



ACHIEVING URBAN FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

PROGRAMMING FOR URBAN FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

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Governments, development agencies, and communities are attempting to improve urban livelihoods and reduce urban poverty and food and nutrition insecurity. However, much of their understanding builds on a rural and agrarian knowledge base or focuses on providing urban public services and infrastructure. Developing more effective urban programs requires considering some key characteristics that affect the livelihoods of the urban poor:

- Greater dependency on cash income and less reliance on agriculture and natural resources
- Low wages from work at insecure jobs
- A large number of women working outside the home
- Legal obstacles, including insecure land and housing tenure
- Inadequate access to safe water, sanitation, and health services
- Frequently weak social networks, which often transcend the geographic boundaries of communities.

URBAN PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

In urban settings diagnostic tools must be able to grapple with livelihood systems that are complex and constantly changing, often span economic sectors, and often involve linkages with rural areas. Standard approaches may be stymied because the poor may not readily disclose coping strategies, which are frequently illegal, and because safety considerations may constrain data collection, with interviews having to be carried out before dark.

Targeting programs may also be difficult. Community-based targeting may not work well in urban areas because poverty and malnutrition are widely dispersed in pockets across the city and because people move frequently and often work outside of the areas where they live.

Project design must also take into account the complex political environment in urban areas. Local, municipal, and national governments, along with community organizations and nongovernmental organizations, combine with political interests from inside and outside a community to exert influence over local activities.

ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Lack of skills, poor health, and inadequate access to capital often limit the poor to jobs that are insecure, temporary, and casual. Incomes, too, are often subject to significant seasonal swings, just as in rural areas. For example, in the rainy season, the government may shut down foodsellers because it fears an outbreak of cholera.

Insecure access to affordable, decent housing also consigns the poor to livelihoods that are unlikely to improve. This is because a house in an urban area serves not only as a base for household enterprise but also as the center of social relations useful for finding jobs, getting credit, or acquiring food. Eviction can be a tragic disruption of these strategic networks.

Lack of secure tenure can also inhibit community development. Donors or governments may hesitate to invest in infrastructure without being assured that people have a stake in maintaining the investment or that they will still be there when construction is completed. Slum improvements may even negatively affect the poor if the poor do not have secure tenure because with improvements, landlords may raise rents, forcing out the very group the improvements were intended to benefit.

Creating successful employment is also difficult. Income-generation and credit schemes tend to be small in scale. While perhaps helping some individuals to cope with deprivation, they often fail to provide permanent escape from poverty. Business-training programs often have difficulty identifying those individuals who are true entrepreneurs and who can generate a significant number of higher-quality jobs. Still, experience suggests that effective programs must ensure that the poor receive training in job and life skills and have access to sufficient credit. Income-support programs need to keep the seasonal dimension in mind as well. Communities must work with the private sector and government to ensure that available labor is matched up with available opportunities and to provide an economic and regulatory environment that promotes business expansion.

PRIVATIZATION OF SERVICES AND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Existing services in urban areas are often overwhelmed by crowded conditions and poor infrastructure maintenance. Dangerous environments are made more so by inadequate health facilities, erratic water supplies, poor drainage, and infrequent refuse collection. Government agencies may not have the capacity or resources to adequately support these services. Privatization may hold out hope for more efficient service, but private companies are likely not to be concerned with distributive justice. They may raise prices beyond the ability of the poor to pay, increasing inequity in access to basic services. In pursuit of profit, private companies may also worsen environmental conditions and raise risks to the health of the poor.



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Proposed solutions for improving service delivery must include input from, and meet the needs of, those the system will serve. Community water systems, for example, must be financially viable for the supplier but also must not exclude the poor who may not be able to pay full recovery-cost prices. Poor people's rights to access basic services must be ensured, even in a competitive, free-market world, and government agencies, civic groups, and the private sector should work together to design and implement effective, sustainable systems. Experiences even in such countries as Haiti have shown that communities can work with the private sector to devise creative, low-cost, often low-tech solutions that accomplish that goal.

Nongovernmental organizations can play an especially important role as facilitators among these groups, providing technical capacity, or knowledge of other experiences, when needed.

SOCIAL COHESION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

People rely on social networks to create opportunities or manage risk. In an urban setting, increased mobility leads to weak social cohesion and fewer opportunities for establishing a sense of community. In addition, networks that are differentiated and decentralized replace the family- and geographic-community-based networks of rural areas. Individual-level social capital based primarily on an ability to reciprocate becomes the backbone of these new urban networks. With so little to give, the destitute may soon be left out of these networks.

Negative forms of social capital can arise, with organized crime providing a system of protection and assistance for many. The resulting crime and violence can seriously restrict mobility for social interaction, eroding the space for developing trust and cooperation in the community even further.

Programs should be careful not to displace beneficial social networks where they exist. They should be sure to take into account the resources, current social networks, and coping strategies of the poor. Where community cohesion is weak, initial efforts might concentrate on focused, tangible projects—such as water and sanitation infrastructure—that will help the community establish trust and mechanisms for further cooperation. Building community infrastructure using community labor is one way to provide employment and contribute to community cohesion. Special efforts should be made to involve those whose social ties may be weak and have few resources, other than their labor, to offer.

Unemployed youth may be a particularly vulnerable group. Providing this group with job and life skills, improving their connections to employers, and augmenting their sense of

self-worth may help to address problems of crime, violence, and sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS.

CONFLICTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Conflicts in rural areas causing flight to urban areas or in cities themselves put immense strains on often-impoorished governments—disrupting services, distorting markets, and eliminating employment opportunities. Conflict may erase any sense of governmental authority and scatter populations in and around the city, complicating service provision.

Even in the midst of conflict, organizations must strive to promote a functional, nondiscriminatory authority to protect the population's access to services, food, and other goods. Relief programs may provide goods directly to needy areas, although sometimes providing cash directly to the poor may be best. At the same time, efforts must be carried out on a continuing basis, with all parties drawn into negotiations, to guarantee a minimal set of interventions for providing basic services.

THE FUTURE OF URBAN PROGRAMMING

In addition to the factors mentioned here that complicate urban programming, a number of trends will also affect the design of future programs. Past urban interventions focused on supplying infrastructure and related services or were sectorally focused. Donors now place greater emphasis on designing strategies that emerge from an integrated understanding of the lives of the urban poor.

Donors and development organizations are also placing greater emphasis on the community's participation in and control of the development process. Instead of providing services or managing interventions directly, they facilitate development processes led by communities, linking communities with local governments and other key players. Donors must acknowledge that this process will take more time than is traditionally allotted, and must incorporate a flexible workplan, because they must consult with, and often improve the capacity of, all stakeholders, including municipal governments. ■

For further reading see J. Anzorena et al., "Reducing Urban Poverty: Some Lessons from Experience," *Environment and Urbanization* 10, no. 1 (April 1998); T. Frankenberger and J. L. Garrett, "Getting Connected: Reducing Livelihood Insecurity by Investing in Social Capital," Parts I and II, *Food Forum* 46 (January/February 1999) and 47 (March/April 1999); and P. Sutter and C. Perine, eds., "Urban Livelihood Security Assessment in Bangladesh" (CARE Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1998, mimeo).

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