

Transcending Borders with Art and Wisdom

Disadvantaged Children in Asia and Denver Connect

By Sherry Kennedy, NARO

In September 2004, the Children, Youth and Environments Center for Research and Design (CYE Center) at the University of Colorado at Denver co-hosted an artwork exhibit by street children around the world. The exhibit included drawings from street children in Asia, who were asked to illustrate what they would do, if they had the chance.

Moved by the children's frank images, the organizers decided to solicit similar drawings from children of low-income families in Denver. The result was a profound experience that transcended global borders and highlighted the innate wisdom and intelligence of one of the world's most vulnerable populations.

Global reaction to street children is varied, casting them as victims or villains. Regardless of perception, however, their vast number—an estimated 40 million worldwide—cannot be ignored.

In Asia, which is home to nearly half of the world's children, high levels of poverty significantly increase children's vulnerability to life on the streets. In an Asian Development Bank (ADB) report *At the Margins: Street Children in Asia and the Pacific*, author Andrew West indicates the most significant question to be addressed by society if the problem is to be managed successfully: How can street children have a future?

For one day in April 2001, street children in Manila were asked to look toward a life beyond the streets by simply dreaming. In an art competition, about 500

children were asked to illustrate what they liked and would like to improve about their city streets. *The Streets of My City*, organized by ADB and local nongovernment organizations (NGOs) resulted in 12 scholarships and was repeated in an expanded form in 2002 through the *If I Had the Chance* competition, which included 1,000 street children from 7 cities in ADB's developing members in Asia and the Pacific—Dhaka, Jakarta, Kathmandu, Manila, Phnom Penh, Port Moresby, and Ulaanbaatar.

The events proved two things: that street children can intelligently decipher the underlying causes of their predicament and the larger issues in the world around them;

and that they have dreams beyond the streets.

The second art competition in 2002 took the process of dreaming one step further. It asked children between the ages of 5 and 16 to answer the simple question—What would I do *If I Had the Chance...*? This exercise unleashed profound illustrations and stories that ranged from simple to lofty.

If he had the chance, 7-year-old Jerome Mentigar of Manila would leave his home next to a mountain of garbage known as Payatas. Not long ago, a landslide left many of his neighbors buried under tons of trash. Jerome says he would like to live in the countryside "to take care of the forests so no one will cut down trees and people will have food to eat." He would like to plant and harvest fruits and vegetables to eat with his father—a man he has never met.

If she had a chance, 14-year-old Myraflor Fulay from Manila would "finish my

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STREET CHILDREN A growing social concern

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In this publication, \$ refers to US dollars.

Disadvantaged Children

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studies. I would tell the children of the next generation that they are very important and they have a future."

And 12-year-old Firliyansah from Jakarta would simply like to "have breakfast."

A global dream shared in Denver

The entries from the *If I Had The Chance* competition were compiled into a book, which landed on the desk of Willem van Vliet, Professor and Director of the Ph.D. Program in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado.

When he contacted ADB in 2004, the obvious question was: What does architecture have to do with a children's art competition? As it turned out—a lot.

Dr. van Vliet also heads Children, Youth and Environments (CYE), a peer-reviewed journal and multidisciplinary, international network dedicated to improving the lives of young people.

If I Had the Chance was subsequently reviewed in the CYE journal and both the book and the original illustrations were included in an international exhibit of street children's art in September 2004. The question posed by ADB to the street children in Asia lit a global spark.

Before the end of the exhibit period, organizers were distributing paper and crayons to disadvantaged children and youth in the Denver area and also asking them to illustrate what they would do if they had the chance.

In response, the children in Denver proved that they too had a firm grasp of what ails their world.

Nine-year-old Jessica Gallardo drew a house with blue skies overhead and said "If I had a chance I will make the world more cleaner."

Twelve-year-old Alex Ramero had equally impressive ambitions when he wrote; "If I had a chance I would make a cure 4 Aids (sic)."

The children's art competition was incorporated into a community forum on youth and family homelessness, during

which university researchers, youth service providers, representatives from local social service agencies, and homeless youth came together to discuss the issues facing more than 6,500 children, youth, and

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adults in families living in shelters and motels and on the streets of Denver.

Some of the issues included the need for more affordable rental and transitional housing in urban areas, increased educational and physical development support for young children in homeless families, and housing and job-training programs for youth trying to leave the streets.

The exhibit, and related events, was held during the launch of the CYE Center at the University of Colorado.

The CYE Center, which is affiliated with the University's College of Architecture and Planning, works with the design professions and allied disciplines to contribute to the health, safety, and welfare of children and youth, particularly those who are disadvantaged and who have special needs.

Throughout the world, organizations like CYE are working to make a difference in the lives of children and youth at risk.

Many groups—whether it's the Sidewalk Angels working with West African street children or Almudos, as they are known locally, the United World College of South East Asia working in Indonesia, or Toronto-based Street Kids International, who work on a global level—prove their commitment to the cause daily.

Improving the lives of these children will, however, require commitment from many more sectors in society. This will begin with governments pledging their support with tangible resources.

As the children's drawings demonstrated, food, shelter, and education are among their most cherished wishes. Helping them transform these desires into

reality will be the true test of our commitment to them.

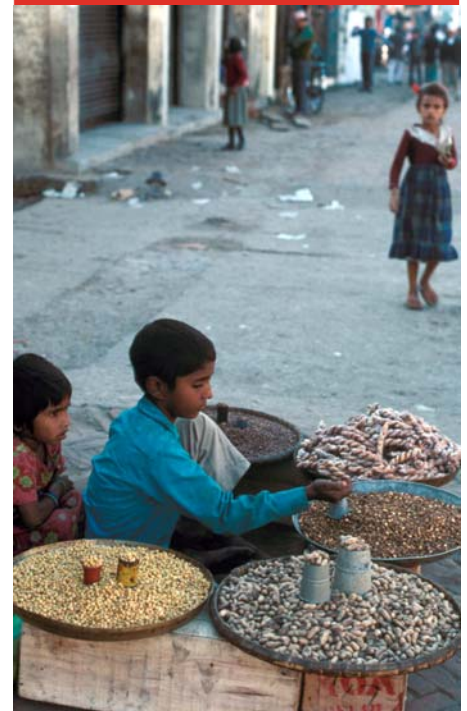
Beyond the dream

If he had the chance, 14-year-old Mohammad Yusuf of Dhaka, Bangladesh, would become a teacher and an advocate for children. He says he is one of the children kicked around and abused in the vegetable market where he works. When asked about his dream to become a children's advocate, Mohammad Yusuf says that the adult "mafia" demand money from children. He also talks about the police who ask for a share, threatening to arrest children for stealing, or chasing them away if they hang around. Mohammad Yusuf works from midnight to 5:00 a.m., loading and unloading vegetables and selling scraps that have fallen from trucks. And like other boys working in the market, he goes to the nongovernment organization (NGO) drop-in center each morning.

In Asia, as in many developing countries, children must work to survive. Freedom from exploitation and illegal employment are seen as luxuries in which they cannot partake.

In reality, illegal employment exists under bonded or restrictive conditions—about 4 million children are injured in the

SURVIVAL In Asia, as in many developing countries, children must work to survive



work place annually, 1.5 million are disabled, and 19,000 die, according to the theme chapter “Develop a Child” in ADB’s *Annual Report 2000*.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by nearly every country in the world, including all of ADB’s developing members in Asia. It cemented the right of children to participate in interventions designed to help them and it gave society the duty to protect them. The convention established universal standards for children’s rights to dignity, freedom from discrimination, survival, development, protection, and participation—considering the best interests of children.

Within the rights-based framework, there are two approaches to working with street children. Both begin with the premise that practitioners should acknowledge children’s needs and seek their input at all stages of project or intervention design.

The first approach, human development, focuses on long-term reintegration into the community and preventive programs. The second approach, service delivery, deals with short-term services such as drop-in centers for food, training, and health care needs. The ideal framework involves both.

ADB’s 2003 publication, *Working with Street Children: Exploring Ways for ADB Assistance*, outlines several key components to successful intervention design.

- **Economic support:** Focus on helping children to become economically independent if they remain on the streets through formal and nonformal education. Providing microfinance and other support to parents is also advisable and can prevent children from leaving home.
- **Health care:** Provide facilities for health education and immediate health care for children still living on the streets.
- **Coordination and integration of services:** Promote a multisector approach that includes education, health, and capacity building.
- **Involvement of family, community, and society:** Help improve the ability of families, communities, and schools to receive and care for children returning from the streets.



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It is important that programs to help street children or prevent children at risk of living on the streets, consider all circumstances affecting their lives.

Tackling the issue of rights abuses, for instance, would be pointless without factoring in issues like lack of adequate housing, nutrition, and education and training.

In his ADB report, Mr. West adds that it is imperative for practitioners to approach work with street children as “implicitly rights-based and holistic (that is looking to the whole child, not particular aspects of the child’s life).”

Turning the dream into reality

Lack of access to education is a primary issue affecting children around the world, either those living on the streets or vulnerable to a life on the streets.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, *Promises Broken: An Assessment of Children’s Rights on the 10th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, denial of education is the root cause of civil and political rights violations, such as illegal employment of children in hazardous and exploitative labor, detention in prisons, and discrimination against

children on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and other criteria.

In Asia, children under 14 years old make up 30% of the population. This number has potential implications beyond Asia, considering that three quarters of the world’s population reside in Asia. In this age group, lack of nutrition and education could lead to intellectual underdevelopment and inability to fully participate in development.

ADB’s 2002 education strategy has a core objective to reach poor and vulnerable populations through innovative, responsive, and flexible nonformal education, particularly in collaboration with NGOs.

Several projects in Bangladesh (Post-Literacy and Continuing Education Project), Philippines (Technical Education and Skills Development Project), and Kyrgyz Republic (Third Education Project) have focused on community-based approaches to education by targeting the needs of at-risk groups such as street children.

Successful interventions dealing with street children should incorporate their needs, perspectives, and knowledge. A life on the street has taught them how to survive, cope, and solve problems—experiences that can surely be useful to adults helping them tackle the complexity of living on the streets.

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Disadvantaged Children

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Street children in Asia spoke clearly when they said they needed to fulfill their dreams if given the chance. The task now lies with communities, governments, organizations, and families to help them fulfill their promise.

If she had the chance, 15-year-old Tati of Jakarta would go to school and realize her dreams, which she calls "high and various." But there is a part of her that knows achieving her dreams is a distant hope. "Sometimes I feel like crying as I am not satisfied with what I can obtain. Is it possible to achieve my ambition?"

If he had the chance, 12-year-old Md. Shohel Rana of Dhaka would become a doctor who would "serve poor children." When asked about his life on the streets, he says the death of his grandmother, who raised him after his mother's death, was the "saddest moment of his life. But then, he adds, "I never had a happy day in my life until now." Winning ADB's art competition is that one happy moment. ■

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NARO Spotlight

Tsunami Update

The Tsunami Impact, Aftermath, and Next Steps

Devastating, incomprehensible, catastrophic. These are some of the adjectives being used to describe the hardest hit areas of Asia.

The global response to this tragedy has been heartening. From young Americans donating teddy bears intended to ease the angst of young orphans to local Indonesian staff in agencies like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) who are donating their salaries to help the aid efforts.

At a special Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit on 6 January in Jakarta, Indonesia, ASEAN leaders and the international community convened to discuss the scope of assistance needed.

In his address, then ADB President Tadao Chino expressed his gratitude to the world community for their generosity. He also emphasized the resilience of Asians and their ability to overcome adversity and "rise to the challenge of rebuilding for the future."

ADB, along with other multilateral and bilateral institutions, is on the ground working closely to assess the damage and prioritize the use of funds. These assessments will then be used to create a targeted assistance program that will maximize the use of grants and concessional funds.

In such emergencies, ADB ensures that financial assistance is made readily available to governments for purchasing and constructing high-priority items like water supply and sanitation systems, schools and health clinics, roads, bridges, and power transmission and distribution systems.

At the request of their governments, ADB will be assisting India, Indonesia, Maldives, and Sri Lanka.

Next steps: early warning system

At the ASEAN Summit in Indonesia, one of the major agenda items was implementing an early warning system to prevent such catastrophes in the future.

In a *Jakarta Post* article, Australian scientist Phil McFadden estimates that a system could be built in the Indian Ocean in one year for about \$20 million. Mr. McFadden calculates that this system would also include 30 seismographs to detect earthquakes, 10 tidal gauges, and 6 special Deep Ocean Assessment and Reporting Tsunamis (DART) at a cost of \$250,000 for each DART plus annual maintenance of up to \$50,000.

ADB has offered to fund a \$1 million feasibility study to examine options for putting such a system in place and linking it to other regional and global warning systems—a cost, ADB reasons, that is well worth the price of saving thousands of lives in the future.

For more information on the tsunami coordination efforts, visit <http://adb.org/tsunami/>. ■



TSUNAMI ASSISTANCE Then ADB President Tadao Chino speaks at a joint press conference in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, in the presence of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and World Bank President James Wolfensohn

News Briefs

NARO Launches an E-Newsletter

The Asia Monitor was launched in January 2005 in the wake of the tsunami disaster. It will be a monthly e-newsletter designed to provide timely updates in areas that our readers identified as important. Links will be provided to different topics and will include a feature article; regional economic updates; and opportunities to work for, consult, or intern with ADB. NARO will decrease production and distribution of its current print newsletter to twice annually (spring and winter). The two annual issues will continue to focus on specific topics impacting ADB and the broader development agenda.

To subscribe to the Asia Monitor, send a request to naro@adb.org.

For back issues of all newsletters, visit www.adb.org/Documents/Periodicals/NARO/ ■

Seek Solutions to Environment Risks Killing Millions in Asia

Environmental risks—such as exposure to urban and indoor air pollution, unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene, and climate change—are the causes of over 2.5 million deaths per year in the Asia and Pacific region.

That was the warning at a special meeting jointly organized by the World Health Organization, United Nations Environment Programme, and Asian Development Bank in November 2004.

The high-level meeting on health and environment was held over 3 days at ADB's headquarters in Manila. ■

East Asia Posts Highest GDP Growth since 1997 Financial Crisis

East Asia registered its best gross domestic product (GDP) growth since the 1997 financial crisis, reaching 7.6%, despite high oil prices and some loss of growth momentum, according to a December 2004 report from ADB's on-line resource, the *Asia Economic Monitor* (AEM), which uses forecasts provided by Consensus Economics. The report defines East Asia as the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, plus the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Korea.

With the external economic environment turning less favorable, domestic demand set to soften and the PRC's economic slowdown likely to continue, the AEM predicts lower but solid growth at 6.5% as its forecast for 2005.

Forecasts for 2005 are subject to three main risks: continued high oil prices, a disorderly adjustment of the US current account deficit, and a hard landing in the PRC, AEM says.

"East Asian economies and financial markets have performed well despite high oil prices as, among others, price peaks have not approached the levels of previous oil shocks in real terms and countries are now more energy-efficient and less vulnerable," says Pradumna B. Rana, Director of ADB's Regional Economic Monitoring Unit (REMU). "But if oil prices remain high, or worse, increase further, they could push up inflation and adversely affect growth in East Asia," he adds.

East Asia's growth in 2005 has been driven by a combination of a rapid increase

in exports and continued strength in domestic demand. The strong growth, coupled with high commodity prices, including oil prices, has led to a rise in inflation across the region. However, this has moderated in recent months, except in Malaysia and the Philippines. The region's stock markets have generally rebounded strongly in recent months following a weak performance around the middle of the year. Reflecting the broad weakness of the US dollar and robust balance of payments, East Asian currencies have generally appreciated against the dollar.

Current account surpluses and strong capital inflows have led to a sizable increase in East Asia's foreign exchange reserves. Continued progress in financial and corporate restructuring and improved prudential indicators have

reduced East Asia's financial vulnerability. Nonperforming loan ratios continue to decrease, and external debt to international reserve ratios are falling in most countries.

"The key policy challenge facing East Asia over the next year

The key policy challenge facing East Asia over the next year or two is to sustain the robust GDP growth at a time when US interest rates and domestic inflation rates are on an upward path

or two is to sustain the robust GDP growth at a time when US interest rates and domestic inflation rates are on an upward path," AEM says.

"Against the emerging global and regional economic backdrop, an appropriate policy response should have three key components: tighter fiscal and monetary policies, greater exchange rate flexibility, and structural reforms to invigorate private investment." *The AEM is available at REMU's Asia Regional Information Center (<http://aric.adb.org>).* ■

ADB Publications

Floods and the Poor: Reducing the Vulnerability of the Poor to the Negative Impacts of Floods

ISBN: 971-561-525-2
Publication Date: September 2004
Online edition: Free
Hardcopy: \$10



Flood mitigation projects worldwide have tended to follow a standard, top-down, and predominantly engineering approach. This new publication suggests problems with that approach, examines water-related disasters from the point of view of affected poor households, and proposes steps to help flood-prone communities prepare to cope more effectively. ■

To order a copy, contact NARO or to download a free copy, visit
www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Water_for_All_Series/Floods-and-the-Poor/

NEWS FROM

NARO

The quarterly newsletter of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) North American Representative Office (NARO) aims to enhance communications between ADB and its client groups in North America. Articles in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official ADB view. We welcome readers' comments and suggestions.

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