ACHIEVING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BY TACKLING URBAN FRAGILITY

Urban Research Series Report I // Published July 2022

Fragility sneaks in under the city

CONTENTS

Jackline, 21, rides on the back of motorcycle taxi which can be dangerous for girls

Plan International / Quinn Neely

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Concerted and effective action is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

There is a clear need for development programmes that address the specific challenges of urban contexts in light of the rapid growth of cities and the rise of urban fragility. We define urban fragility as the inability of city systems to fulfil their core functions due to dynamic and inter-related political, economic, social and environmental risks.

Youth programming approaches are one of the most promising interventions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. However, there is a global lack of evidence on developing and implementing such approaches effectively in urban contexts.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. Our expertise relates to youth programming. Specifically, programmes that support girls, boys and youths to become drivers of change, develop skills and opportunities for youth employment, and protect young people from violence. We pride ourselves on using gender-transformative approaches to advance equality for girls and young women worldwide.

REPORT AIMS AND CONTENT

This report offers an overview of how urban fragility manifests across four countries, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, and of how Plan International's Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC) programme worked to tackle urban fragility in these countries between 2018 and 2021. The programme was funded by the Danish International Development Agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

Plan International worked with young people aged 15 to 25, alongside community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), to tackle urban fragility in capital cities. The programme worked with communities living in poverty and ensured the inclusion of young people, including marginalised young women and men.

This report summarises key insights and learning for future programme interventions and policy approaches gained from the final qualitative evaluation of programme activities. Where possible, findings are disaggregated to illustrate the specific and diverse lived experiences of young women and girls, or young men and boys.

Additional reports will explore key outcomes relating to specific programme areas: violence prevention and reduction, decent work, and civic participation. These reports will note when and how the findings presented here are corroborated by the quantitative evaluation data collected at the end of the programme.

KEY FINDINGS

Accounts in 'most significant change stories' and focus group discussions with young people, as well as key informant interviews, suggest that the programme has made positive contributions to the prevention and reduction of violence among young people in city communities, young people's capacity to find, create and maintain decent work, and their civic engagement.

The negative perceptions held by local city authorities and stakeholders impact on young people's access to decent work and civic participation. Some of these negative perceptions have become ingrained in communities, including those seeing young people as principal perpetrators of violence, an attitude which tends to further their marginalisation.

Involving young people in safety related interventions (including mapping violence hotspots and sensitising their peers to issues of violence, harassment and substance use, among others) and working to address patriarchal norms, was perceived as successful in increasing feelings of safety and security in communities. Similarly, working to address the broader social and economic conditions which influence young people, and prompt their engagement in exploitative occupations, is perceived to reduce their risk of being exposed to violence.

Skill-building, both relating to vocational and general business skills, and facilitation of access to local authorities and banks which can support young people in setting up businesses, was widely perceived as beneficial in enabling young people to gain decent work. Participants reported that the savings groups helped them to improve their financial planning and provided peer support for those young people engaged in starting their own businesses.

Sensitising young people to their rights and providing opportunities for them to engage in dialogue with city authorities, was perceived to promote young people's civic participation. The latter was also discussed as supporting city-wide resilience.

Barriers to the programme's success and to scaling it up include:

- patriarchal and discriminatory social norms/ negative perceptions towards young people

- deficiencies in the justice system and an unwillingness to change among authorities and stakeholders within this system

- COVID-19, and

- limited engagement with the programme from local governance and service structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the suggestions made by the research participants, whether professionals engaged in programming or young people discussing the programme and its effects in their local communities. The views of technical experts in Plan International also feature here.

> **To make cities safer and more inclusive for young people, especially young women and girls, programmes should:**
>
> - establish multi-sectoral collaborations and share lessons effectively
>
> - expand programming to whole cities rather than select communities
>
> - target violence and harassment in public spaces, and
>
> - strengthen the agency of youth.

The SAIC programme has demonstrated that dedicated youth programming addresses urban fragility, especially if it is implemented in close collaboration and partnership with local organisations and city authorities, and if it directly targets the prevalent negative views and stereotypes about young people in cities. SAIC acknowledged the deep connection between unemployment and violence in cities and worked to address this holistically. This involved creating and supporting decent work opportunities and involving perpetrators of violence in such interventions. By strengthening the self-esteem and self-worth of young people, and creating opportunities for civic participation, the programme further contributed towards addressing urban fragility, which supports city resilience in the medium to longer term.

Young people and women feel safe to speak to officials about their problems

BACKGROUND

This is the first report of Plan International's Urban Research Series.[1] The report introduces the concept of fragility, and the origins of urban fragility, then profiles the Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC) programme.[2] The programme was funded by the Danish International Development Agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

The report offers an overview of the theory of change of SAIC and its implementation across four diverse countries in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2018 and 2021. It then highlights key findings from the qualitative endline evaluation of the programme, drawing on interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions and the most significant change stories from the young people involved. The findings represent the perceptions of all these stakeholders regarding programme success and impact, as well as lessons learned and considerations for programme strengthening and scale-up.

This document sets the scene and offers necessary background information for three further reports, which will focus on 1) violence prevention and reduction, 2) decent work, and 3) civic participation. These reports will draw on the quantitative evaluation of the SAIC programme and will seek to establish to what extent the findings presented here are supported.

URBAN FRAGILITY: DISCOURSE AND ORIGINS

THE FRAGILE STATE DISCOURSE

Historically, within global deveopment, fragility has been discussed in relation to nation states and their exposure to war and conflict.[3] 'Fragile and conflict affected states' was a term coined to depict settings where conflict was active and where states could not, or would not, meet their population's basic needs.[4]

The direct after-effects of conflict pose major challenges, such as loss of life, injuries and/or disability, displacement either internally or to neighbouring countries, destruction of physical infrastructure and disruption to supply chains for necessities such as food and medicines.However, the state's capacities and institutions are weakened by conflict and, therefore, less able to meet the population's needs.[5]

By 2030, **2.2 BILLION PEOPLE** (26 per cent of the total world population) will be affected by fragility.[6]

Over the 2000s, so called 'fragile settings' were proliferating.[7] While conflict was becoming more widespread, the effects of climate change and frequent natural disasters resulting from natural hazards were acknowledged to be as damaging as conflict. Economic shocks in one setting were also increasingly causing crises in another. The global development community recognised that these multi-dimensional risks were also likely to give rise to 'fragility'.[8]

Acknowledgement of this multi-dimensional and dynamic nature of fragility shifted discourse in development and humanitarian practice and research. More socially and politically sensitive programming was called for, and more research to understand fragility and how it impacts populations and human capital.

The OECD States of Fragility series started to set out this agenda in 2016. The series noted that fragility risks – social, environmental, security, political and economic – can and will affect any country. The recent COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects only further underscore this. Most importantly, the series shows that neither health nor wealth makes a country immune to fragility related risks and challenges.[9]

460 MILLION or **77 PER CENT** of people living in fragile contexts are in extreme poverty. This is expected to increase by at least 26 million because of COVID-19.[10]

EMERGENCE OF URBAN FRAGILITY

More recently, conversations and debates on urban fragility have started to emerge for two main reasons.[11] First, over 50 per cent of the global population is already concentrated in cities and the movement of people to urban areas is unlikely to abate. Cities are now the most populated spaces in many countries and they house most of the social and economic capital a country has at its disposal.[12] Cities are also complex systems, operating and growing organically according to their own organising principles and the interests and actions of agents therein.[13] As such, cities need to be at the forefront of addressing fragility related risks.

Second, urbanisation is fastest and most concentrated in Africa, the Arab world and Asia, settings with historical legacies rooted in colonialism-related violence that are now exposed to substantive but varied other risks. In their 2018 brief 'From Urban Fragility to Urban Stability', the Africa Center for Strategic Studies identifies that rapid and unregulated urbanisation, alongside increasing populations of young people in cities, may result in a greater risk of community violence. [14]

43 PER CENT of the population in fragile contexts live in urban settings.[15]

Kibera in Kenya is the largest urban slum in Africa

Signe Vilstrup / Plan International

Figure 1: Urban fragility framework

POLICING AND JUSTICE DEFICITS
Mistrust in public authorities and duty bearers, including the police and justice system, is a hallmark of fragility.

RAPID AND UNREGULATED URBANISATION
Rapid urbanisantion and cities with high levels of informal or slum housing are unequal and this correlates to higher crime

REAL AND PERCEIVED INSECURITY
Lack of social cohesion directly correlates to high levels of crime and violence, and perpetuates insecurity.

INCOME AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY
High levels of deprivation, marginalisation and discrimination correlate to high crime rates.
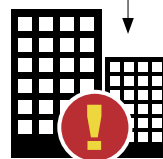
NATURAL HAZARD EXPOSURE
Sudden shocks and continuous stresses erode city infrastructures, put significant stresses on residents and compromise economic activity.

CONCENTRATED POVERTY
Neighbourhoods where more than 40% of the population are poor, are likelier to have underperforming schools, poorer quality housing, harsher policing and ultimately higher crime rates

UNEMPLOYMENT
High unemployment – especially among young people – makes cities susceptible to violence and correlates highly with homicidal violence.

Figure as based on Urban Fragility Framework by De Boer and Muggah[16]

THE URBAN FRAGILITY FRAMEWORK
De Boer and Muggah present an urban fragility framework which highlights the major macro-level drivers resulting in whether and how a city may be fragile. [16] The framework offered is re-created and summarised in Figure 1. It highlights seven key domains which correspond to these fragility drivers. The Igarape Institute uses publicly available indicators and data to score individual cities and their fragility for each domain. Cities can receive a score from one to five for each domain of the framework, and an average score for the city is calculated at the end. Where cities score one to two points on average, they are classified as having low fragility, scores of two to three correspond to medium fragility, and those scoring between three and four are highly fragile.

By applying De Boer's fragility framework, the authors note that globally 1,404 cities exhibit average levels of fragility and a further 284 can be identified as extremely fragile. The highest concentration of extremely fragile cities can be found in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. It is striking that these cities are not all concentrated in low-income countries; over 40 extremely fragile cities are found in upper-middle-income countries. [17]

> *A city experiences fragility when it is unable to fulfil its core functions owing to the manifestation of internal and external risks. Risks can be political, social, economic, and environmental in character."* [18]

The relationships between urban fragility and multi-dimensional state fragility – be it social, economic, security, political or environment related – are undeniable.[19] Addressing this fragility, amid ever-evolving complex city systems that directly shape future generations, is a key priority for international organisations working together to implement the United Nations New Urban Agenda[20] and Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11).[21]

Indeed, Boer and Muggah identify resilience strategies and approaches that can work to directly mitigate and address fragility-related risks or prevent these in the long term.[22] Strategies which focus on young people are particularly promising as they have the potential to create resilience capacities for both current and future generations. However, little empirical data is available on what approaches to addressing urban fragility are most effective, easy to implement and sustainable.

THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES PROGRAMME

Plan International's Safe and Inclusive Cities programme was designed to tackle the diverse and inter-related drivers of fragility. In response to the 2016 OECD States of Fragility report, which emphasises the increasing concentration of fragility in urban spaces, Plan International recognised opportunities for contributing its programming expertise towards the priorities set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (see Figure 1 for SDGs targeted).

COUNTRY AND CITY CONTEXTS

SAIC started in 2018 across four countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. These settings were chosen for several shared features, rapid rates of urbanisation, large proportions of urban youth populations which faced similar fragility challenges, and the presence of dedicated Plan International and civil society partners in each country. Key details concerning each country and city are summarised below to help place the SAIC intervention in context.

What do we mean by city authorities and stakeholders?

City authorities: These include governing authorities with a legal obligation as duty bearers towards city populations, particularly upholding the rights of children and youth, and service providers such as the police, health and education sectors who have statutory responsibilities towards children and youth.

City stakeholders: These include the actors within the city who shape the wider environment around children and youth, such as the media, the private sector and other multilateral organisations such as the UN.

CONTEXT SUMMARY

- While limited recent data is available, levels of youth unemployment in each SAIC implementation city are likely to be high and driving young people towards harmful substance use, informal exploitative labour and also violence and crime.

- Across countries, young people were discriminated against by policies that sought to marginalise youth who were 'idle' and due to poor public perceptions regarding young people who resort to petty crime to secure their livelihoods.

- As a consequence of the above, young people in poor city areas are likely to be marginalised and exploited.

- Unequal power relations and harmful social norms tend to exclude girls and young women in particular.

- Limited education and training opportunities, negative stereotypes and insecurity leave young people with limited capacities and ways in which to contribute towards reshaping cities into inclusive spaces for all.

Community violence and crime are both a cause and repercussion of the fragility a city experiences. Tackling this among young people is a priority as it helps shape future generations and their behaviours and opportunities.

However, short-term impacts may be modest as violence and crime are usually highest among adult community members (aged above 25).

Faridah, 19, is a member of our Safer Cities programme in Kampala

Plan International / Quinn Neely

Plan's urban gardening programme in Addis Ababa

Bonnie Miller

ETHIOPIA

Domain	Key fact
Urbanisation	**22%** of the population live in urban areas, with **64%** living in informal settlements or slums.[23]
Conflict and violence	**Active conflict. In 2016, the proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence was estimated at 20% over the previous 12 months and 28% over a lifetime.**[24]
Unemployment	**Data from 2013 estimates unemployment at 3.5% among those aged 15 to 24 and 1.7% among those over 25 years old.**[25] **These figures are likely to be underestimations.**
CIVICUS rating of civil space	**Repressed: civic space is significantly constrained.**[26]
SAIC implementation city	**Addis Ababa, identified as a medium fragility city by the Igarape Institute (score 2.44).**[27]

The political, economic and social challenges experienced by Ethiopia – and targeted by the SAIC programme as drivers of fragility – must be understood in its historical context. In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front came into power and maintained hold until 2019. During this time, youth unemployment became a major challenge for the country, particularly given the economic stressors caused by the implementation of structural adjustment programmes.

Surveys conducted in 1994 estimated that young people under 35 made up 90% of the urban unemployed population. The researchers noted that the "considerably reduced capacity of the state to offer employment opportunities was seen to explain urban youth unemployment. Furthermore, the mismatch between education and job openings was also a major factor."[28] Studies on youth unemployment from 2020 conclude this problem has persisted; the authors note that surveys from 2018 estimate youth unemployment at 26%, with young women being particularly affected and remaining unemployed for longer. [29]

The challenge of youth unemployment has contributed to the marginalisation of young people, particularly those who are inactive and residing in urban spaces.[30] Frustration among young people who are unable to realise their aspirations, as well as discrimination, including by public policy and officials, alongside the proliferation of gang violence, further contributes to young people engaging in violence. Peddrazini notes: "Violence in cities, whether in the North or the South, in most cases is blamed on the 'usual suspects', namely the young people living in poor neighbourhoods."[31]

Cosmos, 33, is ensuring girls' safety
during the coronavirus outbreak

Plan International

KENYA

Domain	Key fact
Urbanisation	**28%** of the total population live in cities, with rapid urbanisation rates; **47%** of the urban population live in informal settlements or slums. [32]
Conflict and Violence	No active conflict. In 2014, the proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence was estimated at **25.5%** over the previous 12 months and **40.7%** over a lifetime.[33]
Unemployment	Data from 2019 estimates unemployment at **12.9%** among those aged 15 to 24 and **3.4%** among those over 25.[34] These figures are likely to be underestimations.
CIVICUS rating of civil space	Obstructed: civic space is contested by local power holders. [35]
SAIC implementation city	Nairobi and Kisumu, identified as medium fragility cities by the Igarape Institute (scores 2.38 and 2.8).[36]

Following the economic recessions brought about by the implementation of IMF structural adjustment programmes, the National Rainbow Coalition came into power in 1992 with a clear mandate to secure a democratic developmental state.[37] This transition occurred alongside rapid urbanisation and the migration of the population, particularly young people, towards cities.

The country is experiencing ongoing political and economic challenges, and violence in cities has become a significant everyday problem. Tipping points which precipitate violence have been identified and include moments when: "politicians use abusive language; there are arbitrary and very high increases in rent; police harass youths; rigging of elections; and the community perceives decisions to be unjust."[38] These tipping points affect youth in specific and pervasive ways. For example, there have been instances when local city authorities requested that youths pay bribes, and their requests were not answered, arrests were instigated, and excessive force was used. This has undermined trust in public institutions and also precipitated feelings of hopelessness among urban youth. Substance use has become a coping strategy for many urban youth, often precipitating further violence.

The economic and civic empowerment of urban youth is considered one key avenue for addressing the challenges of violence; however, without interventions which equally tackle negative stereotypes among local city authorities and stakeholders these are unlikely to be successful.[39]

Gender norms which hold back women from employment must also be tackled if unemployment is to be addressed. Muyia (2014) estimated the rate of unemployment for females to be ten per cent higher than for males due to a lack of opportunities.[40]

Plan International / Quinn Neely

Sharon, 19, lives in an informal settlement in Kampala where danger is ever present

UGANDA

Domain	Key fact
Urbanisation	**25%** of the total population live in cities with rapid urbanisation rates; **48%** of the urban population live in informal settlements or slums. [41]
Conflict and Violence	Active conflict. In 2016, the proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence was estimated at **30%** over the previous 12 months and **50%** over a lifetime.[42]
Unemployment	Data from 2013 estimates unemployment at **15.6%** among those 15 to 24, and **7.9%** among those over 25. [43] These figures are likely to be underestimations.
CIVICUS rating of civil space	Repressed: civic space is significantly constrained.[44]
SAIC implementation city	Kampala,identified as a highly fragile city by the Igarape Institute (score 3.30) [45]

Like neighbouring countries, Uganda has undergone periods of economic and political instability, most recently with the contestation of election results in 2021. Kampala is the most fragile of the SAIC implementation sites.

Richmond (2018) summarises the data gathered by one of SAIC's implementation partners - ACTogether.[46] Having conducted research across 57 slum communities in Kampala, the study identifies the main drivers of vulnerability in the city as relating to inadequate water and sanitation and inappropriate urban planning. While informal settlements and slums are clearly part of the Kampala city fabric, they are routinely not accepted or legitimised and they present substantive public health and social risks. Kwiringira (2021) shows that sustainable livelihoods within Kampala are not dependent only on economic development and ensuring that environments are economically vibrant, but also on adopting an integrated urban development strategy which emphasises sustainable urbanisation.[47]

Like other SAIC implementation cities, unemployment in Kampala is high, particularly among young people. The absence of economic opportunities and poor living conditions in slums are increasingly associated with substance use issues and violence. Swahn (2018) notes that "parental alcohol use, childhood abuse, homelessness, and frequent, heavy drinking and drunkenness and problem drinking... were significantly associated with alcohol-related violence. The most surprising finding was that both female and male youth were equally represented among those reporting alcohol-related violence." [48]

Faith, 25, takes part in climate change workshop in Zimbabwe

Plan International

ZIMBABWE

Domain	Key fact
Urbanisation	**32%** of the total population live in cities, and rapid urbanisation rates have plateaued; **34%** of the urban population live in informal settlements or slums. [49]
Conflict and Violence	No active conflict. In 2016, the proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence was estimated at **19.9%** over the previous 12 months and **37.6%** over a lifetime.[50]
Unemployment	Data from 2013 estimates unemployment at **27.5%** among those aged 15 to 24, **13.8%** among those over 25.[51] These figures are likely to be underestimations.
CIVICUS rating of civil space	Repressed: civic space is significantly constrained.[52]
SAIC implementation city	Harare and Bulawayo, identified as medium fragility cities by the Igarape Institute (score 2.89).[53]

Like other SAIC implementation countries, Zimbabwe suffered substantive economic and political challenges, partly driven by the IMF structural adjustment programmes implemented in the 1990s.[54] During this time, Zimbabwe experienced almost null economic growth, with the economy struggling to create the diversity of jobs required to maintain growth.

Brett (2005) further notes that the political decisions taken to address this crisis from 1997 onward were counterintuitive and further deepened the gravity of the situation. For example, lump-sum payments to veterans, engagement in the Congo war, violent farm occupations and seizures contributed significantly to setting the country back in terms of development. The seizure of farms contributed to the loss of agricultural-based jobs and precipitated migration towards urban areas. The challenging economic and political situation particularly affected Bulawayo, which had historically seen more urban development and dependency on urban jobs, given the limited agricultural potential in the Matabeleland.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION

THEORY OF CHANGE

Figure 1 offers an overview of SAIC's theory of change which seeks to address the diverse drivers of urban fragility. While the programme was not specifically designed around de Boer' and Muggah's urban fragility framing[55], its aims speak directly to several domains within this (see Figure 1).

Specifically, the programme aimed to employ strategic actions in order to:

- decrease the urban violence and conflict affecting young women and men in cities

- ensure that young women and men in the informal sector have safer, more decent work and sustainable economic opportunities, and

- create lasting relationships between young people, civil society organisations and community-based organisations so that young women and men can effectively influence urban governance, particularly regarding safety and economic opportunities.

The interventions were intended to act both with and for young people (e.g. by working to strengthen their capacities and knowledge) and other stakeholders in the city's eco-system (e.g. city authorities). The programme aimed to bring about desirable changes in young people and the urban environments in which they live and work.

To this end, the programme also employed action research methods, working in close partnership with locally embedded organisations, to generate locally grounded evidence-based responses to the violence and fragility affecting young women and men in cities.

SAIC used programme co-design approaches, bringing together Plan International country staff, community-based organisations, civil society organisations and local young people. This ensured that local stakeholders developed a joint vision and action plan for the programme; local young people had ownership of the interventions and could champion them in their respective communities.

Plan International has extensive experience and expertise in gender-transformative youth programming focused around:

- skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship

- girls, boys and youth as active drivers of change, and

- protection from violence for children, young women and girls.

This meant Plan International was uniquely positioned to design and implement a comprehensive programme in urban settings to tackle urban fragility. The SAIC programme offered an exceptional opportunity to work directly towards advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals in urban contexts (see Figure 1).

What actions did SAIC take and who was involved?

Intervention focus: Violence prevention and reduction – safety programming in communities and public transportation				
1815 young people trained in youth safety skills	**34** safety profiles developed by youth	**95** youth-led safety initiatives implemented	**60** city-level multi-stakeholder meetings convened on safe public transport	**151** city-level stakeholder initiatives supporting improved safety in public transport

Intervention focus: Decent work and youth economic empowerment interventions				
2521 young people involved in skills development	**16** youth-led market surveys completed	**145** initiatives promoting decent employment	**11** city-level multi-stakeholder forums held	**23** city-level multi-stakeholder initiatives addressing barriers to accessing decent work opportunities

Intervention focus: Youth governance and active participation				
1676 young people organised in 183 youth groups in communities targeted by the programme (includes savings groups and CBOs)	**7** city-level alliance meetings with CSOs and government stakeholders	**64** local dialogues between youth and local authorities	**27** social accountability processes put in place	**142** youth groups supported to strengthen their participatory governance

Doreen's involvement with Plan International's Safe and Inclusive Cities programme has helped her turn her life around. Doreen now owns her own business and is a committed girls' and women's rights' advocate.

Keira Dempsey

WHO IMPLEMENTED SAIC?

The programme was implemented by Plan International staff alongside civil society and community-based organisations in each country. For a complete list of participating organisations see **Acknowledgments**.

PROGRAMME EVALUATION

The programme benefitted from a thorough research, monitoring and evaluation component. The evaluation involved a mixed-method strategy, including substantive qualitative data collection (interviews, focus group discussions and most significant change stories) to understand how the programme was received and implemented in each country.

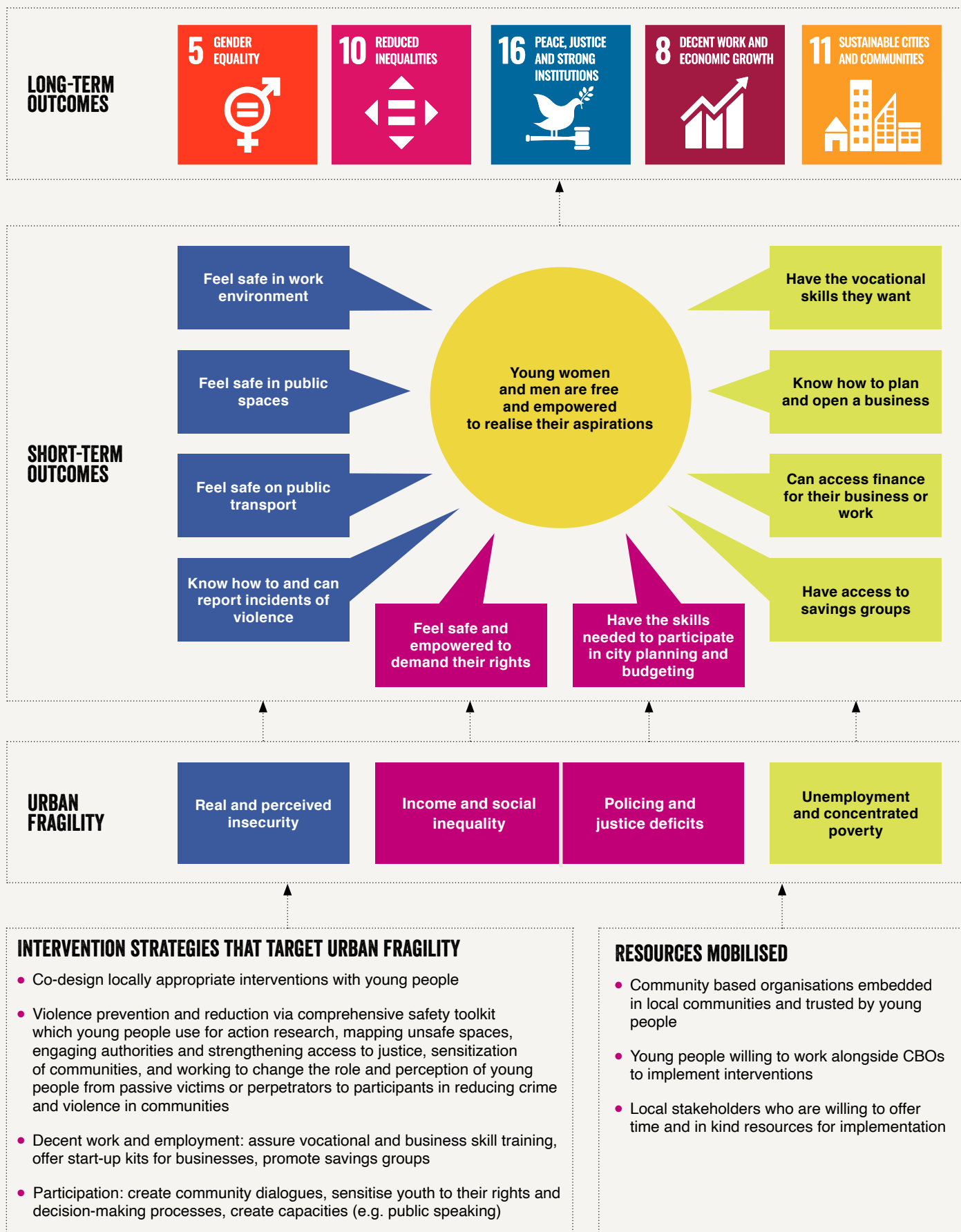The findings in this report represent the main themes identified upon reviewing the qualitative data collected for the SAIC endline evaluation. The interviews, focus groups and most significant change stories collected during the end-line evaluation were read, inductively coded, and analysed using thematic content analysis. These findings summarise the perceptions of young people and key stakeholders regarding the programme, and offer the most up-to-date insights, programme impacts and lessons for future programming.

A controlled before and after study was simultaneously conducted to estimate the programme's effectiveness. This means that in each city and location of implementation, outcomes were measured at different time points among a representative sample of young people – including some who had taken part in the programme and others who had not. By comparing the changes between these groups of young people at different time points, we can estimate the effects of the SAIC interventions. The midline evaluation brief provides a more thorough account of the evaluation methods.[33]

Table 1: Overview of qualitative data collected during SAIC end-line evaluation

Data collection method	Ethiopia	Kenya	Uganda	Zimbabwe
Key informant interviews (KII)	25	16	14	4
Focus group discussions (FGD)	10	16	18	7
Most significant change stories (MSC)	None collected	1	18	7
Total materials	33	33	50	18

Figure 1: SAIC theory of change

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

5 GENDER EQUALITY
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Feel safe in work environment

Feel safe in public spaces

Feel safe on public transport

Know how to and can report incidents of violence

Feel safe and empowered to demand their rights

Have the skills needed to participate in city planning and budgeting

Young women and men are free and empowered to realise their aspirations

Have the vocational skills they want

Know how to plan and open a business

Can access finance for their business or work

Have access to savings groups

URBAN FRAGILITY

Real and perceived insecurity

Income and social inequality

Policing and justice deficits

Unemployment and concentrated poverty

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES THAT TARGET URBAN FRAGILITY

- Co-design locally appropriate interventions with young people

- Violence prevention and reduction via comprehensive safety toolkit which young people use for action research, mapping unsafe spaces, engaging authorities and strengthening access to justice, sensitization of communities, and working to change the role and perception of young people from passive victims or perpetrators to participants in reducing crime and violence in communities

- Decent work and employment: assure vocational and business skill training, offer start-up kits for businesses, promote savings groups

- Participation: create community dialogues, sensitise youth to their rights and decision-making processes, create capacities (e.g. public speaking)

RESOURCES MOBILISED

- Community based organisations embedded in local communities and trusted by young people

- Young people willing to work alongside CBOs to implement interventions

- Local stakeholders who are willing to offer time and in kind resources for implementation

KEY FINDINGS

The qualitative data across different country and city contexts points to several perceived effects of the SAIC programme relating to young people's exposure to, and perceptions of, violence, their capacity to find, create and maintain decent work, and their civic participation

1: PROGRAMME EFFECTS RELATING TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND REDUCTION

1.1 FEELINGS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

Programme staff and local young people ran a range of safety initiatives in the cities where Plan International implemented the SAIC programme. These included:

- carrying out safety audits, mapping unsafe zones and identifying local violence hotspots

- participating in community social responsibility activities like community clean-ups

- training young people to become safety champions and facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges on community safety

- engaging transit operators on gender issues, including on issues of violence, crime and sexual harassment on public transport; and

- carrying out sensitisation regarding forms of violence.

The latter also included sensitisation on gender-based violence and discussions over issues of discrimination based on sex and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Young men noted how this changed their day-to-day behaviours:

> *Personally, the project trained me on the effects of domestic violence; for example, before I didn't know about the different forms of harassment. The project also trained me on the effects of harassment on girls, before I didn't know that it was bad to do bad touches to women, or to be verbally abusive to girls… Before the project came, I was one of the people who would throw sexual advances at young girls… but due to sensitisation by the SAIC project, I stopped those bad habits."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Uganda**

Young women reported that engaging in programme activities helped make public spaces and transport safer for them to navigate. However, they also noted that violence and harassment still persisted in their cities and they linked this to widespread unemployment.

> *In my view, violence has declined in the last three years because of the awareness by Plan International. Young men and women have got training on violence from the Ethiopian Centre for Development (ECD) and there is some change and decline in the violence rate since then. This is because young men have got awareness about violence."*
> **Focus group discussion, young woman, Ethiopia**
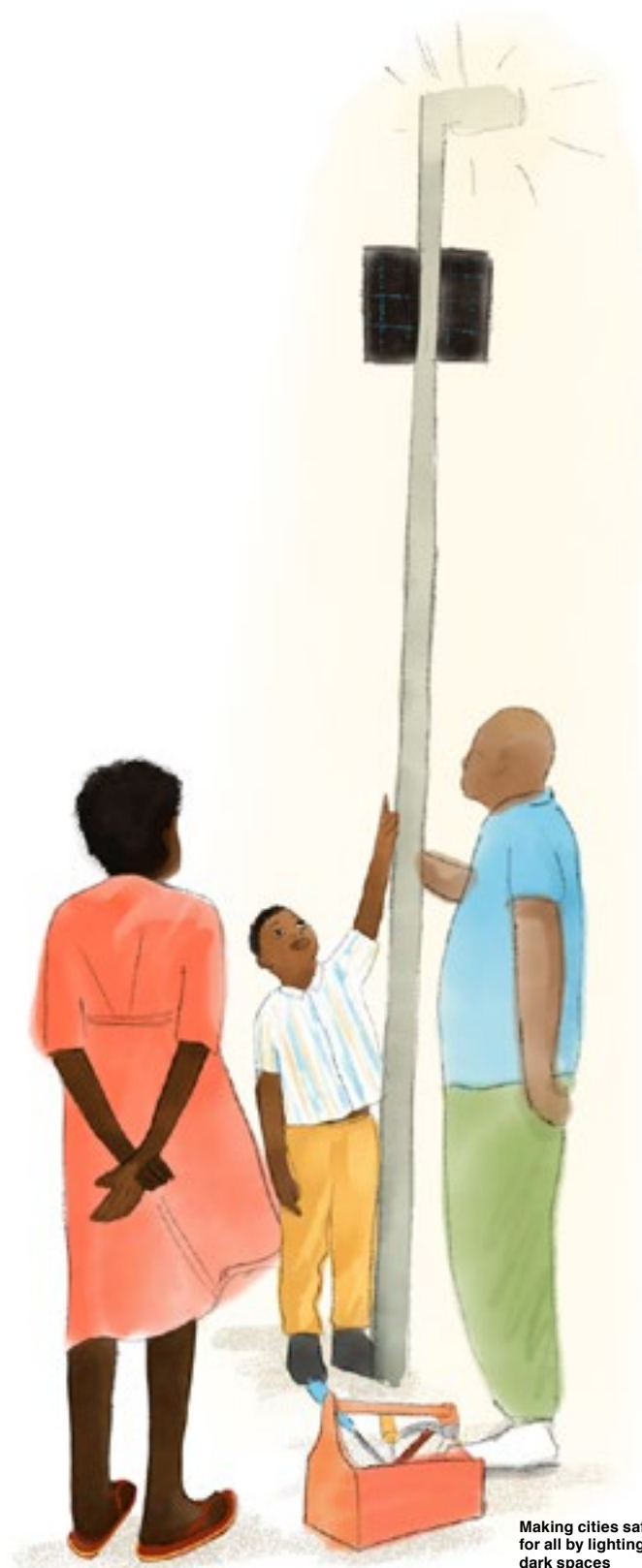
Making cities safer for all by lighting up dark spaces

Young people were encouraged to reflect on the actions needed to make areas safe and to be involved in positive change. For example, young people in Uganda worked with the SAIC programme and city authorities to install lights in unsafe zones.

> *We mapped the dark corners in Kosovo and the project of SAIC helped us since they installed security lights in the dangerous places we identified, some walls were painted by the project with information about the dangers of using drugs, hence a reduction in violence."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Uganda**

After implementing the activities, programme beneficiaries reported feeling safer within their communities.

> *ECD [the local implementing partner] trained us to identify unsafe areas of the community. We located unsafe areas within the community on a map. There was jungle and a grave area. With the help of ECD the jungle was removed and now local people can freely move around that area. In addition to this street lights are installed within the community and hence people can move safely in the evening and in the night."*
> **Focus group discussion, young man, Ethiopia**

1.2 INCLUSIVE AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY ACTION

The programme targeted marginalised young people, specifically young women and men living in extreme poverty and insecure city areas. Even within these areas, further levels of discrimination may apply. For example, young people who have perpetrated violence and those young people engaged in harmful substance use experience discrimination. Similarly, young women involved in sex work are highly discriminated against and exposed to higher levels of sex-related violence, mainly due to exploitation (see next section).

The programme sought to directly target these groups and change the prevailing negative stereotypes about young people; young men and boys in particular were described as predominantly 'idle' and responsible for community conflict and violence.[1] Engaging these groups carried reputational risks but also yielded surprising and effective results.

> *But at the start, you know, sometimes people think, don't engage them, engage those who are like formalised. So we started by engaging informal groups who did not have even registration although it was a risk, we did not know how their reception was. As a partner, my fear was we would be labelled as working with criminals, gangs, so that was a risk*

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[1] Across implementation cities the majority of crime and community conflict is associated with adults aged 25+, however community perceptions on this still dis-proportionally discriminate against young people.

Everyone deserves to feel safe on public transport

from our side, but through the engagement, we are seeing some sort of transformation and those young men who were being sidelined, because of their nature and maybe because they use motorbikes, have turned out to be actually number one ambassadors for the project."
Key informant interview, Partner-Generation Shapers, Kenya

Young people who had previously perpetrated violence were involved in programme sensitisation activities as well as decent work interventions (although never alongside victims of violence). The young people who engaged reported that their violent behaviour was due to exploitation by wider city-level gangs. The programme gradually assisted them in realising their aspirations to integrate with communities and lead a safer life.

I used to like fighting and we were the leaders of the gang wars, when the project came, we were coming from an election age where there was more violence in the community. We used to be sent to beat up people, but at times we would take the money and spend it and not do anything. My previous behaviour of beating up people has changed, I realised that harassing young girls and people doesn't pay. The project has taught us how to live with members of the community, to forgive and forget and give back. We are now refraining from violence as we now have things to do."
Most significant change story, young man, Zimbabwe

The programme involved raising awareness of the different forms of violence that young people may be exposed to, including discrimination based on sex, and the harmful effects of substance use. Several young people, and young men in particular, reported increased awareness of the diverse forms of violence that manifest in cities daily, including harmful gender norms. They also noted that their understanding of the risks of substance use prompted them to change their habits. Some young people were also involved in sensitising their peers to these issues.

Activities like sensitisation in the community about drug abuse and domestic violence helped a lot to reduce violence because they first identified those who use drugs and those who harass people, they trained them and when they changed, they encouraged them to also sensitise their fellow youths, which we are doing. We want many young women and men to stop using drugs and whenever I meet a group of young men, I always teach them about drug abuse. Security lights and painting of walls with information about drugs helped our community, we can see they changed when you compare with those years before the project of SAIC. "
Most significant change story, young man, Uganda

1.3 DECENT WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Safety mapping activities, sensitisation to forms of violence, and inclusive anti-discriminatory action cannot pre-empt the violent situations that young people may find themselves in. Programme staff and partners were aware of the need to work with women who engage in sex work to address the exploitative conditions and the wider socio-economic conditions.

A range of decent work interventions were implemented (see next section), so that alternative, safe and decent income-generating strategies would be available for young people. This was reported to help those young people who relied on sex work to divert to other avenues of work.

Kawempe used to have a lot of young women involved in prostitution and getting unwanted pregnancies. But when the project came and started providing skills, most of the young girls were diverted to skilling, for example, tailoring, hairdressing, and bakery among others, so they no longer practice prostitution as they used to do. In my community, the number of youths abusing drugs has reduced as a result of the project, young men have received skills like mechanics and electrical engineering."
Most significant change story, young man, Uganda

It has been quite a journey for us as young people as when JAZ came, we applied for financial support and we managed to get funding, and they helped us set up a recording studio. This has enabled us to support upcoming artists in the community and now we don't necessarily have to go to town and worry about studio time. People now believe in us and they come to us everyday because they want to know about SAIC, about what we are doing, and we are inspiring a lot of young people. We used to go deep into drugs and substance abuse, but now we have been changed and now we feel like people that young people can look up to, especially in our community."
Most significant change story, young man, Zimbabwe

Learning new skills to secure decent work
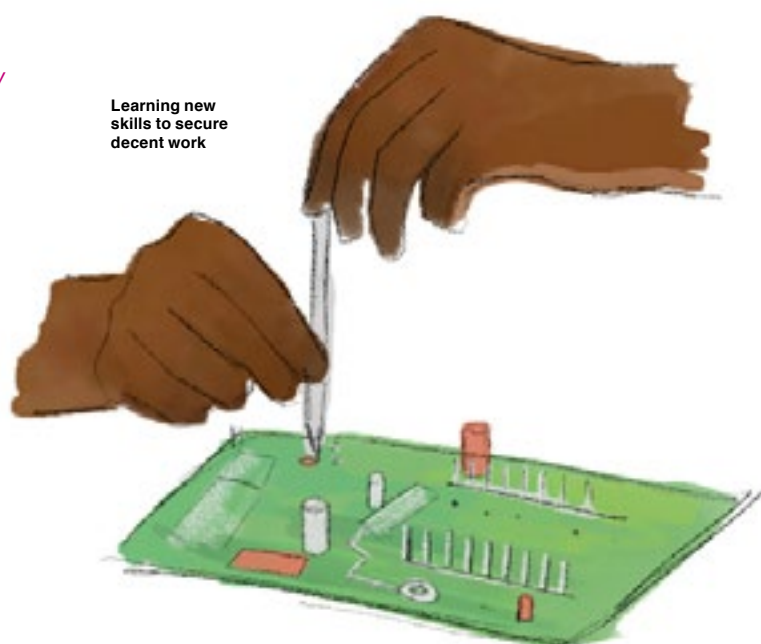
2. PROGRAMME EFFECTS RELATING TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAPACITY TO FIND, CREATE AND MAINTAIN DECENT WORK

2.1 BUSINESS AND VOCATIONAL SKILL-BUILDING

The programme sought to advance young women's equal position in society by directly challenging gender norms surrounding the ability to work, the gendered distribution of labour, and skills development. Across all implementation cities, CBOs and CSOs conducted training in work-related skills. This included training in generic skills such as CV writing and conduct in interviews, as well as training in vocational skills such as baking, tailoring and business (e.g. writing a business plan and applying for funding).

Young people reported appreciating the skills training and the support provided to enable them to open their own businesses.

> *We got training on CV writing and how to conduct yourself during an interview for those that are looking for employment through Junior Achievement Zimbabwe. They also taught us how to be an entrepreneur and how to market your own business, how to handle your finances and they brought Empower Bank to teach on financial literacy and how to get loans to start your own business."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Zimbabwe**

> *As an individual, I got skills from the project and I am currently a mobile journalist which has given me different opportunities. For example, early this year I was involved in capturing a story of a sponsored child in Kamuli. I was paid 200 dollars. Also, I have been getting opportunities to represent young people on different radio stations, for example CBS radio and supper FM radio, to discuss issues affecting young people while using public transport."*
> **Most significant change story, young woman, Uganda**

2.2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Young people who participated in the programme were encouraged to apply for employment wherever possible, but the programme also emphasised the possibility of young people opening their own businesses. Programme beneficiaries were supported to apply to city authorities and also wider stakeholders (e.g. banks) for formal economic support for their own businesses and entrepreneurial ventures.

Learning new skills to secure decent work
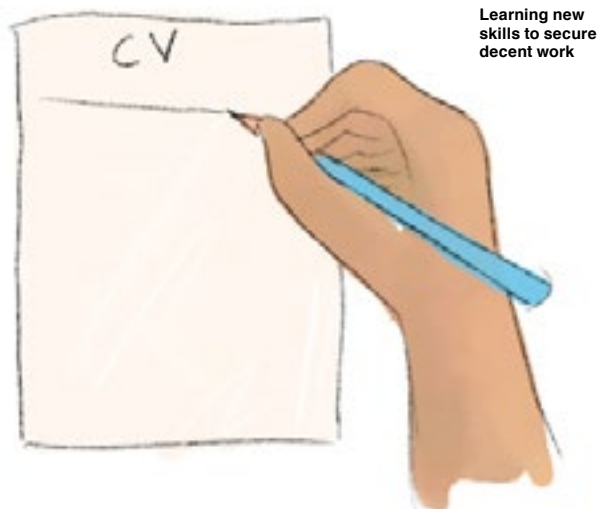
> *The project has made me… be a visionary and run my own thing and push it until I make it. When it comes to entrepreneurship I have realised where I feel at home. The project has now trained the youth to write business proposals, to write CVs and apply for work and be able to access decent employment. I am now able to get a loan and apply for any funds and we are capacitated, the youths in the SAIC project are doing well and striving. I feel like the project should not end now because there is a bigger fraction of youths that still need this."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Zimbabwe**

SAIC also offered start-up kits and grants to some of the young people involved in the programme. Where possible, support grants were also offered during COVID-19, to ensure that these young people could continue with their business activities.

> *SAIC has also helped in access to finance, it provided loans and grants and relief funds that helped youths when COVID-19 was at its peak last year. So all these mitigation strategies have helped youths in the informal sector… SAIC also supported the businesses of the youths through buying their products, PPE during the start, and a lot of hand sanitisers and soap were purchased from the youths in businesses."*
> **Key informant interview, Ministry Official, Zimbabwe**

2.3 ACCESS TO DECENT WORK

In each of the city contexts, SAIC relied on the locally established links between CSOs and CBOs and city structures. Capitalising on the organisations' knowledge of the context, the programme recognised that city stakeholders may have inherited negative views about young people's civic participation in cities, and particularly slums. Similarly, young people had negative perceptions of local authorities, believing their main role was to obstruct informal businesses rather than to support youth. SAIC thus worked with both young people and city stakeholders to address these misconceptions and empower them to work together in actively transforming their communities into safer, more inclusive places.

Learning new skills to secure decent work
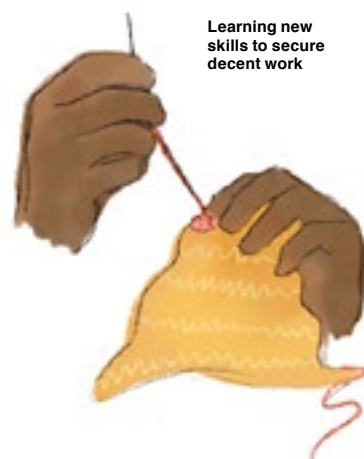
In Uganda, the implementing partners flag that there has been a change in how youths perceive the authorities. Young people now understand that the authorities can be interacted with and that they are supportive of their business ventures:

> *There was a lot of sensitisation in the area… before when they used to see you pass with the tag, they would run off… we've done a lot of sensitisation together with Plan, they used to think registering a business was so, so difficult but in these frequent talks they know it's easy, some of them used to fear to come here but now they can come to the office for revenue and they inquire, it has actually changed attitudes."*
> **Key informant interview, Community development officer, Uganda**

Learning new skills to secure decent work

The programme also worked with local authorities and private institutions to help them better understand the needs of youth and how best to engage with them. One of the local financing banks changed their practices, enabling more young people to benefit from its businesses:

> *The bank has also changed its approach. It no longer considers age but instead assesses how much potential one has before giving out funds. This has been helpful since many of the SAIC project beneficiaries are quite young, yet have the potential to operate a business after receiving guidance from the project activities like forming saving groups."*
> **Key informant interview, banking official, Uganda**

2.4 SAVINGS GROUPS, ACCESS TO FINANCIAL CAPITAL AND PEER SUPPORT

The programme emphasised sustainability in its business planning skills as well as programme activities. This included putting in place savings groups. Young people reported that these groups were essential to ensuring that they were able to support each other and their own businesses longer-term.

> *Before the project, I had a very small business with no knowledge on saving, the SAIC project has fully changed my business life and financial status. I now have a very big business with a big deep freezer from UYDEL. I now also sell tea and porridge both in the morning and evening with snacks. I now earn highly, take good care of my family, save my money and am an employer. I employ a girl who was a sex worker, but now she stopped because I gave her a job and she also joined our saving group."*
> **Most significant change story, young woman, Uganda**

3: PROGRAMME EFFECTS RELATING TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S CIVIC PARTICIPATION

3.1 DIALOGUES BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND CITY STAKEHOLDERS

Urban resilience relies on effective relationships between citizens and governing bodies and effective communication between young people and city authorities is critical to this. One of the programme's key activities was thus to sensitise young people regarding their rights and effective mechanisms for engaging with city authorities. In Ethiopia, implementing partners put in place a social accountability programme which was appreciated by the young people involved.

> *The social accountability programme has created good opportunities in the area. After the introduction of social accountability, responsible bodies started to work properly. The community and youth started asking for their rights and the responsible organisations also started fulfilling their responsibilities. ECD played a great role in linking the youth with government institutions, and in giving skills training on how to ask about their rights."*
> **Account in focus group discussion, young man, Ethiopia**

Young people acknowledged the benefits of the programme, noting that they are now more involved in city decision-making.

> *Three years ago, most of the decisions were carried out by the local authorities in the area. However, over the last three years the community, including the young women and men, actively participate in project planning and management, decision making and influencing."*
> **Account in focus group discussion, young man, Ethiopia**

Young people speak up and shape the city they live in

Young people and women feel safe to speak to officials about their problems

Young people also noted that they now know how to proceed even where the issues they advocate on have not received appropriate attention or follow-up action.

> *In the past, we used to take our petitions to the chief but they were never followed through, but through the SAIC training, we were taught how to effectively make a petition and the processes to follow, such as, when making a petition, we should make three copies of the petition form and take a copy to the MCA, the Ward Administrator and Chief so as to help in the following up of the petitions."*
> **Account in focus group discussion, young man, Kenya**

Similar programmes and effects were noted across the other implementing cities, with young people reflecting that by building these civic participation skills, the programme helped create long-term change.

Overall, the programme placed particular emphasis on facilitating young women's civic participation in order to amplify their voices in civil society.

> *We never used to attend community meetings and we used to say those meetings are for the parents and elders in the community, but now we have more youths attending, for example during the national budget there were mostly youths in the meeting. I was one of the youths that was really speaking out and I even came out on national television airing out an issue about the road to Hyde Park St Peters. The issues I raised are now being discussed in parliament and they are now taking action about that. This really shows that this project has brought about real change to the youths. We can now stand up for ourselves without the help of the elders and partners and make a real change in the community by engaging stakeholders. Our community leaders now have trust in us and we have a good relationship with them. They now listen to us and see our importance in the community."*
> **Most significant change story, young woman, Zimbabwe**

3.2 STEREOTYPES REGARDING YOUNG PEOPLE

SAIC acknowledged that strengthening the civic participation skills of young people would only lead to effective action in urban spaces if and when local city stakeholders were equally sensitised towards the needs of young people. The negative stereotypes of city authorities and stakeholders toward young people (and their origins) had to be addressed to ensure the programme's sustainability. Young people reported that they felt tangible differences in the way that authorities and stakeholders treated them as a result of the programme.

> *Before the project, the local leaders and police mostly looked at youths with negativity, as criminals, minors, and useless people in society. They would not listen to the youths' issues, but due to the coming of the project, leaders and police were engaged and trained on how to work with us. Currently, there is a good working relationship between police, youths and the local leaders. The local leaders now listen to our issues and act accordingly. Before, youths were afraid to report cases to police, but currently, youths freely report and the police act accordingly."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Uganda**

3.3 CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND CITY RESILIENCE

Across countries, young people noted that they were contributing to making their cities better and more resilient places through civic participation. In Ethiopia, for example, young people reported that their SAIC participation prompted them to engage more when COVID-19 became a problem.

> *The participation and contribution of young women and men increased over the last three years. We participated in social, economic and political issues affecting the lives of the youth and the community as participation is crucial for the overall development of the nation. For example, we mobilised financial resources for buying food items, hygienic materials and clothes to support the elderly and poor segments of the community in our area, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, we actively participated in mobilising the community for the expansion of electricity in the streets of our vicinity, reducing the risk of violence. We have also been working with community police, the Police Office, and the Office for Women and Children to manage issues related to harassment and violence in our areas."*
> **Account in focus group discussion, young woman, Ethiopia**

This type of civic engagement and city resilience directly contributes toward SAIC's overarching aims of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

4: BARRIERS TO SUCCESS AND SCALE-UP

While qualitative data collected across the timeline of the SAIC programme suggests that substantive benefits for young people in urban spaces have been realised, interviews with implementing partners and local city authorities also highlighted barriers to implementation and scale-up.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS AND SCALE-UP

1: Patriarchal and discriminatory social norms

2: Justice deficits and unwillingness to change

3: COVID-19

4: The limited engagement of local governance and service structures

4.1 PATRIARCHAL AND DISCRIMINATORY SOCIAL NORMS

The data collected across all the implementing cities suggests a strong link between the emergence of violence and various factors that affect young people, including having limited economic opportunities, being marginalised in decision-making processes and a lack of accountability from public services. This situation has strong historical roots and has often been precipitated by the policies of previous governments, which promoted negative views of young people.

Social norms which place a higher value on the views of adults and elders than the views of youth also influenced the extent to which local decision-makers consulted young people. These views and norms still influence older age stakeholders working in city financing structures and the police, for example.

Across all country and city contexts, the qualitative data collected suggests the presence of strong patriarchal norms. For example, police and public transport stakeholders across several countries commented that a woman's dress choice could be considered to invite sexual violence. Young people also acknowledged harbouring such beliefs and stated that these attitudes were directly enforced in their homes, communities, and schools.

Young men noted that they were encouraged to be economically active and take on roles outside the home. In contrast, young women reported they were less likely to work in general and more likely to work at home or in the immediate community.

4.2 JUSTICE DEFICITS AND UNWILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

Interviewees from across the SAIC programme cities noted that major violence prevention and reduction issues were linked with corruption and bribery among city authorities.

The young people interviewed described reporting cases of violence and then being expected to bribe officials to follow up on the matter. This was particularly the case for young women reporting incidents of harassment or sexual violence. Over time, girls and young women felt discouraged from reporting such crimes.

Young men said they were required to bribe city officials in order to receive financial support for their businesses. The city authorities who benefit from this system are not motivated to change or act favourably towards SAIC programming. Consequently, several implementers noted that stakeholders sometimes did not want to support the programme.

Not all authorities want to maintain this status quo. However, given that the underlying issues have shaped governance and power structures in cities for decades, even stakeholders who want to bring about change must do so with sensitivity to the prevailing socio-political context.

4.3 COVID-19

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health measures – local lockdowns and social distancing – meant considerable economic challenges for urban residents. Economic activity in crowded cities declined, creating pressure on young people whose livelihoods depended on informal activities such as peddling or petty jobs. While SAIC continued its programming, resources were limited. In some cases, the programme had to prioritise supporting existing beneficiaries and their youth businesses (e.g. by offering support grants).

4.4 LIMITED ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE STRUCTURES

Interviewees identified the limited engagement and use of local governance and service structures as the main shortcoming of the SAIC programme. While implementers sought to work with and alongside these local structures, Plan International and its local partner organisations took primary responsibility for programme implementation. The eventual hand-over of programming duties to city officials and structures was not considered in the current programming cycle. Discussing such engagement, alongside wider multi-sectoral partnership models in cities, is critical if the SAIC approach is to be scaled up.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the suggestions made by all research participants, whether professionals engaged in programming, or young people discussing the programme and its effects in their local communities. The views of technical experts in Plan International also feature here.

TO MAKE CITIES SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS, PROGRAMMES SHOULD:

1 ESTABLISH MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATIONS AND SHARE LESSONS EFFECTIVELY

The local organisations and authorities acting in cities have significant influence over whether violence happens, and whether actions can be taken to address and redress the impacts of this. Data collected across SAIC implementation countries suggests that local authorities often held pre-conceived notions of young people being perpetrators of violence. These ideas gave rise to tense relationships between young people and local authorities, which caused problems for those young people seeking to report cases of violence.

SAIC and its implementing organisations and partners worked closely with local authorities to sensitise them to the needs and problems of young people. The data collected from different countries suggests that stakeholders started to view young people differently because of the programme. This, in turn, contributed to making cities safer and more inclusive spaces for young people.

Enhanced collaboration and communication among local implementers supporting programmes such as SAIC is essential. As the programme evolved, implementers and local stakeholders developed specific niches of expertise regarding the activities they implemented or supported. Opportunities to share lessons learned and good communication among implementers and stakeholders are crucial to improving programme activities and ensuring effective scale-up.

2 EXPAND PROGRAMMING TO WHOLE CITIES RATHER THAN SELECT COMMUNITIES

The main recommendation expressed by participating young people and local city stakeholders was the programme's scale-up and expansion to diverse and older age groups. SAIC participants noted that they experienced substantive benefits under the programme. They felt that expansion to other age groups and parts of the city would be beneficial, particularly as young people are likely to move from area to area frequently. Similarly, local city stakeholders welcomed the programme and felt that expanding it would complement ongoing government efforts to build city-wide resilience.

3 TARGET VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES

Focus group discussions with young women from different countries suggest that young women often do not feel safe in public spaces in local communities or on public transport. The programme sought to address this by sensitising communities to the different forms of violence that different genders may be exposed to and asking young people to interrogate their beliefs regarding gender norms. This prompted changes in how transport staff, for example, engage with young women, contributing to making city spaces more accessible for them. However, despite this, patriarchal social norms are still deeply embedded and women have different types of social networks compared to men (e.g. choosing to meet in homes rather than public spaces given reduced feelings of safety in the latter). This means that young men are more likely to access and benefit from public spaces.

> *The existing public spaces are not sufficient for the high number of young women and men found in the area. Although young women and men in the area have high demand to enjoy public spaces, young men benefit more than young women. Young men are more networked and can access information on public spaces. This helps them to use the existing public spaces. Young women pass most of their time at home and do not usually access the existing public spaces."*
> **Account in focus group discussion, young woman, Ethiopia**

4 STRENGTHEN THE AGENCY OF YOUTH

For participation in urban spaces to be effective, it is important to strengthen the agency, including skills, self-esteem, and self-worth of young people. The young people and implementers involved in training on these issues in Uganda felt that it contributed to young people's civic engagement capacities.

> *Due to the training on self-esteem, I gained the confidence to lobby for my community at the office of the president. Personally, I got leadership skills from the SAIC project. I contested, won the elections, and I am now the area councillor of my community, and for the very first time, society believed in me as a youth."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Uganda**

The effects of such skill-building, whether through direct training or indirect action, were evident across all countries in the way young people explained their current involvement in civic groups and youth associations, or in the way they described their ability to demand change on the issues they care about.

> *My main achievement from being involved in project activities is that we got the chance to register that I am the founder of the Youth Community Dialogue Initiatives (YCDI) association. It's a youth-led association which focuses on community development, empowering young girls, influencing decision making and safety initiatives to make sure that our community is safe."*
> **Most significant change story, young man, Zimbabwe**

> *The project has empowered us. In case of anything in our communities we can report. For example, in the last month, four people were affected by violence and harassment and two lost their lives (…)As an advocate of safe community, together with other safety champions in my community, including some community members, we approached my local chairperson to forge a way forward to ensure safety in the community."*
> **Most significant change story, young woman, Uganda**

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THE URBAN RESEARCH SERIES AND THE URBAN HUB

This publication is part of Plan International's Urban Research Series. It is the first of four reports examining data from the Safe and Inclusive Cities programme. The reports will summarise key learning about protection from violence, securing decent work and employment for youth in cities, and ensuring meaningful civic participation and social cohesion among youth.

Cities and urban contexts face specific fragility challenges. Plan International is committed to investing in and implementing programmes that work toward the New Urban Agenda and SDG11 and seeks to *achieve inclusive, sustainable and equitable cities.* Our Urban Hub has been established to further this aim.

The Urban Hub works across all Plan International offices, including thematic focus areas and Centres of Excellence, to harness evidence and learning from urban programming. The Urban Hub commissioned the Urban Research Series, with support from Plan International Denmark. Using the learning featured here, we aim to build a community of practice that strives for responsible, gender-transformative and sustainable urbanisation and urban development, for children and young people in all their diversity. The series will feature research and learning on diverse topics and from a range of programmes.

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