



Book Review

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The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World

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UNICEF has been publishing its annual report on the State of the World's Children (SOWC) since 1980. It critically and closely examines the various issues adversely affecting the health of these children. The report includes supporting data and statistics related to child health such as child survival, development and protection from all over the world and presents this as report as country, territory and region in a single volume. This year's publication *State of the World's Children 2012* (SOWC 2012) appeared in February 2012, with the theme of "Putting Children First in an Urban World".

One half of the world's population lives in cities and town and this is expected to increase to 70% by 2050. One out of three urban people lives in a slum. As the urban population is rising so is the number of urban poor. Out of a billion children living in urban areas, millions are suffering from exclusion or are at risk of exclusion. Urban poor children are devoid of the basic rights of survival, such as development and protection, and are marginalised in ramshackle and overcrowded settlements; even there they are under the constant threat of eviction. They suffer exclusion from essential services like health, clean water, sanitation, education, electricity etc. Their existence is not acknowledged, as neither births nor deaths are registered. They are prone to disease and disasters. Their abuse, exploitation and discrimination are observed but nobody seems to act. The hardship endured by children in poor communities is often concealed and perpetuated by the statistical averages on which the decisions on resource allocation are based. As these average figures are lumped together the poverty of some is obscured by the wealth of others. One of the consequences of this is that already deprived children remain secluded from essential services. Urban rural disparity has been felt for a long time but the disparity that exists among children of cities has been neglected.

over 142 pages. Various inspiring success stories from around the world have been chronicled. The international commitments, existing treaties, declarations and legislation have been quoted whenever required. The first chapter is an overview of the world's urban landscapes focusing on the hardship of urban slums. The next chapter is dedicated to the state of children in an urban setting through the lens of international human rights instruments and development goals. It focuses on the gap of existing treaties, declarations and legislative commitments and the actual provision of services with a special focus on the disparity among the poorer quintile and richest quintile of urban dwellers. Chapter three examines some of the phenomena shaping the lives of children in urban areas, from their reasons for coming to the city and, their experiences of migration to the challenges posed by economic shocks, violence and acute disaster risks. Chapter four presents efforts to improve the urban realities that children confront. These instances show that it is possible to fulfil commitments to children-but only if all children receive due attention and investment and if the privilege of some is not allowed to obscure the disadvantages of others. The next chapter identifies broad policy action that should be included in any strategy to reach excluded children and foster equity in urban settings driven by disparity.

The second part of the report presents key performance indicators (child survival, nutrition, health, HIV/AIDS, education, demography, economy, protection, equity etc.). The statistics also focus on the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. For the first time the report adds a table on equity, focusing on urban rural disparity. The ranking of countries based on under five mortality rate (U5MR) which is the critical indicator of the well being of children, illustrates the efforts put in by countries towards child health. The country with the highest U5MR is on the top of the list and the lowest is at the bottom.

The English edition of SOWC is also available in French and Spanish. The book is very informative for all



countries. Government and policy makers can examine the problems in their respective countries with ready references depicting the size of the problem with suggested solutions illustrated by various success stories.

About the book:

UNICEF. The State of the World children 2012: Children in an urban world. New York: UNICEF; 2012.

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