation is manipulation and tokenism.

### 4.3 YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

As pointed out above, the reasons for promoting children and youth participation vary. This section focuses on some critical perspectives on young people's civic participation. There are recent "paradigm shifts, both in adult's thinking about youth and in young people's attitudes towards their own leaders as well as organizations and institutions, are key to enabling and encouraging youth involvements in arenas traditionally reserved for adults" (Merkle 2003, p. 214). Participation needs to be seen as contextual. Mayo (2001) presents two different approaches why participation is pursued as a goal:

- a). Practical approach—to develop more efficient projects and services;
- b). Empowerment approach—the need for using 'bottom up' approaches that is connected to the wider agenda for children's citizenship.

Cabannes (2006) documents a comparative study of young people who are engaged in resolving the community's most pressing problems, and in strengthening the capacity of local participants to support these improvements in four cities in Latin America—Cotacachi in Ecuador, Barra Mansa and Icapui in Brazil, and Ciudad Guyana in Venezuela. The ways in which young citizens can be active in the governance of and share the power in the urban consultation process of their municipalities is outlined in this work. The strategy for active consultation has been confirmed in four municipalities as a valid approach to improving the situation of children. It has resulted in tangible changes, especially with respect to young people's

participation in the discussion, prioritization, and formulation of their own concerns. Also valuable have been the less tangible changes in attitude that affect local people and processes over a longer period of time, encouraging attention to the situation of children and their capacity as active citizens.

The concerns articulated by young people in these four cases are marked by certain characteristics. They wanted lights in dangerous tunnels, covers for drainage ditches that threatened their safety, window repairs in schools, sports areas that could be completed for a small investment, or a doctor at the local health centre. However, to mainstream the initiatives of children into larger processes of governance is never straightforward. Cabannes (2006) indicates that although young people constitute a significant proportion of the population, they are perceived as one of the many groups whose interests municipalities are pressured to address. Making special efforts to include children in local processes can mean intensified pressure to create the same kind of political space for other groups (ethnic minority groups, people living in the streets, those with HIV/AIDS, older adults, people with same-sex orientation, and transsexuals among others.)

There were also challenges in acknowledging the full capacity of children, real local mobilization, and full commitment of adults in the consultation process, and to overcome what Cabannes (2006 p. 217) calls an "excessively 'adult' vision of urban administration."

In an innovative research project, Porter and Abane (2008) examine young people's participation in transport planning by drawing on fieldwork in Accra, Ghana. They argue that little attention has been paid to the transportation needs of the poor and powerless within African transport policy and planning. This article is an important but rare example of a project that connects children and youth participation

to the wider questions of infrastructural development. Drawing on the experiences of young people, the article highlights how transport services for young people are very important for sustainable development, but also argues that the needs of young people in planning transport services has never been acknowledged in important international agreements like the Millennium Development Goals. The authors argue in favour of exploring the mobility needs of the young people who are unknown and unconsidered in transport and development planning across the developing world. Porter and Abane (2008) point out that children and young people can generate relevant knowledge about transportation needs in order to improve policy. The article discusses experiences from Ghana more specific, including methods in participatory approaches with children and young people (e.g. visual methods). Central to this article is the call to involve young people in planning transport services, the practice of which is rare, also in the western context.

Merkle (2003) explores the paradox in the participation of disadvantaged youth in Bolivia. She argues that although youth are highly organized and active in social and cultural groups, they are not involved in local politics. Merkle identifies many challenges facing youth political participation:

Merkle (2003) stresses the need to promote participation that is inclusive and meaningful. "Enabling this to happen requires more than a set of participatory methods. It requires an understanding and commitment to participatory principles from every level of the organisations involved, from funding agencies to project staff and residents themselves" (Driskell et al., 2001, p. 86).

A critical concern over the efficacy of young people's participation in what is increasingly known as community-focused urban development stems from the question of what constitutes 'community' and the *place*

and *degree of influence* of youth have within them. Although much has been written on community participation, differing definitions of 'community' and the conceptual blurring of the terms 'participation,' 'participant,' and 'participatory' have created confusion (Cornwall & Jewkes, as cited in Skovdal, 2009). The euphoric word '[community] participation' has "become part of development jargon . . . No respectable project can use this 'in' word now, nor can it get funding without some provision for the participation of the people" (White et al., as cited in Rigg, 2007, p. 151). Indeed 'participation' as a concept is old, but the praxis of participation is complex and far from straightforward. Community and participation have been used not only to enable young people to seek their own solutions, but also to convince them into the agendas of others with a more top-down approach (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Lund 2008).

There are ranges of approaches under the umbrella of 'community participation' that empower youth to address their own problems. These include, among other things, local, community-driven projects carried out with different levels or degrees of community ownership and involvement. In suggesting ways of empowering young AIDS migrants in Southern Africa, Ansell and Young (2004) identify three variants of what is conventionally regarded as community based support for youth empowerment: participation *within* the community (i.e. not in formal/government institutions); participation organized *at* the community level, where coordination of service provision for young people (e.g. food, education, health care) occurs through the use of existing traditional community institutions as well as religious-based and village-based committees; and participation *by* the community, where resources (time, labour, money) are mobilized from community members to support youth-led development initiatives. In all these contexts, community

participation fails to consider that many young people experience multiple migrations and that they are newcomers to the areas in which they reside (Ansell & Young, 2004). Since many community-based programs lack funds, they tend to be donor-driven, seldom taking into account the perspectives of the beneficiary youth and families who may have considerably divergent expectations (Bourdillion, 2004).

Although community participation has become an act of faith in urban development—something to believe in and rarely questioned—research shows limited participation by youth. This is partly because an understanding of the processes whereby participation might achieve beneficial effects is still in its infancy (Skovdal, 2009). However, part of the criticism towards community based projects/activities result from the fact that many young people themselves are sceptical to it. Despite initiatives to enable young people's voices to be heard, there are still too many examples of tokenism with major gaps in rhetoric and reality, raising questions about the need for wider institutional change (Mayo, 2001). There are also concerns that the rhetoric of participation fails to address existing forms of power relations and unequal structures beyond the immediate communities (Willis, 2007).

▼ *local people view participation as a means to extract resources from donors. [Participation] needs to be understood as an outcome of the historical engagement of people . . . with external agents. And, this in turn informs and colors the ways in which local people respond to participatory development interventions. For local people, participation has little to do with self reliance, empowerment or even efficiency. (Rigg 2007, p. 38)*

Although many different types of communities flourish within a geographical locality, 'community' often refers to the inter-dependent system that exists within a geographical area. However, the different communities and community-based development programs that exist within a geographical location are likely to be influenced by complex interactions between various types of communities and identities that young people and their families belong to (Clever, as cited in Skovdal, 2009). Hence, 'resourceful communities' is a myth, and more often than not, structural and material constraints impact on otherwise dynamic, motivated, and well organized communities (Skovdal, 2009). It makes little sense to speak of community participation in an abstract, trans-cultural sense. Since community membership is so fluid, the resources available within a community may not be readily available especially to young people who themselves are mobile, their membership in communities shifting over time (Ansell & Young, 2004; Ansell & van Blerk, 2004).

Cornish and Ghosh (2007) argue that community participation tends to neglect the often hierarchical and exploitative social relations that typically characterize marginalized communities. Community suggests cooperation and cohesiveness among members, yet, as Campbell and Murray (2004) note, residents of geographical communities do not always share common interests, identities, and values. This could leave, for example, some community based cash transfer programs like micro-finances and credit systems for improving youth livelihoods open for nepotism, especially if such approaches are scaled-up to address the increasing demand for addressing material poverty (Skovdal et al., 2009).

In writing on 'genuine participation,' Skelton (2008) questions the rhetoric of young people's participation, arguing that it can be, or is, far from the reality. She argues that it is important to not only recognize the context in which young people participate but also question the authenticity of it—especially in situations where they are excluded and marginalized in other aspects of societal affairs, thus linking youth participation to power structures and hierarchies that exclude them in multiple ways. Skelton's argument is valid, and has a lot of resonance to critical perspectives addressed by others scholars of childhood and youth studies in the context of the global north (Stephens 1992; Kjørholt, 2002). Kjørholt (2002) argues that there is a danger of using young people as mere symbolic actors rather than as active and empowered participants. Furthermore, the complex ways in which young people represent an integral part in processes of economic, political, and cultural reproduction in society are to a great degree overlooked (Kjørholt, 2008).

Children and youth are critical resources in the sustainable development of the communities in which they live. Although their participation contributes to greater awareness of ecological and social justice, and potentially to a more just and harmonious society, they can be relegated to symbolic representation. In other words, rather than enacting real influence, participatory projects for young people might turn into 'prestige projects' that serve as tokens for certain political decisions rather than empowering and realising young people's actual interests (Hart 1992; Kjørholt 2002). Stephens (1992) points out, for example, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, that children and youth played an important symbolic role in the opening ceremony. Young people from different countries arrived at Rio harbour in a ship, the Gaia, a replica of a Viking ship, bearing a UNICEF banner that read:

Keep the Promise for a Better World for All the Children (Stephens, 1992). However, these children and youth<sup>7</sup> later expressed frustration because they were not actually listened to and taken seriously in the hearing that was arranged at the conference.<sup>8</sup> Stephens (1994) argues that critical investigation is needed into the potential hidden forms of cultural imperialism underlying some participatory models, for example: "those that would use participation projects as points of entry into and catalyst for change within families and local communities without sufficient regard for the meanings and textures of local worlds" (Stephens, 1994, p. 12). Hence Skelton's (2008) question: How can young people genuinely gain from participating in a system, a process, a model for development that previously has consistently marginalized them?

Similarly, Mayo (2001) connects young people's participation to wider political questions of participatory democracy:

▼ *Neo-liberal economic strategies continue to set the framework within which communities are being invited to participate, at whatever level. This point is simply to set the challenges posed by involving children and young people within these wider debates about participatory approaches to development and regeneration overall. Education for active citizenship through active learning will need to provide the next generation with the tools to develop critical perspectives on these debates globally as well as locally. (Mayo, 2001, p. 292)*

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to children, youth had a "preparatory process" called Youth 92, which was moderately successful, and had a final statement that was presented at the culmination of the conference. Action 21 has strong references to youth engagement.

<sup>8</sup> Having said that, Severn Suzuki spoke at the closing of the main plenary, and seemingly had great and lasting impact, as her video is now viral, with one version having over 5 million hits. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLV6jaZFLro&feature=related>.

Finally, while globalization is a structural force shaping young people's autonomy, participation has been seen as a way to encounter global forces and mobilize young people in this process (Aitken et al., 2008). By highlighting the inherent tension in discourses of participation, Kjørholt (2008) questions whether contemporary debates on participation have the "unintended effect of contributing to and accelerating processes of invisibility" (p. 30). She argues that there is a need to detect young people's traditional roles in social reproduction in different societies and localities in order to examine the forms of participation that really matters both for themselves and the communities in which they live. We need to ask:

*whether or not there are potential conflicts and tensions between notions of participation as constituted within rights discourses that are claimed to be global, and [youth's] 'traditional' and integrative forms of participation in social, political and economic life in different local and national contexts. (Kjørholt, 2008, p. 30)*

#### **4.4 FORMS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION THAT MATTER**

What transpires from the above discussion is that there are different forms and levels of participation. For instance, young people may merely be collaborators (during research or problem identification activities), or could be given power and control (during the intervention). There is a constant shifting between different levels of participation (Kjørholt, 2004; Skovdal, 2009), and enhancing or strengthening young people's capacities in a community context is not an easy task in the dynamic nature of communities. Such enhancement calls for forms of participation that matter and that are valued greatly by young people themselves. In suggesting alternative

approaches to young people's participation, Mayo (2001) presents two central conclusions. First, there is a need to avoid the risk of children and youth not being listened to in practice in spite of the rhetoric of participation. Secondly, there is a "need for significant institutional change . . . It is not simply a question of whether individual adults can learn to listen in new ways. There are wider questions to what extent the views of children and young people can make a significant difference" (p. 291).

The above review makes it clear that it is important to explore what participation means for young people, what it represents, and when it gains position in their lives. This is because meaningful participation is always dependent on the contexts of use, and has implications on the structural location and continuing commitments of stakeholders, including youth. Although participation is the key, what kind of participation and how it takes place needs careful scrutiny.

Summing up, there are three important issues. The first issue relates to the need to explore the nature and kind of participation of urban young people. This implies generating knowledge about the social and cultural context in which youth live. As the subsequent part of the review reveals, in poor urban communities, children and youth may be vibrant participants whether through their involvement in paid work, labour within the family, or in the urban informal economic sector. It is important to "question if these forms of participation are any less 'authentic' because they do not take place in the public arena and are not about young people identifying their own needs as somehow individualized and separate" (Skelton, 2008, p.171). This is not to undermine the importance of some very innovative activities that have put the agency and assets of youth at the forefront. The Youth Fund, which is meant to enhance opportunities by young people, is a very good example here (UN-Habitat, 2007a).

Preliminary data collected by UN-Habitat suggests that there are a large number of youth led agencies in many countries in the south. It is of vital importance to pay attention to the activities, meanings, and textures of young people's local worlds. This presupposes a consideration of the position of youth in an intergenerational structure, as well as linking participation to local practices and the transmission of knowledge between older and younger members of the communities that children and youth inhabit (Kjørholt, 2008). The intergenerational focus is particularly vital and is emphasized in *Creating Liveable Cities for All Age* as discussed in a recent policy paper by UN-Habitat (2008)

The second point is the need to examine the knowledge young people have to make participation work. Despite the fact that young people have specific cultural and environmental knowledge relating to access to and use of urban spaces and places (see Chawla, 2002a), this knowledge is rarely taken into account compared to the more-so flagged out form of knowledge in the context of civic and political participation. It is documented that youth have differentiated experiences and opportunities in urban environments. Young people's knowledge can make significant contributions to improving not only their quality of physical environment, but also the ways in which they question, contest, resist, and develop core ideas and rights in relation to urban life. It important to move beyond whether or not participation works, but in what context and what approach and attitude are necessary to make it work.

Finally, important challenges for future research are to critically evaluate and investigate the efficacy of a variety of different participatory projects conducted under the umbrella of youth led urban development. A major issue is to link such evaluation to research based knowledge about the role of youth in local cultural practices. An important aim with this is to identify best practices that can serve as examples for policymakers.

## 5. Young people and the struggle for urban space

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section focuses on the complex ways in which young people in urban south inhabit and make use of public spaces and develop social and spatial strategies in order to navigate the rough terrain of urban poverty and marginalization.

The last two decades have seen a proliferation of studies on young people who inhabit the street environment. A wide range of topics have been researched, including the health risks of street life (Panter-Brick, 2002, 2004; Raffaelli et al., 2001; Butler and Rizzini, 2003), youth involvement in different kinds of street based and informal activities like vending, hawking, and begging (Staples, 2007; Frankland, 2007; Swanson, 2007; Abebe, 2008b, 2009). The social stigmas of being 'out of place' and ways in which young people seek to develop positive social identities by forming, among other things, street subculture or use slang (Beazley, 2003; Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003) have also been the focus of research. Other studies examine the ways in which these young people develop complex strategies of resistance in order to survive the numerous negative, or, at times, harsh experiences and treatment by the public and the police (Bar-On, 1997; Scheper-Hughes & Hoffmann, 1998). A considerable body of this literature acknowledge the agency of young people who inhabit the streets, especially their refusal strategies to navigate through their socio-spatial exclusion and marginalization (Young, 2003; Beazley, 2003; Gough & Franch, 2005).



**BELOW:** Young people require public spaces where they are able to relax and socialize with their peers, Uberlandia, Brazil  
© Alessandro Scotti/UN-Habitat



Feminist scholars have been at the forefront of problematising the category of urban childhood and youth in street circumstances (Ennew, 2003; Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003; Beazley, 2000, 2003; Evans, 2005; Young, 2003; van Blerk, 2005; but also see Abebe 2008b, 2009, Ursin, in press). The literature on street children began to emerge in Latin America where the phenomenon of street childhood captured academic, policy, and media attention in the 1980s and 1990s. Following Aptekar's (1988) work *Street Children of Cali*, there has been a growing body of research on the connection between street existence, deviant behaviours and sexuality in Africa and Latin America (e.g. Veale, 1993; Rizzini et al., 2002, Aptekar & Heinonen, 2003; Aptekar & Abebe, 1997). These and other researchers have been instrumental in pushing the boundary of research on urban childhood and youth from cross-disciplinary perspectives. These studies have contributed greatly to improvements in the social well-being of the children, and not the least to broadening contemporary understanding of urban childhood and youth.

## 5.2 WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE ON STREET CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAY?

The study of youth in street circumstances is challenged by problems of definitions and categorizations. Classification of street children as children *on* the street and children *of* the streets have for long been used in academic research and communities of practice. These definitions are based on the view of the 'street' in direct *opposition* to 'home.' Children on streets are presented as an antipode to children inside the home. The term street child has a strong ideological overtone. Emanating from adolescents' visibility in public spaces, there has been a growing global trend towards the view of such children as 'dangerous,' a view that is translated into the concept of zero tolerance (Malone 2001).

The framing of urban space and youth research is done only from the perspective of street youth.<sup>9</sup> Research has documented how such young people are being viewed as 'intruders' in and 'illegitimate users' of the street (see Connolly & Ennew, 1996; Malone, 2001). Their presence often raises not only emotional responses that consider them as social pariah infesting public spaces, but also instigate powerful acts of anger and repression (Bar-On, 1997). In a lucid paper titled *Brazilian Apartheid*, Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1998) write about street children's marginality as follows:

Street children's "marginality" is derived from living on the edge and margins of society, and above all from their violating the neat social and moral categories that separate "home" from "street". . . a poor, ragged child running unsupervised along an unpaved road in a favela or playing the field of sugar cane is just a "kid", an unmarked menino or menina. That same child transposed to the main street and plazas of town, however, can be seen as a threat or a social problem: a potentially dangerous (or potentially neglected) menino de rua, a "street kid." (p. 358)

Nearly a decade ago, Panter-brick (2002) reviewed the literature on the ways in which theories on street children and youth fails to capture the full complexity of their material, social, and spatial lives. Most of the arguments Panter-Brick made in her review are still valid. The term street youth, or street children, is a generic term that obscures the heterogeneity in children's actual circumstances (Panter-Brick, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Examples of notable exception are *The One Stop Centers* that were focused on providing urban spaces that can advance the development of youth in a broader context to incorporate youth participation in community life (Driskell, 2002).

It conceals enormous variation in the 'experiences of youngsters who share the common condition of being . . . in street environments, spending their lives largely outside the spheres typically considered appropriate for children, such as home, school, and recreational settings.' Secondly, she suggests that the individuals concerned are all minors under 18 years of age, but from a broad age spectrum including teenage and near-teen youth as well as children as young as 5 (and sometimes, also the infants of homeless parents). In addition, the term is also imbued with pejorative or pitying connotations. Finally, the term deflects attention from the broader population of children affected by poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, "street children" is a construct that reflects various social and political agendas. (Panter Brick, 2002, p. 149)

The view of street children and youth as public nuisances misses the main reasons of why they are in public spaces in the first place. Directing attention on behaviour and the kind of activities they are involved in (most of which are out of constraints rather than choice) leads away from broader questions of urban poverty and inequality. It holds such children and youth responsible for the complex, and often powerful, structural and socio-economic problems that have affected them, their lives, and their families (Staples, 2007; Frank, 2007). Elsewhere, scholars have also cautioned against the construction of a unitary 'street youth model' that diverts attention away from the diverse ways in which young people make use public spaces (e.g. Beazley 2003; Connelly & Ennew, 1996; Evans, 2006; Young, 2003). They argue for moving beyond the psychopathological approaches of studying young people (Aptekar & Abebe, 1997) and their 'troubled' lives on streets to instead acknowledging the positive aspects of their lives, particularly their adaptability and the inventive and resourceful ways in which they cope in adverse living conditions (e.g. Beazley, 2003).

Lucchini (1996) elaborates important aspects of the 'child-street system.' The child-street system is a conceptual framework that demonstrates the diversity of relationships different children have with street spaces, depending on several dimensions that make up the child's subjective experience of street life. The central components of the child-street system are the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of street life, the dynamic behaviour (types of activities) of the children, self-identification, motivation vis-à-vis street life, and gender-structured differential access to street environments. The child-street system incorporates the social networks of children and demonstrates the complexity of their relationships and livelihood strategies. The analytical relevance of this model is that it reveals the complexity of street experiences, and that it has contributed to a shift in understanding of street childhood as situated in time and place, in other words, an understanding that includes the socio-spatial and spatio-temporal relations of between children and their families (Connelly & Ennew 1996; Young 2003), their mobile livelihoods (van Blerk 2005), and the ways in which gender and social maturity shapes their life trajectories in street environments (Abebe, 2009; Evans, 2006). This approach highlights some striking differences in the life circumstances and negotiated identities of street children and youth in, for example, Bangladesh (Conticini, 2005; Conticini & Hulme, 2007) and Brazil (Butler, 2009; Ursin, in press).

In a special volume of *Childhood* that focuses on 'children out of place,' Conolley and Ennew (1996) have further called for research on street children that goes beyond analysis of their relations with streets (and other public spaces) to explore the root causes of the 'street child phenomenon' (see also Dallape, 1996; Droz, 2006). The body of knowledge from this publication reveals that there are valuable lessons to be learnt regarding the material, spatial, and temporal geographies of these young people. It is

recognised that young street people are not mere victims, but take responsibility for their own actions and have some control over their lives (see also Beazley 2003; Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998; Van Blerk 2005). Many street children and youth are skilful agents and entrepreneurs (Gough, 2008). A considerable number of studies illustrate the marginal position of street children and youth—socially, economically, and spatially—within urban space and society. However, they also demonstrate how these young people manoeuvre through and trade out of their poverty and marginality. It is documented that youth in street circumstances resist their social place despite the fact that they are largely perceived as deviant and homeless minors (Young, 2003). Empirical studies also reveal how they appropriate urban space to fit their everyday activities (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003; Beazley, 2003). However, by focusing on the marginality and exclusion of street children, research has yielded a limited understanding of the settings, sites, and contexts where the youngsters are accepted and even incorporated into the activities of mainstream society (Ursin, in press). The strategies children employ include nomadic and episodic processes of homeless mobility (Van Blerk, 2005), inhabiting particular spaces at particular times, and using spaces that are immoral, impossible, or impractical for adults and mainstream society to use (Young 2003).

Adaptation to street life also depends on a many social factors. Evans (2005) uses the concept of 'street careers' and analyses the complex ways in which ethnicity, age, gender, and social maturity intersect to shape young people's life paths on streets in Arusha, Tanzania. Evans highlights the nature of children's livelihood strategies and how society constructed them as 'deviant.'

Both boys' and girls' overwhelming perception was that life on the streets was 'bad' in terms of their physical and emotional well-being. This was related to difficulties in meeting their basic needs, an unhygienic living environment which made them vulnerable to illness, experiences of harassment, verbal and physical abuse, violence and sexual abuse. Furthermore, they seemed to have internalised negative connotations of 'street life' dominant in the wider community, accepting the normative view that street life is morally 'bad.' This was linked to the 'deviant' behaviour they were forced to adopt as survival strategies, such as drug use, stealing, commercial sex work, violence and sexual abuse. (Evans, 2006, p. 113)

Evans (2006) concludes that young people's 'street careers' and gendered life-course trajectories are characterized by considerable diversity and fluidity of movement between difficult home environments, the street, the mines, NGO centres, rural, and urban areas. While girls are positioned as doubly marginal on the basis of gender and age inequalities and have differential access to service provision, they are actively subverting gender norms by seeking independent lifestyles in towns and cities.

Social maturity and physical size tend to affect the way children see themselves in public space, and in relation to society. Ennew (2002) highlights how the public view of street children changes from one in which the latter are seen as 'innocents' or 'victims' who deserve alms when they are young, but as 'dangerous' when they come of age. Such experience fits in with the common stereotype of children and youth in public spaces as unproductive—as unwilling to work, as destitute, as drug users, prostitutes, school drop outs, as 'street lumpen.'

### 5.3 STREET YOUTH SUB-CULTURE

Recent studies within *Children's Geographies* seem to have shifted the focus of attention from the street as a primary locus of young people's social interaction to the time and place of relationships, and to the ways in which street children create, develop, and sustain their own sub culture (Ursin, in press). An excellent example of such research is a study by Beazley (2003), who demonstrates how in Indonesia, Tikyan children on streets actively respond to their stigma and marginalisation of the main culture. Beazley documents that the Tikyan shows their degree of struggle and opposition to mainstream society by creating and occupying specific territories on the street and present themselves as cultural occupiers and social definers of those spaces. In doing so, they develop street identities as a distinctive way of life, embodied in beliefs, customs, social relations, and particular patterns of behaviours (Beazley, 2003).

Tikyan subculture is further manifested in a range of physical appearances and behaviours: dress styles, hairstyles, body piercing and tattoos, drugs, alcohol, and sexual activities. Beazley argues that although these styles and behaviours are perceived as negative, disturbing, in contrast with normal norms for Tikyan boys, they provide positive self-identity, well-being, and self-worth. Beazley further argues that to look tough is a vital aspect of Tikyan masculinity and solidarity. Despite the fact that many street youth are very poor, appearances in style and a certain 'look' are essential elements of their own and group identity construction. Through their clothing styles, street children contest, resist, and subvert the discipline and constraints imposed on the body by the Indonesian state and society.

Similarly, although in Indonesian dominant culture, the hair of males should be short and neat—for instance in the army, religious schools, and prison, where hair is shaven—most Tikyan boys deliberately adapt to punk hairstyles such as mohawks. Others cut out zigzag marks along the side of their scalps or shaved their heads. These styles are seen as a sign of 'reverse discourse' and resistance. Other ways of modifying the body that give street children and youth a distinctive subculture are tattoos and body-piercings through which they reinforce their difference and express their creativity. Using drugs, alcohol, and inhalants are Tikyan boys' habitual acts in order to show masculinity and be deviant in a predominantly Muslim society (Beazley 2000, 2003).

Another example of research youth subculture is one done by Tobias Hecht (2000) on the ways in which street children in Recife, northeast Brazil, produce meaning and identity. Hecht illustrates how street children identify themselves as *maloqueiros*—which gives them the image of being naughty: stealing food and money, fighting, use drugs and drink alcohol, prostitution. They see these 'bad' things as a betrayal of the rules of matrifocality. They claim that street life 'forces' them to earn money through begging, stealing, pick-pocketing. They spend most of these earnings on drugs or video games. Unlike Brazilian street children who take life-sustaining resources back to their families (Hecht 2000), Tikyan children would rather not to take the money they earn home to help their mother because she would reject it and consider it 'bad' money, since it was earned through theft or prostitution, something that would go against the moral integrity of the household. Life on the street gives children a negative-self image, yet they become reluctant to change it. Street life is a constant reminder of their status as pariahs in the public space (Hecht, 2000).

Cities are sites where youth seek to craft, fashion, and develop individual and collective identities that are reflective of their 'traditional' roots and 'modern' encounters. As Sommers (2010) described, young urban people are likely to experience the stimulation of urban youth culture.

*The swirl of "new" and "modern" trends, fashions, ideas and technologies that hit cities first have a magnetic attraction. As soon as stylish new t-shirts, slang phrases, shoes, songs, arm movements, gadgets and the like hit the streets, many if not most urban youth are eager to master and/or own them. Rural youth, not wanting to be viewed as "backward" or "bushy", greedily grasp at incoming trends as well. (Sommers 2010: 7)*

Drawing on sociological notions of subculture, Bucholtz (2002) notes how young people develop linguistic and artistic styles. Bucholtz argues that the creation of a distinctive style by youth through semiotics tends to destroy the power and influence of the meaning of what is appropriate within the dominant culture. Further, youth's symbolic representation of identity through music, fashion, and styles shows that subcultures are distinct. As Beazely demonstrates, the Tikyian subculture contributes positively to the self-image and resiliency of its members. Whereas for the Brazilian street children, they view their subculture and lifestyles as a betrayal of what is good in accordance to the rules of matrifocality (Hecht 2000; for related studies in Asian context please see Saldanha, 2002).

An important aspect of youth subculture and identity is belonging to religious institutions. Religion may be a pathway to success in the city. Memberships into 'modern' religions that combine music with 'prosperity teaching' are very appealing for youth. Pentecostal churches are often unusually effective in attracting urban youth to their communities (Hansen, 2008).

## 5.4 SOCIAL, TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES

Van Blerk (2005) documents the complex ways in which conforming to street life can result in a gradual process of identity formation as children are drawn and coerced into performing particular behaviours in Kampala, Uganda. These include newly arriving street children being initiated into street life by stealing from the public and being coerced by older youth to smoke, drink, and sniff aviation fuel. By focusing on the mobility of street youth, Van Blerk (2005) shows how life on the streets is not only transient, but also fluid and temporary. Once on the street, children engage in mobility processes, which disrupt their microgeographies and transform their perceptions of street life and the identities they have constructed for survival.

*Not all street children engage in the same forms of mobility and there are often very different and complex reasons for each individual move. There are three types of move that street boys typically engage in over time (both nomadic and episodic): between spaces in the city, between street and non-street locations and between Kampala and other towns. (Van Blerk 2005, 11)*

Van Blerk concludes that leaving a homeless existence on the street occurs at different stages in children's life paths by means of socially and spatially complex choices. Although some boys remain immersed in criminal culture and maintain an identity on the streets as an adult (or moving between prison and the streets), there are two main ways in which young people leave: resettlement out of the city and finding residence within the city.

Struggle for and appropriation of public spaces is an important aspect of street life. In response to their marginalization, street children manage and developed 'spaces of

resistance:’ bus stops, public toilets, traffic intersections, railway stations, pavements, city parks, local markets, and spaces under the bridge. These territories are not only home for the children, but also places where they exert their power and autonomy and where their identities are constructed (Beazley, 2000, but see also Young, 2003 and van Blerk, 2005). Occupying urban space is a form of resistance and refusal, a reactionary response to the negative and stigmatising effects of street life.

Although street children are often perceived as lacking care and ‘adult supervision,’ what is meant by home, family, protection, and a ‘responsible’ adult is conceptualized differently across cultures (Panter-Brick, 2002). Indeed adult-child relationships may be premised upon a radically different understanding of “normal” childhood and youth (Panter-Brick 2002). Over the years research has sufficiently demonstrated that by bringing life-sustaining resources and thus supplementing family livelihoods, many children and youth in street circumstances play a pivotal role in processes of economic vitality of households. These are what Hecht (1998) call ‘nurturing children.’

In communities facing significant poverty the caring role of nurturing children is immense. They are the “prime caretakers of incapacitated adults and the prime income earners in the household, such that relationships of care, protection, and provision flow from the child to the adult rather than from the adult to the child” (Panter-Brick 2002, p. 150, see Evans, 2010a). Many AIDS-affected households may have fewer resources to meet material needs, and time constraints reducing the ability of adults to provide care for children (Ansell & van Blerk, 2004).

Ansell and van Blerk (2005) show that children may take on adult responsibilities if there is additional work to be undertaken or money to be earned. They can care for sick relatives<sup>10</sup> and otherwise contribute to the family. Households are often more willing to take in children who can contribute to the household (Ansell & van Blerk, 2004).

It is important to acknowledge that although many street children and youth live without parental guidance, they do interact with adults in everyday life—especially with their mothers (Hecht 2000). Friendship is central to street survival and to the formation of positive social identity. It is also key to dealing with harsh material deprivations and contexts of rejection by mainstream society. In exploring the role of friendship as a survival strategy among street children in Accra, Mizen and Oforu-Kusi (2010) argue that “despite the new-found sensibility towards the ways that street children make sense of and work creatively upon childhoods not of their making, awareness and knowledge of those relations of cooperation that must surely lie at the core of these children’s lives remain a curiously neglected topic” (pp. 441– 442).

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Under conditions of great adversity and an ever-present threat of violence, and without immediate support of state or family, ... Accra’s street children have developed friendships involving cooperative ways of living ... childhoods defined by terrible starkness and desolation, where isolation and individualism sit alongside companionship and reciprocity. Just as the impulse to assist and support one another takes shape through the experience of pervasive insecurity and threat, so too do these very same forces constitute powerful barriers to sustaining them. (Mizen & Oforu-Kusi 2010 p.442).

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<sup>10</sup> (See Abebe 2010, Evans 2010a for reviews on a reversal of role in care provision and young people as carers in the context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa).

Despite the tendency for deviant behaviour, research suggests that most street children and youth try to pursue mainstream moral attitudes (Ennew, 1994). Ennew (1994) points out that street children, in the absence of parents, bring each other up and develop supportive networks, coping strategies, and meaningful relationships outside adult supervision and control. In addition, although most children living on the street have normal cognitive abilities and are emotionally stable (Aptekar, 1988), how long-term existence on streets impacts their identities and adulthood requires careful elucidation. Many young people in street circumstances engage in a range of informal economic activities and some go to school. Contribution to family livelihoods can be a protective factor for them; because this work is often a way of securing the transition to adulthood, bringing wages to the home will increase the child's status within the household (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Abebe (2008b, 2009) shows that many children who beg on streets in Addis Ababa "recognize that their contribution plays a pivotal role in sustaining their household's livelihoods which may serve the purpose of buying food, paying house rent or ensuring that there are sufficient resources to run household economics smoothly" (Abebe, 2008b, p. 276). By acquiring knowledge and skills, and by learning how to meet adversities, the risk from engaging in informal work can be reduced, and the resilience factor fostered (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

Street children's social networks are often well developed. As noted above, friendship is an essential source of social, economic, and emotional support (Abebe, 2008b). Indeed, in the context of the failure of the state and NGOs to realize their rights, reciprocity and support for one another maintains young people's lives, livelihoods, and patterns of social reproduction on streets.

Failed by family and kin, abandoned by public and private sectors, neglected by those very global systems and institutions that profess advocacy in their name, that children have to resort to the 'help' of friends in order to live is itself a mark of the intensity and harshness that can define contemporary urban childhoods. (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2010, p. 452).

What the above argument indicates is that experiences of the street vary considerably based on peer interaction, level of poverty, and the social context of the street. "Rather than being the most victimized, the most destitute, the most psychologically vulnerable group of children, street children may be resilient and display creative coping strategies for growing up in difficult circumstances" (Veale et al., as cited in Panter-Brick, 2002, p. 161). In Uganda, time spent in non-street locations requires children to display different behaviours and many children revert back to non-street values of home (Van Blerk, 2005).

Street children are drawn into particular street activities and identities depending on the groups they meet. Transport sites are often the places where contacts are first made because of the opportunities that abound there for earning money such as off-loading luggage and carrying shopping bags (van Blerk, 2005). According to van Blerk, the process of belonging is filtered through a range of spaces and social interactions. At first, other street boys may assist newcomers to earn money, but then use their more powerful position to initiate them into street life by stealing from them and coercing them to smoke, drink, and sniff aviation fuel (van Blerk, 2005). Beazley (2000, 2003) demonstrates interdependence between younger street children and older street youth, and the ways in which friendship and acquaintance are important in inclusion into and exclusion from the Jakarta street subculture. She argues that street youth teach newcomers how to earn money and survive by shoe shining, busking, selling, or

parking cars. New boys will also be taught how to steal in the busy local market in. During normal working hours, street boys in Yogyakarta are engaged in selling newspapers, bottled water, sweets, and stationary around bus terminals, traffic lights, public markets; making and selling jewellery along traditional souvenir-stalls where they find many both local and foreign tourists shopping. The most favourable activity for the boys is busking with a guitar—the highest in working hierarchies—along major streets and transport terminals as well as serenading people at the numerous night food-stalls (Beazley, 2003).

Spatial mobility is an integral livelihood strategy of street children and youth. Van Blerk's (2005) study in Kampala reveals that although mobility was important in assisting youth to move into new places where they could belong, and out of problematic situations, what comes across in many of the stories, particularly in relation to their leaving the street and visits to their homes, is the boys' desires to renounce (or maintain) their street identity. Likewise, temporality is a central feature in shaping the nature of activities and behaviour of street children and youth. Drawing on qualitative fieldworks with youngsters in Brazilian slums (Barra), Ursin (in press) reveals how street youth appropriate the use of public spaces in the context of autonomy and power. This appropriation is manifested in the need to 'manage' conflict in temporal shifts of day and night. The young generation on the street strategise their behaviour, changing from *diurnal* subordinate positions (as serving workers) to *nocturnal* dominant positions (as demanding thieves and assaulters).

► *The typical diurnal pattern of interaction generally occurs from sunrise to a couple of hours after sunset. First to emerge in the early morning hours are the fishermen. The elders appear soon afterwards, strolling down to the beach for their daily workout. The ambience is quiet. The mornings are considered the safest time of day in Barra among the formal residents. Gradually, poor and middle class people appear, on their way to school and work. The young people who live on the street also reckon it a safe time of day and thus prefer sleeping; some hiding, others in broad daylight on the pavements for the early risers to stumble. (Ursin, in press)*

Corresponding with the temporal shift to darkness, there are however inversions in status and stigma indicators, degrees of territorial power, important resources, valuable knowledge, and preferred social networks.

► *Being in the streets of Barra after midnight, it becomes obvious that the public space no longer belongs to the middle class and the business sector. Poor youngsters are in majority . . . thus they execute control. Although the goal continues to be money, the survival strategy is no longer based on trustworthiness, but fearsomeness. Because of a temporarily higher social status, the nocturnal behaviour of poor youngsters is more secure and dominant. Not always physically stronger, they still normally triumph in confronts with tourists or middle class residents, because of greater body control, more fight experience, attacking gregariously, in addition to the general fear of the 'Other' as a criminal, immoral and unpredictable predator. Their dominant position is not only exposed through aggressive behaviour and criminal activity, but also through territorial performances. (Ursin, in press)*

## 5.5 SOME POLICY INSIGHTS

What the preceding analysis reveals is the breadth and complexity of street children and youth livelihoods, culture, perceptions, and expectations of and from mainstream society. Despite the proliferation of research on street children and youth, new insights are needed on the ways in which these marginalised groups of people can be taken seriously. Previous studies that focused on street children's and youth's daily experiences emphasized their spatial mobility and everyday livelihoods produced limited knowledge about the complex ways in which they *use* street environments in relation to/competition with other actors.

There is a need to move away from a rehabilitative approach that criminalizes street children and youth for their public presence towards pro-active measures that both addresses their material needs and mitigate the impacts of poverty to solving questions inequality and dissatisfaction that brings these children and youth onto the streets in the first place. Policy focused research on long-term experiences and implications of street life need to elicit knowledge not only from the children but also other stakeholders: city governments, community leaders, security officers, the police, military, NGOs, and schools. Moreover, only few studies have focused on advancing our understanding of the ways in which, for example, interventions targeted at improving street children's lives and welfare might have unintended negative consequences with respect to their relationships with their families and communities (Nieuwenhuys, 2001; Droz, 2006).

Although the reasons why marginal livelihoods such as begging persists among disadvantaged children and youth are largely societal, public moral discourses tend to blame such children as individuals (Abebe, 2008b, 2009). As a result, interventions to address their problems are based on panic assumptions that they are becoming

dissatisfied and dangerous as they come of age. Abebe (2009) comments that such a perspective is unhelpful, both in analytical terms and from the point of view of social policy. Although many children in this research are stigmatized as being dirty, backward, immoral, criminal, and deprived, intervention programs should not accept these perceptions as given and unproblematic. A crucial issue to address is how these negatively ascribed identities emerged historically (Staples, 2007) and the ways in which structural forces of poverty and exclusion continue to influence the children's and youth's livelihood trajectories.

Another central policy issue that emerges from the scrutiny of the vast body of literature is the contested nature of young people's access to and struggle for use of urban space. This is evident not only in terms of the use of city space for informal trading and street careers, but also the competition that poor children and youth enter into together with wealthy investors as well as municipal offices. An increasing proportion of young people struggle to make ends meet, fighting off livelihoods in a highly contested places and spaces in the context of urbanization and the quest for urban land. Young (2003) identifies two patterns of socio-spatial acceptance of young Ugandans on the street—coexistence and incorporation—that have useful implications for policy. She argues that whereas the first demands tolerance, simultaneously engaging in everyday activities with other actors, the second also involves responsibility and trust, suppressing the stigma of homelessness; working alongside others.

Van Blerk (2005) makes useful recommendations for a policy that recognizes and supports the mobility and the life strategies of street youth:

First . . . mobility affords street children a number of opportunities that enhance their survival strategies on the street. Second . . . by recognising the importance of their mobility for survival, organisations that seek to support street children, should consider both daily and long-term mobility within their programmes. Third . . . it is not simply spatial relocation that assists street children to leave the street but that children make their own choice and can develop their own strategies for doing this. Foremost leaving the street is about individual choice and changing identity and behaviour away from street activities. It is imperative then, that organisations work with children and young people as individuals to discover the most appropriate time and means by which to facilitate this process. (Van Blerk 2005, pp.18–19)

We need to acknowledge the interdependent livelihoods of street youth with each other and with members of their families. To recognize that many street children and youth “possess a strong sense of reciprocal living under conditions of such austerity is to further point to the wider significance of their friendships” and familial relationships (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi 2010, p. 453). Finding an appropriate solution to young people’s multiple deprivations is not simple and straightforward. It is essential to understand the specific context within which their poverty is embedded. In a participatory research on urban poverty, young people pointed out a number of priorities in trying to overcome the problems they faced on a daily basis, including:

‘My main problem is food,’ ‘If we had house, our problem would be solved, and I can study hard,’ and ‘I want people not to insult me.’ Many children further expressed their aspirations in life and what stakeholders might do to improve their life chances: ‘I want to be a journalist so that I will tell people how good we are and how we survive;’ ‘I would like NGOs and the government to provide shelter to poor people like us;’ and so on. (Abebe 2009, p. 297)

Preventive and rehabilitation efforts need to define young people’s priorities by engaging them in planning and intervention programs and by responding to their shifting needs and social experiences. A sustainable livelihood strategy, in which such young people are helped to build their lives in a self-reliant manner and are provided with opportunities for upward social mobility, should incorporate their felt needs, social skills, and their potential.

## 6. The political and economic contexts of youth marginalization

**T**he section examines the literature on young people's involvement in a range of livelihood strategies and mobility practices in the urban south. It also situates the debates on youth poverty and marginality firmly within the context of urbanization and political-economic transformation of cities.

### 6.1 YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELL-BEING IN SLUMS

Rapid urbanization poses as many challenges to youth as it offers opportunities. In exploring the enormous social and economic issues facing city dwellers, Susser and Schneider (as cited in Hansen 2008, p. 12) use the term "urban wounds" to explain how contemporary cities are sites of deep-seated poverty and social inequality, as well as the locus in which disruptions in social reproduction are manifested (see also Katz, 2004). Urban wounds do not merely affect certain demographic groups like children or youth. Instead, they are manifestations of hidden ruptures in social systems and reflect interlinked social, economic, political, and environmental problems (Katz, 2004). The metaphor of 'wounding' implies a vision of collective well-being that must be negotiated within space (Hansen, 2008). It suggests that while urban wounds are destructive, they can be healed (Hansen, 2008).

The complexity of urban problems requires comprehensive and coordinated interventions. For example, the economic dimensions of urban development is not just related to the role of the city in the national economy, but also to the repercussion of the economy on the residents of the city in terms of employment, incomes, and poverty at the household level, as well as its impact on urban environmental and social issues, such as workers' rights (Potter et al., 2004).



**BELOW:** In Afghanistan, young people have positively participated in the Reconstruction Process. © UN-Habitat



One implication of rapid urbanization is that it accelerates environmental degradation and leads to the deterioration of the quality of urban life. Environmental degradation is a serious concern that threatens and changes opportunities for children and young people to participate fully and freely in urban life (Malone 2001, p. 5). Poor living conditions and high levels of informality characterize the lives of most city residents in the urban south. This means that the health and well-being of children, youth, and their families is compromised, as health status is related to the quality of urban environments.

*Historically, cities have been associated with higher levels of infectious diseases; the emergence of new diseases and higher death rates . . . This reality has informed the notion of the 'urban penalty' or, alternatively, the view of urban areas as a 'demographic sink.' Many countries have effectively overcome this experience of urban disadvantage through a mix of public health interventions and socio-economic change, to the point where infant mortality rates in rural areas tend to exceed urban infant mortality rates. Yet, evidence . . . suggests that in the past three decades the locus of malnutrition and infant mortality has shifted from rural areas to small and medium-sized towns and cities, which often includes the capital city. Thus, the notion of urban penalty still has resonance [ . . . ] to the extent that urban areas are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, the epidemic further underscores it. (van Donk, 2007, p. 4)*

UNHSP (2003) indicates that the rapid rate of urbanization may bring a relatively low pace of economic development. Shortage of urban land for all income groups is the most serious problem (Hesselberg, 1997). This directly affects the well-being and living conditions of the urban poor, including youth. Francoise (2006) argues that today's slums reflect the spatial dimension of modern urban stratification that results in growing economic, social, cultural, and political inequalities. This also highlights

the interrelated nature of slums with wider questions of urban poverty. In his recent book *Planet of Slums*, Davis (2006) comments on how over 1 billion people in the developing world cities live in slums in difficult and unhealthy conditions. He attributes the problem of rapid urbanization to a lack of jobs and housing, arguing that women, children, and youth are disproportionately affected and, as a result, engage in marginal and often very difficult livelihood strategies.

The number of slum dwellers is estimated to reach 2 billion in the coming three decades (UN-Habitat 2003). Although these numbers vary based on the definitions of what constitutes slums, youth in the developing world will have a formidable challenge in trading out of poverty as they negotiate their lives towards adulthood. Most of the residents of cities in the urban south live in slums and squatter settlements that lack basic services. They are forced to put up their shacks on steep erosion-prone, close to overflowing rivers, mosquito-infested wetlands, along railway lines, or close to sources of heavy air and water pollution (Hesselberg, 1997). Drawing on the experience of Nirobean slums, Kiwala and Arvidsson (2003) document on how young men and women try to cope with such dire situations:

*The slums, lacking security of tenure, are the only places young people can find cheaper accommodation. Often sharing with friends or total strangers, they live in overcrowded and dangerous environments. Some are introduced into sex and drugs at an early age, and many find themselves having sexual relationships and babies prematurely. Others mix with criminals and drug barons and become victims as well as offenders . . . young girls [tend] to be at much higher risk in the slums than at home in the countryside (Kiwala and Arvidsson (2003: 10).*

Residential relocation to poor neighbourhoods is positively correlated with vulnerability for children to various health problems (Bartlett et al., 1999; Mugisha 2006). Lack of housing, shortage of water, frequent power cuts, and inadequate waste disposal mechanisms are among the few challenges that limit the potential of urbanization from benefiting children and youth. The World Health Organization (as cited in Hesselberg 1997) explains the implications of overcrowded living conditions for communicable diseases:

Many health problems affecting poorer groups are associated with overcrowding . . . The average number person per room is 4 or more among poorer groups; it also common for poorer households to live in one room . . . beds are often shared; in the most extreme cases even small rooms are subdivided to allow multiple occupancy . . . Overcrowding ensures that diseases such as tuberculosis, influenza, and meningitis are easily transmitted from one person to the another. (p. 14).

Bryceson (as cited in Sommers 2010) asserts that the “common assumption that urban dwellers enjoy better health than rural dwellers does not apply to the urban poor” (p. 4). Even direr than the water-related public health threats is the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is widely accepted that levels of HIV infection are higher in urban areas, with large urban areas showing higher HIV prevalence rates than rural areas (Kalipeni et al., 2004). Although there is evidence that urban residents, particularly urban youth, tend to show higher levels of awareness of HIV/AIDS and ways of avoiding HIV infection than rural residents (van Donk, 2007), they are the most affected demographic group (Kalipeni et al. 2004). Youth in east and south Africa—the ‘AIDS belt’ of the continent—are at the epicentre of the problem with urban prevalence rates about double those in rural areas and higher than anywhere else in the world (Abebe &

Skovdal, 2010). The impact of AIDS is not limited to youth, affecting also those who depend on them for livelihoods such as younger and older family members (Ansell & van Blerk, 2004; van Blerk et al., 2008).

An important aspect of growing up in the context of urban poverty is impoverishment that is exacerbated by bad housing conditions. Poverty, tenure insecurity, and lack of physical space impact the well-being of children, youth, and their families (Bannerjee & Driskell, 2002; Mugisha, 2006). Children’s Rights and Habitat indicate that families must have “legal security of tenure and must be protected from the traumatic effects of forced eviction and displacement” (UN-Habitat, 1996, p. 5). Adequate housing is an important component of a stable and secure family context and crucial for urban children (Bartlett et al., 1999; Bannerjee & Driskell 2002). A study of the living conditions of child beggars in one of the poorest neighbourhood of Addis Ababa revealed that almost 90% of all sampled children live in congested situations with five to six children residing in one room, and that some rooms are shared by more than one household (Abebe 2008b, see also Mugisha 2006).

Research in Lesotho and Malawi (Ansell & van Blerk, 2005) indicated that life in the informal rental sector is related less to the nature of young people’s homes or even to the physical fabric of the wider neighbourhood, but the social and economic consequences of the prevalent tenure system have a considerable impact on young people’s well-being. Forced eviction is a particular problem that has a range of consequences such as homelessness, economic upheaval, destruction of property, family separation, interruption of education, financial difficulties, and children having to enter the labour market (Bartlett et al, 1999).

Ansell and van Blerk (2005) document how children not only highlight the inadequacies of the informal private rental sector but also the dynamic character of urban environments, which are not captured in conventional city planning. They argue that although many young people were concerned about negative aspects of their home environments, the intangible aspects of renting housing in slums prompted children to change their accommodation and, at times, migrate. For many youth, the informal private rental sector represents insecurity and instability, a situation that should be recognised by those advocating private rental as a solution to wider problems (Ansell & van Blerk, 2005).

*Children talked primarily about the relationships between their families and their neighbours and the owners of their homes, and about the drawbacks of having to pay and sometimes being unable to pay rent. Whereas Blantyre children [Malawi] were more likely to associate moving with difficult relationships with landlords and landlords and inability to pay rent, the generally more affluent Maseru children [Lesotho] were more concerned about thieves, but they were also more likely to associate migration with a move from rented to owner-occupied accommodation. (Ansell & van Blerk 2005, p. 470)*

Ansell and van Blerk's (2005) findings have important implications for planning the rental accommodations that, increasingly so, meet the demand for housing in many places of urban south, and targeting the housing needs of young people is an important part of planning for families and communities, which should take into account questions of security and well-being.

Research on the long term health and well-being of people who grew up in slums of the global south is lacking. Woolcock et al. (2010) reviewed a broad range of transdisciplinary literature addressing child-

friendliness in contemporary Australian cities. Although their study is in the context of a developed country, the arguments and recommendations presented have broad relevance to contemporary questions of city space in the global south. These include (a) the need for a more thorough analysis—both conceptual and applied—of the ways in which children and young people's well-being is affected by different urban forms and by the social and ecological variations that occur throughout cities; and (b) the focus on younger children needs to be complemented by a focus on adolescents and young adults who in turn need to be actively involved in confronting these challenges.

## 6.2 YOUTH, UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFORMAL LIVELIHOODS

The lives of many urban youth are dominated either by work or the need to find work (Sommers, 2010). Employment is crucial in shaping young people's lives and identities. Work is not just a means of sustaining life. Although its primary function is economic, there are social dimensions to work that determine young people's meaningful participation within society (Du Toit, 2003). Work has also a psychological significance. It is an essential source of identity, which provides young people with a feeling of self-worth. Due to limited opportunities compounded by stigmatization and negative public attitudes, unemployed youth often experience feelings of low self-esteem. They may develop low self-confidence and experience social and economic isolation. Marginalization and exclusion often create a vicious circle. In the absence of positive and supportive relationships, "young people are prevented from participating in local life, which in turn leads to further isolation" (Kagan & Burton, 2005, p. 296).

Accurate youth unemployment rates are “remarkably difficult to establish and the reported range is phenomenal” (Sommer, 2010, p. 6). The Youth Employment Network (YEN)—created in the framework of the Millennium Declaration where Heads of State and Government sought to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work—highlights that there are daunting challenges with respect to improving young people’s living conditions, creating social protection, and job security programs.

#### Facts on youth poverty and unemployment:

- Sixty-six million young people are unemployed, and a much higher number are underemployed.
- Over the next decade, as many as 500 million young people are expected to enter the world’s workforce.
- The unemployment rate for young people is two to three times higher than for adults.
- In South Africa, youth unemployment rose from 45% to 56% between 1995 and 2000.
- The informal sector accounts for up to 93% of all jobs available to young people
- Wages in the informal sector are 44% lower than the formal economy and protection and benefits are nonexistent.
- Social security coverage for Latin American youth dropped from 44% in 1990 to 38% by the end of the decade. (ILO, 2004)

An important dimension of rapid urbanization pertains to a deep transformation in the spheres of employment and livelihood options available for youth population. As access to secure work opportunities declined due to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), youth create alternative sources of income. This has resulted in a rapid increase in activities that are unregistered and unprotected by state law, in what is increasingly known as the informal economy (Hansen & Vaa, 2004). This is amplified by urban population growth that has created societies in which young people are an absolute demographic majority (Hansen, 2008). This demographic trend is transforming cities, widening the gap between the haves and the have nots, and making it increasingly difficult if not impossible for young people to establish themselves as independent, self-sufficient adults within the formal economy (Hansen, 2008). Indeed, in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, a significant share of the urban youth population depends on self-employment and livelihood strategies in the informal sector—also called “the black market, the hidden sector, the underground, fraudulent, peripheral, shadow and creeping economy, terms suggesting that it is not the context for honourable economic activity” (Sommers, 2010, p. 6). The informal sector is growing rapidly. In Africa, for example, two in three urban residents obtain their livelihood from the informal economic sector, which is thought to be growing at an annual rate of 7% (Sommers, 2010).

▼ *A striking characteristic of . . . urban life on the streets, in shops, markets and neighbourhoods, is how often the subject of moneymaking comes up. How a certain person or enterprise is getting ahead, where prices for commodities are high or low, when new shipments of materials are arriving at the docks, where and why police are sweeping through particular neighbourhoods or markets – these are examples of the subjects that youth and others in . . . cities discuss. This is not idle chat—it is crucial information in a changing and extremely competitive economic environment. (Sommers 2010: 7)*

The opportunities the informal sector provides in terms of work and livelihood for many young men and women is immense. As Sommers (2010) point out, although life in town is tough and sometimes threatening; cities are hardly ‘black holes;’ they also provide youth with opportunities, attractions, and possible trajectories that are simply not available in rural areas.

▼ *from work to housing to marketing, most people’s lives take place within the unregulated (and technically illegal) informal sector of the city’s mushrooming economy . . . Through youth’s eyes, the anonymity of city life is not a threat but a resource: cities are places where they can throw off (or at least delay) adulthood expectations and reinvent themselves. Surviving in cities is hardly easy, but if you “make it” there’s a chance to assume a glow of success that may be forever out of reach in home villages. (Sommers, 2010, pp. 1–7).*

Informal economies have opened opportunities for youth but have also increased their exposure to and exploitation by global market forces (Rakodi, 2002; Arnfred & Utas, 2007). Despite the vitality of small-scale income-generating activities for youth livelihoods, new groups have, over the past decades, entered the informal economy, opening a tight space of competition (Van Donk 2007, p. 7). In a context of economic

deregulation, larger firms are increasingly making use of casual employment and/or relying on a myriad of small-scale informal operators (Arnfred & Utas, 2007). The transformations are experienced in different ways—integration into the formal economic structure, exclusion because of inability to compete with rapid changes and competitions, increased tax, and globalization. In many places, the informal sector is also regulated by the state that has introduced stringent rules (Bjerkli 2008). Van Donk (2007) discusses how the urban economies are particularly vulnerable to changes in the global and macroeconomic environment.

▼ *In recent years, industries dependent on highly skilled workers have largely benefited from processes of globalisation, whereas labour-intensive industries dependent on low-skilled and semi-skilled labour have declined...This has resulted in growing levels of urban unemployment (among both men and women, who tend to be employed in different economic sectors that are affected by global economic restructuring and trade liberalisation), informalisation of the economy, lack of secure income, a growing proportion of the poor in urban areas, and increasing income inequalities, all of which is clearly evident in cities and towns. (Van Donk, 2007, p. 7)*

A major challenge for international development agencies is to connect to grassroots organizations that articulate the defence of socioeconomic rights of young people working in the informal economy (Hansen & Vaa 2004; Arnfred & Utas, 2007). Parpart et al. (2002) argue: “the growing power of global corporate and financial forces in an increasingly unequal world has inspired new thinking about potential solutions to the disempowerment and marginalization of young people throughout urban south” (p.13). Much needs to be learned about the ways in which youth are multiply impacted by and respond to

macro-economic changes at national and international levels. In addition, research needs to examine how urban revanchist policies transform youth livelihoods, access to urban spaces—especially by young informal workers—and the ways in which such workers organize themselves to address their collective challenges of poverty and marginalization (see Swanson 2007).

Another central aspect of young people's informal urban livelihood strategies is the unrecognized fact of material exploitation. The value of young people's work is not only pivotal in sustaining urban households, but is also well-recognized and exploited by employers. For example, it has been estimated that in Thailand, young people's labour force is approximately the same as adult female labour force but the former receive nearly half of the adult's minimum wage (Potter et al., 2004). Although children and young people in many developing countries are important income earners for the family (Schildkrout, 2002; Boyden, 2009), so far there have been limited ways in which their conditions of work can be improved without threatening their and their households' survival strategies. Low income households display a range of coping mechanisms (Rakodi 2002, some of which are at times at the expense of young people's well-being). Not all the informal livelihood strategies are equally available to all households and the youth population. However, the ways in which youth sustain themselves in the informal economic sectors ought to be one of the basis on which policy responses are formulated.

A serious challenge highlighted by the UN Habitat program on youth empowerment is promoting investment that can be "targeted towards urban poor neighbourhoods, [whether] they in decaying peri-urban or in the inner city. Employment-intensive investment [need to be] harnessed to promote both productivity and living and working conditions in the urban informal

sector" (Miller, 2001, p. 3). Another important dimension of young people's livelihoods is their involvement in marginal livelihoods within the informal sector. Young people who work in Thailand's sex industry are typical cases in point here. These young people see their practice not as an issue of morality, but of turning a socially unacceptable form of earning into a way of fulfilling their familial obligations (Montgomery, 2001).

#### Young people's marginal livelihoods in Addis Ababa

Street children and homeless youth are often targets of the police, whose security agendas include fighting 'dangerous vagabondism' and cleansing the 'social ills' of the city . . . which is the political capital for many international organisations, including the headquarters of the African Union (AU). Since child beggars employ the city spaces that mainstream society uses for different purposes from theirs, their presence makes begging a constantly visible phenomenon, although for most children the activity is not permanent. The existence of children who beg on the streets always raises complex issues in society. It suggests an apparent decline in the 'moral economy,' a failure of social values, and an erosion of cohesiveness and solidarity. In Addis Ababa, in particular, the childfree street ideology subtly links with discourses on rapid economic development, 'proper childhood' and 'national image.' . . . the public considers begging as tarnishing the image of Ethiopian society. It is commonplace discourse that such children and youth reinforce an image of Ethiopia as a country of famine, desperation and helplessness.



These discourses also relate to emerging middle- and upper-class families whose ideal image of childhood resonates with the Western construction of children inside family, school and home. Furthermore, the practice of begging contradicts the state's ideology and social organisation, the children's presence on the streets being considered a manifestation of 'failed development.' Children—beggars as well as non-beggars, including those who sell items on street—are seen as engaging in 'illegal activities' that discourage 'healthy investment' and the activities of those well-established formal businesses that pay taxes to the state. Recently, the City Government of Addis Ababa has embarked on new attempts to formalise many informal street vendors through job-creation schemes. . . . However, although children and young people form a significant proportion of the informal vendors, they have never been targets of such schemes. Instead, the schemes themselves have been used as an excuse to remove all street vendors and prevent them from selling items on streets informally. (Abebe 2009, pp. 295–296)

Throughout the cities in the developing world, educated youth are among the unemployed who enter the informal sector and business. This informal business offers opportunities for young men to earn respect through projecting aggressive self-confident masculinities onto the urban landscape and to create social nodes within networks of marginalized youth (Hansen & Vaa, 2004). A recent comparative review of young people's lives across different geographical contexts conceptualizes such form of urban youth agency as 'resourcefulness' (Jeffery, 2011, p.1). It is important to view young people's

involvement in informal livelihoods as a resourceful way of mustering resources to achieve sustainable livelihoods in the context of rapid social change.

Young people's marginality in cities is discussed by many authors (Frankland, 2007; Staples 2009). Abebe (2009) looks at begging within the contemporary framework of livelihoods, understood as the multiple means through which young people develop resources to improve their life chances. It examines the different reasons children have for begging, the way they understand themselves as subjects and social actors, their begging strategies, and the structural conditions in which begging becomes a viable livelihood practice. Taking seriously the structural effects of poverty, Abebe examines begging as a form of street work, as a passing phase and even pastime in some children's lives, and as an effective means of negotiating poverty and various forms of exclusion while developing skills that may be useful over the course of life. The research places begging—and children who beg—in their broadest socioeconomic context. It highlights that begging is an activity that should be seen in relation to its time-space wherein the temporal scales associated with daily rhythms, seasonal shifts, and the life course and with reference to children's mobility play a crucial role. The research makes sense of the fluid world of children's begging, and in so doing, it contests analyses that see begging as pathological or which spur moral panics around its practices.

### 6.3 YOUTH MOBILITY AND WORK-TO-SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

Young people are the main actors of urban transformations through rural to urban migration. Migration is pivotal to and an integral part of youth's livelihoods and transition in urban south (Gough, 2008). Young people's migration can be prompted by failure of rural livelihoods and rural poverty (Kielland, 2009; Thorsen, 2009) and by the AIDS epidemic (Ansell & van Blerk 2004; van Blerk, 2008). It is a pathway to better life opportunities. Recent migration research in Asia indicates new gender patterns whereby an increased level of female migration is reported than has been the case in the past. In Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and in Indonesia, women migrants constitute between 60 and 70% of legal migrants; these migrants are mainly employed overseas as domestic workers (Ukwatta, 2010). Comparing the lives of modern urban young women in Thailand with their counterparts in Zambia, Cheran (as cited in Rigg, 2007) identifies two fundamental differences. First, unlike Thailand, the income generated by young migrants workers in Zambia is rarely large enough to generate a significant surplus that can be channelled back to rural homes. A second difference with the Thai experience is that young migrants in Zambia are more likely to be male than female. "Indeed the income generating opportunities for women would seem to be markedly fewer and there are still considerable restrictions on female mobility" (Cheran as cited in Rigg, 2007, p. 65).

These findings from Asia partly resonate with research on young migrant men and women in urban western Africa (Chant & Jones, 2007; Langevang, 2008), as well as throughout the rest of the continent (Kielland & Tovo, 2006; Gough, 2008; Kielland, 2009; Thorsen, 2009). Gender plays a crucial role in the decision making power of young people to migrate, where to

migrate, and for how long. In the context of South Africa where there is a history of forced family dispersal associated with colonialism (Madhavan, 2004), young people and men often work in mines far from their families and villages (Young & Ansell 2005; van Blerk et al., 2008). Here, working in mines and in cities and sending remittances back to rural villages is a common way of family livelihood strategy and a mechanism of maintaining rural households from collapsing (Young & Ansell, 2003). On the other hand, the engagement with urbanity and modernity in Zambia may have brought new desires to the village but, for women at least; it would not seem to have brought markedly greater opportunities to meet those desires (Rigg, 2007).

Chant and Jones (2007) examine how young low-income women and men in urban areas negotiate livelihoods, with particular reference to work and training in Ghana and Gambia. They document how the income-generating activities undertaken by young people are commonly unskilled and poorly remunerated, mainly comprising assistance to relatives on market stalls and in small family businesses, or engagement in own-account informal services and commerce such as running errands or street-vending. Hours and times of remunerated work vary, but frequently involve 1–2 hours of activity before and/or after the school day, as well as on weekends. Chant and Jones argue that girls not only play a greater role in unpaid work but are also more likely to engage in paid work. They are also more likely than boys to hand over their earnings directly to parents. While participation in work conceivably takes time away from study, one major reason why young people take on remunerated activities is to pay for, as well as to establish a legitimate claim to, schooling. According to these authors, many young people from poor households recognise that being in school prevents them from contributing as much as they might to household expenses, and also that the costs

of education can be a significant drain on already exiguous resources. Chant and Jones (2007) call for more future research

*to explore the nature of transitions which policy often summarises as a path from education to work, work to poverty alleviation, childhood to adulthood . . . that young people described a rough interface between education–work, that education often required work for financial and other reasons, and that leaving school was not a parental decision but often involved the agency of the young person. (p. 196)*

A number of studies highlight how youth transition is closely linked to mobility and that it is a negotiated experience rather than a mere movement from childhood and adulthood (Gough, 2008; Punch, 2002). They suggest that young people's school to work transition is not unitary and straightforward but complex and fragmented: there are many pathways of youth moving towards the future. Punch (2002, 2008) argues that youth transition is a complex process affected by, among other things, the possibility to find a job in towns. Young people in Bolivia make decisions about different types of school-to-work transitions, which include migrating to continue their formal education, working in the community, or seeking employment opportunities in regional towns or abroad after a cross-border migration (Punch 2002, 2008). Culturally bounded notions of responsibility are linked to how young people perceive the opportunities and constraints facing them as well as their decisions about if and how they should combine work with formal education (Punch 2004).

Migrating to have access to educational services is the most common practice. Many young people in Africa stay in rented accommodation as well as youth hostels far away from their families in order to have access to secondary education (Ansell, 2002, 2004). Many young people who live

in peri-urban settlements in Ethiopia travel on average 10 kilometres to attend classes in the nearest secondary school (Abebe, 2008c). Youth in cities are generally more successful in schooling compared to their counterparts in rural areas. However, "the differences between the rich and the poor in African cities are growing, and acquiring [quality] education in cities tends to be much more available to the minority of families with sufficient funds to obtain it" (Sommers, 2010, p. 4).

Youth transition is shaped by the interdependent livelihood strategies and family relationships of young people. Although young people in the developing world achieve relative social and economic independence at an early age, interdependent social and economic relationships continue throughout the life course (Punch, 2002). Many youth, for example, give substantial amounts of money to their families when they have enough jobs but also draw on familial resources such as money, land, animals, and social networks of support when they are unemployed or want to establish a more independent livelihood as they come of age (Punch, 2004). As a result, the 'notion of 'youth transition' from dependent child to independent adult is problematic since young people negotiate and renegotiate their interdependence with their parents and siblings throughout the life-course' (Punch, 2002, p. 24).

Like other social services in urban Africa, access to urban education is unequal for young people, and the quality varies considerably within cities. Slums are not only the sites in which young people navigate their lives but also one of the youngest demographically with limited possibilities for improved life chances (Mugisha 2006), and despite the strong attempt for universal education following the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2000), access to education and enrolment in schools in slums is one of the lowest in

the world. According to UN-Habitat (2010) survey of access to education across five big cities—Nigeria, Kenya, India, Brazil, Jamaica—60% of youth with primary level education are denied equality of opportunity, compared with over 40% of university-educated youth, with children from slums and poor backgrounds the most affected. Availability of schools in urban areas does not automatically result in higher enrolment numbers. Families in slums often cannot afford school because of the combined cost of fees, textbooks, and uniforms (UN-Habitat, 2010).

#### 6.4 YOUNG PEOPLE, STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The economic and political transformations affecting the lives of young people are varied and complex. These include poverty, debt, corruption, war, geo-political conflicts, epidemics, unfair trade, structural adjustment programs (SAP), inappropriate policies, and ineffective legislation (Bass, 2004; Lund, 2008). The macro-economic policy changes imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, which forced poor countries to open up their economies<sup>11</sup> in response to the 'Washington Consensus,' are seen as having devastating impacts on the lives of children and youth (Katz, 2004; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Christensen et al., 2006). Although the basic goal of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were said to restore the developing countries' balance of payments,

increase their debt-service capacity, attract foreign investment and achieve economic growth by restructuring trade and financial flows, this often worked at cross-roads for the real lives of young people on the ground (Boyden and Levison 2000). The actions taken to promote these—privatization, deregulation, and decentralization—have exacerbated the poverty of rural and city residents.

SAPs have led to serious deterioration of the living conditions of the poor, which is associated with increased unemployment and declines in the real minimum wages (Yitbarek, 2008 p. 41). Among the most vulnerable group impacted by SAP are the urban poor (Burgess et al., 1997; Rakodi & Romaya, 2002). The report of the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network (2002) has strengthened this consensus: laying off of workers, decreased wages, the increase in cost, the diversion of investment to consumption and non-productive activities. The impact of SAPs goes beyond the expansion of rural and urban poverty and inequality. Despite sustained economic growth associated with neo-liberalism, the poorest of the poor are left behind (Boyden, 2009). Langevang (2008) observes a sharp contrast between business districts and middle class housing developments on the one hand and, on the other, the low income areas where the majority of city residents live. Youth in the latter live in cramped housing conditions without basic amenities. They work from home, the streets, or the market—the places that are the manifestations of divisions between peoples and places. Writing on the uncertain livelihood pathways of youth in Accra, Langevang (2008) notes:

<sup>11</sup> These include first, 'stabilization policies,' designed to make certain macro-economic changes as preconditions for rescheduling of the huge debts which many countries had run up; and secondly, 'structural adjustment policies,' meant to remove 'distortions' in the economy in order to facilitate the functioning of the market and foster 'economic recovery' (Boyden & Levison, 2000).

With economic reform has come retrenchment of the public-sector . . . increase in the prices of all necessities from food to housing, transport, education and health care. Concurrently . . . borders have been opened up to the importation of commodity goods, media images and ideologies from around the world on a hitherto unseen scale . . . In this urban space the opportunities young people can seize and the futures they can hope for differ from those of previous generation (Langevang, 2008, p. 2039).

Young people navigate their situations and negotiate the grounds of their everyday lives, yet it is not a matter of course that they will acquire the resources they need to marry and set up their own families, which formally gives them the status as adults (Langevang 2008).

Against this backdrop, some commentators have called such youth a “lost generation,” a generation whose life prospects are bleak (O'Brien, as cited in Langevang, 2008, p. 2039). Hart (2008a) also points out how cuts in state welfare and the imposition of health and education fees have impacted the life chances of young people. Economic restructuring has increased the unpredictability of southern economies and youth's exposure to cycles of boom and bust (see Katz, 2004). As Boyden and de Berry (2004) argue, economic inequality can be seen as the core of not only unemployment but also of social instability, indeed, as one of the main causes of conflict “insofar as the economic is considered inseparable from the social, political, cultural and historical” (Cramer, 2003, p. 409, see also Hart, 2008b). Inequality can cause young people to drift into conflict or participate in violence in order to overcome the marginalisation and acute exclusion from a “society that they are familiar with but which they have no part of” (El-Kenz, 1996, p. 51).

Poverty amplifies the reproductive works of young people in social reproduction (Katz 2004, Robson, 2004, Abebe 2007). “Poverty is often highlighted as one of the major risks for children and is recognized as often co-occurring with other risk factors, such as parental unemployment, poor health, or substance abuse” (Boyden, 2009, p. 123). It has a series of consequences for children, youth and their families. Furthermore, Boyden (2009) explains:

Poverty is . . . a grave misfortune in its own right, a direct cause of mortality, morbidity and suffering among countless children and adults globally. But a close association between poverty and other forms of adversity has also been established, due very often to factors of political economy, as well as to environmental hazards impacting whole populations and to personal tragedies which affect only some households’ (Boyden, 2009, p. 112).

An emergent trend seen in many AIDS-affected communities is the interplay between poverty and HIV/AIDS. Not only is HIV/AIDS a consequence of poverty, it also leads to poverty. Poverty often leads to loss of educational opportunities where people can get information about how to protect themselves (van Blerk et al., 2008). There is a growing body of research on the impact of AIDS in daily and generational reproduction, and how young people map out their social and material worlds through the care of younger siblings, heading households and involving in migratory labour following parental death (Evans, 2005, 2010a, 2010b; Evans & Becker, 2009; Abebe & Skovdal, 2010).

As the proportion of the urban poor is growing faster than the total urban population, a phenomenon described as the urbanisation of poverty is growing (van Donk, 2007). Closely associated with the urbanization of poverty is the feminization and infantilization of impoverishment and exploitation. Boyden and Levison (2000) point out that the feminization of poverty is consistent with processes of increasing women's paid and unpaid work in both the home and the community. And, in general, work that is shifted on to women tends to be shared by young people or completely shifted on to girls working under women's supervision. This means that young people's local work cannot be detached from material realities of their families but needs to be situated in intersecting gender and generational contexts (Aitken et al., 2006).

Among the key processes involved in social reproduction is the socialisation and education of children and young people (Katz, 1991). Few studies have seen the disruptions in patterns of children's socialization associated with urbanization. In her study of Bolivian immigrants to the city of El Alto, Merkle (2003) describes an increasing urban phenomenon of 'dual socialization'—whereby on the one hand young people grow up in a city exposed to urban, western, and 'modern' life styles and on the other try to maintain a sense of pride in their own roots. Merkle's observations characterize the situation of many young people's experiences in the urban south. According to Merkle (2003), the drivers of dual socialization are parents, schools, and the media:

▶ *parents are inclined to educate their children to be as modern as possible . . . The educational system further promotes the cultural alienation of children and youth . . . formal education [being] characterized by a systemic disdain for indigenous culture and tradition. Today, there is evidence of a movement towards recollection, expressed, for example, through increasing number of autochthonous music and dancing groups that are active in schools . . . The media, such as radio and TV, also have a decisive influence on children and youth, by supporting the propagation of western life styles and attitudes. Generally speaking, it can be said that the role of the traditional . . . family in the socialization and formation process of youth is decreasing, whereas the importance of peer groups is increasing. (Merkle, 2003, p. 207)*

Although a lack of access to secondary school-education is a key factor behind youth involvement in informal livelihoods, there is to date a vast problem of educated unemployment<sup>12</sup> in many parts of global south (Jeffrey: 2009). Argenti (2002) comments:

▶ *Young school and university graduates' opportunities for employment in state bureaucracies have not expanded, and have commonly shrunk on account of economic crises and structural adjustment programs. Most of the young, educated or uneducated, who have been drawn into cities have not succeeded in finding jobs in government employ or opportunities in the formal business sector; many have been forced into the informal sector, which at its lowest end provides only for crime and prostitution. (p. 127–28).*

<sup>12</sup> While the uneducated youth may form the militant wings, it is their better-educated counterparts, who have had the opportunity of further education and access to information networks, but that still find employment very limited, that form the intellectual branch of the youth movements (Furlong, 2009).

Rigg (2007) explains the cascade of interlinked social and economic changes that are not only perpetuated by urbanization but also take on a cyclical form as migration leads to social and cultural change, which in turn creates a context for yet another migration:

1. Resource pressures in the countryside and industrialization create the economic context in which young women take up work outside farming and beyond the local area;
2. Education and changing mores oil the process by lowering the social barriers to female mobility;
3. A continued commitment to the natal village and household maintains the link between the migrant and her home and family;
4. Remittances provide these women with a surprising degree of authority and decision making power given their age and marital status;
5. The experience of living away from home gives these young women the confidence and ability to challenge traditional gender norms about the roles of daughters;
6. Having been away, returning home is relatively easy; and
7. For those left behind, the absence of young women may require men to take on new tasks. (Rigg, 2007, p. 64)

The inability of young people to gain employment means that a generation of young men will stay unmarried, unable to become financial independent, a common phenomenon of being 'not adult' observed throughout Africa (Durham, 2004; Christansen et al., 2006).

Those youth enter the informal economy, where legal protection is absent and the work is characterized by long hours but low pay. There is a huge distinction between male youth who manage to find work in the informal economy and the truly marginalized young men. The ability to enter into this means of informal employment is determined by class and socio-cultural status (Jeffery, 2009, p. 747). Jeffery's (2009) work in India shows that, despite the huge investment families make in formal education, neo-liberal economic changes have undermined young people's efforts to obtain well-paid work. Although the empowering possibilities of education are recognized, Jeffery argues that many young people find the doors of opportunity firmly closed and the chances to benefit from schooling very limited.

Jeffery (2009) demonstrates how Indian caste and class intersect to marginalize and exclude skilled unemployed young men from "inferior" classes or castes. The research showed how educated Jat male youth had been able to make use of social connections with fellow caste members in urban areas to acquire reasonable secure work in the informal economy. However, Dalit young men—who are the lowest in status among the educated unemployed youth in India—did not have the social contacts and cultural attributes to be able to find face-saving jobs in the informal economy. Consequently they suffered a more profound feeling of marginalization and exclusion than their higher caste counterparts. Thus arises one of the most unsettling paradoxes of contemporary social change:

At almost the precise moment that increasing numbers of young people formerly excluded from schooling have come to recognize the possibilities held out by education for individual improvement, opportunities for these groups to benefit economically from schooling are disintegrating. (Jeffery, 2009, p. 182)

The gulf created in the lives of young people who are increasingly drawn into modern ways of life along with continued detachment from conventional forms of life are important sites of rupture and deskilling that policy-oriented research has surprisingly failed to explore. An educational officer in Abebe's (2008c) research in Ethiopia observes the paradox of socialization in connection to migration and education:

▼ *Children cannot advance in their education and leave school without finishing even the First Cycle. Many young people who finished secondary education, are now again back in the villages, like many other illiterate people, as if they were useless. This is frustrating for children who are still at school because they are not inspired, as they are not sure whether education leads to a better life in the future. Insufficient schooling has detached young people from, or made them unaware of, their livelihoods ... Now, many would not be happy to pursue working in agriculture. We are experiencing a phenomenon in which our children are trapped between many worlds, divorced from their rural ways of life, but neither integrated nor fully able to appreciate the rewards of modern education. (Abebe, 2008, 17–18).*

The claim that a whole generation has lost the skills and experiences regarded necessary and appropriate for life reveals fears about the social reproduction of society as a whole (Reynolds, 1995). In her book *Growing Up Global*, Katz (2004) documents how altered processes of social reproduction resulted in discontinuities over space and time in what and how young people work, learn and play, and what they use knowledge for. In particular, she reveals how disinvestment disrupts processes of skill acquisition, arguing how children no longer use the skills they have gained in their childhood when they come of age. Katz calls such disjunctions between what young people learn and what they are likely to need for their world of adulthood “deskilling” (p. 250), which is further manifested in the erosion of livelihoods, as well as in the altered trajectories of traditional pathways to adulthood. Children learn agricultural skills but have no land on which to practice them; they attend school only long enough to learn skills that are inappropriate for non-agricultural employment; or they may learn to work with and use local resources, most of which are fast disappearing.

## 7. Summary and a tentative agenda for research

This working paper sought to review the literature on the linkages between youth participation and sustainable development in the urban south. To achieve this objective we examined published and unpublished materials on youth employment, mobility, livelihoods, accommodation, struggle for access to and use of urban space, and social exclusion in the context of rapid urbanization. The growing body of research indicates that the role of youth participation and the significance of their views in ensuring sustainable urban development are undisputed. In order to understand the interconnectedness of the social, political, economic, and cultural forces that affect youth, and how they impact and are impacted by them; it is imperative to look at youth not at the individual level or as a static group but instead as a dynamic structural segment of society. The working paper highlights the importance of viewing youth as interdependent with other stages of the life course. As highlighted below, this is useful not only conceptually (i.e. to understand young people's lives from relational and socio-generational perspectives) but also methodologically and from a policy point of view. The following sections briefly summarize the central argument of the literature review, shed lights on the gaps in knowledge, and outline some tentative agendas for future research.

### 7.1 TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

The review in part two shows that young people often position themselves in society in much the same way they are positioned by it, and that chronological age is the least common form of demarcating youth



**BELOW:** Equipping youth with necessary skills helps them improve their access to livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan. © UN-Habitat



in relation to childhood and adulthood. It is relevant to examine the specific contexts in which children become youth, and when adolescence is succeeded by adulthood in different urban contexts. Part two examined the literature on the dynamic relationship between categories of 'problem youth' and what are considered appropriate practices for alleviating the difficulties young people face in the context of urbanization. Since youth is a shifting generational category, policy-oriented research with/on youth must examine not just the experiences of 15–24 years old. It is important to operationalise the concept of youth for devising strategic research questions that reflect the particular demographic group. Research needs to be anchored in intergenerational relations and agency within a larger society while highlighting the unique and specific needs and problems of youth. Research needs to also consider the political and pragmatic processes through which certain people can make claims to being youth or try to designate others as youth, for the very category itself is also under reconstruction in the context of such processes (see Durham, 2004).

The above perspectives are closely entwined with how, across urban south, 'problem youth' have been described variably as being 'at risk' 'as troubles' 'lacking the necessary school motivation,' or 'needing to cultivate developmental assets.' While these perspectives are dominant in research and policy, critical studies that engage with practitioners 'on the ground' while remaining committed not to lost sight of views from academia is needed. How do these dominant assumptions reflect shifts in demographic, social, political and economic contexts of cities? How can we move beyond the conceptualizations of young people 'as problem' or 'in problem'? What are the local fallout impacts of such conceptualizations to urban service delivery? How can urban development professionals and those working with youth resolve

the tension between models of youth as 'dangerous' and youth as 'in danger'? How does this tension play out in projects that are designed to empower youth?

A central argument that emerged from part three is for firmly grounding young people's environmental knowledge in the broader social, ecological, and political context. Part three highlights two forms of urban knowledge: knowledge *for* and knowledge *by* youth. Although youth knowledge about the social and cultural worlds of cities they live in is immense, "those that deal with the material aspects of urban life generally have little awareness of the needs and priorities of children and young people" (Bartlett, 2002, p. 7). Moreover, despite the growth in concerns over the impact of urbanization on youth, there is limited research on how young people acquire knowledge and what kinds of knowledge they use to tackle problems in urban areas, and in what contexts. How and where do young people gain cultural understandings of urbanity? What kind of environmental knowledge young people hold? How can young people's knowledge about the environment be fostered or enhanced? How do urban environmental challenges—pollution, congestion, bad housing, and slums—affect the lives of urban youth?

These questions are closely linked to young people's exclusion from political participation. Part four examined recent debates on youth participation in different urban contexts: communities, and urban development projects. It is argued that when young people are given opportunities to participate they often engage with, contest, or change the social relations of the communities in which they live. The studies make it clear that there is a significant disconnect between, on the one hand, the policy-oriented concerns of participation (often seen as participatory approaches in research and practice) and, on the other, the lived experiences of young people that

are deeply enmeshed with interconnected spheres of livelihoods and social relations. These gaps indicate the importance of and the need to further highlight the research questions suggested by Panelli (2002): “what are young people’s experiences of decision making and political participation? How can young people respond to established urban policies and political structures? How can urban institutions and political processes be changed to more appropriately recognize and include young people?” (p. 119)

The body of literature discussed in part five demonstrates that the quest for urban space and place is central to the ways in which young people (especially street children and youth) build their livelihoods, identities, and social relationship in cities. Although a lot has been written about street children’s and youth’s daily experiences and livelihood strategies, there is very limited knowledge about the complex ways in which they use street environments in relation to/competition with other actors: city government authorities, security officers, the police, supermarket owners, NGOs, and schools. Moreover, we need to elicit knowledge on how young people experience and understand different urban spaces and places. As Panelli (2002) asks, what are the relations between space, place, and movement for young people in different social, economic, and cultural contexts? How do young people mobilize particular urban spaces or construct places of significance for their own lives?

A central aspect to young people’s lives in cities is the need to find work, which is mostly located in the informal economy. This working paper has analyzed examples of the diverse productive and reproductive work young people do in urban settings. The activities young people engage in are often shaped by complex relationship and informal social networks. Although much has been written about the ways in which the informal economy provides livelihood opportunities for youth, there is limited knowledge about

how transformations in the sector enhance or constrain their life chances. How are changes in the informal economic sector shaped and are shaped by young people’s livelihood strategies and options for employment? How do institutions and actors (state, NGOs, multinational corporations) influence young people’s livelihood pathways as well as their role in the informal economies of cities?

These questions can be seen as points of departure for comparative, area-specific research on how young people move as competent agents and creative players of their urban worlds. The questions stress the need to highlight three interrelated points. First, it is crucial to promote interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral perspectives in urban issues that affect youth. To achieve this, the views and perspectives of youth should directly be integrated into planning, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. It is important to make a full circle in the generation of (academic) knowledge that is informed by and can possibly influence urban development policies, and practices. We need to ask what the role of young people is in planning, protection, and management of urban development projects. How can young people engage in and inform research and/or development that affect their lives? What are effective ways of linking knowledge from research on/with urban youth with policy and practice? How can one extract—but also connect—the impact of urbanization on young people’s lives from other forces prompted by broader historical and political transformation?

The second point is that the above research questions need to be dissected and intersected by gender, ability, class, ethnicity, or geographical location. Understanding the lives of urban youth cannot be appreciated without acknowledging the diverse contexts and structures that shape their experiences (Panelli, 2002). The uncertainty that urban young people face compels them to draw on diverse resources and pathways, depending

on where and who they are in gender and class terms, and as they negotiate their everyday lives and orient themselves toward the future (Hansen, 2008, p.7). Too often, there is inadequate consideration of the extent to which the lives, agency, and capacity of urban youth are imbued with socially constructed gender roles and obligations (Abebe & Bessell, 2011). Young people's position in families not only shape their immediate experiences of urbanity but also by gender, which shapes their mobility practices and whether and in what ways they are able to 'make it' in cities. It is crucial to capture the deeply gendered nature of youth experiences in cities. Gendered and inter- and intra-generational analysis on differentials in access to resources in urban areas is one important area of investigation and intervention for policy. In addition, attention needs to be given to differences between different categories of youth (e.g. educational and employment status), their family circumstances (e.g. religion, socio economic status, class, and ethnicity) and sites of residence (e.g. slums).

Finally, the vast body of published academic and policy-oriented research synthesized here points to the importance of taking into account both the immediate contexts and

the 'bigger picture' within which the lives of young people unfolds. Young people's living conditions in cities are the outcomes of struggles to obtain scarce resources. Poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion not only constrain their life chances but also shape the type and degree of their civic, economic, cultural, and political participation, which is fundamental to their empowerment. This means that questions of youth marginality are inseparable from broader structural issues of inequity and inequality. Such a perspective is necessary because, "major players in the field of poverty reduction adopt a default position which individualizes that which should, in fact involve structural and collective effort for change in most circumstances" (Boyden & Cooper, 2007, p. 5). The working paper recommends that future policy-oriented research identifies and includes young people's view and perspectives, as well as the knowledge, processes, and contexts that are needed for effective and meaningful participation. It must firmly situate youth poverty at the heart of political decision making and engage local institutions, state, and international actors to bring about positive change in young people's lives.

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# Young people,

PARTICIPATION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

IN AN URBANIZING WORLD

Although the proportion of young people in cities is growing rapidly, few studies take into account the diversity of and views on their urban experiences. This working paper examines the lives, capacities, and agencies of urban youth in the developing world and identifies significant gaps for research. In particular, it highlights the political economy of youth-focused development in an increasingly urbanizing world. Political-economic processes that shape and are shaped by young people's urban lives get particular attention.

This review first explores the origins and changing meanings of the concepts youth, sustainable development, and participation. Then various interrelated spheres of youth participation are examined, especially against the backdrop of international policies and treaties and academic debates on the lives of youth in the context of poverty and urbanization. The central themes of the analysis are youth involvement in community projects, environmental issues, employment, mobility/migration, livelihoods, informal accommodation, urban space, social exclusion, and social transition. The analysis reveals a significant disconnect between, on the one hand, policy-oriented concerns of youth participation (often seen as participatory approaches in research and practice) and, on the other, the lived experiences of young people. The review also reveals that rapid urbanization poses as many challenges to youth as it offers opportunities. Although many young people are competent, knowledgeable, and creative, deep socio-economic transformations have profound consequences for their participation and life chances within cities. Several important readings that are reviewed have both presented and called for a contextualized understanding of the social worlds of youth whose positions in society are not always clarified. The review emphasizes the analytical power and policy significance of a political economy approach. At the heart of the politico-economic analysis is the role of structural forces that not only result in young people's disenfranchisement but also explain the perpetuation of their marginal positions in society. Its policy implication is to firmly situate youth poverty at the heart of political decision making and engage local institutions, state and international actors with the power and moral responsibility to bring about positive change in young people's lives. A number of research questions and tentative agendas for research are mapped out. Future research needs to build on those questions and incorporate the views of young people and the contexts that make their participation in sustainable urban development work.

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