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## I INTRODUCTION

This strategy paper has been developed in the context of UN-Habitat's Safer Cities Programme, and the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD). It forms part of UN-Habitat's work on urbanization, the inclusive city, the problems of urban youth, and issues of governance and youth participation. It is in keeping with the Millennium Development Goal of achieving a significant improvement in the lives of urban slum dwellers by 2020.



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Since the beginning of the 1990's, the population of urban youth living in poverty, and youth crime and crime by minors in cities in the developing world have increased significantly. As part of the Safer Cities initiative, UN-Habitat has undertaken a number of exploratory surveys and studies in African cities which focus on the plight of youth in the correctional system, and those at risk of criminalization and victimization,

such as street children. Through its Urban Management Programme, it has worked in collaboration with local partners on the development of youth junior councils and youth participatory mechanisms.

In June 2002, in collaboration with the Government of South Africa, UN-Habitat initiated an international conference held in Nelson Mandela Metropole, on the development of citizenship among youth in conflict with the law in Africa. That conference brought together representatives of national governments, cities and municipalities, civil society organizations working with youth at risk, as well as youth leaders, criminal justice personnel, the research community and United Nations agencies. Its aim was to provide tools to support initiatives concerned with youth at risk, and young offenders, to elaborate a strategy on youth at risk, and to establish a network of cities and public and private organizations working with such youth. The conference resulted in a Declaration, and a Platform for Action, both of which focus both on the problems of the most vulnerable youth in African cities.<sup>1</sup>

Building on the conclusions reached at the conference, a follow-up meeting was organized by UN-Habitat to develop a strategy paper on Youth at Risk in Africa. This was in association with the World Bank facilitated *Youth Employment Summit* 2002, held in Alexandria, Egypt, September 7-11<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting an Expert Group, which included representatives of UN-Habitat, city mayors, and international NGO's,

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<sup>1</sup> The conference Declaration can be found in Annex I. The Agenda, background paper and conference report can be accessed at [www.welfare.gov.za/documents/](http://www.welfare.gov.za/documents/)

developed a draft and made recommendations which form the basis of the current paper.

At the global level, in 1995, the United Nations *World Programme of Action on Youth* established ten priority areas for improving the lot of young people. They included education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, and youth participation. In 2000, five new concerns with a major impact of young people were added to the list: globalization, information and communications technology, HIV/AIDS, conflict prevention, and intergenerational dependency.<sup>2</sup> All of these are crucial areas of concern for Africa's youth. A global policy paper on *Children, Youth and Urban Governance*, which considers how greater participation by young people in national and local governance can be facilitated, was completed by UN-Habitat in 2004.

## 1.1 OUTLINE OF THE PAPER AND ITS PURPOSE

This strategy paper sets out the global context for concern about the plight of young people in urban settings, the extent and nature of those problems for African youth, and the urgency of the need for widespread and concerted action. While all young people in Africa are affected by rapid urbanisation, deteriorating health and economic and social conditions, the paper focuses on the most vulnerable

youth - young people whose background places them 'at risk' of future offending and victimisation. There is already a huge increase in youth crime and deviance among young people in the region. The concern here is with the serious impact of recent global and regional trends on the most vulnerable young people and the communities in which they live, and on their capacity to participate in their own societies and be included, productive, and fulfilled citizens.



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Secondly, the paper outlines the crucial role which national and local governments must play in meeting these challenges, including the adaptation of government structures which will foster and enable the rights of children and young people to be protected and supported, and the development of youth policies and participatory mechanisms. It sets out the major steps which will enable cities and municipalities to develop effective local strategies. Such local strategies

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<sup>2</sup> [www.un.esa/socdev](http://www.un.esa/socdev)

should form a key part of city development policies and practice, developing city-wide crime prevention aimed at improving the quality of life, and at the inclusion of youth, and a collective vision of how cities should function. In the context of NEPAD, a major aspect of such development lies in the enhancement of young people's capacity to contribute to strategic city plans. Finally, the paper outlines the important role the international community can play to support city initiatives in Africa in relation to at risk youth.

The overall purpose of the paper, therefore, is to provide guidelines for national, and especially local governments in Africa, as well as the international community, on the steps which must be taken to empower and meet the needs of urban youth at risk, and to promote community safety and better governance. It is intended for elected city officials, local government administrators and services, as well as others who work at the local level in the public and private sectors. In the context of this paper, *empowerment* refers to the circumstances and factors which enhance the development of citizenship and productiveness among young people as they move into adulthood. It is concerned with the adaptation of government structures and institutions to protect and deliver children's, youth and human rights, including the right to participation. Empowering African cities and municipalities, and youth themselves, will help to build healthy individuals and communities.

## 1.2 WHY A FOCUS ON YOUTH AT RISK IN AFRICA



There is now ample and accumulating evidence in developed and developing countries that the conditions under which children and young people grow up are crucial for their mental and physical health, and emotional, social and intellectual development.<sup>3</sup> A range of common factors influence and shape their lives in all countries. The quality of early childhood care and conditions, and parental and family relationships, are especially important. Adequate local and family employment and income, good housing and environmental conditions, all have a major impact on families and their quality of life. In

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Shaw, M. (2001). *Investing in Youth: International Approaches to Preventing Crime and Victimization*. Montreal: International Centre for the Prevention of Crime.

adolescence, access to good schools which reflect their needs and culture, to good role models and leisure and recreational facilities, the availability of healthy and rewarding employment opportunities, and quality health care are all important.

Whatever the country, therefore, there are common factors which place children and young people *at risk* of becoming involved in crime and of being victimized. These risk factors also vary with gender. Young girls and young women are exposed to different sets of experiences from boys and young men as they grow up. The common *protective* factors which strengthen children and young people's resilience in the face of difficult living conditions have also been clearly identified. They include such things as good parenting, a stable and supportive home environment, a healthy and supportive environment, and good school achievement.<sup>4</sup>

In Africa, there is overwhelmingly evidence of the presence of such risk factors among children and young people growing up in urban settings. Severe urban overcrowding and decay, increasing poverty and unemployment, family and community breakdown, on-going wars, disease, child and youth exploitation, and trans-national trafficking and crime are multiplying the severity and range of risks to which children and young people in African cities are exposed, and call for urgent action.

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<sup>4</sup> See Hawkins et al., (2000) *Predictors of Youth Violence*. Washington: OJJDP US Dept of Justice; Shaw op cit., and Shaw, M. & Tschivula, L. (2002). 'Developing citizenship among urban youth in conflict with the law.' *Environment and Urbanization*, 14 (2) October 59-70.

### 1.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF AN URBAN FOCUS

When infrastructure and services are lacking, urban settlements are among the world's most life threatening environments...

*Innocenti Digest 10 UNICEF (2002)*

The world's population is becoming increasingly urban, and three-quarters of the urban population growth is occurring in developing countries. Existing urban areas are not equipped to accommodate such rapid population increases, and cities in the developing world are characterized by unplanned and overcrowded settlements without access to even the basic urban services. Children and young people represent a very high percentage of urban populations in such countries.

Urban areas should provide greater opportunities in terms of access to better housing, health services, schools and employment, than rural regions. The majority of those growing up in cities in developing countries, however, face greater risks than in rural areas.<sup>5</sup> These include greater health risks from overcrowding and poor sanitation, increased vulnerability to natural disasters, risk of eviction through the illegal occupation of land, and greater economic vulnerability because of the reliance on cash income and the lack of secure employment.

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<sup>5</sup> See UNICEF (2002). *Poverty and Exclusion Among Urban Children. Innocenti Digest No. 10* Florence: Innocenti Research Centre.



## 1.4 WHO ARE THE URBAN YOUTH AT RISK?

Internationally, a number of terms are used to refer to young people. The term youth is often defined as those between the ages of 15 and 24, young people those of 10-24, adolescents 10-19 year-olds, and children, those under 10.<sup>6</sup> Countries and regions have many different conventions. In Africa, it is common to define young people as those up to 35 years of age, and to include those under 10. In general, follows the international conventions where data exists, and uses some of these terms interchangeably. It focuses mainly on youth of 15-24.



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At risk' youth in urban settings include all those young girls and boys whose living conditions, health and circumstances or behaviours place them at risk of victimization and/or involvement in crime. They include, but are not limited to, youth already in conflict with the law, those living in urban slums, street children, youth gangs, school-drop outs, unemployed youth, substance abusing youth, those who are sexually exploited, war-affected children, and those affected by the pandemic of HIV/AIDS including orphans. These groups include both girls as well as boys. Girls in particular are often targets of sexual exploitation, and heavily affected by HIV/Aids. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, youth at risk are defined as 'those children and young people whose circumstances, life-style and/or behaviour put them at risk of future offending or victimization.' Urban youth include all those living in cities and townships under local government administration.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> These are the definitions generally used by UNICEF, WHO, UNAIDS and ILO, for example.

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<sup>7</sup> This is normally taken to include populations of 150,000 or more, governed under city or municipal status with an elected mayor, although many Africa countries use a figure of 2,000 to distinguish between rural and urban settlements (UN Habitat (2001) *The State of the World's Cities 2001*).



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