



Youths protesting against government rule in Cairo © Kim Badawi/Getty Images Europe

## Youth: the face of Urbanisation<sup>1</sup>



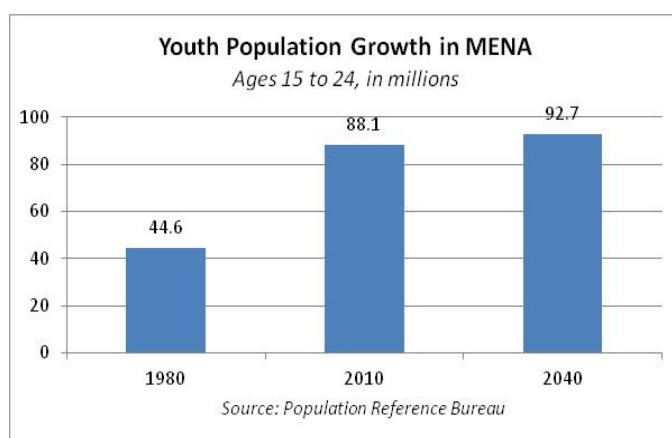
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The year 2011 was one of remarkable and uneven transition in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Mass uprisings in cities in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya brought about changes in governments; protests have quelled in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen; and cautious reforms were introduced in Saudi Arabia. The situation remains very fluid, but there is a consensus that 2011 ushered in a period of fundamental transformation in the region.

The process of transformation has been led in the main by the youth of the region. A peculiar feature of the region's demographics is the disproportionate ratio of young citizens to other age groups and an urbanisation rate soon near 70 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

It is estimated that there are approximately 90 million people aged between 15 and 24 years old in

the cities of the MENA region<sup>3</sup>, and they have been at the forefront of the demands for change. These demands, channelled in the main through social media platforms has led to coinage of the term, 'Arab Spring' with its attendant symbolism in various countries and for the future of the region as a whole.



<sup>1</sup> The consistent support of the Government of Norway in developing this theme within the Cities Alliance is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> See The Population Reference Bureau (2011): "Youth Population & Employment in the Middle East & North Africa" and The World Bank (2008): "Sector Brief, Urban development in MENA."

<sup>3</sup> The Population Reference Bureau (2011): "Youth Population & Employment in the Middle East & North Africa." See also, Kronfol N., M. (2011), "The youth bulge and the changing demographics in the MENA region: challenges and opportunities?", WDA-HSG Discussion Papers Series on Demographic Issues: No. 2011/8.

Most of the dissatisfaction among youth links to their economic, social and political marginalisation. A significant proportion of these youth are both poorly educated and trapped in structural unemployment, while others are highly educated and globally connected, but excluded from local social and economic assets that urban societies can offer. To absorb the anticipated growth rates, an estimated 50 million additional jobs need to be created within the next decade, almost entirely in the cities in the region.<sup>4</sup> In the process, cities have taken centre stage in demands for democratic participation, political accountability and legitimisation, as well as access to economic opportunities. Although these demands are addressed to the national political systems of the respective countries, it is local authorities that will be especially challenged to respond quickly, effectively and with the increasing participation of their citizens – if authorised to do so in the future.

## Global trends: a demographic earthquake

Unsurprisingly, the ongoing transformation in the MENA region mirrors a major demographic shift at the global scale.

**Definition of Youth:** Youth is less an age range than a life phase marking the movement from childhood into adulthood. While one common parameter is 15 to 24, many African societies extend the range to include older people as youth. The accepted definition of youth in Rwanda and South Africa, for example, extends to age 35. Marriage status may also significantly narrow the youth category, since in some parts of the world a young person who marries may no longer be considered a youth.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank (2011): "Towards A New Partnership for Inclusive Growth in the MENA Region."

The world's population is younger than ever before; according to projections, by 2050 the number of youth will have risen to 1.2 billion, 90 percent of which will be living in developing countries.<sup>5</sup> In Africa today, slum dwellers make up more than 70 per cent of the region's urban population, and the vast majority of them are under 24.<sup>6</sup>

With young people looking to cities for work the face of urbanisation is a young one. According to the World Bank, youth are 40 percent more likely than older generations to move from rural to urban areas or across urban areas.<sup>7</sup>

The challenges posed by a fast-growing young population are particularly apparent in cities, where the so-called "youth bulge" – the number of youth as a percentage of the entire adult population – has impacted urban areas.

Many cities are in fact unable to provide their burgeoning young populations with opportunities, and as a result youth find themselves increasingly marginalised without access to employment or quality education.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, most of the world's youth – some 85 per cent – live in developing countries where the demographic pressure occurs amidst a number of existing challenges, such as inadequate infrastructures and basic services. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the enduring global economic crisis has made the situation even more difficult by disproportionately impacting young people and resulting in record unemployment among an estimated 87 million youths aged 15 and 24. Considering the numbers alone, addressing urban youth issues undoubtedly presents one of the most critical development challenges of our time, with four main themes: unemployment, education, security and participation. As the Arab Spring

<sup>5</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2009): World Population Data Sheet.

<sup>6</sup> UN-HABITAT (2010): State of the Urban Youth 2010/2011 Report.

<sup>7</sup> The World Bank (2007): World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

has once again demonstrated, the problem is not whether youth will be able to raise their voices, but rather if cities will be able to respond appropriately to these challenges, provide opportunities and harness their potential for development.

## Unemployment and social exclusion

Although around 25 per cent of the working age population is between the ages of 15 and 24, youth account for almost half of the total world unemployment. Compared to adults, youth are almost three times as likely to be unemployed. In Africa, 27 per cent of youth are neither in school nor working.<sup>9</sup> In Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, unemployment among youth is 40 per cent of the total unemployed; in Syria and Egypt, it is nearly 60 per cent. In these nations, the average youth unemployment rate was higher than in any other region in the world.<sup>10</sup>

The inability to find employment creates a sense of uselessness and idleness among young people that can lead to increased crime, mental health problems, violence, conflicts and drug taking.<sup>11</sup> There is a demonstrated link between youth unemployment and social exclusion.



Young boys pushing a cart in Accra, Ghana]. © .Andrea Zeman/Cities Alliance

9 ILO (2010): Global Employment Trends for Youth.

10 Abdih, Y. (2011), 'Closing the Jobs Gap', IMF Finance & Development: Vol. 48, No. 2.

11 ILO (2010): Global Employment Trends for Youth.

In general, young women experience even more difficulties finding work than young men. Also, youth from poor families face more structural barriers to entering the labour market than their middle income counterparts. Even when employed, many are unskilled, in insecure jobs, and working in unsatisfactory conditions.<sup>12</sup>

**“There is no doubt that what young people strive for is the chance of a decent and productive job from which to build a better future ... Take away that hope and you are left with a disillusioned youth trapped in a cycle of working poverty representing a vast waste of economic potential”**

*(ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2010 p2).*

Investing in youth at an early stage can help cities avoid cumulative issues linked to exclusion and missed opportunities over the long term. Focusing on youth is also highly sensitive from a macroeconomic point of view. Young people are the drivers of economic development in a country and an integral part of its poverty reduction and growth. As the World Bank and ILO emphasise, foregoing this potential is not only a missed economic opportunity, but will have tremendous costs for both youth and society to reverse.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the alternative to doing nothing becomes dramatic when the social and the political dimensions are added to the pure economic costs.

12 UN-HABITAT (2010): *State of the Urban Youth 2010/2011*.

13 See The World Bank (2007): *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation*. See also ILO (2010): Global Employment Trends for Youth.





Young girls hawking goods in Accra, Ghana) © Andrea Zeman/Cities Alliance

## Access to quality education

While creating jobs requires macroeconomic investment policies and a sustainable business environment, education plays a significant role as well, particularly for youth. In the most obvious sense education is vital in forming human capital which enhances productivity. However, since schooling is also a key determinant for the development of capabilities and skills for youth, it also becomes a broader and essential matter of equality of opportunities. UN-HABITAT's *State of the Urban Youth 2010/2011* report shows how, for example, early investment in female education can reduce income social and income disparities later in life.

If this is the case, why has significant progress with the millennium goal on literacy not always translated into employment rates or better social conditions? It is crucial that young people have access to knowledge that matches the demands of the labour market and expand their capabilities.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> UN Economic Commission for Africa (2009): African Youth Report 2009 – Expanding Opportunities for and with Young people in Africa.

The quality of schooling impacts a young person's prospects for income, employment and housing and, more generally, their access to opportunities; and it benefits the community they live in. If cities want to tap into the potential that exists within their young populations and mobilise that talent for the benefit of society as a whole, they should seek to ensure that inequalities in early childhood do not carry over into adulthood.

## Staying safe and healthy

While the energy of youth represents an enormous opportunity, the frustration from exclusion and lack of prospects can potentially threaten the security of a city, and even that of an entire country. Social, economic, and perhaps even political alienation – together with the dangers of HIV/AIDS, prostitution and trafficking – form an explosive cocktail for youth living on the margins of cities. Figures on the prevalence of HIV reveal that young people, especially young women, are

more vulnerable to acquiring the virus. Behind this vulnerability are issues of nutritional deficiencies and the impact of other diseases, sexual abuse and exploitation, early marriage, and the mobility of youth in relation to rapid urbanisation processes.

Since youth are easy targets for exploitation by criminal organisations and military groups, investing in appropriate programming for poor, marginalised youth in cities has the potential to simultaneously reduce urban crime levels and significantly enhance security.<sup>15</sup>

Experience from Latin and North America has shown that successful, sustained reduction in crime and violence (levels have mostly been achieved at the municipal level through integrated approaches (Bogota, São Paulo, Diadema, New York).<sup>16</sup> There is a clear link between urban planning and the prevention of crime and violence.<sup>17</sup>

Services such as housing, transport, parks and recreation, education, and social development are all basic elements that can prevent crime and violence. Spatial urban planning and renewal such as integrating safer design principles into infrastructure works – public lighting, playing fields, family-friendly public spaces, and improved roads and footpaths, for example – can reduce the potential for certain crime and violence problems. However, spatial infrastructure development should be combined with social interventions such as youth education and training programmes; alternative livelihood training; micro credit and savings; sports, recreation and culture programmes; and family support services.

15 Sommers, M. (2007), 'Creating Programs for Africa's Urban Youth: The Challenge of Marginalization', *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*: Vol.10 No.1.

16 The World Bank (2011): *Violence in the City. Understanding and Supporting Community Responses to Urban Violence*.

17 UN HABITAT (2011): *Building Urban Safety through Slum Upgrading*.

### Community Based Crime and Violence Prevention in Honduras

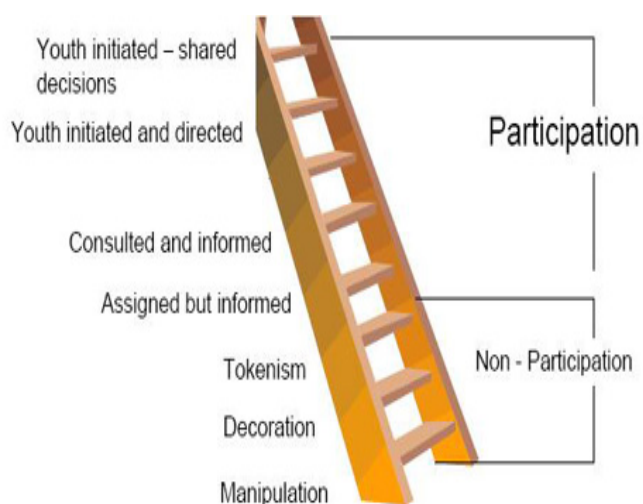
To address the very high levels of homicide and youth violence in certain neighbourhoods in Honduras, the Honduras Barrio Ciudad project –an urban upgrading project with an integrated crime and violence component –was developed. The project is supported by the World Bank and is being implemented by the Honduran Social Investment Fund in seven municipalities.

The crime and violence components developed together with the communities were based around situational prevention, capacity building, and complementary investments and activities. Under these three components youth were mobilised, insecurity maps were developed by the community to inform project design, and walkthroughs of hot spots were conducted at night with the community. Other activities included municipal-level training, the creation of crime and violence plans, the improvement of relations between the police and community, and strengthening conflict resolution, skills training and leadership capacities of the youth. In addition, the design of small infrastructure projects promoted situational prevention and natural surveillance.

Initial results are very promising in the first community in which all infrastructure projects have been completed and all the social interventions delivered. Eighty-five per cent of community residents now feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Seventy-six per cent feel safe in their own homes, compared to 51.4 per cent before the project began. Eight-five per cent of residents no longer avoid certain places in their neighbourhoods for fear of being victim of a crime (up from 62 per cent). Eighty-eight per cent feel that the danger that they will be affected by crime has decreased. None of the community residents had any knowledge of a death as a result of violence, as opposed to 20 per cent before the project.

## Youth participation in decision-making

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that young people “have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard”. Yet, in much of the world – and especially in developing world cities – children and youth who are the majority of the population are often an invisible demographic, with little say or ability to participate in decision-making processes.



**Youth Participation Ladder.** Adapted from Hart, R. (1992): *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*.

Most youth do not participate in civil society, and the relatively few who do tend to be reasonably well educated, elite male youth. Marc Sommers argues that this calls into question who civil society represents in this context.<sup>18</sup> Since the views and needs of elite and marginalised groups can be dramatically different, it should be seriously questioned whether elite youth leaders are able to effectively and accurately represent and advocate for the needs of the marginalised youth majority.

<sup>18</sup> Sommers, M. (2007), 'Creating Programs for Africa's Urban Youth: The Challenge of Marginalization', *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*: Vol.10 No.1.

Adolescent girls and young women often face additional barriers to participation. In many contexts, they are not considered youth if they are married or have children and might therefore be excluded from initiatives. Many also have significant obligations on their time such as work, household duties, and child care that limit their ability to participate in programmes. Combined with cultural restrictions, these factors create significant challenges to involving female youth in programming. To counter these challenges, research must be carried out to learn about the workdays, protection needs, and cultural constraints that female youth face. It is also vital to learn what female youth are seeking in a programme and when they might be able to attend.<sup>19</sup>

The chances of having a lasting, positive impact on the lives of marginalised urban youth are greatly enhanced when youth are given opportunities to participate in, identify with, and contribute to a programme designed for them. Decision makers therefore need to move away from the limited notion of young people as beneficiaries and see youth as key partners and agents of change. The well-known Youth Participation Ladder shows the range of participation from manipulation (identified as non-participation) to youth-initiated programmes. The argument could be made for a next step on the ladder for youth-led activities and initiatives.

In addition to leading and participating in policy discussions and programme design, youth can contribute to baseline assessments, community mapping work, and, critically, the elements of the youth programme itself. Youth can also help monitor and evaluate programmes.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.





San Javier Park Library, Medellín, Colombia. © Alex Ricardo Jimenez/Cities Alliance

### **The contribution of the Street Children Federation in Mumbai to the “Provision of electricity to pavement dwellers in Mumbai” project**

The street children federation in Mumbai, called Sadak Chaap, is a loose but fast-growing federation of children living on the streets. “Chaap” means stamp, and “Sadak” is street – the term aptly describes those who carry “the stamp of the street”. The simplest definition is one the children have developed themselves: “Without a roof and without roots....roofless and rootless”. Sadak Chaap forms part of an alliance of Indian urban poor organisations (NSDF and Mahila Milan) supported by the Slum Dwellers International (SDI) network.<sup>20</sup>

In 1997 pavement dwellers, along with local CBOs and an NGO, began a project to achieve legal, regular, and cheap electricity connections for pavement dwellers living in the Byculla area

in central Mumbai. After the pavement dwellers secured a letter from the government declaring that their dwellings would not be demolished for the next year and a half, and the NGO agreed to absolve the electricity company in the event of any dispute with the Municipal Corporation, the project could start.

Sadak Chaap became involved in the project by helping the electricity company’s licensed electricians. In return, the licensed electricians provided them with the necessary training to install the internal wiring in the pavement shacks. By involving the street children in the instalment of the internal wiring, the project organisers were able to save 40 percent of the cost of installation compared to installation by licensed electricians. The youth acquired useful skills during their work in the Byculla area, and they have since worked as electricians on additional SPARC projects in Mumbai and other Indian cities.

<sup>20</sup> Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) is an alliance of country-level organisations (called ‘federations’) of the urban poor from 33 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. [www.sdinet.org](http://www.sdinet.org)

## The Cities Alliance response: the Catalytic Fund call for applications

Despite a growing awareness of urban youth, more action should be taken in this area. If youth are to be harnessed for development they must feel safe, be healthy and engaged in a positive way. Since youth constitute the main demographic in the urbanisation process, it is imperative that youth issues – as they link city issues – are given full priority in the development agenda.

The Cities Alliance is highly committed to supporting the role of youth in cities. With its goal of strengthening and promoting the role of cities in poverty reduction, and in sustainable development, supporting the full participation and representation of those who constitute the future of a city is an integral part of that vision.

To address the critical set of interrelated issues that involve youth, the Cities Alliance will dedicate the next Call for Proposals for its Catalytic Fund to the theme “Youth and the City: Challenges of and Visions for Demographic Change”. The choice of theme builds on efforts the Cities Alliance has made

in recent years to integrate gender and youth in its work programme under Norway’s sponsorship.

The thematic call has three main objectives in line with the ‘catalytic’ nature of the Fund:

- To raise awareness of the role of youth in urban development at a time when cities, grappling with a historic urbanisation process, appear ill-prepared to provide improved governance, meaningful representation, or economic and social roles for their youthful populations.
- To select and support, both technically and financially, innovative youth-led or youth-focused projects and to revisit traditional Cities Alliance areas such as city development strategy, slum upgrading and national policies on urban development with an emphasis on youth.
- To provide a flexible platform for successful projects to develop peer-to-peer learning networks and to systematically extract and share knowledge that both informs and influences urban practices as well as policy dialogues at the local, national and global level.



Three young Egyptian boys on a street in Cairo. © Andrea Zeman/Cities Alliance