



The international secretariat for child-friendly cities: a global network for urban children

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SUMMARY: This paper discusses the establishment of an international Child-Friendly Cities Secretariat in Florence. The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI), active since Habitat II, is a loose network of municipalities that are committed to improving the quality of life for their child residents. The paper describes some of the wide range of projects that have been undertaken in response to this initiative and lists the activities that the secretariat plans in order to support these efforts and share information about them.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN SEPTEMBER OF this year, a global Secretariat for Child-Friendly Cities was established at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) in Florence (Italy) by UNICEF, UNCHS/Habitat, the Italian Committee for UNICEF and the Istituto degli Innocenti (a local Italian NGO). The secretariat plans to provide services and support to interested municipalities with the key objective of maintaining channels for sharing experiences and encouraging networking among cities committed to improving the quality of life for their children.

II. THE CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES INITIATIVE

THE CHILD-FRIENDLY Cities Initiative (CFCI) is not new. It was launched in 1996 as an outcome of the World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) resolution to make cities liveable places for all and, in UNICEF's words, for "children first". The Istanbul conference declared that the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy society and of a healthy city.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, now ratified by 191 countries, poses a new challenge for cities in their provision of services and amenities. While there may be illegal settlements, from a child rights' perspective there are no illegal children. All children have the right to have access to basic services and to enjoy opportunities for development, whether they live with their families or alone, in slums, on pavements or in squatter colonies. The CFCI has advocated the adoption of urban management approaches that are aimed at ensuring that the youngest citizens realize their fundamental rights.

In developing nations, as well as in several European countries, a growing number of municipalities have made the political decision to become "child-friendly". By starting new programmes for children, by increasing investments in the social sector, by adopting child-focused management techniques and methods and by formulating child-centred municipal plans of action, they aim to improve the quality of life for young city dwellers. Cities have also set a number of quality indicators and are using these as a yardstick for measuring progress.

Recognizing the experimental nature of many of their activities, increasingly cities have felt the need to exchange notes, share experiences and sort out common problems together. Informal exchanges have gradually developed into networks and regular meetings. Since Habitat II, CFCI partners have come together in Accra, Ghana, in 1997 and for three major fora in Italy in 1997, 1998 and 1999. The CFCI has a wide variety of partners at this point: civil society organizations such as NGOs and CBOs; business and the media; international and national agencies; central government; and local authorities. A critical partnership is with the Mayors Defenders of Children (MDC), launched by UNICEF in Dakar, Senegal, in 1992. Global meetings of MDC have encouraged municipal authorities, along with other actors, to orient their development activities towards poor women and children and to increase investments in child-focused programmes. The mobilization activities at the international level have catalyzed action at the local, regional and national levels, supporting the decentralization process which is underway in many countries.

III. SOME EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS IN CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES

THERE IS NO single definition of what a child-friendly city is or ought to be. In some contexts, especially in the North, emphasis seems to be on environmental and physical issues such as improving recreational areas, developing parks and green spaces, controlling traffic in order to make streets safer for young citizens. In the South, the focus is more frequently on increasing access to basic services for the poor. In many cases, a conscious attempt has been made to adopt a child rights framework for identifying activities and for monitoring progress.

A quick review of experiences around the world reveals a variety of models. In Ecuador, the cities of Quito, Tena, Cuenca, Guayaquil and Riobamba have involved children in defining criteria for a child-friendly city. With the initiative *La Ciudad que Queremos* (The City We Want), children and adolescents have participated in decisions about the cities where they live and have advocated for their own rights. Children's brigades, supported by specially trained youth leaders, were created in 15 Quito communities, each with 30 children. The brigades developed activities that strengthened children's capacity to analyze problems, make decisions and develop alternative solutions. Activities included, for example, the analysis of the waste collection systems in their communities. The municipality of Quito has tried also to enhance community participation more generally. With the objective of providing basic water and sanitation services in different marginal urban neighbourhoods, funding and materials were provided while the community contributed the labour.

Thirty-nine Colombian municipalities (including four in Bogota) have adopted a programme approach aimed at improving coordination and coop-

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eration between local governments, communities and civil society. A key component has been the creation of social development committees. These partnerships between local governments, NGOs, CBOs and communities have engaged themselves in the preparation of local development plans. Besides the committees, different networks for special interest groups have been created, such as citizens' meetings, youth work groups, women's committees and "special treatment networks" to record, monitor and assess cases of domestic violence.

Again in Colombia, 25 municipalities of the Andean Sub-regional Project, located in the least developed departments of the country, have focused on training community leaders in order to equip them to draft local development plans that, from a children's and women's perspective, would coordinate decentralization and social mobilization activities. Ten mayors' offices have prepared basic health care plans with community participation, organized training for health monitoring and promotion and set up aqueduct administrative boards.

In Bolivia, 109 municipalities have adopted a strategy that involves families directly and that aims at reducing child and maternal mortality, advocating for children's rights and increasing community participation, especially by women.

The city of El Alto in Bolivia has drafted a comprehensive plan (*Plan de Emergencia de Lucha contra la Pobreza*) in an area where only 34 per cent of the population have access to sewerage, electricity, garbage collection and telephone connections. The community-based plan focuses on the 400,000 inhabitants, out of a total of 600,000, who live in poverty, and has committed the city council to allocating US\$ 39 million toward implementation.

In less-urbanized Africa, a leading example is the city of Port Harcourt in Nigeria, where local government officials are sensitized to plan development programmes with community-based organizations in urban slums. The objective of the intervention is to improve access by women and children to basic services and to services focused on reducing the incidence of child abuse.

In South Africa, the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council has undertaken a child-friendly project whereby a coordinator has been named to form a child policy team among city agencies to help integrate existing programmes for children and to create a municipal plan of action for children in Greater Johannesburg.

In the Philippines and India, some complex approaches have been developed to make cities better places for children and women. Manila and other cities in the Philippines are engaged in mobilizing local government officials and working through local government leagues in order to intensify action in favour of women and children in low-income areas. Advocacy efforts have facilitated the creation of an appropriate local policy environment for children and argued in favour of increasing resources for services for children. A special focus has been on initiatives in the area of child protection. Declarations of commitment for child survival, protection, development and participation have been adopted separately by several municipal bodies and have been progressively translated into specific local policies, programmes and services. Manila and Davao municipalities have created local councils and task forces (against child abuse, for instance) for the protection of children. The League of Municipalities is formally committed to the implementation of the child-friendly movement in 1,545 municipalities in the Philippines.

In the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, the cities of Lucknow and Mirzapur

have formulated child-friendly city plans of action in collaboration with the state government. The plans include city-mapping of urban poor communities, inter-sectoral workshops for convergent planning and a focus on child rights with children's participation.

The Calcutta Municipal Corporation, in collaboration with the state of West Bengal, has drafted a comprehensive city plan of action for children within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The plan, which is coordinated by the mayor, focuses on eradication of child labour, making all primary schools "joyful learning centres", providing sanitation options for children, and providing basic services and protection to all street children in the metro area. In addition, children's participation is highlighted, together with community mobilization and civil society support. The mayor of Calcutta has also supported a joint project of the All-India Council of Mayors, hosting the launch of the Indian Mayors as Defenders of Children initiative with the participation of 21 Indian municipalities.

In Europe, there are a number of important initiatives. To cite just one, in Italy, the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative has received the support of the national government, the local urban bodies, NGOs and civil society and is including a growing number of cities and towns. A particularly active environment ministry has been encouraging cities to adopt a special code that allows them to be declared child-friendly. Quality indicators allow the monitoring of the city's quality of life from a child's perspective. A permanent secretariat has been established to coordinate national-level activities. Yearly fora are held to facilitate experience-sharing and the award of prizes to the best cities.

IV. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

CLEARLY, SO FAR, the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative has been a network of committed and interested parties rather than a single programme governed by specific guidelines. The very flexibility of the approach, which has allowed for rich and diverse experiences, has at times also been its limitation. On the one hand, flexibility has allowed for the integration of a variety of programme components such as, for example, the Mayors Defenders of Children initiative and municipal programmes such as the municipal *Pacto para la Infancia*, a network of 291 municipalities in Honduras that have signed a commitment to children, and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the other hand, a loose network may not have the technical and scientific capacity to process and standardize methods and techniques experimented with on the ground. It may also be unable to monitor the impact of single interventions and the cost-effectiveness of investments. The newly created global secretariat may identify in its mandate the objective of helping to define a basic set of quality indicators and methodological criteria that make cities suitable places for children.

Activities currently planned by the secretariat for the coming year include:

- data collection relating to child-friendly cities and global child-focused programming in urban areas;
- research on innovative strategies aimed at putting the child at the centre of the city's development agenda;
- data-processing and the development of a database;
- information exchange regarding initiatives in favour of the urban child;

- setting up of a web page and an electronic bulletin to make available information, documentation, processed data and programming tools for use by urban local bodies and communities;
- strengthening of networking mechanisms to ensure better coordination and collaboration among cities;
- the organization of a major meeting among Child-Friendly Cities Initiative partners.

The secretariat invites all child-friendly cities in the world to send information about their programmes and initiatives to the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative Secretariat (c/o Eliana Riggio, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Piazza S.S. Annunziata 12, 50122, Florence, Italy.)