



Monitoring Social Inequities and the Colombia Project

Context

Intra-urban inequities, particularly within mega-cities, indelibly mark a child's life from birth. Globally, over half the world's people – including more than a billion children – now live in cities and towns. Worldwide, hundreds of millions of children live in urban slums, many without access to basic services. In Latin America, three out of four children live in urban areas and 45 percent of children live in poverty. Analyses and measures of poverty and inequality that generate evidence about the impact of public policies are therefore crucial to improve childhood quality of life and rights in cities. Without an in-depth assessment, policies often fail to adequately support the citizenry they are designed to assist.

Equity for Children undertakes analyses and addresses intra-urban inequities through an initiative that monitors social exclusion for children at the local level. In one such demonstration project located in several cities across Colombia, the effort examines how inequity is linked to neighborhoods where the youngest children grow up. The initiative leverages Equity for Children's underlying belief in social action, which encourages the participatory approach of communities, including the children themselves, to develop the most effective policies.

In Colombia, one out of three children between the ages of zero and two suffers from chronic under-nutrition and close to 80 percent of those between the ages of three and five do not visit early childhood education centers. There are twice as many children with these vulnerabilities in the lowest income population groups as there are in the overall population and children's living conditions vary completely depending on the neighborhood in which they grow up and the social group to which they belong.

Measuring Inequities in Childhood

Equity for Children, in partnership with **Cómo Vamos** and **Fundación Corona**, is working to analyze and compare early childhood quality of life in different neighborhoods of Bogotá, Manizales, Cali and Bucamaranga in Colombia with the goal of obtaining data to support better policies that guarantee childhood rights. In its first phase, the project focused on zero to five year-olds. Future phases will expand the population studied to children of all ages across additional cities in Latin America.

Equity for Children's work shines a light on the need to incorporate a childhood perspective in measuring the quality of urban life so that both policy makers and their constituents, including the children, are well informed and actively participate with the policy making process to improve child wellbeing. The aim is to not only engage children and youth but their families and communities as well in a holistic manner. The initiative seeks to foster sound public policies based on social accountability and civic engagement. It does this by developing deep partnerships with local grassroots organizations to measure and analyze inequalities, generating field-based evidence in order to give voice to those affected, particularly the children.

The expectation is that social participation, mobilization and accountability will increase due to workshops and training provided by the initiative and that local executive and legislative authorities, as well as the incoming mayors in 2015, take the recommendations into account in drafting public policies.

Lessons learned from this initiative will be assembled into a toolkit for identifying and addressing inequalities in access to services in disadvantaged communities. This toolkit, including good governance and community practices as well as a report on gaps in access to public services particularly affecting children, can be used to reproduce this process in other cities facing similar inequalities. The goal is to create a replicable model and to highlight good practices that can be implemented in other parts of Latin America and the Global South.

Outreach

Equity for Children outreach includes:

- Producing easy to understand reports and analyses for a broad audience based on official statistics of multi-purpose household surveys that are disaggregated for specific communities in order to foster a well-informed and participative citizenship;
- Organizing participatory workshops in local communities to increase awareness of inequalities among all stakeholders involved and to build capacity on how to engage with local authorities;
- Presenting recommendations at both the local and national government level for the development and improvement of programs to mitigate inequalities in access to services in specific cities;
- Disseminating these analyses, findings and recommendations via campaigns, the media and other means of communication to a broad audience, including academics, students and technical specialists leveraging the Equity for Children/Equidad para la Infancia audiences and regional networks. To date the initiative has been highlighted in nine articles in major print publications in Colombia, five feature stories in news reports and a radio interview of Equity for Children Executive Director, Alberto Minujin.