

# Urban Primer

Essential background information  
for urban practitioners

For Field Testing

*Guidance for Development Programmes*

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**Audience:** Urban practitioners  
**Purpose:** Essential background information and knowledge for those directly working in urban environments. Key concepts and principles for working in urban contexts.

## Introduction

The world's population is becoming increasingly urban. And poverty is rapidly shifting from rural to urban areas. Ninety per cent of global population growth over the coming decades is expected to occur in the towns and cities of the developing world.<sup>1</sup>

The changing context of poverty from rural to urban areas requires some different ways of thinking and addressing poverty. The nature of poverty can look very different from one urban environment to another, and even what is officially defined as 'urban' may vary significantly between different countries. There are very diverse forms of communities in urban areas. There are also very different vulnerabilities, challenges and opportunities in urban contexts. All of this affects the way in which World Vision (WV) will respond, and how it can effectively contribute to improving the well-being of children.

This 'Urban Primer' outlines a number of key concepts and principles that build on WV's Development Programme Approach and will help practitioners to apply this in diverse urban contexts.

## What is meant by 'urban'?

There is no single accepted definition for an 'urban' context. The terms 'urban' and 'rural' are defined by each national government, and thus depend on the particular context of a country. National definitions of 'urban' are usually based on population size and density, the proportion of non-agricultural jobs and government administrative boundaries. However, other characteristics should also be considered when defining an 'urban' area for WV programming. At least one factor from each column of Table I should be present. An increase in any one of these factors will usually mean that urbanisation is increasing. 'Peri-urban' areas can be defined as areas currently outside the urban boundaries that show increasing signs of urban characteristics.

### What is different in urban contexts?

The following elements of urban contexts make them unique or distinct from other contexts. The urban poor are **often** (but not always) less resilient to changes, shocks and threats due to:

- the higher cost of urban living
- a dependence on informal or cash economy
- greater insecurity of income and employment
- increased vulnerability to exploitation
- living in hazardous locations with informal housing
- informal or illegal status which limits access to services and representation
- a lack of social networks and community trust
- urban risks such as crime, street violence and traffic accidents.

<sup>1</sup> UN Habitat 2011, Annual Report 2010, UN Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya, page 2.

**Table I. What is meant by ‘urban’? <sup>2</sup>**

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Human</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
On-going construction of buildings or major development of infrastructure or industry.	Primarily non-agricultural labour and reliance on industry.	High population and density compared to surrounding areas.	Close proximity to political leaders and authorities; leaders are usually elected rather than traditionally appointed.	Majority of land is occupied or in-use. Open spaces (such as fields) are limited.
Changing land-use from agricultural to commercial and residential.	Informal, cash-based trades and services are present.	Mix of cultures, ethnicities, languages, religions and identities.	Territory is governed through municipalities or similar entities like a ward or council.	Pollution and traffic congestion issues.
Presence of slums, shanty-towns, shacks or otherwise poorly-constructed and informal housing without access to basic services such as water and electricity.	A high proportion of the population is unemployed or underemployed.	Presence of unregistered migrants and/or displaced persons.	There is a high need for integrated land-use and strategic planning to meet the needs of local residents.	Volume of waste and limited waste management is creating environmental hazards.
Land tenure is often insecure and the poor are often excluded from formal systems of security of land tenure.	Extreme differences in assets between the rich and poor.	Street/gang violence and neighbourhood security issues.	Informal power structures and corruption have significant influence on government processes and public service delivery.	Stormwater and flood management issues.

**\*\* Also refer to the LEAP Assessment tool section on ‘Urban/rural context’.**

## Rural – urban continuum

Urbanisation should be understood in terms of a changing scale or ‘continuum’ between rural and urban areas, with sometimes significant movement of people back and forth along the continuum. Around 300 million people in developing countries became urban dwellers between 2005-2010, either because they migrated from rural to urban areas or because their rural settlements became urban.<sup>3</sup>

Urbanisation is not only about movement of people or growth in population, it is also about the increasing connections between people, resources and information. For example, the growing communications connection between rural and urban environments through mobile phones and technology, the flow of agricultural products from rural producers to urban markets, and the regular movement of people between rural and urban settlements. These examples show how rural and urban environments are increasingly connected. Practitioners need to be aware of these links and analyse the impact they may have on the poor and the programmes being implemented.

<sup>2</sup> The categories of this table are based on the DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.

<sup>3</sup> Data from UNDESA, Population Division, at <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WUP2005/2005wup.htm>

## Urban communities

The concept of ‘community’ may have multiple meanings in urban settings. Urban communities can be both geographic (neighbourhood-based) and non-geographic (people gather in communities outside of their neighbourhoods for reasons of work, culture and solidarity). Some communities may form in response to a common interest, issue or economic opportunity. Such communities may also disperse due to a number of factors such as evictions or rent increases that force people to move.

Distinct types of urban communities include communities of **place**, **practice**, **interest**, **culture** and **resistance**. Urban residents are likely to be members of multiple communities. Depending on the mobility of urban residents, the community of place (or geographic area) may not be the community that people most quickly or willingly associate with.

**Table 2. Urban community types<sup>4</sup>**

Urban communities of...	
<b>Place</b>	Identify with a particular geographical area or location. Could be longer term (such as residents of an urban neighbourhood) or temporary (pavement-dwellers).
<b>Practice</b>	Based around a common form of work. For example, networks of entrepreneurs, service providers and labourers.
<b>Interest</b>	Organised around issues of common concern – they may fight slum crime, fires or floods; or organise to get their rubbish collected, to access child care or to demand basic services.
<b>Culture</b>	Shared language, values, beliefs or world views. They are members of a shared culture.
<b>Resistance</b>	Form in the face of threats of social violence, political oppression, war or disaster. May be internally displaced.

### Questions to consider

- How would you describe the communities that exist in your urban settings?
- Are there particular vulnerabilities associated with the communities listed?
- What are the implications for community engagement processes?

## Urban characteristics

It is recommended that urban programme staff determine together which of the following characteristics best reflects their local urban context. To assist staff with this process, questions to consider have been included in ‘Appendix 1’ of this document. Further analysis of the implications of these characteristics on child well-being and programming responses should be undertaken during assessment and design.

**Table 3: Urban characteristics**

<b>Diversity</b>	> Many different individual and group identities in an urban area
<b>Change and mobility</b>	> Frequent changes in the local urban setting > High rates of mobility and movement among individuals and communities
<b>Informal status</b>	> Many residents of urban slums are not recognised as legal citizens > Many urban slums are not registered or recognised as ‘official’ areas
<b>Dependence on informal cash economy</b>	> Difficulty in securing long-term, stable employment > Jobs or industries not known to local authorities > Poor are vulnerable to exploitative working conditions
<b>Exposure to risks and hazards</b>	> Urban poor live in vulnerable locations that threaten their health and safety
<b>Inter-connections</b>	> Many connections may exist between local residents, with external groups and to rural areas.

<sup>4</sup> Based on the typology developed by Nabeel Hamdi in *Small Change* (London: Earthscan), 2004.

## Urban governance

In urban environments, it is essential to understand the influence and importance of governance. Poor governance has been commonly identified as the greatest barrier to urban development.<sup>5</sup> Weak or absent relationships between the government and its citizens is at the root of urban poverty.

Many urban residents in developing cities do not have a say in the decision-making processes that most affect their lives. This could be because authorities have deliberately excluded them from these processes (often because the urban poor may live in 'illegal' settlements), or because local government structures are not set up or properly resourced in a way that allows for their participation and influence.

Urban residents represent a significant potential contribution to affect change in their cities. However, the exclusion of urban residents from the decision-making processes of the city, not only fails to tap into their potential to contribute, but it also significantly affects their access to services, security of land and housing tenure, livelihoods, and can lead to further marginalisation.

Municipalities are primarily on the front line of responsibility for ensuring that the rights of children become reality.<sup>6</sup> However local governments cannot function effectively on their own, and must operate within hierarchies of higher levels of government. In their decision-making processes, they also need to interact with civil society and the private sector to ensure that basic social needs are met.

Long-term and effective solutions to urban poverty are anchored in the promotion of good governance. This means promoting genuine collaboration and accountability between urban stakeholders, with the processes ideally led by the municipality or city government.<sup>7</sup>

### Example from the field: Yerevan ADP, Armenia

Throughout the design phase of the programme, partnerships were formed and built with organisations that were interested in contributing towards improving child well-being in the target district. The collaboration between 25 organisations was formalised through the signing of a partnership agreement which outlined the responsibilities of each party. The municipality (KZ District Administration) has the lead role in coordinating the efforts of the various organisations involved with improving child well-being, and chairing the regular network meetings of the 25 partners. A non-state agency supports the municipality in co-chairing the meeting on a rotational basis.

## Urban vulnerabilities and child well-being

Good governance underpins effective responses for achieving all the child well-being aspirations. Poor governance increases the vulnerabilities of children in urban environments. For example, complex city planning processes and a lack of coordination in informal settlements, marginalise the poor and keep them out of decision-making processes. Programming responses which advocate for pro-poor policies, transparency and accountability at city governance levels have the potential to make a significant impact in the lives of children.

<sup>5</sup> CARE International UK, *Urban Poverty: What CARE is doing about it*, June 2006; Oxfam GB, *Urban Poverty and Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, July 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Bartlett, et al. *Cities for Children*, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> UN-HABITAT, *Participatory Urban Governance*, 2000.

Whilst many vulnerabilities are related to poor governance, some are also related to broader social and economic factors in urban contexts. It is important to ensure a thorough analysis of both macro-level and micro-level issues that relate to child vulnerability. This includes analysing both the city-level systems (macro-level) and community issues (micro-level) that affect urban poverty.

The following table outlines some of the key urban vulnerabilities that affect children and some potential opportunities for promoting child well-being in urban contexts. Specific references to the relevant child well-being outcomes have been highlighted in order to assist programming staff to make the link between their context and the child well-being framework:

**Table 4. Urban vulnerabilities and implications for child well-being**

Vulnerabilities	CWB Aspiration	Potential programming responses
<b>Enjoy good health</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Risks and hazards often concentrated due to poor housing, lack of planning and application of building standards or population density</li> <li>→ Large populations sharing limited space and services</li> <li>→ Threats to health due to density and inadequate access to services. For example, contamination of the food or water supply, high levels of air or noise pollution, disease outbreak or a natural disaster.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children protected from infection, disease, and injury</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Children and youth in urban areas have minimal exposure to pollutants</li> <li>← Households have effective options for waste disposal and pollution management (clean and hygienic environment)</li> <li>← Local environment, infrastructure and recreational spaces are free from physical hazards.</li> </ul>
<b>Are educated for life</b>		
<p><b>Informality in education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Street children and children from low-income households unable to access formal school systems</li> <li>→ Lack of adequate funds to access education, or inappropriate forms of schooling related to age and learning abilities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Informality in employment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Youth and adolescents with limited economic and career opportunities</li> <li>→ Lack of education or appropriate job skills</li> <li>→ Militant or extremist groups seek to exploit unemployed urban youth.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children read, write, and use numeracy skills</b></p> <p><b>Children make good judgements, can protect themselves, manage emotions and communicate ideas</b></p> <p><b>Adolescents ready for economic opportunity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Children can access appropriate forms of quality formal and informal education</li> <li>← Support structures are in place to ensure a smooth transition from informal to formal schools</li> <li>← Children of migrant families understand their rights and their families are able to advocate for access to learning</li> <li>← Access to appropriate vocational skills training and support in identifying alternative employment opportunities.</li> </ul>

## Experience love of God and their neighbours

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Social exclusion of the urban poor</li> <li>→ Absence of traditional kinship networks; family structures fragmented</li> <li>→ Urban children and youth look to alternative forms of community for support and sense of identity, such as gangs</li> <li>→ Exploitation and abuse of power.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children value and care for others and their environment</b></p> <p><b>Children have hope and vision for the future</b></p> <p><b>Children enjoy positive relationships with peers, family and community members</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Children and youth are aware of the urban environment they live in and how to care for it</li> <li>← Where family structures are fragmented, children can access safe and appropriate child support and care services</li> <li>← ‘Positive’ forms of community and peer groups – according to criteria set by urban children/youth – are identified and supported in their care and support elements</li> <li>← City and district development plans are pro-poor, and include policies that respect the rights of children.</li> </ul>
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## Are cared for, protected and participating

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Informal housing and land ownership; temporary settlement in areas without adequate services or in low lying or unsafe areas</li> <li>→ Lack of access to services for unregistered urban poor</li> <li>→ Children exposed to a range of negative social behaviours including alcohol and drug abuse, high risk sexual practices and violence</li> <li>→ Dependence on the informal economy created by labour competition, migration from rural areas or from other parts of the same city, and exploitative economic practices</li> <li>→ Child labour to increase household income; children working long hours in unpaid, low-waged work or in harmful working environments.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children cared for in a loving, safe, family and community environment with safe places to play</b></p> <p><b>Parents or caregivers provide well for their children</b></p> <p><b>Children are respected participants in decisions that affect their lives.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Urban residents live in safe housing with appropriate security of tenure</li> <li>← Children and youth have access to green spaces, or safe peer-gathering places for recreation</li> <li>← Children and youth can provide feedback on the quality, accessibility and appropriateness of civic services</li> <li>← Appropriate measures are taken to improve the safety and security of urban neighbourhoods</li> <li>← Advocacy on labour rights and policy changes</li> <li>← Informal settlements included in government disaster planning through resident participation</li> <li>← Children and youth obtain information about activities and civic services relevant to them, and have access to decision-making processes.</li> </ul>
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## What kind of approach works in urban contexts?

In order to effectively address issues of urban poverty in cities, WV programme designs need to address both the **macro and micro** levels. Issues of child well-being in cities are connected to **city-level systems**, including social, political, economic and environmental systems. If needs are only addressed at the household or community level, programmes and staff risk being unable to understand and address the macro-trends that create and shape urban poverty. Local household concerns need to be understood alongside the influences of the city, in order to achieve sustainable urban development. In urban contexts, programmes should include influencing the multiple layers of governance structures; including municipality, state and federal structures to bring about sustainable change.



Given the importance of addressing governance in urban development, staff will need to engage with various levels of government - the municipality or local authorities, city government and national government. To promote the interaction and accountability between duty bearers and urban citizens, staff should understand the role, the powers and responsibilities of the municipality within their country context. Understanding the municipal sources of revenue and planning and budgeting processes is also important when seeking to strengthen collaboration with the duty bearer as the lead agency.

<b>'Macro'</b>	<b>'Micro'</b>
<i>Large in scale, scope or capability</i>	<i>Small in scale, scope or capability</i>
An entire city or metropolitan area	A local neighbourhood, ward or block

For staff in WV urban programmes to coordinate effectively and strategically at a city-level, it is necessary to explore partnerships **beyond** the primary focus area, or even the programme impact area. Connecting with networks and coalitions at the macro level is important in contributing to collective efforts in addressing the issues that impact child well-being.

## What could success look like in an urban programme?

Imagine that it is time for the end of programme evaluation. What kind of impact would WV hope to see through its urban programme, assuming that it has attempted to address both macro and micro-level change in the urban environment? The following examples of successful measures may help picture the results of a successful urban programme. It would be useful to keep these in mind during design and implementation of similar programmes:

### Macro-level impact

- Municipal government policy frameworks reflect locally defined child well-being priorities and include the urban poor (example child-friendly neighbourhoods).
- There are strengthened systems of accountability between citizens and authorities.
- Government decision-making processes on planning and development include the participation and influence of the urban poor, youth and children.
- Coalitions and networks influence government decisions and promote accountability in the implementation of development policies.
- Partnerships involving WV reflect interdependence, mutuality, alignment, transparency and collective impact.
- Citizens with common concerns develop networks across and beyond the municipality, and establish systems for communication, organising structure and ongoing action plans.

### Micro-level impact

- Children and their families have improved access to infrastructure and services at a higher quality standard.
- Residents of slums and informal settlements have greater security of land and housing tenure.
- Citizens have improved understanding and access to information on relevant laws, policies and resources.
- There are strengthened relationships and a sense of community exists between residents of settlements.

- Community systems are established for improving the environmental health and security of urban neighbourhoods.
- Urban citizens recognise the value of collective action and can identify examples where their contribution or participation has helped to bring about positive change in the community.
- Communities feel that they are living in a safer and more protected neighbourhood.

## Urban context monitoring and adaptive programming

Cities, slums and informal settlements are typically in a state of continual change. Changes can be felt and seen at the individual household level, street or neighbourhood level, municipal or district level, or across the whole city. These changes may disrupt project plans, force community members to move or change their priorities, and they may also change the local political or business environment.

The causes of high levels of urban migration are often linked to rural issues. For example, drought, conflict and lack of higher education opportunities. Therefore it is important to understand the interdependencies and connections between rural and urban areas (see section on ‘What is meant by ‘urban’ above).

The complexity, uncertainty and frequency of change in the urban environment requires staff to have an ‘adaptive’ programme management approach. This often requires being able to work with a degree of uncertainty - working between what is known and what is unknown. It requires going well beyond developing a design and logframe and implementing it. Regardless of ongoing changes in the context, staff must become continual searchers of solutions. In other words, being responsive and comfortable to adjust programme activities whenever changes occur in the urban context requires a different way of working. Local-level staff will need to, in addition to monitoring progress against defined indicators, **regularly observe and monitor the changes taking place in the urban context** and adapt their programme plan accordingly.

The following exercises (Table 5) are useful for encouraging urban context monitoring and an adaptive programming approach throughout the life of a programme:

**Table 5. Exercises for urban context monitoring**

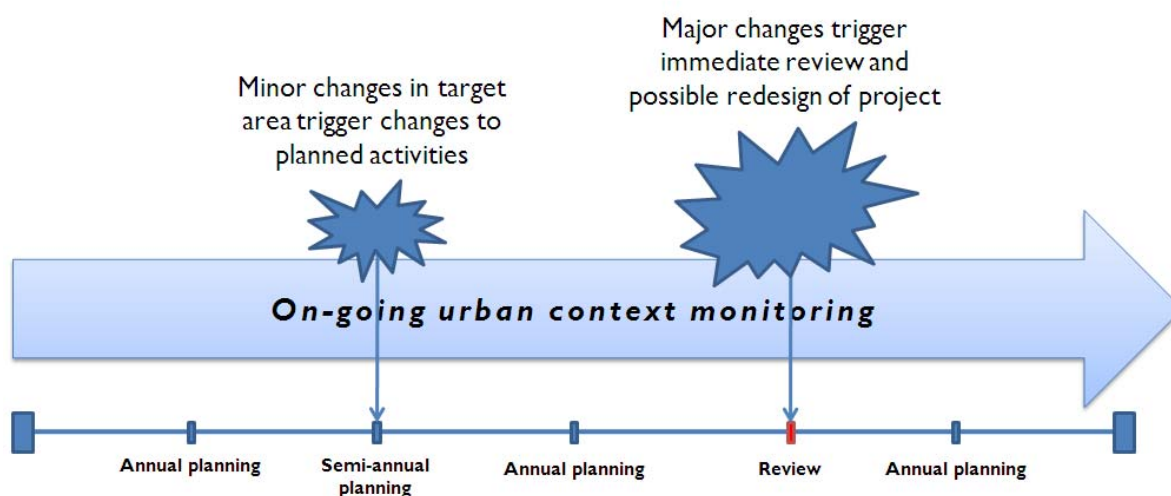
Tool	Process	Outcome
<i>Urban Context Monitoring</i>	Regular observation and reflection exercises with staff, volunteers and partners to track and record changes in local context over time.	Up-to-date information about the local urban context, to input into planning, monitoring and evaluation and redesign processes.
<i>Walk and Talk</i> <b>(Re-applied during implementation)</b>	Observations and informal conversations with community members that inform staff reflections. Note any changes to the area, physical, social, economic or environmental characteristics, including disaster risks.	Up-to-date information on community vulnerabilities, assets and mobility patterns to inform planning, monitoring and evaluation and redesign processes.
<i>Relationship and Influence Mapping</i> <b>(Re-applied during implementation)</b>	Map the relationships between key stakeholders at regular project intervals. Note any changes in levels of influence or power, and connections between different actors.	Awareness of the relationships that have an impact on child well-being in the target site. Information about changing power and influence that can trigger changes to project plans.
<i>Knowns /Unknowns</i>	Assess what issues are known, how	Identified gaps in knowledge or

<b>(Re-applied during implementation)</b>	they are known and what issues need more information before being addressed. Develop a plan of action to gather this knowledge and what will be done with it.	information about the situation in a community or target area; and actions planned to address those gaps in programme activities.
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Urban context monitoring will ensure that staff and partners are aware of, and prepared for, changes that will affect the outcomes of the project.

- > **Minor changes** in the urban context might trigger temporary disruptions to planned activities or timeframes. For example, a slum fire or flood could temporarily displace families and children. Similarly, a brief fluctuation in the local prices of food could change the immediate priorities of community members.
- > **Major changes** in the urban context would trigger an immediate review event, and possible redesign of projects and activities. Major events could include a significant change of government, the withdrawal of key partners or a national economic crisis. These changes may be taking place at either the macro or micro level, which is why it is important to monitor changes at both levels.

**Figure 1. Sample urban project monitoring and planning cycle**



## Appendix I: Urban characteristics - questions to consider

Urban characteristics	Questions to consider
<p><b>Diversity:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Many different individual and group identities in an urban area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How diverse is the community in terms of socio-economic status, political affiliations, ethnicity, culture, religion, demography and household composition?</li> <li>• What grassroots organisations, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, federations, associations, unions or other forms of social/political organisations exist in this area?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Change and mobility:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Frequent changes in the local urban setting</li> <li>&gt; High rates of mobility and movement among individuals and communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are different ways of ensuring up-to-date knowledge and understanding of changes in the urban environment and the impacts of these upon projects?</li> <li>• What are some of the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental trends and changes that affect the programme impact area now and may do so in the future?</li> <li>• How do these trends affect different groups within the urban community and what are their implications?</li> <li>• How is urban growth and migration shaping this community now? How may it do so in the future?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Informal Status:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Many residents of urban slums are not recognised as legal citizens</li> <li>&gt; Many urban slums are not registered or recognised as 'official' areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can slum residents or new urban migrants be included? These groups change quickly, and are often not counted or included in any official data.</li> <li>• What are the housing and land tenure situations, and how do residents access basic services, water and sanitation?</li> <li>• What are the implications of insecure living situations in the event of disasters?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependence on informal cash economy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Difficulty in securing long-term, stable employment</li> <li>&gt; Jobs or industries not known to local authorities</li> <li>&gt; Poor are vulnerable to exploitative working conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the resources available be mapped in any given urban context (for example, technology, infrastructure and governance systems)?</li> <li>• How can community access to information and local resources be facilitated?</li> <li>• What are the education levels, formal and informal employment patterns, sources of livelihood?</li> <li>• How can the new emerging opportunities for employment within the government and private sector be explored? What skills are in demand?</li> <li>• What labour laws guide employment conditions in this urban context? How do regulatory bodies address the issue of exploitation of the most vulnerable?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exposure to risks and hazards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Urban poor live in vulnerable locations that threaten their health and safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do natural disasters such as fire, flood, earthquakes and storms effect the urban poor's heightened vulnerability due to the location of their homes in dangerous, unsafe or illegal locations?</li> <li>• What are the specifically urban hazards? For example, issues associated with living in slums, pollution, overstretched services, population density, tenure security, poor building conditions, illegal connections to electricity and water, poor access to health care, insecurity of income, and employment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Inter-connections:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Many connections may exist between local residents, and with external groups and rural areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is this community connected to the broader society? For example, are there rural-urban connections, connections between different segments of the urban community or other connections?</li> <li>• What connects people within this area? For example, family ties, employment, location, political affiliation, religion, virtual communities or other links?</li> <li>• What power dynamics exist within and between groups? What opportunities exist to leverage the various methods of information communications and technology (ICT) and local media?</li> </ul>