

# **Social policies and marginalized urban youth: centrist prescriptions and divergent practices**

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## **Abstract:**

Although conditions of risk confronting urban youth are most visible in the immediate contexts of family and community, the degree to which specific social policies affect the status of adolescence is less understood. Between 1999 and 2002, with support from the International Development Research Centre, a team of researchers in Canada, Kenya and Nicaragua undertook a comparative inquiry into policy changes designed to influence social services impinging on the welfare of marginalized urban youth. Qualitative case studies focused on three stages of policy: a) the politics and macro-level forces underlying the formulation of social policies that affect urban youth; b) the institutional dynamics of policy implementation within selected urban sites and corresponding relations between units of local government and civil society organizations; and c) the actions and perspectives of groups of individuals who have been engaged in, and affected by, these policy processes. Despite the diversity of contexts and policies examined, case study findings revealed how the formulation of youth-oriented policies are shaped by dominant discourses that rarely accommodate the perspectives of youth themselves. Likewise, the implementation of such policies constitutes a complex set of practices that are subject to negotiation and different forms of appropriation, and therefore often exacerbate the marginalization of urban youth. In keeping with the qualitative and collaborative design of the project, the research helped to generate inter organizational dialogue within the communities that were the sites of inquiry. It also fostered insights regarding the role of collaborative international research as a catalyst for cross-national dialogue and a knowledge base for grassroots rights-oriented social change.