

Concept Paper on Data on Urban Children in the MENA Region

Why Data on Urban Children is needed by Municipalities:

It is stated by UNICEF that ¹about half of the world's poor already live in urban areas and the number of people living in informal urban settlements is expected to double in the next 25 years. By the year 2025, some 60 percent of children in the developing world will live in cities and half will be poor. At the same time, a worldwide trend of government decentralization is underway, i.e., local governments are assuming more responsibility for providing social services, a function once performed by state governments. The convergence of these two trends means that cities need to equip themselves to serve a growing number of children, families, communities, and to help them find solutions to poverty.

Municipalities have a crucial role in protection of children and their well-being, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. Data on urban children is important for Municipalities and other concerned partners to facilitate proper planning for interventions, advocacy initiatives and research activities needed towards child protection.

Data on children in the MENA region is limited and aggregated at the country level and what is available at the lower levels is in most of the cases fragmented and disarrayed and foremost it is defective and incomplete. According to the studies conducted by the CPI on the status of children in 12 MENA cities, the sources of data on children at the municipal level are very weak; this hinders creation of databases and identification of the appropriate indicators. The situation becomes worse when talking about data on urban children. In fact if we are to evaluate and promote the status of children, it will be necessary to assess the need for data in relation to resources available. High priority should be given to:

- 1- Appraisal of the appropriate **effective** method of data collection, which is able to provide the required accurate, precise and of high quality data.

- 2- The **efficiency** of the method i.e. its ability to provide the required data considering the minimization of time and cost.
- 3- The way in which the collected data processed, analyzed and utilized to develop the optimum indicators, in order to improve the status of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Who is Responsible?

The Cities and Municipalities, childhood councils, and non-governmental organizations should join efforts to overcome the constraints imposed by the lack of sufficient data on children status in MENA countries. These efforts should include the implementation of awareness and advocacy campaigns; first for the municipal officials about the important role that the municipalities should play in children protection and promotion of their well-being; second for the public and civil society organizations; like youth clubs, women societies, etc. Some of the officials at these organizations believe that child protection is the responsibility of certain governmental authorities; such as, the ministries of social affairs and childhood councils, thus, a remedy for this misconception will only be achieved by collaboration and unification of these efforts.

Municipalities should collect, process and analyze data on children; they should build their databases for children and identify their indicators, to utilize in their strategies of planning. Such data encompasses the numbers of children, the services provided for children which include data on education services (the numbers of schools and kindergartens; if they are enough, illiteracy, drop-out of schools,...), data on health services (the numbers of hospitals and health centers for children, immunization, nutrition, ...), data on recreation services (open spaces, play grounds...), and any other socio-economic, cultural, and environmental services

What Set of Indicators is Required?

Serious efforts of public awareness are needed for the municipalities to understand their role and for citizens to cooperate, therefore, basic data on children, including V&D, classified by age, sex, and residence (rural – urban), should be collected at the city and municipality level, and sets of socio-economic, demographic, and environmental indicators should be identified at the same level, in order to determine

the efforts that should be done. The minimum required sets of indicators should include data on:

- The household level (socio-economic profile of children and their parents).
- The individual level (the child himself/herself).
- The community level:
 - The environment surrounding the child.
 - The basic services provided by the community for children

The first set of indicators includes socio-economic indicators, namely:

- Number of the household members.
- Sex of the head of the household.
- Marital status of the parents.
- Parents' occupation.
- Parents' education.
- Family income.

Information on these characteristics is needed to identify the most discriminate socio-economic and parental characteristics that determine children situations.

The second set includes data on demographic and nutrition and health characteristics of children and their mothers:

- Fertility rate.
- Age of the child
- Sex of the child.
- Birth order of the child.
- Breast feeding.
- Weight and height.
- Age of mother.
- Infection.
- Exposures of the child to violence, aggression, child labor, live in street or any other type of discrimination.

These indicators are known to be related to vulnerability. Their effect interplays with that of the socio-economic determinants, both as intermediate variables and as confounding factors.

The third set of indicators could be made-up of two types of influential factors; the first type are those factors relating to housing conditions and the environment surrounding the child such as:

- Type of the house "type of roof, type of floor building materials, number of the rooms, area of the house, etc..."
- Waste collection inside and outside the house.
- Type of the latrine.
- Animals in the house.
- Water quality.
- House density.
- Energy sources for cooking and light.

The other type of factors includes those relating to public and basic services particularly:

Education:

- Number of schools.
- Pre-education and school enrollment for children.
- Estimations for literacy and drop-out.
- Student teacher ratio.
- Class density.

Health:

- Number of hospitals, health centers and clinics.
- Skilled attendant delivery.
- Disability.
- Prevailing diseases.
- Immunization.
- Infant and child mortality

Nutrition:

- Availability of food.
- Malnutrition.
- Drinking water.

Social phenomena:

- Child labor.
- Street children.
- Juvenile crimes.

How to Obtain Data:

Such data and indicators are not readily available at the city and municipality levels in MENA region, this fact was confirmed by the results of the assessments conducted by the CPI in 12 MENA cities as the attached table shows. However, there are many methods that could ease this task and make the data available either from primary or secondary sources or both. Some of these methods, despite their ability to produce current, accurate and precise data, they involve with high cost and time consumption, these methods include:

- **Census:**

Censuses provide full enumeration for the population with its socio-economic and demographic characteristics, in addition to the housing and environmental conditions, they also provide data on children distributed by age, gender, and residence at the national and local levels.

- **Household survey.**

Complete coverage at the households level provides data with the same or more quality than that obtained from census, as all the efforts and budget will be concentrated at this level, this increase the accuracy and precession of data.

Other efficient methods which could be resorted to, in order to minimize time and cost, and increase precession and accuracy, are those rely on sampling. These methods include:

- **Sample surveys.**

This type of surveys is the most commonly used in MENA Region in childhood and motherhood surveys, for the inaccuracy and incomplete of the vital statistics and the limited data on children status provided by census. Sample surveys are built on the selection of a representative sample from the population under study. Samples could be obtained at random or nonrandom methods; however the simple random sample is one of the important and easy types of random sampling, as it is a quality measurement for other sampling methods i.e. the results obtained by other sampling methods compare to its results to test accuracy.

- **Studies and research on selected topics.**

This is useful for studies about specific phenomena and specific categories, such as, street children, child labor, etc..., this is performed focusing on selected topics and collect data and indicators concerning this topic only.

- **Review of legislation/policies/programs.**

Rich data and useful indicators could be identified through the adoption of best practices that could be obtained from the revision of the successful initiatives.

- **Informal/traditional methods.**

This includes focus group discussions, mail questionnaires and other methods that are not rely on formal interviews.

One important tool for formulation of solutions to identified problems at the local level, is **Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA)**. A qualitative survey methodology tool utilized by many organizations including The World Bank, Ford Foundation, UNICEF, UNDP and UNHSP (Habitat) and other organizations. It is developed from a series of qualitative multidisciplinary approaches to learning about local level conditions and local people, and has contributed to the development of action plans and participation strategies. PRA provides a package of techniques from which those most appropriate for the project context can be selected. The techniques include interviews and discussions, mapping, ranking, and trend analysis.

Another tool developed by UNICEF is **DevInfo**.²"A software to assist countries in monitoring the millennium development goals "MDGs" and advocate their achievement through policy measures, multi-sectoral strategies and the development of appropriate interventions". DevInfo has the ability to enrich reports and presentations with tables, graphs, and maps which could be useful in, it is a potential tool for advocacy and awareness about the MDG **at country level**.

However, despite all the potentials of Devinfo as a useful tool for compilation, presentation of data and monitoring, and above all its main function as useful database for dissemination, the software lacks the capacity to deal with raw data in terms of processing and analysis, it is not useful at the lower levels of administration "cities,

Quoted from: <http://www.devinform.org/>²

localities, municipalities, etc...", it is even not suitable if a country would like to start from the very beginning to collect, process, analyze its data, and identify its indicators; its rather useful when data at the country level is already collected processed and analyzed using other appropriate technologies specialized for these tasks such as SPSS, before disseminating the information with the use of DevInfo".

Difficulties Causing the Gaps:

The discussants in the CPI workshop on Knowledge Management held in Amman in November 2004, pointed out the following causes of the data gaps characterizing child information in MENA cities:

1. Lack of database on children status at the city and municipality level, especially child labor, street children and disadvantaged children in general.
2. Lack of specified data classified according to sex, category, urban and rural children.
3. Deficiency of specialized bodies for observation, data collection and statistics on childhood issues.
4. Poor coordination among the establishments concerned with childhood, a cause for constraints of easy flow or contrast of information.
5. Divergent concepts and terminology used in children issues (street children-beggars – orphans, child labor...etc).
6. The gaps in authentication and information exchange, due to weaknesses in technical, administrative, assessment and coordination skills of staff, in fields of authentication and information.
7. Relying mainly on official and governmental information resources on children status, necessitates transparency in collection and analysis of information for the implementation of programs and plans.
8. Lack of binding legislations and rules as well as weak control on application.

What is missing?

Urgent efforts are needed to fill the data gaps particularly at the cities and municipalities of the region, these efforts should concentrate on the following fields:

A. Education:

1. Rates of enrollment and drop-out of school.
2. Academic and schooling environment, conditions and suitable school activities (such as theatres, libraries, play grounds).
3. Facilities for the requirements of the disadvantaged children such as teachers and equipments.

B. Health:

1. Infant and child mortality rates classified by gender and cause of death.
2. Impact of violence and armed conflicts on health, psychology and mental conditions of children.
3. Environmental pollution and crowds affect the health of children in cities, especially at poor slums which also lack play grounds and public utilities.
4. Some factors endanger the safety of children such as girls circumcision, traffic accidents, drugs...etc.
5. Nutrition related problems: malnutrition in some cities and obesity in others.

C. Violence and discrimination:

- Violence against children: physical, sexual or psychological at school, family or the community as a whole.
- Female discrimination in education and usage of public facilities.

D. Street Children:

- Causal factors for this phenomenon: Poverty, drop-out of school, family disintegration, drugs...other reasons are also apparent such as off recording of new births which hinders education and other facilities, unattractive school environment for children, rare employment opportunities.
- Several hazards result of the above phenomenon such as mendacity, child labour, bad manners, drugs...etc.

E. Disadvantaged Children:

- Services for the disabled and disadvantaged children.
- Problems of orphans, alternative families, nursing mothers and sheltering.

How to Promote?

Cities and municipalities should be desirous to enhance their capacities in the area of Child Protection, this can be done through:

1. Awareness of officers responsible for children issues and their rights as well as activation of international Laws pertinent to children needs.
2. Training and qualifying the required staff for collection and analysis of data related to childhood issues.
3. Establishing studies and research units concerned with children status in municipalities to collect analyze and disseminate data.
4. Bridging the gaps in information on the status of children in cities through a number of sources and means of data collection with concentration on qualitative more than quantitative studies.
5. Networking and coordination among government and non-government institutions and departments to exchange information.
6. Initiate partnerships with the private sector and donors to carry out field projects for children.
7. Setting rules and legislations for child rights protection.
8. Periodic reports of cities and municipalities on the status of children.
9. Necessity to exchange expertise and information among cities and municipalities of the region in issues related to children status at the local and regional levels.

V&D Children Data:

Data on the groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged children is useful for planners to assess the current situation and to think of means by which they can control and promote the situations of children in these categories and moreover to forecast the future and make precautions. Such information is also useful for situation monitoring, program monitoring, Legislation & policies monitoring, advocacy and resource mobilization.

The targeted groups include:

- Street children/working children
- Orphans and adopted children
- Displaced and refugee children
- Poor children
- Early marriage/pregnancy
- Harmful practices (FGM)
- Violence (home, community, school)
- Exploitation (sexual, incl. gender-based)
- Abuse (drug users, abusers)
- Deprived of primary care givers
- Children in institutions
- Disabilities (mental physical)
- Accidents and injuries