

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN IN URBAN CONTEXTS

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- Case studies of success from different urban contexts to inspire change and action.
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SUMMARY

This evidence into action brief summarises the state of research on the topic of urban children and COVID-19, and proposes ideas for action.

Across the world, public and political attention is firmly focused on recovery from COVID-19. But it is vital that we build back better. The pandemic has compounded problems caused by existing structural inequalities of poverty, inadequate housing and economic exclusion for those living in urban informal settlements in the global South – problems which have hit children particularly hard. With an end to the pandemic uncertain, this briefing aims to provide some insights into the current consequences and risks for urban children and youth in terms of impact on health, income and education and the importance of safe play and public space. It highlights local solutions and good practice and demonstrates how, in the context of limited government support for the urban poor, grassroots organisations and collective community action have attempted to fill the gaps and used existing networks to support families affected by the pandemic. These experiences provide important lessons for partnership approaches to tackling child poverty that go beyond the pandemic to inform how collaboration can help address complex urban poverty challenges.

- Policymakers should strengthen partnerships with NGOs and organised communities to improve access to healthcare and health education. Infant and early childhood immunisation initiatives should be accelerated, prioritising children living in informal urban settlements.
- NGOs should support social and livelihood protection schemes, working with governments, communities and the private sector. Secure employment and trading rights in cities can also help to stabilise incomes for the lowest-paid workers.
- NGOs should invest in targeted local education provision and better internet connectivity and access to digital devices to improve learning for children and youth in slum settlements. Local governments should use conditional cash transfers to remove financial barriers to education for children in poor households.
- Children in cities need safe living environments and safe spaces for play. NGOs and governments should work collaboratively with communities and community-based organisations to improve urban design and environments.



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ACRONYMS

MHT	Mahila Housing SEWA Trust
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing network
SEWA	Self Employed Women’s Association



1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe consequences for individuals, families and communities across the globe. The tragic loss of life has been accompanied by a wider set of economic and social impacts. But these effects have not been equally distributed, with older and poorer people and individuals with disabilities and long-term health issues bearing the greatest costs. Coping with poverty and marginalisation during the pandemic is fraught with impossible choices between protecting livelihoods and health. While COVID-19 is generally a mild disease in children, the effects on lives and well-being extend beyond health issues, to exacerbate the conditions of poverty, family distress, violence and homelessness that shape young lives. Moreover, children in urban contexts have been more impacted by COVID-19 than their rural counterparts. For example, in a recent global survey of children and caregivers from 46 countries, 39% of urban respondents reported having difficulty paying their rent during the pandemic – compared to only 6% in rural areas.¹

This briefing paper draws on a growing evidence base on the consequential impacts of the pandemic for children and youth. Children and their caregivers across the globe have experienced the loss of family income, increased domestic stress, the closure of public spaces and schools, and additional responsibilities of young people to take on adult roles. These overlapping stressors have had a major impact on mental and physical well-being and prospects for adult life. Now, with the health crisis developing into an economic crisis, Save the Children predict that globally the number of children living in monetary-poor households could increase by around 117 million due to the pandemic.²

The health and economic effects of the pandemic are multiplied for people resident in urban informal and low-income settlements and in conflict-affected cities. Limited access to water and basic hygiene services, overcrowding, inadequate housing and insecure tenure alongside a lack of stable income all increase the risk of infection and reduce the ability of poor urban residents to cope and subsequently recover from the shocks caused by COVID-19.³ Poverty and sub-standard housing conditions make sheltering in place difficult if not impossible. Families are unable to adapt to the closure of schools and workplaces through home study and online working, as they are unlikely to have reliable access to electricity, computers or internet connections. These pressures increase vulnerability to the protection risks of violence, child marriage and child labour.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

Given the importance of economic and environmental conditions as key determining factors shaping the impact of COVID-19, this section provides evidence to highlight the contextual implications for urban children and youth in formal and informal settlements.

2.1 COVID-19 and health

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect across the world. As of mid-February 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports over 107 million cases of the virus and around 2.3 million deaths.⁴ While rates have varied considerably by region and country, there are few parts of the globe that have not been affected. The primary characteristic of COVID-19 is its transmission through physical proximity. With over 90% of COVID-19 cases in urban areas,⁵ the pandemic is having the greatest impacts in densely populated cities. Household poverty, a lack of access to medical treatment, informality, sub-standard housing, the absence of water and sanitation services, and overcrowding in both developed and less-developed contexts, all increase the risks of exposure to the virus and the consequences of ill health.

Globally, the residents of informal settlements are particularly vulnerable due to the density of populations and inadequate access to clean water and space to physically distance.⁶ Mapping of settlements in Cape Town in South Africa has highlighted the severe challenges of implementing physical distancing arrangements within informal settlements.⁷ Poor households in urban areas are also most likely to be financially disadvantaged by the loss of employment opportunities,² with consequences affecting health that include reduced access to food, medical treatment and other essentials. Poverty can mean heightened risks of complications from ill health due to diet and environmental conditions.

Emerging evidence indicates that children are both less likely to contract COVID-19⁸ and, where they are infected, experience less severe symptoms than adults.⁹ But studies of new variants of the virus continue to explore this issue.¹⁰ To date, the rates of hospitalisation and mortality from the virus among children has been low, although children with pre-existing respiratory conditions may be at higher risk.¹¹ Where children and adolescents are infected, around 20% are thought asymptomatic,⁹ which may lead to lower observation of the disease in young people.

The public health response to the pandemic has implications for the prevalence of other communicable and chronic diseases. Poverty and poor environmental conditions are shown to increase child mortality rates and vulnerability to illness and injury in 'slum' settlements.¹² These factors are compounded

With over 90% of COVID-19 cases in urban areas, the pandemic is having the greatest impacts in densely populated cities.

by major disruptions – created by the pandemic¹³ – to health services, the prioritisation of capacity and restricted access to medical facilities, causing a delay to routine childhood immunisation and the diagnosis and treatment of non-COVID-19 conditions.¹⁴ In the global South, infants and children living in informal settlements have a greater incidence of diarrhoeal and respiratory illness and malnutrition than their urban peers.¹⁵ This means that any additional reduction in already-limited access to medical assistance can have catastrophic effects.

Responding to the increased vulnerability of low-income urban populations and reduced access to both hygiene and medical assistance during the pandemic, organised community groups have sought to fill gaps. Building from experience of previous pandemics, this has included drawing on existing social and kinship networks to disseminate public health information and to coordinate the distribution of food to individuals shielding from COVID-19.¹⁶ There has also been joint working between communities and local governments to inform policy responses and build dialogue with urban residents that public agencies find hard to reach.¹⁷ COVID-19 has demonstrated the crucial role of partnerships between government and communities to understand needs and shape appropriate responses to the pandemic at scale.¹⁸

2.2 Loss of income

A key consequence of the pandemic is the loss of employment and earning opportunities, due to the lockdown of workplaces and markets. While the loss of work opportunities has had an impact across all income groups, it has had dire implications for people in low-paid and insecure forms of employment.¹⁹ They have experienced significant falls in earnings and increased risks of eviction and homelessness. Urban households are disproportionately affected by income loss. Save the Children research demonstrates that 82% of the urban respondents had lost income, while 70% of urban respondents reported losing more than half their income, compared to 65% of rural respondents.¹

The United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights that loss of working hours during the pandemic has been more severe in developing and emerging economies. This is due to the greater reliance on informal employment, more limited opportunities for teleworking, lower share of jobs in the public sector, and constraints on the implementation of COVID-19 response

One study shows that 82% of the urban respondents had lost income. 70% of urban respondents reported losing more than half their income.



measures.²⁰ This is confirmed by country studies. In India, a survey of urban slums in 10 cities conducted by World Vision and the National Institute of Urban Affairs found 94.6% of respondents reported that lockdown impacted negatively on earnings.²¹ The impact is also evident among refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) dependent on humanitarian aid who have very limited capacity to absorb economic shocks. The loss of livelihoods rapidly depletes savings, with women disproportionately affected as they are overrepresented in the informal economy.²⁰ Monitoring by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) during the pandemic shows that 74% of refugees can only meet half or less of their basic needs.²²

Informal workers such as waste pickers, street vendors, domestic and childcare workers and market traders have seen severe restrictions on work as public spaces have been closed and physical distancing arrangements enforced.²³ Globally, there are around 2 billion people working informally, the majority of whom are in developing countries. With low levels of social protection, they are likely to experience ongoing instability during the post-Covid recovery. The World Bank estimates that the economic impact of COVID-19 will push around 49 million people into extreme poverty, with 78% of these in sub-Saharan Africa (22.6 million people) and South Asia (15.6 million).²⁴ The heightened consequences of lost income and livelihoods on low-income households, caused by lockdown, creates the need for families to make impossible choices between health and hunger. The impact of loss of employment makes it less likely that low-income households will comply with further lockdowns, potentially lengthening community exposure to COVID-19.

The implications for child welfare can be significant. Reduced levels of household income are pushing young people into unsuitable forms of work and begging. As nearly all employment for youth in urban Africa (94.9%) is in the informal sector, with a similar 86.3% in Asia and the Pacific and 85.1% in Arab nations,²⁵ there will be limited options for young people during the pandemic.

The loss of income also results in reduced access to food. Across Asia, one quarter of low-income families surveyed did not have food stocks on hand and one third had just enough provision for one week.¹⁹ This finding is supported by data from the longitudinal Young Lives study in India, Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam where one in six participating households have run out of food since the beginning of the crisis, with the rate significantly higher among households that were food-insecure prior to COVID-19.⁵

These factors also increase pressures on domestic relationships. As family members are confined to small spaces during quarantine and as livelihoods have become more precarious, there has been a sharp increase globally in domestic violence.

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Children and girls in particular are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.² Save the Children research highlights nearly one third (32%) of households had a child, parent or caregiver who said that there had been physical or emotional violence in their home since the start of the pandemic.²⁶ Similarly, research with adolescents in urban Ethiopia shows that 66% of respondents thought that the pandemic has increased stress in their households: one in four reported that members of their household became angry quicker than before COVID-19.²⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) research indicates that falling household incomes is a key factor in the rising numbers of child marriages in poor families.²⁸

Including informal sector workers in the delivery of essential services during the pandemic has become an important feature of many city responses in the global South. Increased participation in public policy design helps to limit the consequences of falling incomes on family well-being and draws on local knowledge and capacity to tackle COVID-19 more widely. In Johannesburg, municipal authorities adapted their approach to closing down street trading, recognising their importance for low-income households, issuing special permits to food sector informal traders and designating them essential services.²⁹ Similarly, agreement with informal trader groups in Ahmedabad³⁰ to distribute food during curfews and with waste recyclers in Bogota³¹ have maintained provision, while protecting income for informal workers.

2.3 Impact on education

The closure of schools and universities across the globe has disrupted the education of an estimated 1.6 billion learners: around 90% of the world student population.⁵ During the pandemic, governments have closed education institutions to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission within communities, with reopening linked to a fall in the infection rates. Informal education provision in low-income settlements is also affected, as distancing regulations prevent social contact outside of household groups. The prolonged closure of educational facilities is expected to lead to a reduction in individual learning achievements, but also to longer-term consequences for individuals and families that include reduced lifetime earnings,³² rising dropout rates, social isolation and increased exposure to violence.³³ Save the Children research estimates that almost 10 million children will not return to school following the pandemic.²

The implications are amplified for children in low-income households, who may lack the space or facilities to engage in home learning.³⁴ This reinforces existing inequalities of access and achievement.³⁵ At least one third of the world's school children (some 463 million children) were unable to access remote learning when their schools were closed due to COVID-19.³⁶ The Young Lives study shows a correlation between household income, parental education and chances of being able to study from home. Across

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their cohort, almost 90% of participants in Vietnam were able to study remotely compared to 28% in Ethiopia. The capacity for remote learning in Ethiopia fell even further to 14%, where parents had no education.¹⁹ Even where remote learning policies and technology was available, children may be unable to learn due to skills gaps of teachers or lack of parental support.

For young people in the global South and those experiencing displacement, the closure of schools may be life changing. Lessons from the Ebola crisis in Africa³⁷ show that increasing household poverty was accompanied by school dropouts, as children were required to take on additional caring or income-generation activities to support their families. In West Africa, there were increased levels of early pregnancy, resulting in falling education attendance as pregnant girls were not allowed to go to school.³⁸ If this pattern is repeated for COVID-19, the consequences are likely to be severe, particularly for girls, who already have lower enrolment and completion levels in secondary education, and who may become more vulnerable to violence and abuse.³⁹

While reopening schools safely is a priority to reengage children in education, the pandemic provides a chance to jumpstart delivery of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all (linked to Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all)⁴⁰ and prevent a reverse in progress achieved in recent years. A key element will be to address poverty as a barrier to access and achievement in education. Partnerships between governments and communities and the use of programmes such as conditional cash transfers can provide the support to incentivise and meet the additional costs of full-time school attendance for low-income families. There is strong evidence to demonstrate the positive impact of cash transfers to address financial barriers to education⁴¹ and the benefits for vulnerable groups, such as child refugees in Kenya.⁴² While short-term costs may appear prohibitive, investment that brings together national and donor budgets may have a significant impact in preventing a deepening of poverty and insecurity.

2.4 Play and public space

Physical distancing and restrictions on the use of public spaces was a key feature of the immediate public health response to COVID-19. Enforced home quarantine and the closure of parks and some open spaces (other than for essential activity) have severely limited the opportunities for recreation and children's play. The restrictions have affected all families. But those with small or overcrowded homes, or lacking outside space or resident in insecure shelter, have been disproportionately affected by confinement.²

Research by Save the Children shows that more than half of children who responded to its Protect a Generation survey said that they were not in touch with their friends or were playing less often and that this made them feel less happy, more worried and less safe.⁴³ Children in urban contexts had a higher risk of isolation: 54% of children in urban areas reported that they were not in touch with their friends compared to 46% of their rural peers.¹ The lack of space and opportunity for recreation exacerbated the wider health effects of the lockdown on mental health and stress within the family, caused by school closures and the loss of normal routines and contact with friends.⁴⁴

While some families were able to provide space in homes or gardens for children's play activities, this varied significantly across social and income groups. For children in informal settlements in the global South, public spaces have become increasingly controlled and/or dangerous, due to restrictions on movements and (in some contexts) the violent enforcement of lockdown and curfew rules.⁴⁵ With many families occupying small dwellings, and having a lack of secure tenure, the public realm has an important role in the social lives of children and youth. However, the practices of controlling the use of public space instituted during the pandemic may be hard to shift after the crisis. Approaches of enforcement and the potential acceleration of privatisation of communal areas may further restrict the mobility of children and spaces for play in cities.

The pandemic has clearly underlined the importance of housing and public space to health and well-being. For people in low-income and informal settlements, 'housing has become the front-line defence against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life-or-death situation'.⁴⁶ Upgrading urban settlements, providing decent and secure housing and safe places for children to play are vital to accelerate recovery from COVID-19. The scale and complexity of this challenge requires strengthening state–community collaboration, to utilise the full capacity of human and financial resources available to deliver improved living environments.

3. CASE STUDIES

The following case studies demonstrate the reality of the impacts of the pandemic discussed in the literature review. With examples from Argentina, South Africa, India, Uganda and Zimbabwe, these cases studies show how communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and organised networks and federations of the urban poor are taking action to tackle these issues.

3.1 WIEGO: supporting the informal sector is key to food security

Evidence collected by the international network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) shows the importance of the informal sector to communities of the urban poor living in informal settlements.⁴⁷ Existing informal-economy networks have been vital to maintain essential services and quickly target support policies in South Africa and Argentina to address food security. In South Africa, dialogue with networks of street traders has led to designating informal food vendors as key workers, to protect

their vital role in providing affordable and accessible food for vulnerable families and the working poor in townships. In Argentina, engagement has enabled grassroots groups to inform policymaking at a city level, restructuring the government cash transfers from monthly to weekly payments. This has assisted households with budgeting for the purchase of food and essential goods. In both contexts, participatory dialogue has enabled tailoring of public policy to address the fundamental needs of families during the crisis.



3.2 ACTogether Uganda: strong grassroots networks are vital for faster crises response

Partners in Uganda's urban poor settlements have responded to the additional stress on young mothers and child-headed families during the pandemic, providing access to food, medicines and basic sanitation supplies. Working as ACTogether, community-based organisations, municipal government and funding partners have taken collective action to support the creation of health and hygiene stations to avert the spread of the virus.⁴⁸ Alongside providing personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitisers

and information to the community, the partners have offered cash grants to the most vulnerable young women and men to buy food for their families. A rapid response was possible in Uganda because of existing mobilised communities that form part of the National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda. Working through grassroots networks and using their experience of collaboration with local municipal government has provided the foundation for developing and delivering support targeted at low-income settlements.

3.3 Growing up on the Streets: listening to the voices of marginalised youth in Harare

Among urban poor populations, observing requirements to isolate at home and physically distance to avoid infection has been most difficult for children and youth living on the streets. The experience of young people living 'in the shadow of a pandemic' has been explored through the production of a story map in Harare, Zimbabwe. Told through short films and photographs by young people living in hidden alleyways and streets of the city, it highlights the extreme difficulties created by lockdown as children

and youth try to stay safe and meet basic needs for income and food.⁴⁹ Created as part of a longitudinal research project – Growing up on the Streets – the story map provides a unique insight into the effects of the pandemic on access to shelter, work and food. The use of participatory story maps enables young people to present their own reality of coping and surviving during the pandemic, providing important evidence for policy and programming.

3.4 Mahila Housing SEWA Trust: using technology to mobilise communities

The Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (MHT) was founded in 1994 by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India.¹⁶ Engaging people in low-income and informal settlements to share information, to organise collective action and to track the spread of COVID-19 has been essential throughout the pandemic. Organised community groups such as MHT have worked through existing networks of women community leaders to mobilise local action. With limitation placed on movement and to

comply with social distancing requirements, software such as WhatsApp and Zoom have been used to hold meetings to keep people in touch with changing public health responses and to aid planning for the distribution of relief materials to vulnerable families. The use of digital technologies has established an additional and flexible means of engaging and mobilising people in low-income settlements that will continue to bring benefits after the pandemic.

3.5 Zimbabwe Young Peoples' Federation: making communities safe and inclusive

Groups such as the Zimbabwe Young Peoples' Federation been active in responding to the pandemic within low-income settlements.⁵⁰ Linked to the Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) Know your City campaign,⁵¹ the federation has collected socioeconomic data within communities to advocate for change. These initiatives have provided new and powerful insights into the needs and the

capability of residents to recover from the pandemic. Networks allow for a national exchange of knowledge and experience among young people and also a basis for establishing livelihoods and savings initiatives. In settlements with a high proportion of children and youth, collective action creates a basis for action to work towards recovery and building better, safe and inclusive communities.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE – RESEARCH INTO ACTION

As shown in the literature review and the case studies, COVID-19 has underlined how poverty amplifies the effects of health and economic crises, and vice versa. For children and families globally, the lack of adequate housing and access to basic water and sanitation, fragile economic conditions (where people rely on insecure sources of income) and limited public protection and support have exacerbated the impact of the pandemic. These reported impacts indicate the importance of multisector collaboration and action, by NGOs working with communities, local government and the private sector at a local level to reduce the vulnerabilities of families and children most at risk. Learning the lessons of COVID-19 to build back better is essential to improve the lives and prospects of children and youth across the world.

4.1 Support local actions to improve healthcare

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the exposure of urban populations and informal settlements to the transmission of COVID-19 and consequent impact on existing health vulnerabilities. These include the treatment of chronic conditions, rates of infant and childhood immunisation and access to medical assistance. Wide-ranging evidence from the pandemic, such as the examples shown in the case studies here, also demonstrate the important contribution that organised communities have made to coordinating responses and to local support during the crisis.

- Policymakers must strengthen partnerships and state dialogue with NGOs and organised communities in urban low-income and informal settlements to design and deliver health education and ensure vulnerable children and families have better access to basic medical assistance.
- Government, NGOs and international health agencies need to protect and accelerate infant and childhood immunisation initiatives, prioritising children living in informal urban settlements.

4.2 Improve the built urban environment

Poor conditions within informal settlements, lack of basic services, heightened risk of evictions and high-density populations have made responding to COVID-19 nearly impossible and exacerbated existing health deficits. Improving urban environments, access to adequate housing and water and sanitation contributes to both recovery from the pandemic and to the long-term well-being of families.

- NGOs should work with local government and communities to provide safe living environments and accelerate improved access to water and sanitation facilities as part of slum upgrading programmes. This will make a major contribution to improving the long-term health of children and adults.
- Governments should work with NGOs and communities to address housing insecurity for households with children, recognising the significant impact that evictions and homelessness can have on young lives.

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4.3 Develop income-protection strategies

COVID-19 has clearly exposed the effects of poverty and precarious livelihoods on the well-being of families. Lockdown conditions and the overall reduction in economic activity has had a major impact on the urban poor dependent on informal sources of income. For families, the consequences have been deepening poverty, reduced access to food and increasing levels of domestic violence affecting women and children.

- NGOs and governments should take collaborative action with urban workers groups to secure employment and trading rights in cities. This can help to stabilise incomes for the lowest-paid workers.
- NGOs should support the extension of social and livelihood protection schemes, working with governments, communities and the private sector. These financial safety-nets can have significant benefits for families in informal settlements.

4.4 Invest in education

The learning of 90% of all pupils and students has been disrupted by the pandemic. This has far-reaching implications for participation and attainment, for dropout rates and for the safety and well-being of children out of school. While the priority remains restarting education in a COVID-secure way, there is a need to boost investment in education and promote innovation that takes account of the additional barriers to access and achievement created by poverty and the conditions of informal settlements.

- NGOs working with communities should invest in targeted local education

provision for children and youth in slum settlements. Improving connectivity and access to digital devices are key to maximising the internet for remote learning.

- Governments should expand the use of conditional cash transfers. These have been proven to remove financial barriers to participation in education for children in poor households.

4.5 Improve public spaces

Increased securitisation of public space during the pandemic has restricted the number of safe places for child play in cities, particularly in informal settlements where violence has been used to enforce lockdown and curfew regulations. This has not only affected children's physical and mental health, but sets a worrying precedent about the future management of public spaces.

- NGOs and governments should strengthen collaborative work and action with communities and community-based organisations to improve urban design and environments. These must include spaces for safe play in cities.

4.6 Listen to the voices of children and youth

As the two case studies from Zimbabwe demonstrate, the involvement of young people in local research and community initiatives provide an important means of understanding the crisis from their perspectives and realising the vital and active participation of youth in recovery and resilience initiatives. While the health of young people is expected to be less directly affected by the pandemic than adults, they will continue to experience the implications for their well-being and future prospects.

- NGOs should support marginalised children and youth to share their experiences of poverty and to participate in the design and delivery of investments in education and pandemic response measures.

4.7 Strengthen partnerships for local solutions

Lessons from the Ebola and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemics⁵² have clearly shown that stopping the transmission of disease needs to start with local action. Responses to the pandemic have put a spotlight on successful collaboration between organised communities, NGOs and government at city and national levels across the global South.⁵³ Sharing information and changing behaviours, identifying and supporting vulnerable people at risk and mobilising local knowledge and capacity are vital for large-scale and coordinated responses to pandemics.

- NGOs should work with and through organised communities, local governments and businesses to strengthen partnerships to address urban poverty.

Governments should expand the use of conditional cash transfers. These have been proven to remove financial barriers to participation in education for children in poor households.

5. CONCLUSION

While the full implications of the pandemic are unclear, practitioners will be fully aware that it has focused a spotlight on existing structural inequalities of poverty, inadequate housing and economic exclusion. Evidence from COVID-19 shows that changing the conditions that reproduce poverty offers the best opportunity to support families in the short term and affects the longer-term prospects for children.

While current research suggests that the health of children and youth is less affected by COVID-19 than adults, they are highly vulnerable to the consequential impacts on home, education, family income and safe places for play. Each presents a risk factor affecting the well-being of children and youth, but in many instances overlap to have fundamental and lasting implications, well beyond the pandemic, for children's lives and life chances.

It will be essential to continue to track the long-term effects of the pandemic on the lives and well-being of children growing up in poverty. COVID-19 has underlined the vulnerability of urban poor populations and demonstrated how existing issues of economic and social marginalisation

amplify the impact of crisis. Families with the fewest resources such as refugees, street dwellers and people living in slum conditions are most at risk and most likely to struggle to recover.

With public and political attention focused on recovery from COVID-19, it is vital that the opportunity is taken to build back better. Reducing family vulnerability to ill health through better housing, better access to healthcare, better and more secure employment, better education and stronger legal protections and civic participation are essential. The pandemic is a moment to protect the substantial gains made in poverty reduction, education and health. But it is equally important to make a leap forward to accelerate the eradication of urban slum conditions.

In developed and developing nations, communities have coped through local action, whether this been individual acts of neighbourliness or mobilisation of grassroots action. The value of community collective action, working alongside local government, to identify and meet needs and to inform the design of policy, is vital to implementing the lessons of COVID-19.

ENDNOTES

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