

Prioritizing Children's access to housing around the world

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[0:11] Patrick Canagasingham: Hi. I'm Patrick Canagasingham, chief operating officer with Habitat for Humanity International. Many thanks to all our guests and to all of you for joining us today as we examine the impact of children living in inadequate housing globally and highlight the ways it actually is driving poverty inequity. And I have with me an esteemed panel made up of subject matter experts from partner organizations, so let me briefly introduce our panelists today.

Thomas George is the global lead for urban with UNICEF. Robert Ndugwa is the head of data and analytics for UN-Habitat. And finally, we have Sarah Sabry, who's the global lead for urban, Save the Children.

So I just want to thank your panelists up front. Thank you for all what you do, but also for joining this important conversation this morning or this afternoon depending as to where you are located.

Let me actually begin by highlighting the problem statement, and we do have a significant challenge. Currently, there are 1 billion people residing in slums and what we call informal settlements. Now, this is it, and this is going to be the focus of our conversation today. Of the billion or so, experts tell us between 350 to 500 million are children. That's a reality that we're dealing with, and we know that the number is only going to get larger. Again, some of the experts tell us, by the year 2030, chances are close to 3 billion people are going to live in slums and informal settlements.

Now, if that isn't problematic, think about this. We are also told that the impact of housing has a significant correlation with access to education, health, livelihoods, et cetera. For example, according to the World Health Organization, or WHO, children living in these conditions are more vulnerable to infectious diseases such as pneumonia and diarrhea, which are some of the leading causes of child mortality under the age of 5. These are all conditions that we could work to eradicate, and that's the conversation today is we're not just going to focus on the challenges and be all well with the challenges, but we can find solutions.

As we approach this year's World Children's Day on Saturday, Nov. 20, we are acutely aware of the deep disruption that COVID has had on the most vulnerable populations, particularly children. If we don't act and act now, I would say, with purpose and renewed determination, this pandemic could cause lasting damage to children's ability to thrive over their lifetimes. These are real challenges, real problems.

I'd like to start our conversation today on how housing impacts both immediate and long-term outcomes for children. Evidence shows that the overall well-being of children is deeply linked to the quality of their housing and surrounding environment. On a personal note, having previously worked for child-centered development organizations and currently working for Habitat for Humanity, I think it's fair to say that it would be really challenging for us to pursue child well-being outcomes without addressing the issue of adequate housing.

On that note, I would invite Sarah Sabry to begin this conversation. And, Sarah, the question I would pose is this: In what ways does poor quality housing directly affect children and families?

[4:37] Sarah Sabry: Thank you, Patrick, for the introduction and for having me here today. And kind of following your approach, I'm really going to respond to this question by taking the lens of those 350 to 500 million children growing up in slums and informal settlements. And the very short answer to your question is that it affects children and families in so many ways and almost in every possible way. And I'm going to just highlight two aspects to consider here to start with, and the first is there are aspects around the home itself — it's basic infrastructure, its quality, the space, the size, what it allows children and families to do. And the second aspect is the location of this home, which is the neighborhood where it's located, and in that case, the slum and informal settlement.

And just to start off here, if we take health as one important point, housing without adequate access to clean water and sanitation means that children are often sick with diarrhea. And diarrheal disease is still the second-largest ... second-highest cause of child mortality for children under 5. And imagine here that children who are repeatedly sick with diarrhea and the impacts that has on them. So it affects their growth, their nutritional status, can lead to stunting, wasting, makes them more vulnerable to illness, affects their ability to learn and perform at school, and so on.

The second aspect I would say is air quality. And within the home, this is often very poor because, in slums and informal settlements, a lot of people are using unsuitable fuel for cooking, for eating, and this obviously affects air quality at home, especially in overcrowded and poorly ventilated housing. This obviously then contributes to higher rates of respiratory illness, especially in the youngest children. Also relating to air pollution is where these homes are located. So the location of housing means it's often close to waste dumps where waste is burned, close to industrial waste, and this all affects child development.

Now, another major point is about safety, so injuries and everyday hazards, and here, housing is often constructed using flimsy construction, and there's exposed electrical wiring within the

home and in the neighborhood, all the unprotected cooking arrangements in small rooms, in crowded homes, open drains in the neighborhood and absence of sidewalks, safe crossing places. All of this contributes to higher rates of injury.

And then you have all the intense weather events — flooding in coastal cities, near rivers, cyclones and hurricanes. Again with poor quality housing, it has a huge impact on safety. Sense of security of children, evictions, a lot of people living in slums are renting rooms and housing. They can be evicted overnight. Rental crisis can increase again from one day to the next, and so all of this severely disrupts child well-being.

And finally — and I would say very, very importantly — is stigma. And this is often an issue that is not adequately taken into consideration. As children grow older, especially as they become adolescents, they become very embarrassed not only of their home, but of the neighborhood where they live. And this affects child health, well-being, but also as they become youth, it affects their access to jobs because some neighborhoods are stigmatized. Children living in these neighborhoods, youth from these neighborhoods, are not as employable as others when their address is seen. And it also leads to them being harassed by the police when it's known where they live. So basically, the point is housing, its quality and the location where it's at affects children and their families in almost every possible way.

[9:04] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you so much, Sarah. And I'm so glad that you also highlighted the last point around stigma. Stigma also has, again, a very strong correlation to, I would say, protection as well, and again, you gave a really good example in terms of perceptions that a lot of the children have to deal with. So let's hold on to that thought for a moment. I want to come back and revisit this because it's something that I personally witnessed within many countries, many communities. I have seen this firsthand, and I've heard from communities as well. So let's hold onto that thought.

And, Thomas, I would like to turn to you now. It's the same question. The question is this: In what ways does poor quality housing directly affect children and families? And, if you don't mind, based on what Sarah said right at the end, if you could also build on maybe some specifics, particularly in the area of child protection and maybe some of the things that UNICEF is doing but fully, again, bearing in mind the importance of housing.

[10:03] Thomas George: Thank you, Patrick. I would like to take the conversation beyond children living in slums to children who don't even have any shelter over their heads. I'm referring particularly to this issue of street children, and, you know, there are estimates of so many million children living on the streets, but I don't think anybody has any clear idea of how many children are there. Having worked in India, I've seen this large group of children which migrate from city to city and from town to town using railways as a means for their transportation.

I would think that right to housing is a fundamental right of children, and, in the child rights discourse so far, right to housing has not got the kind of importance that it should have because

I think that the housing is what transforms how a child is cared for, the safety of children and how children can access services. When we talk about safety, Sarah spoke about the safety or shelter from natural hazards, but also safety from harm. We know that the kind of abuse or the protection issues which children face generally, and especially those living in the slums and informal settlements, which also is a hotbed of crime and other antisocial activities.

For focusing on the right to services, I would say that the first thing is to be counted, and children living in slums and informal settlements or children not having houses, not even counted for access to services. Public outreach doesn't reach them. So this is an area where we need to really work towards getting the children living in inadequate housing or without housing to be counted and to be part of the local government development plans and also be part of any programs which are addressing children living in urban areas. So I would conclude saying that right to housing for children is a fundamental right which we need to highlight in the days to come.

[12:40] Patrick Canagasingham: Thanks. And what I've appreciated thus far between Sarah and you, Thomas, is that you're beginning to surface some of the salient issues. I love what Sarah said about stigma, and to your point about ... you talk about it as being a right. A right to housing should be actually a significant part of the policy discourse, and we will come back and talk about the policy discourse. On that note, Robert, I want to invite you because this issue is front and center for you and Habitat as well. So same question and would love to hear your perspective.

[13:20] Robert Ndugwa: Thanks a lot, Patrick. I would like to agree very much with Sarah and Thomas on the issues they've highlighted there. And from the UN-Habitat side, we believe strongly in the right to adequate housing, and that is easier said than translated into what it really means for children.

But what we see very much in the evidence is that there's a lot of research, historical research, because the issue about good housing has been around for longer, but that research documents very strongly that the setting and the location of those houses where children grow up has a very strong impact in terms of lifetime, from childhood all the way to adolescence and adulthood in terms of their physical, in terms of emotional, their psychological, but also their behavior development.

And, obviously, that impact also comes sometimes directly but also indirectly. Perhaps focusing a little bit more on the indirect component, we see that whenever you have challenges about good housing, even for the caregivers or the parents themselves, that alone translates into a lot of stress for those parents. It translates into lack of support to the children who live in such houses. So directly and indirectly, we see most of these impacts. But for children, I think what is very critical here is to understand that ... children have a very critical step and stake in terms of development, and that development tends to be in the early ages for which a home provides that sort of environment to nurture that development. And as long as that home is not adequate, is not safe, is not comfortable and is not healthy enough, then children are likely to have all

those lifetime impacts that will affect their positive development but also their socialization, including even overall performance in terms of academic where evidence shows that children coming from that sort of poor housing background tend to perform much poorer in terms of reading or math scores when it comes to standardized tests. So the issue here is that housing as a center and housing as a right has a direct impact on children but also many other indirect impacts amongst the children but also the caregivers themselves.

[15:59] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you, Robert. And, again, what I appreciate about what you said, amongst other things, is the concept of direct and indirect. Sometimes our focus can be looking at how it directly impacts children, but how also it indirect impacts children I think is equally important.

What I want to do right now is I want to switch gears for a moment. Our respective organizations — Habitat for Humanity, UN-Habitat, UNICEF and Save the Children — participated in the annual UN summit on climate change, COP26, in Glasgow just earlier this month. In addition to our discussions on urgency around climate change, we also need to make sure that we just cannot overlook the significant burden COVID-19 has had on so many programs and interventions around the world. I of course want to bring it back to children.

How does the global landscape — i.e. public health, climate change, rapid urbanization, migration, just to name a few — impact children? And I think, more importantly, the access to our focus today: adequate housing. Robert, I want to start with you this time around.

[17:28] Robert Ndugwa: Patrick, thanks a lot. Indeed both from public health emergencies such as the COVID as you've highlighted that we've faced in the last two years, including climate change or the rapid urbanization or the migration, all these have a direct but also sometimes an indirect or long-term impact on children, especially children living in urban areas as we've come to see it of late.

And obviously the challenge of adequate housing as I noted earlier is a very historic one. It's been around for longer, and we've tried many, many solutions, but sometimes not really achieving what we aim for. And what these many global challenges — from the health emergencies, climate change, urbanization, migration — have done is basically to expose the whole plight of housing as a crisis and bring it to the forefront of many headlines that we see today.

And this is very much manifested in the form of, taking an example for COVID, when all these lockdown measures came up, they were stay home orders that were put in place. And for people, for example, in informal settlements, this meant that you're telling seven people to stay in their 4-meters square house or room for the entire period of the COVID crisis. And that, for children, meant that it felt like a prison. It felt like something that's so uncomfortable, wondering why do we have to stay in this small box for all these periods of times without really enjoying the well-being that children desire.

And so we begin to see the same impacts when it comes to climate change. For example, when we see all the floods that are routinely coming up in urban areas or the heat waves that are also coming up in urban areas leading to loss of lives, but also sometimes leading to livelihoods being lost, particularly for the caregivers, which then indirectly brings the direct impact to children who come from those sort of households.

So when we see perhaps the aspect of migration, again, every time you migrate with children, there are many psychological problems that these young people experience, and since some of these are basically long-term, sometimes it affects their own future earnings and the possibility to basically increase one's chance of establishing long-term and stable relationships. So for children, migration could be positive, but, in many ways, the process of migration itself can be such a bad experience for children that it can last for a lifetime.

So, in essence, what we see for children in this whole picture is that unless we get to solve that housing problem for these children, ensuring that we provide the right conditions that support their health development but also helps them to be around the environment that they need, for example, accessing schools, accessing all the other basic services, this is the only way we can guarantee that in future we can have a well-natured population, a strengthened economy and one where I think all of us and the future of health can be secured.

[20:48] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you so much, Robert. You said something that resonates so much with me. About six, seven weeks ago, I undertook my very first program visit with Habitat, believe it or not because I couldn't travel due to COVID, of course. I visited programs just outside of Amman in Jordan, and I was talking to this family, and the mother ... she had four children with her, four school-age children. She said precisely what you just said. She said, you know, when I asked her about COVID, the impact of COVID, she was thankful that in partnership with Habitat, that she had a place to live. And as we know and as we've just talked, a home is definitely the first line of defense when it comes to issues like health, et cetera. But she said something, and she said, you know what? Because my children are unable to get out ... you know, they can't really venture out when there's a lockdown, or when there was a lockdown, they were unable to go to school. And she used the same term that you used. It felt like they were living in a prison. Interesting, isn't it? And perspective really matters here. There are still parts of the world where COVID has still or still continues to have that devastating impact, and you know, it's important for us to bear that in mind.

Sarah, I'm going to turn to you. I want to ask the same question. Would love to hear from you particularly what Save the Children is doing to really address just not the issues, but really to give us perspective about what could recovery also look like even as we address this important question.

[22:24] Sarah Sabry: Thanks, Patrick. So, really building on what Robert said, so seven people in a 4-meter room living for many months and then asking children to homeschool in the setup has so many flawed assumptions in it. Obviously, that these children will have a room where they could concentrate on their schoolwork, that they will have a laptop or computer to connect

to the internet, that they will have unlimited funds to have unlimited wifi to be able to connect to the school, et cetera. I mean, this was difficult enough for those of us with children living in comfortable situations. Imagine how it was for context of urban poverty.\

So, from that, I would say safe back to school has become a huge ... one of the critical priorities of Save the Children in our upcoming strategy period. This is a huge, concerted effort of the organization to get children back into school, to catch up with school going forward. And bear in mind, there are some countries where schools have been closed for 18 months and have just reopened. So children living in poverty have really been hit very hard, and COVID has been very much an urban crisis with the vast majority of cases in urban areas, and they've been really the most affected by this. Obviously, children are being affected by the disease but by the measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID.

The other thing I want to comment on is the climate crisis, and Save the Children, we've recently published a landmark report which looks at how children born today will be impacted by the climate crisis. And just on heat waves, as Robert mentioned, children born today will experience on average globally six times as many heat waves as those born in 1960. And this is the global average. If you look at the regional variations in some regions, like the Middle East or east and southern Africa, some of the impacts of climate change are significantly more and worse than the global averages. And, again, living in a home in context of poverty makes everybody so much more vulnerable to that.

The other point I want to go back to relating to COVID was, you know, the huge psychological pressure this put on children and families. So you were telling people wash your hands, maintain safe physical distance so that you can survive this, especially at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. And these issues are practically impossible in contexts of overcrowding. And so you can imagine the psychological pressure again that put on children to tell them to survive, for your parents to survive and the elders to survive, you need to do these things in contexts where there is no running water or there's very limited running water, clean running water, et cetera. This I think has been a huge pressure on children living in contexts of urban poverty.

Now, again, another point, and I want to mention this from experience, is climate change and intense rain, for example. So in a lot of slums and informal settlements, it rains a little bit, and you have waterlogging in the neighborhood where open drains flood and mix with sewage and garbage, et cetera. Imagine with more intense rainfall, this waterlogging becomes quite extreme, and you see it in some neighborhoods. Sometimes this water at knee level, almost you can see the marks on some of the homes of people in these neighborhoods. So I think between climate change, COVID, it's really exacerbated the situation and made it very visible as to how this level of inequality cannot be tolerated.

[26:35] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you, Sarah. And again I've just made note of something you said about survival for a child, the psychological trauma and how we grossly underestimate what it really means in parts of the world where even with the best of intentions, when we talk about best practices when it comes to hygiene, for example, we fail to realize the

context isn't it. And we also fail to realize at times the adverse impact that it has, particularly on children based on the constraints that they have to face on a daily basis. So, again, I keep coming back to perspective is ... that perspective is absolutely important, even as we are respective organizations and the space that we work in, make sure we appreciate what that really means in each of the contexts that we operate in.

With that, Thomas, I would like to invite you. It's the same question, Thomas. And what I would appreciate is, even as we continue to talk about climate change, maybe if you want to give other examples of shocks and stresses including migration, et cetera, and, again, these issues are further amplified by COVID, is see if you could again give us an example or two please.

[27:45] Thomas George: Thank you. Thank you, Patrick. I'll start with a brief comment on the impact of COVID and then go into migration.

One may have very rightly put it that COVID was a crisis which exposed many other hidden crises. I would think that one crisis is the crisis of slums and informal settlement. Another crisis is the housing crisis. You know, initially, if you remember the kind of preventive actions which were prescribed were not at all practical for slums and informal settlements. Stay away from another person, have 6 feet between them, and you know, there are so many people ... I know I've lived in cities like Dhaka where, in some parts of the city, there are 200,000 people living in a square kilometer. So how would anyone take the social distancing of 2 meters at all seriously in such a context? I think that ... I think we really missed out on taking the reality of slums and informal settlements when we first went out with our preventive [inaudible].

On migration, climate and migration are huge drivers of urbanization. I think that's something everybody agrees to. World Bank estimates that there are 1.4 million people moving into urban areas every week, and this movement into urban areas is in a few continents like Asia and Africa and a few cities. So you can imagine the kind of ... the burden which it brings into the cities. The cities are not ... themselves, the city structures are weak, the city governance systems are weak, and they're not able to take on these huge additional numbers of populations which are coming in.

Again, I'll go for an example from Bangladesh, Dhaka where I lived for five years before coming to New York. There are parts of the city which grow at 20 percent a year annually. So even when we saw during COVID that even in developed countries the city systems crumbling. The urban public systems crumbling in developed countries. How can we even expect a city in a developing nation to look at that? So for us, UNICEF, we were already into an urban evaluation, and we ... halfway through the evaluation, we brought in the COVID ... the impact of COVID as well, and the evaluation recommendation and the management response is to have an all of organization approach for focusing on slums and informal settlements. And I have to say that we get very good collaboration from Robert and his team and other parts of UN-Habitat to get the data in place. We are right now working for getting the child data set for 60 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which will be kind of a foundation for integrating a focus ... a very serious focus on slums and informal settlements into our country programs.

[31:03] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you, Thomas. And, Thomas, I want to stay with you for a moment. We've identified significant issues. Like I said right at the beginning, the intent here is not to be over or daunted by the challenges that we see. Our respective organizations actually exist to solve problems, and I really want to pivot and start talking about some of the solutions both in terms of what we are doing and what we should be doing as well.

So, for example, we know that children are particularly vulnerable because of their dependence on others, and I think at least a couple of you kind of alluded to this to meet the basic needs. I mean, Robert talked about direct/indirect dependency on caregivers, et cetera. And again, recent data shows that by 2050, almost 70 percent of the world's children will live in urban areas. That's a reality. That's a reality that we just cannot ignore. Predominantly, guess what, in informal settlements, slums, inadequate housing, and the list goes on.

So I ... shelter has to be absolutely transformational. That's the whole premise of this, right. To mitigate whether it's child poverty, improving health outcomes, creating better educational opportunities, et cetera. So, Thomas, I'm going to ask you this question and then turn to the other panelists of course. What policy — and you kind of alluded to the policy discourse, both you and Sarah did right at the beginning — is what should policymakers do different to address the growing needs of children in urban areas?

[32:45] Thomas George: Thank you. Thank you, Patrick. This is my favorite topic. I have a few points on that. I think we've been talking even in this discourse about billions globally and all that. I think there is an acute need to localize this data because localizing data is what translates into actions on the field for children. So when you say 70 percent of our children will live in urban areas, where are they going to live? If they are going to be mostly in Asia and Africa, and I think we need to be very clear even ... not just in rich countries, but in rich cities, and, you know, there could be a lot of difference in where people move based on their country.

The second point is how does this localized data and analysis translate into plans for children? I think there's a lot to be done there in terms of adequate resources, the capacity, and stuff like that. If you ... the third area is on adequately addressing children's issues and the right housing and appropriate national and local level policies. If we take the example of national urban policies, in most countries it's more about land use and stuff like that. Does children's issues figure in that? Even if right to housing figures in that, do they have a bearing on the rights of children there? So I think integrating children's issues into the national urban policies and also into the national planning standards is crucial here.

The fourth point is on strengthening capacity of local governments. In most of the developing countries, the capacity of local governments is quite limited, and even the decentralization there might be ... I mean, in some places, it's ambiguous; some places it's a bit ... you're not very clear. Maybe the function is decentralized, but the finances are not decentralized, and you know, it can be quite a convoluted figure there.

So how can we strengthen the local governance and the coordination between different sectors? Because the services, the housing and other aspects of what children need are delivered sometimes by the local government or by deconcentrated levels of the national government, so how do you bring them together and have a coordinated approach?

The last bit is this is such a complex task which no agency can take it alone. I think you need strong partnerships at the global level, regional level, national level, the city level. So we need to invest in getting those partnerships going. So I'm glad that we have this partnership going on right housing for children, and we need to take it further.

[35:57] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you so much. Thank you, Thomas. That was very comprehensive, and, to your point, I really want to hone in maybe in a few minutes on the concept of ownership, particularly when it comes to national governments. What does local governments really mean? What does it really mean to enable local government from a governance standpoint to take ownership as well? These are important questions.

Robert, I'm going to turn to you, but I'm going to maybe morph this question in a way where Thomas kind of alluded to something important is the evidence that we need, and I just want to, considering your area of expertise and what you and Habitat does, is to talk about the role of data, even as we look at policy discourse. And if you maybe even have an example, a concrete example just for illustrative purposes that you could share with us, that would be useful. Robert?

[36:48] Robert Ndugwa: Thanks a lot, Patrick. Indeed, as Thomas noted, I think the delivery of adequate housing is very much a shared responsibility. And if we can all make it a priority in all our programs, that's the only way we're going to be able to strengthen most of the mechanisms for collaboration across all partners or even stakeholders and help us to work in a very complementary way to address this historical problem.

From the side of data, we really are pushing for more investments, and not investments in global partners like ourselves here at UN-Habitat, but actually building the systems at the local level, at the city level where the action is actually happening. So basically localizing the knowledge and localizing the systems and localizing the interpretation of that data is a very important aspect. Because when you strengthen those local data systems, or as we call them the urban observatories, then you help at the local data to make sense to those from which it's collected from but also directly impacting the decisions of the local policymakers.

So we are pushing a little bit more on that button, that data at the global level is very helpful for headlines. For example, when we work on the slum populations and we list the billions of people who live in slums, it's very good for the headlines. But we want to now begin translating that to the local, translating it to the local languages, the local policies, as Thomas noted, but also the local investments and changes that are required at that local level. And that's a pattern we are pushing to ensure that we leave no one behind, or we leave no space behind, but also the evidence helps us to understand who is being left behind, why and how they are being left behind.

[38:41] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you, Robert. And your point or your emphasis about evidence is critical because we need the evidence to make our case. Just not to make our case, but even as we seek solutions as well. Talking about seeking solutions, Sarah, I'm just going to turn to you.

Even as we look at solutions, even as we hone in on policy and the policy discourse, Save the Children has done a lot of work on the policy front but also from an advocacy standpoint. Oftentimes when we ... specifically when we talk about campaigns, we have this perception, well, but that's just a global piece. How does it really relate to, let's say, what we've been just talking about, national governments? How does it impact local governance? Can you give us an example or two maybe from the Save the Children experience, Sarah, where we can be hopeful that it actually works? It actually works even ... whether it's a global campaign but how it's also bottom-up in terms of how we work with local government or national governments as well.

[39:48] Sarah Sabry: Well, there are a lot of examples from Save the Children advocacy, and I would say also from the UNICEF advocacy efforts. But perhaps just kind of going back shortly to the question, and, you know, if we want to think of policies on housing, I think we need to think of two separate issues. One is the current housing stock we have and the immense upgrading efforts needed to bring that to basic human rights of living. And the second is that with this rapid urbanization and the figures you mentioned, Patrick, at the very beginning of the session, you know, of expectation of growth, there's the vast majority of neighborhoods that will accommodate this rapid urbanization are pretty much yet to be built. And so the question is how can these look different from where we are today? And I think if we want to look at policy, we have to look at these two aspects separately.

And perhaps, just this thing, it's very context specific, I would say, and here goes back to Thomas' point on localizing data, et cetera. It's really very context specific. There are some cities where slums and informal settlements are 10 percent ... house 10 percent of the population, and there are some other cities where they house 90 percent of the population and they're the rule rather than the exception. And I think in that case, in addition to data, I think we need to really ... a really in-depth ... a really kind of in-depth political economy analysis of the housing sector. There's a reason why things are the way they are. Obviously lack of resources and rapid urbanization is one, but housing is a sector with kind of rapid wealth accumulation as well. And there are people and corporations who benefit from the status quo, so you need to really, as governments, look into how does this play out and to see how to address it.

The other point that I always feel is really missing from the housing debate is around rental regulation. There is an assumption that the vast majority of people who live in slums and informal settlements have built their own homes and live there, but, actually some of this is aggregated data from demographic and health surveys shows that over 50 percent of the people living in a particular neighborhood, slum or informal settlement, are renting this housing. And so when I look at policies, we need to also think of rental regulation in some spaces.

[42:38] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you, Sarah. You're absolutely right, and I'm sure we can all think of specific examples as well. And talking about the solutions, I want to talk about hope and inspiration. As we look at ... like I said at the beginning, when you talk about numbers, it's easy to be overwhelmed, but we exist because we want to make a difference. So, Sarah, starting with you very quickly, what gives you hope right now as we collectively work to improve children's access to adequate housing?

[43:14] Sarah Sabry: So, I mean, what gives me hope is the work some of our organizations are doing, and we've come together actually, all four organizations, along with another 21 organizations and formed recently something called the Global Alliance Cities for Children, which is an alliance of organizations that focuses on child rights and well-being in the urban context. So I hope that the work we do can raise the profile, you know, the issue of housing and need for adequate housing for child health and well-being around the world. So I hope kind of collectively we can advocate, and that our collective voices can be more impactful than just one or two organizations globally that are talking about this.

[44:03] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you. Thank you, Sarah.

And we just received our very first question from the audience, and I think we should answer. And keeping in mind hope. Hope is absolutely important, particularly when we talk about how children are traumatized, how children need to live with the kind of stigma that they're confronted with. And I'm just going to turn to the audience with the very first question, and the question is this. What are the gaps in programming that need to be addressed to ensure that we are meeting the needs of children? So I assume this question can be directed at us as organizations. What are the gaps that we see? But it also could be seen from a collective in terms of what are the collective gaps that we really see that we need to address from a programming standpoint? Thomas, can I turn to you?

[45:03] Thomas George: Yeah, thank you, Patrick. I would take this question with an urban focus. There was a feeling that urban children have an advantage over rural children, and largely during the MDG era, that we focus more on rural children than on urban children. But as we got better with data, especially localized data, we found that city averages mask inequities. And whoever has asked the question and all others who are listening in, I would urge them to go on the net and look for this report from UNICEF called "Advantage or Paradox for Urban Children." And that analysis from 70 countries using 10 indicators showed that, in 40 percent of the countries analyzed, urban ... the urban poor children were worse off than rural children in terms of achieving those indicators. And in 25 percent of the countries, urban poor were worse off than even rural poor. So I think if you look at ... if you approach this question from which are the groups of children who are being left out, I would say that it's, again, it's localized, but the poorest in urban are the worst off because of various reasons, including the weak public systems, the policies in some countries not to focus on slums and informal settlements, the growing urbanization, the vast migration into urban centers, and also the refugee movement.

[46:55] Patrick Canagasingham: So, Thomas, if I ... thank you for that. And if I understand what you're really trying to encourage us to do is that we need to appreciate the problem for what it is, and urbanization is a significant aspect of it. And I think what you're really saying is, yes, there's a gap, but there is an opportunity as well, based on how we focus.

You made another reference which I think we should not ignore, and it was your reference to the Millennium Development Goals or the MDGs. For me, my humble opinion there is ... the biggest distinction between the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals is with the MDGs, it was like the development ... the developed world telling the developing world get your act together. We didn't necessarily look at our own back yard and ask important questions, particularly some of the issues we're talking when it comes to urbanization as well. The SDGs is different. It's collective ownership, right?

So, Robert, I mean, even as we wrestle with the SDGs and realizing the intent and the vision of the SDGs, and going back to the question that has been posed to us, where do you see the gaps even with the SDGs? Even as we're trying to realize the intent and not the specific focus on what Thomas said. Think of urbanization and of the need for us to have a laser-like focus in how we address it.

[48:26] Robert Ndugwa: Thanks, Patrick, and I think you made a very strong point there in terms of the shifts from MDGs to SDGs. If there's anything that SDGs has really also emphasized is this one aspect of the universality, but also the value of partnership, the need to work together. And I think in the urban sphere, particularly around children who require different services at different stages of their lives, that that interconnective nature between housing or health or education or even the dispersion, in terms of what is available within a certain location, is all crucial to build and nurture that sort of childhood that we all envy and desire. And in this case, we need to harness in this era of SDGs that idea of central partnerships working across the silos of health or across the silos of education, knowing that we are all speaking and probably addressing the needs of the same child. And that intersectional [inaudible] in terms of connecting all our work, our policies, et cetera, is very important.

The other gap and opportunity I see is around the aspect of the era we are living in, which is a technologically advanced world as well as a very innovative world, and I think we need to find a way of harnessing that technology and innovation for this generation to see how we can harness the power of these tools to deliver either more affordable housing solutions and particularly with the right [inaudible].

[49:57] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you, Robert.

And there's a follow-up question, Sarah, that I want to turn to you, and it's really about the quality of programming. And you know, both Thomas and Robert have kind of given us perspective and context. Maybe if I could just turn to you and say, yes, and even as we're wrestling with this and we see there are gaps and there are opportunities, just going back to the question that I asked previously around hope and inspiration is that if you could maybe just

come back and say, “and guess what, because we’ve been also focusing on some of the gaps over the past, let’s say, couple of years or so many years, even with the Sustainable Development Goals, is that we are seeing the improvement, particularly as it pertains to children, particularly as it pertains to adequate housing.” Maybe if you could highlight what’s working and inspire us.

[50:58] Sarah Sabry: I guess a lot has been working, Patrick, but then COVID has really kind of reversed a lot of the development gains of the last decades. So I guess perhaps what’s been working this past year with COVID is the increasing rollout of social protection programs around the world, which is ... it’s been great to see a lot of governments have responded and rolled out programs for informal workers who are generally outside of social protection systems, child grants, et cetera. So there are examples, but I have to say it’s ... we have to be really cautious about this because really this past year and a half has, you know, seen world hunger on the rise, child poverty on the rise, poverty in general on the rise, so it’s ... yeah, have to be cautious of it, I would say.

[52:04] Patrick Canagasingham: Yeah. And if I may turn to Thomas and Robert as well, I’m sure you continued to be inspired by what your respective organizations do and what this means. Talk about that whole Thomas.

[52:19] Thomas George: Yeah, I mean, my take on this is, you know, a lot of interventions in urban in the past for most of the organizations were projects. I think there is a need to switch from a project mode to a program mode because project modes are not sustainable, and when the project is over, the whole thing is ... crumbles. So I think, for me, a huge learning in the past few years is that to sustain anything which we do, we need to be on a program mode rather than a project mode.

[53:01] Patrick Canagasingham: That’s a great point. Great point. And it’s a very pragmatic solution that you are putting forward, Thomas. And having that lens is going to be critical because trying to projectize and look for solutions is not going to be durable as well, particularly in the medium to long terms. That’s a great point. Robert, let’s talk about hope and your perspective.

[53:22] Robert Ndugwa: Thanks, Patrick. I think if there’s anything we can really hold on is the whole aspect that in the last two or three years, there’s been a lot of advocacy and renewed awareness amongst the global community of the need to really look at the aspects of urban particularly [inaudible] the component of adequate housing. And I do feel that that rallying energy is one that we can hold on but also make use of in the coming years, particularly building around the aspects we’ve discussed in terms of global challenges of climate change but also the migration crisis that we are seeing all over the place.

And I think with all that advocacy, we are very hopeful that the data and evidence that we’ve channeled out there has helped to showcase who and where and how people are being left behind but also bring up some solutions of what we can do better. And as we continue

documenting some best practices, we should be able to learn from those cases from cities that other cities can also copy and at least [inaudible] replicate in their own cities. So that's the sort of hope we are hanging on at the moment.

[54:30] Patrick Canagasingham: Thank you so much, Robert. And talking about hope, if I may also bring a Habitat for Humanity perspective as well. So one thing to look forward to is our respective organizations also working on a very important paper that actually calls out some of the issues that we just talked about but also really highlights what interventions ought to really look like. Title "Children, Cities, and Housing Rights and Priorities." So stay tuned for that. It's prepared by Habitat for Humanity International in partnership with UNICEF and UN-Habitat, so that's an important piece.

In the interest of time, since we only have three minutes left, this is what I'm going to do. First of all, a huge thank you to our panelists. Each of you, beyond emphasizing what the core issues are when it comes to urbanization, informality, more importantly, the impact it has on children. We talked about numbers right at the beginning. Between 300 to 500 million children, further amplified by COVID and the impact that COVID continues to have but also how COVID has actually altered the world, the global landscape. And yet we talked about hope. We talked about the importance of our organizations being relevant even as we seek solutions, and some of the solutions are front and center. It's visible. We talked about data. We talked about numbers.

But, like Sarah said, how do you deal with stigma? How do you deal with millions, hundreds of millions of children, who have to live with the stigma of growing up in a slum? Or, what Robert said, the role of caregivers and the impact on children. Thomas' point is very important even as we seek solutions and as we look forward and are hopeful about the future is our approach matters. Our interventions matter, and we are making a difference, and we should continue to make a difference. So it might be something as, you know, like Thomas said, what is our lens? What lens do we really apply? Do we projectize some of the solutions? But what would a programmatic approach really look like when it comes to the impact of housing on children? Very compelling, very important.

For us at Habitat for Humanity, even as we're focusing on a program theory of change, calling out the systemic issues, including the issues we talked about today, but taking again a very pragmatic view that in order to solve some of these problems, we can't do it on our own. We need each of you. It's just not about partnerships for the sake of partnerships, but partnerships that thereby we can co-create some of the key solutions as well. So stay tuned. The paper is just one example.

But I just want to applaud each of your organizations for the great work that you do. Even as we continue to call out the issues, but more importantly seek durable solutions that extend beyond short term. So on that note, I just want to thank each of you, and please stay tuned and stay engaged as we continue this important conversation. Thank you.