Adolescent Girls Creating Safer Cities: Harnessing the Potential of Communication for Development (C4D)

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Because I am a Girl

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Acronyms

BIAAG: Because I am a Girl
C4D: Communication for Development
CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child
EGM: Expert Group Meeting
MDGs: Millennium Development Goals
UN: United Nations
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UN Women: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG: Violence against women and girls
WICI: Women in Cities International

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Introduction

Safer cities strive to create public spaces that are open and accessible to everyone, without exception. Most cities, however, are not totally safe for adolescent girls. What's more, they are run and developed predominantly without their needs being taken into account. Each week 1 million people move from the country side to city slums, of which a growing number of migrants are girls,[1] and there is growing pressure to find ways to address the myriad of dangers girls face, from violence and exploitation, to discrimination and access to schooling and safe housing.

Communication for Development (C4D) has emerged as an important addition to those promoting the rights of girls in the city. Programmes based on C4D take into account the fact that, as experts in their own safety and use of the city, girls are best positioned to identify the issues and priorities that affect them today and in the future, in order to make cities safer and more inclusive. In short, C4D gives adolescent girls a voice with which to take an active role in the development of safe urban environments.

Why C4D?

Since 1971, C4D has been used as a way of integrating children's rights and social transformation perspectives within communication planning, which the UN deems crucial to achieving and sustaining improvements for children's well-being.

With a strong focus on dialogue, community participation and ownership, this evolving field leverages modern and established communication technologies, and their underlying principles, to help create a level playing field for everyone in terms of accessing all of a country's social benefits.

[1]UN-Habitat, (2008), *State of the World Cities Report 2008-2009.*

Life on the periphery: cities and inequality

In most urban areas of the developed world, public spaces are divided up for fairly obvious uses, but over time they change, often restricting or removing access and opportunity for girls that was originally intended. So, while girls' particular needs and rights may be recognised as a specific category in policy and planning, they are often ignored in practice, particularly beyond the initial urban planning phase.

In contrast, in many cities of the developing world, the differences are stark: the rich live in well-serviced neighbourhoods, gated communities and well-built formal settlements, whereas the poor are confined to peri-urban areas or informal settlements and slums.

Wealthy residents can assert their right to the city, use spaces and services, and benefit from educational and economic opportunities. They are able to use public transportation, parks and schools while also opting for private services and enjoying private spaces. They are also able to rely on the police and the judiciary to a greater extent than poor city dwellers.

Cities can therefore be places of inclusion and participation that promote rights and opportunities for all members of society, but they can also be places of exclusion and marginalisation where crime, violence and lack of rights greatly impair their opportunities.

Life on the periphery of the city further decreases the ability of the urban poor to access municipal services. Specifically, lack of secure tenure, adequate housing facilities and access to sanitation, water, food, health, education and recreational facilities exacerbates the urban poor's vulnerability.

There is now a good body of evidence suggesting there are more girls than boys in slums, with women and girls now representing 55 to 70 per cent of slum-dwellers globally. About 40 per cent of the population in slums are girls under the age of 12. By 2030, approximately 1.5 billion girls will live in urban areas.[2]

While cities offer more opportunities to access education and sustainable paid employment, adolescent girls in particular are likely to miss out on them. In many places, their role in taking on unpaid care work at home prevents them from joining the paid labour force when they become young women. Those who do work tend to do so in the informal economy, where there is little stability or protection. And when families experience financial hardship, girls are often the first to be pulled out of school.

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[2] UN-Habitat,(2008), *State of the World Cities Report 2008-2009*.

Why girls move to cities

It is estimated that there are 283 million adolescent girls living in rural areas.[3] Many of them migrate to urban centres independently in search of jobs and education, as well as to escape from traditional customs and practices.[4] A survey in slum areas of Addis Ababa found that one in four young women migrants between the ages of 10 and 19 came to the city to escape child marriage.[5]

Some adolescent girls migrate to cities to be reunited with relatives, find new opportunities or simply because they heard reports from their friends about positive city experiences.[6] Migrant adolescent girls find success, confidence and independence in the city often after coping with inadequate sanitation facilities, unsafe water supplies, and insufficient health services or support. But many also find work in domestic settings and in small businesses where the risk of exploitation is very high, and realising their full potential remains a rare occurrence.[7]

Exploitation happens because girls are young, isolated, unaware of their rights, disconnected from services and afraid to expose their negligent employers. At worst, they can work 16 or more hours a day, are beaten, badly fed, poorly paid, and engage in transactional sex to pay for their basic needs, putting them at risk of acquiring and transmitting HIV.

In schools,…select boys as Girl's Rights Spoke Person… However, it might be difficult, as I had experienced in my high school, the boys usually do not want to be labeled as "girly", including talking about girls concerns.

— Girl, Indonesia

[3] Girls Grow: A Vital Force in Rural Economies. Chicago Council on Global Affairs. http://www.thechi cagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/GlobalAgDevelopment/Report/GirlsGrowReportFinal_v9.pdf

[4] Ethiopia Ministry of Youth and Sports, Population Council & UNFPA, (2011), *Programme Brief Berhane Hewan* (light for eve); a programme to support married and unmarried adolescent girls in rural Amhara Region, Ethiopia. 28 Feb. http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/Ethiopia_BerhaneHewanBrief2006.pdf

[5] Plan International, (2010), *Because I am a Girl Report: Digital and Urban Frontiers: Girls in a Changing Landscape*, p. 37.

[6] Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE). Women, Slums and Urbanisation: Examining the Causes and Consequences. Geneva: COHRA, May 2008; and International HIV/AIDS Alliance: Children Living outside of Family Care: The Street, September 2009. http://www.ovcsupport.net/s/

[7] European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (2011). Building Evidence for inclusive policies. http://www.genreenaction.net/IMG/pdf/Background_paper_-_Conclusions_Recommendations _-_Building_evidence_for_inclusive_policies.pdf)

International commitments

There are plenty of chances for girls and young women to benefit from opportunities and possibilities that are available in cities, but the future of cities depends on what city governments do now to support adolescent girls to realise their rights as enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

While girls fall within the CRC and CEDAW by virtue of being young and female, there are no international conventions that advocate on behalf of girls specifically and exclusively. Fortunately, children's issues are receiving international attention and support, and there is renewed focus in developing global initiatives committed to fulfilling children's rights – such as Plan's Because I am a Girl (BIAAG) campaign and UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities program.

What's more, six major UN agencies joined forces in 2010 to create the UN Interagency Task Force on Adolescent Girls focused on working with and for marginalised adolescent girls.

However, greater national and international commitments are needed to institute policies and resources to improve the safety of adolescent girls and make real the goal of gender-equality.

Girls' rights to the city

As the majority of the world's population now live in cities, it is obviously vital to understand the gendered use of urban space to make cities safe, inclusive and accessible for girls. In response to this, a new concept has emerged: the 'right to the city', whose premise is that all city dwellers, without exception, should be able to benefit fully from what the city offers.

The right to the city includes:
- Liberty, freedom and the benefit of the city life for all
- Transparency, equity and efficiency in city administrations
- Participation and respect in local democratic decision-making
- Recognition of diversity in economic, social and cultural life
- Reduced poverty, social exclusion and urban violence

Adolescent girls' safety and their right to the city are inextricably linked. The creation of safe and sustainable cities and communities depends on the elimination of the violence and insecurity that prevent women and girls from using public spaces and public transport freely as citizens.

Urban planning, management and governance

Urban planning, management and governance systems have changed very little over the years and have more often contributed to urban problems than functioned as tools for creating more inclusive and safer cities.

The historical lack of participatory urban planning is not just a technical matter; it is also a matter of local governance, since the ability of local governments to formulate and implement inclusive public policy can help reduce urban crime and violence through, for instance, improvements in transportation, housing, education, cultural activities, sporting events and job creation.

There is some movement on this front. Participatory planning efforts have over the last few years engaged with local people in the planning and design of their neighbourhoods, but the voices of adolescent girls have still been marginal. When coupled with C4D, however, participatory urban planning can provide the means for engaging with adolescent girls in creating safer streets and better-planned spaces.

If girls will just have the chances to shine on their own freely or without discrimination, then it would be sure that girls can make a difference to our society — girls can help in improving every aspect of our nation, even of the world. These things must be known clearly to those in authority so that they can think too on how they can support the girls...If it would come to their senses that supporting girls' rights would mean a better society, then everybody must work it out — everybody must participate in acknowledging girls' rights.

— Girl, The Philippines

International collaboration on safe cities for girls

C4D also helps promote urban inclusion and democratic governance of cities. UN-Habitat, Plan International, Women in Cities International and other partners such as the Huairou Commission are increasingly integrating C4D in participatory planning processes involving local communities and local government bodies. The results include greater local ownership, broader multi-stakeholder dialogues, and the encouragement of urban communities to engage actively in local decision-making processes.

A lot of opportunities await for girls who will be studying in the cities... like engaging in various activities which can enhance one's self and be able to mingle with people from all walks of life.

– Girl, The Philippines

In 2010, this partnership began developing a programme framework based on 'safe cities for girls', initially piloting and then implementing a multi-city project to test and validate Plan's 8-Point Call to Action on Girls' Rights in the City.[8] The eight points are:

All girls have the right to:
1. Access safe education in the city
2. Be free from violence in the city
3. Secure and decent housing
4. Move safely in the city
5. Affordable and accessible services in the city
6. Age-appropriate and decent work in a healthy urban environment
7. Safe spaces in the city
8. Participate in making cities safer, more inclusive and more accessible

These recommendation are aimed at maximising the opportunities and minimising the risks for all girls in cities, but especially the most vulnerable – those living in slums or on the streets. Strategic and targeted investments are required to make urban conditions more responsive to the needs and concerns of adolescent girls. Therefore, the 8-Point Call to Action on Girls' Rights in the City must be part of strategies at all levels to combat poverty, challenge inequality and promote opportunities for adolescent girls in the city.

[8] Plan International, (2010), *Because I am a Girl Report: Digital and Urban Frontiers: Girls in a Changing Landscape*, p.91.

C4D: advocacy, social mobilisation and behaviour change

Changing the way cities are shaped to ensure that they are safer and more inclusive of girls requires time and concerted action from multiple sectors. A long-term goal of many strategies aimed at addressing gender inequalities and violence against women and girls is ultimately rooted in attitudinal and behavioural change – change that respects the diversity of women's and girls' voices and experiences living in cities, towards healthy and non-discriminatory views on women and girls.

C4D considers how issues can be addressed through advocacy, social mobilisation, behaviour change.

Advocacy

Advocacy, information and communication are the building blocks of crime and violence prevention strategies, providing up-to-date developments in building safer cities, and empowering in-house and external partners to take part in programmes aimed at preventing urban crime and violence.

Advocating for and communicating about safer cities with adolescent girls involve understanding and communicating the current safety situation to the public, as well as the needs and desires of community members to take action and improve their safety and well-being.

Public perceptions of effective crime prevention and safe cities measures can often be more effective in reducing the fear of crime than actually reducing the level of crime. These are shaped over the long term by the media and personal experiences of violence, as well as through sustained and consistent advocacy and communication strategies as prescribed by C4D.

Case study: 'Not even with the petal of a rose'
Plan and Casa Ensamble, Bogotá, Colombia

The project, supported by the mayor and the municipality, was part of Bogotá's initiative to become a 'safe city', a place with very high levels of violence against women and girls. The campaign used face-to-face communication and arts-based communication to reinforce the campaign messages, which were also complemented by songs and petitioning, used in areas where other channels could not reach. Songs and the arts can reinforce the messages conveyed in posters and stickers and can be created with local people to ensure local language, dialect and realities are embraced.

Social mobilisation

Beyond an advocacy and communication strategy comes social mobilisation, addressing sustainable urban development, slum-upgrading programmes, urban environment improvement and the promotion of gender equality and youth empowerment. Addressing the causes of crime and developing a culture of prevention are just as important to achieving sustainable gains in urban development and to fighting poverty.

Case study: Youth empowerment through technology, arts and media (YETAM)

Plan in Kenya, Mozambique and Cameroon

Plan's flagship programme-YETAM- focuses on the rights of young people, particularly their safety. This three-country multi-faceted initiative is based on the active and meaningful engagement of youth, particularly girls, to increase their decision-making power and to advocate for issues important to them, using arts and media, targeting local to global audiences.

A diverse communication strategy was utilised as girls and boys built strong communication, leadership and teamwork skills. Initial face-to-face meetings were followed-up with digital and paper mapping to identify gender and violence issues in various different locations. Mapping involved groups of participants sharing their ideas and experiences of safety and violence in marked neighbourhoods. The project's use of arts and citizen journalism added a visual communications element.

In the first year of the project not only did more girls became involved in community decision-making roles and district planning and budgeting processes, but also additional youth groups starting up their own campaigns.

Girls would function at grass-root level by telling their brothers and fathers about their problems and in that way to change their attitudes.

– Girl, Finland

Behavioural change

The long-term goal of behavioural change, in this case towards adolescent girls, requires identifying undesirable behaviours and ways to change them. Facilitating partnerships and exchanges between boys and girls, for instance, has proven to be a constructive way to help change mindsets and behaviours. In fact, boys are often key allies in efforts aimed at realising girls' rights.[9] Successful approaches to increase understanding of issues by men and boys has been done through a variety of channels, including media campaigns, sensitivity training, street theatre, education and communication materials, global advocacy media and youth structures.

Case study: Safe Delhi Campaign
Jagori, UN Women and UN-Habitat

The goal of this campaign was to empower a group of 60 youth leaders, both boys and girls, to create a safer and violence-free environment in their community. Visual communication channels including magazines and posters were used to create a constant awareness of issues of violence against women and girls. The magazine Hamari Baatein, published once every three months and posted in different areas of the neighbourhood for nearly three years, provided a consistent visual presence of the project's message, evoked community interest and triggered discussion.

It was reinforced through theatre, dance and movement in areas with high levels of illiteracy. The theatre and dance performances also dramatised sensitive issues that people were unwilling to discuss directly such as child marriages, drug abuse, rape and spousal abuse.

The use of broadcast media such as video and radio supported the magazine, theatre and dance by broadening the scope of the advocacy, while training the women and girls involved in the production of these programmes how to identify local issues of concern, interview local residents, and work with local production companies.

[9] Plan International, (2011), *Because I am a Girl Report: So, what about boys?*.

C4D channels – pros and cons

There are many ways to use C4D communication channels to foster girls' active participation in the creation of safer cities: face-to-face, broadcast media, print media, and internet and mobile phones.

Face-to-face communication is in general highly interactive, relatively low-cost, gives immediate feedback, is adaptable to local contexts, and is good for complex information exchange. Drawbacks include its reach being rather limited and that it may not be ideal for exposing sensitive social issues.

Broadcast media tends to be the most costly of the communication channels, but its benefits are that it can reach very large audiences and can be used for general or specialised audiences. Drawbacks include it being difficult to adapt to specific cultures and languages, being generally only available to those with access to electricity, and that its messages may be censored by governments.

Print media, a relatively low-to-medium cost, can reach a broad literate audience rapidly and can explain more complex issues and behaviours. On the down side, it cannot be changed once printed, it is suitable for a few, short, focused messages, and may not be applicable in areas with low levels of literacy.

Lastly, internet and cell phones can provide high interactivity but the cost can vary from low to high. On the positive side, they are increasingly global in reach, they can convey both simple and complex messages, and provide a private place for information exchange if needed. And they provide new ways of communicating and creating dialogue that fit very well with C4D's underlying principles. Negative points include limited availability in some countries and communication difficulties across international boundaries.

These four channels can of course be combined to suit best each requirement.

[C]hildren have been involved in City decision making through Children Representatives... However children's voice usually not really heard as they usually not feel confident to say something or is encouraged to say something good instead of the real situation.

— Girl, Indonesia

@ Plan

A global programme to create safer cities for girls

Women in Cities International, UN-Habitat and Plan International are partnering to create safer cities for girls in a programme that utilises multiple communication to convey issues girls face in cities – both during the events and afterwards with the audiences.

A process using a dialogical methodology called 'Fast Talk' collected feedback and shared the ideas, opinions and experiences of 38 girls and young women from cities across Egypt, Finland, India, Indonesia, Kenya, the Philippines and Sierra Leone.

These C4D channels helped girls to openly discuss their issues and concerns, while providing opportunities to share them in private without fear of embarrassment or criticism. The results of these helped validate research findings about issues facing adolescent girls in cities, and feed into an international programme intended to engage adolescent girls in building safer, more inclusive cities.

Challenges using C4D

While the prospective benefits of C4D are many, there are also numerous challenges. The first is one of understanding: because C4D approaches are not widely understood by other UN agencies, international organisations, government, NGOs, communities or adolescent girls themselves, the potential uptake could be severely limited.

In addition, C4D initiatives tend not to be adequately supported by community leaders and government structures, and more broadly many governments simply do not support policies that promote communication for engaging adolescent girls.

At their best, C4D approaches can put issues of adolescent girls on the political agenda of city planning, providing they take into account social contexts. But practitioners need to remember that social change is complex and for C4D to work it must consider the family, community and city so that adolescent girls do not bear the burden of creating change alone.

Beyond that, C4D approaches are going beyond messaging to become multi-dimensional initiatives that are faced with increased pressure to demonstrate evidence-based results. Also, it is still early days and it is not always easy to accurately measure how well C4D approaches ensure safer and more inclusive cities for girls. More evidence will help to plan and monitor how well C4D approaches work in making cities safer and more inclusive for adolescent girls, and a learning process should be attached to C4D initiatives that feeds back into the quality cycle.

Girls in the cities have opportunities for schooling that do not exist for girls in rural areas simply because in the rural areas, there are a lot of limitations which I believe can hinder one's growth.

— Girl, the Philippines

Concluding thoughts and the way forward

Girls migrate to the city for a variety of reasons. Cities provide many opportunities to build girls' capacities, from confidence and leadership skills, to developing social girls' networks, and to helping reform policies.

But many still face high levels of violence and multiple forms of exploitation. It is up to governments, at all levels, to create cultural and legal frameworks that protect women and girls, who in turn are best-placed to advise governments and communities on their precise needs.

C4D approaches have been used effectively to this end, helping to build safer, more inclusive cities while raising awareness, enhancing self-esteem and empowering the urban poor and more marginalised. They have been able to provide adolescent girls with a platform to advocate for safer cities, based on the underlying principles of access to information, inclusion, participation, equity and empowerment.

With the three underlying approaches of advocacy, social mobilisation and behaviour change, C4D has enabled adolescent girls to spark change and make waves in their communities, from social media to radio shows.

While many challenges remain, there is enough evidence so far to warrant increased investment by the international community to scale up and promote research methods and programmes that builds girls' capacities and enhances their socio-economic status. And C4D offers an integral framework from within which girls can choose tools that are most relevant to their lives, and that prioritise their voices.

Girls need to be educated, so when they meet with boys in their focused programming and policies they would not lose their voices, because if girls are not educated they will not have much to say.

— Girl, Sierra Leone

Policy recommendations

The four international conventions and commitments below form the basis of girls' right to safe cities, and lay the foundations for the policy recommendations that follow:

• UNESCO and UN-Habitat Right to the City

• Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC)

• Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

• Plan's 8-Point Call to Action on Girls' Rights in the City

The following policy recommendations are influenced by Plan's consultation with young people around the world on girls' safety and right to the city.

- C4D initiatives should engage a diversity of adolescent girls. A broad range of voices representing age, class, ethnicity, ability and sexuality should be prioritised – rather than working on single representation.

- Governments should scale up commitments to engage adolescent girls through C4D tools and methodologies, through initiatives that promote and facilitate girls' rights to the city. This includes supporting girl-led multi-media campaigns, civil society organisations and girls' networks carrying out these initiatives, such as data collection and participatory research.

- Effective coordination and collaboration with girls' rights and safety organisations that use C4D, as well as with community-based organisations, municipal departments, research organisations, girls' engagement consultants, men's organisations dedicated to gender equality, and a wide range of government departments – all creating a supportive environment for adolescent girls.

- National and local governments should embrace girls' recommendations in changes to urban planning and programmes that affect their lives, such as street lights, safe transportation, safe homes, schools, and gender-sensitive facilities. They should also employ more women in male-dominated services including the police, public transport and teaching. C4D can promote transparent and accountable governance processes by creating dialogue between government and adolescent girls.

- Promote adolescent girls' access to employment and vocational training. Use C4D principles to provide opportunities to build essential skills such as leadership, public speaking and enhancing girls' social networks. Governments should support livelihood, technical and education programmes to support girls' education, while enhancing girls' socio-economic status.

- An integrated response to violence prevention that addresses social, spatial and law enforcement issues in the context of gender and age. C4D's underlying facility to enable girls to promote their rights to various audiences makes it ideally suited in this context.

- Government support for civil society initiatives and advocacy campaigns that engage men and boys to denounce violence and promote the rights of girls and women.