



**SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES, STRENGTHENING SYNERGIES:
LIMA FRAMES A COLLECTIVE STRATEGY TO ADVANCE EARLY
CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, 2019–2021**

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SYNOPSIS

Jorge Muñoz had long championed efforts to improve the lives of children in his relatively well-off district of Peru’s capital city, Lima. In 2019, he had a chance to take some of his ideas to scale. As newly elected mayor of metropolitan Lima, a city of almost 11 million, he oversaw basic services for about a third of the country’s population. At the time, a fifth of Peru’s population lived in poverty, and one in three people lived in informal settlements, where supporting families to give infants and toddlers a healthy start on life presented many challenges. The mayor directed the metropolitan government’s Social Development Department and a small interdisciplinary team of architects and social scientists (1) to identify lessons learned from pilot projects, (2) to establish new ways of assisting infants and young children, and (3) to coordinate to get the job done. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the capital city in 2020, the metropolitan government and its team continued this work, using some of their newly created systems to respond to the larger challenge of caring for vulnerable populations during months of emergency lockdown measures. The national government labeled Lima’s program, which engaged residents in project development, as a promising model for helping local governments implement a nationwide strategy for the promotion of early childhood development.

INTRODUCTION

Anita was three years old in 2019, when someone snapped a photograph of her on a newly built stairway that led from her community to others in metropolitan Lima, Peru’s capital. Her family lived in a settlement called The Hill, one of several such communities perched on the city’s rocky slopes. Her parents usually had to pay the driver of a *mototaxi*—a three-wheeled motorcycle with a roof—to drive them to and from their home because there was no safe footpath and the topography was ill-suited to bus service (figure 1).

The new stairway had now changed all that. Outfitted with a low handrail designed for children of Anita’s height, as well as a handrail for adults, the new route enabled 30 families with young children to safely walk between their homes and the rest of the neighborhood for the first time. It also helped children to climb the steps on their own—without having to hold on to caregivers’ hands, which served as an important boost to their own development.

The stairway was part of a project called Opening Paths, one of several under the umbrella of Urban95, an initiative that Netherlands-based Bernard van Leer Foundation promoted with city governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) across the world. The nonprofit foundation and its partners aimed to improve the lives of babies, toddlers, and caregivers by considering urban spaces from the average height of a three-year-old child, which is 95 centimeters, or a little more than three feet.¹ Their programs rested on evidence that investing in cognitive and social development during the first few years of children’s lives improved educational outcomes and, later, job market potential and might help reduce future violent behavior.²

The question was whether changes in the built environment could improve service access while also providing opportunities for advancing children’s development. To create a model of what such an approach might look like in Lima, a city of 10.5 million people, Opening Paths had embarked on a two-month effort to identify better ways of



Figure 1: An Urban95 project, Opening Paths, in Chorrillos District. Photo credit: Alto Perú.

<https://altoperu.medium.com/abriendo-caminos-en-alto-per%C3%BA-561f01b1016d>

servicing low-income families with infants and young children in the city's Chorrillos district.

Soon, an opportunity to build on the lessons learned from those early efforts materialized. A sympathetic political leader, Jorge Muñoz, was elected mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima in October 2018 and took office in January 2019. From 2011 to 2018, Muñoz had served as mayor of the Miraflores district, where he established a local chapter of the international City of Children network, a project comprising more than 200 partner cities.³ Children aged 7 to 11 years participated in councils through which they advised Muñoz's office, submitting their own proposals for ways to improve their neighborhoods. The mayor's office implemented several of their ideas for enhancing safety and expanding structured play in parks.⁴

Upon entering the metropolitan government, the mayor and his team had a new opportunity to scale their efforts to promote childhood not only across the sprawling capital city but also to its youngest children. To do so, they studied the city's most-effective small Urban95 pilot projects and established a partnership with the Bernard van Leer Foundation called Childhood City: First Steps (Ciudad Infancia: Primeros Pasos).

THE CHALLENGE

At the time, about one in five people in the capital city lived below the national poverty line, and almost half of Lima's 10.5 million residents lived in informal settlements.⁵ Entire neighborhoods were built on steep, arid slopes with no planning, which complicated mobility and safety—especially for those trying to reach public spaces and services with young children in tow. Furthermore, the metropolitan area's 43 districts, each of which had its own elected government, had to agree to be part of the effort. Departments within the metropolitan government that rarely worked with one another would have to collaborate. And the mayor wanted to ensure that the city's early childhood focus continued long after he retired from office.

Reaching low-income households with young children presented serious practical challenges. Because the houses in many informal settlements had been built mostly without official permission and because their members had typically migrated from rural areas or other Lima districts, official sources of information such as the census registry and other registries became quickly outdated. The lack of reliable data made it difficult to determine where to locate services and how to plan public spaces and early childhood projects.

Topography presented another obstacle to any kind of urban planning program that aimed to improve physical access to municipal programs and open spaces. Sandwiched into an arid, earthquake-prone area between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes, communities spread up steep, unstable rocky slopes that the municipal water system frequently did not reach. And poorer families with young children often had to traverse that difficult terrain in order to gain access to services they needed. Creating green parks with lawns—cool places to play and rest—would be difficult in the area's generally dry conditions.

Safety was also of concern. More than 300 pedestrians died in traffic accidents in 2017, according to citizen observatory data.⁶ That was about three times the number in New York in the same year. In some parts of Lima, about a third of residents surveyed said they had been victims of crimes—mainly robberies or thefts. Although homicide rates were far below levels in most parts of Central America, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, and even parts of the United States, they were high enough in a few districts—about 15.6 per 100,000 in La Victoria, for example—to trigger fear.⁷

In addition to those problems, several other issues made coordinating innovative projects difficult. One was the division of legal authority between levels of government. The mayor of metropolitan Lima administered only one district directly: the historic center, known as Walled Lima (Cercado de Lima) (figure 2). Every other district had its own mayor. The districts and the metropolitan government each had departments responsible for various types of social services. Some metropolitan departments had the authority to act in any district; for instance, City Services and Environmental Management maintained parks throughout the city. However, other city departments had district counterparts. In those cases, if a metropolitan department wanted to do something in a district—for example, adjust a street’s traffic flow—it proposed



Figure 2: Lima Districts
Modified from <https://www.peruwayna.com/living-in-lima>.

the activity to the district mayor. If the mayor approved the project, the metropolitan government and its district counterpart carried out the activity together. Any innovations and reforms in districts other than Walled Lima had to navigate these complex jurisdictions.

Moreover, changes to streetscapes or the harnessing of city data required collaboration across city departments because the metropolitan government's Social Development Department had no legal authority to take the steps required to, say, build a sidewalk. Consequently, explained Carlos Contreras, whom Muñoz picked to manage that department, Urban95 projects had to operate transversely—that is, they had to coordinate with other departments that had the authority to do whatever Social Development could not do on its own. But few departments were accustomed to working together, and at the time there was no innovation office to convene people across departmental lines or to follow up on collaborative projects (exhibit 1).

Sustainability was always in question because mayors were not permitted to serve more than single four-year terms. Consequently, they tended to enter office with teams they had established previously, and they often dismissed much of the existing administration, thereby shrinking institutional memory and losing technical knowledge. Projects formulated and planned by one mayor often got shelved by the next. Accordingly, strategies had to focus on projects that required no longer than one mayoral term to implement and evaluate or on projects that were resilient to political cycles.

Finally, a culture of public distrust influenced perceptions. Years of high-profile corruption scandals landed former politicians such as local mayors and national presidents under criminal investigation and made citizens of Lima wary of new ideas and new projects—especially when those citizens were not well acquainted with all of the organizational partners and the issues in question. Contreras said he knew that the Urban95 approach would at first seem a mystery to many in the metropolitan government and the general public and even to members of his own team.

FRAMING A RESPONSE

When Muñoz became Lima's mayor, he brought some of his key Miraflores colleagues with him. Contreras, new manager of the Social Development Department, had led Miraflores's social services as manager of human development. A physician by training, Contreras recognized the positive impact of supporting and stimulating the earliest stages of child development. As a public official, he realized the broad value of improving services for families, caregivers, and young children at the metropolitan level. The mayor put him in charge of a new initiative, which he later called Childhood City: First Steps. Now Contreras had to identify the best ideas—for instance, the ones used in transforming The Hill settlement where Anita lived—and take them to scale.

To help explain how urban planning and the lives of the city's youngest residents were linked, Contreras could point to ideas city residents had already voiced. A citizen observatory called Lima Cómo Vamos had led the way in

canvassing opinion on urban life and spurred public debate about ways the city could improve. In 2016, it had started an awards program to recognize and publicize initiatives for improving public spaces. Nonprofit organizations and foundations rose to the occasion and initiated projects throughout the metropolitan area—often with a focus on improving safety, mobility, and public spaces for low-income families.

The city's early efforts to better the lives of children had focused mainly on improving children's physical health, Contreras said. But Muñoz took a broader view based on his experience while mayor of Lima's Miraflores. For support, he could also point to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that United Nations member governments had adopted in 2015.⁸ SDG Target 4.2 encouraged governments to expand access to quality early childhood development, care, and preprimary education.⁹

Contreras was already slightly familiar with Urban95 when he took up his post. Some months before the October 2019 election, he had addressed an international conference about the Miraflores City of Children project. A Bernard van Leer Foundation member had approached him to discuss initiatives and pointed to ways other cities were transforming public spaces for the benefit of young children. The examples included creating easier and safer pedestrian access to social service centers, clustering several services that caregivers and children needed in special priority zones, coordinating opening hours and public transportation to expand access, and developing parks tailored to the needs of children under age three along the routes families traveled. Some cities also sought to use data and communications systems to target support to those who needed it most or to make families aware of opportunities available to them. All aimed to measure results so they could adjust as needed.

After becoming head of the Social Development Department, Contreras contacted the Bernard van Leer Foundation to resume the conversation he had started before the election. He indicated he was also interested in meeting the foundation's nongovernmental partners. And in those conversations, he included key members of his department: Roxana Alvarado, his deputy manager at the Welfare and Social Promotion Office, which coordinated social services; Virna Vera, municipal ombudsperson for the Children and Adolescents Division, which ensured and defended children's rights; and Ninfa Chávez, who headed the Maternal and Child Care Division, which supervised the metropolitan nurseries and kindergartens.

One aim was to learn more about the things other cities had done to improve access to early-childhood-development services for larger numbers of low-income households. Another was to hear more about what was already happening in Lima. And a third was to create a network of people who could share expertise and advice.

Above all, Contreras said, he wanted the group to develop the outline of a plan that would take full account of the city's characteristics, the purview and limitations of the Social Development Department, and the effect of political cycles on project continuity. He also asked the group to help find ways of

explaining the initiative to others by answering such questions, as, Why were transformations of urban public spaces to aid in early childhood development important? and, How did child development and urban space connect with each other?

As the meetings progressed, there was general agreement that Urban95 offered a logical way to scale the mayor's focus on childhood across the entire city, Contreras said. Bernard van Leer Foundation executive director Cecilia Vaca Jones, who had previously served as coordinating minister of social development in Ecuador, highlighted the opportunity to expand across parts of the city in order to reach more families and also across levels of government. There was also excitement about how the initiative focused on improving the lives of families with children younger than those with which Contreras and his team had experience.

The next step was to engage a bigger group of people to help fill in the details and explore the exact terms whereby the city could partner with the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Contreras asked the foundation to support an event that would bring experts, community leaders, and officials together and then, later, to consider the plan that emerged from such conversations and others.

To make coordination across departments more effective, it was important to build support within the metropolitan government. Contreras suggested that pilot projects aim to establish early wins that helped departments to earn trust and appreciation both within and outside the government. He wanted to ensure that collaboration across departments would not imply increased costs and burdens but, instead, would require only minimal adjustments to their responsibilities and activities—and would even generate synergies.

Contreras chose a private-sector architect, Carlos Javier Vega, to integrate the many suggestions that emerged from these discussions with the mayor's ideas and then to tailor the strategy to Lima's context and capabilities. Vega was a member of an NGO called Alto Perú, which worked in the Chorrillos district. He had collaborated with the foundation since 2017 and was familiar with the Urban95 approach. Plus, Alto Perú had already worked successfully with district governments. For instance, Vega and his team developed a project in 2018 in the low-income San Juan de Miraflores district: a Children's Route (Ruta de los Niños) that provided families better access to government offices, schools, other facilities, and a park. The team had worked not only with the local community but also closely with the district government to renovate streets and a nearby park, thereby improving mobility and encouraging neighbors and schools to use the spaces for classes and community activities.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

The Social Development Department leadership team, which Contreras directed, moved to translate the mayor's vision of promoting childhood throughout Lima into the reality of the Urban95 project called Childhood City: First Steps. Implementing the strategy called for a series of linked elements.

- Bringing together experts and public officials to better understand urban planning and early childhood development and to learn to work together
- Establishing the scope and objectives of the Urban95 partnership with the Bernard van Leer Foundation
- Building trust and support with other departments of the metropolitan government in order to collaborate efficiently
- Designing urban space projects—parks and public works—that could be replicable throughout the city
- Developing innovative services to provide communities, families, and caregivers, in addition to young children, with counseling and support focused on early development
- Building more-extensive interdepartmental coordination so as to scale the pilot projects throughout the capital and ensure sustainability of the initiative
- Strengthening synergies with collaboration partners at the metropolitan level so as to provide a national model

Refining the concept

To help public officials from the metropolitan and district governments grasp the core ideas behind the initiative and build relationships with experts and potential partners outside government, Contreras and his team decided to begin with a two-month course on urban space and early childhood. They first invited proposals from the Urban95 partners that had developed pilot projects with the Bernard van Leer Foundation. One of them, an architecture collective called Coordinator of the City (in Construction) (Coordinadora de la Ciudad [en Construcción], or CCC) submitted a successful proposal. The course was named the School of Production of Public Space: Childhood and Neighborhood, and a CCC cofounder, Javier Vera Cubas, an architect and urbanist interested in community engagement and social inclusion, led the subsequent steps. Other nongovernmental partners, whose expertise ranged from early childhood development to urban planning, to community engagement, helped with the course.

The announcement came just days after the mayor took office in January 2019. The course was free and open to public officials of the metropolitan and district governments; professionals and students from the fields of architecture, urban design, and social sciences; and community organizers and leaders. The sessions took place throughout February and March, and they built an understanding of why it was important to make the city stimulating, friendly, and safe for young children. They also provided a practical tool kit for how to go about all of that. Those who participated had a chance to generate and exchange ideas, apply what they learned, and become part of technical teams for future pilot projects.

The course content included lectures by foreign and local experts, practical project-design sessions, guided walks through parts of the city, and training in

project development and management. Meetings took place weekly, each of them for a full day.

The participants joined working groups of 8 to 10 people, which usually included a few NGO members, 4 or 5 young professionals or students, 2 or 3 community leaders, and 2 public officials. The groups designed small projects by drawing on guidance from an Urban95 tool kit. They plotted residents' activities and travel patterns, conducted surveys, mapped out what might be stimulating—or overwhelming—for young children along the routes people followed, and developed indicators that could be used to assess the impacts of the projects they designed. Some of the groups moved from design into implementation as the event progressed. They learned by doing and discovered the advantages of using what was at hand in order to develop concepts that districts could easily carry out on their own. Contreras hoped to recruit some of the members of the course working groups as consultants and have them continue to assist the city as its Urban95 proposal moved forward.

Officials from eight of Lima's districts participated, but because the governments they served could not spare their time for the whole workday, district personnel rotated. For that reason, the impact of the school was limited in terms of collaboration with public officials. José Cepero, an architecture professor who cofounded IntuyLab, an experimental architecture laboratory, explained that public officials sometimes could not take time off from their jobs to participate in weekly daylong sessions, and as a result, government staff were unable to experience the course as intended. Toward the end, the number of public officials dwindled, and only a handful remained.

The school spawned pilot projects such as the Opening Paths stairway in The Hill neighborhood that enabled Anita, her family, and her neighbors to walk to a nearby nursery for the first time. The objectives of that and other pilot projects were twofold: on the one hand, to help local communities, and on the other hand, to develop the work methods the metropolitan government would apply in its future Urban95 activities.

The Opening Paths pilot, which Cepero led in collaboration with anthropologist and psychologist Silvia Aragón, helped create a model work process that engaged the community in decision making—a step that was important for sustainability and for building support. The team worked with the community to identify priorities, codesigned the project with residents, and built the stairway with public participation. The new route improved walkability, connected public spaces within the neighborhood, increased opportunities for physical exercise by both caregivers and children, promoted children's sense of autonomy by adding a separate railing for them, provided spots for nursing and resting, and helped establish connections between neighbors and caregivers that persisted after the project concluded.

Vega the architect invited Contreras and his senior staff at the Social Development Department to visit, and Contreras said he and his team had found the Opening Paths pilot a convincing proof of concept.

The approach became a hallmark of Lima Urban95, Vaca Jones said. The program placed a high priority on ensuring that the most-vulnerable communities in the metropolitan area were involved in conceptualization and design and that they participated in, as well as benefited from, urban space projects.

Finalizing a plan

While the school was in session, Contreras and Vega began to develop the details of a plan they would discuss with the foundation and submit to the mayor. Contreras said there would be three focal points: creating child-friendly public spaces, improving the access routes for families to reach early childhood development services, and boosting families' awareness of the services and facilities available to them.

The Childhood City: First Steps project became the basis for a collaboration between the city government and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which agreed to invest slightly over 403,000 euros (about US\$476,000 at 2018 exchange rates). Panez & Faesa of the RSM Group, a financial management and accounting firm that had worked with the foundation in Peru, served as grant holder and auditor. In addition to defraying the personnel costs of the Urban95 team, the goals of the grant were (1) to change the city's management model so that departments could work more easily with one another, (2) to encourage experimentation that would ensure that families with infants and young children could move around the city easily and safely, and (3) to communicate more effectively with families about early-childhood-development services and opportunities. The project was to end in December 2019.

To work within the city's districts, Contreras had to coordinate with elected district governments, which had departments of their own that mirrored those of the metropolitan government and had final authority to decide on which programs they would implement. The metropolitan government had direct authority over only one district, the historic Walled Lima, so-called because it lay within fortifications Spanish colonists built in the seventeenth century to defend against pirate attacks. UNESCO had declared some of its public spaces World Heritage sites, but this district also included Barrios Altos, an area with many low-income residents who were once thought to sympathize with a resistance group active in Peru until about 2012. To build interest and support while also moving quickly, the plan called for some initial projects in this community (figure 3).

Fostering collaboration within the government

The novelty of the concepts behind Urban95 made it important to build understanding and commitment among public officials throughout the metropolitan government. Both the rationale for the focus on children aged three years and under and the idea of using creative urban planning to scale access to appropriate services were novel.

To start, Contreras established a working group within his own department, Social Development. He then began to introduce other departments to the idea. Early on, he recalled, he approached the manager of the Urban Development Department, Gloria Corvacho, who was enthusiastic and said her team would collaborate. The two of them agreed that they would not only track the progress of each of the projects they launched as part of the program but would also find ways of measuring impacts on the families and children they wanted to help. The data would help persuade other city officials—as well as residents—that the Urban95 initiative was worthwhile. Some months later, Corvacho was promoted to become manager of the Metropolitan Municipal Department, which supervised planning, implementation, and evaluation of the city government’s work.

The Urban95 team next reached out to other city departments and tried to identify civil servants who were strongly committed to the ideas behind the Childhood City: First Steps project. Because City Services and Environmental Management was the department responsible for the maintenance of parks, Vega spoke with its manager, Ximena Giraldo, and proposed slightly modifying some of its everyday activities to make these public spaces more suitable for the

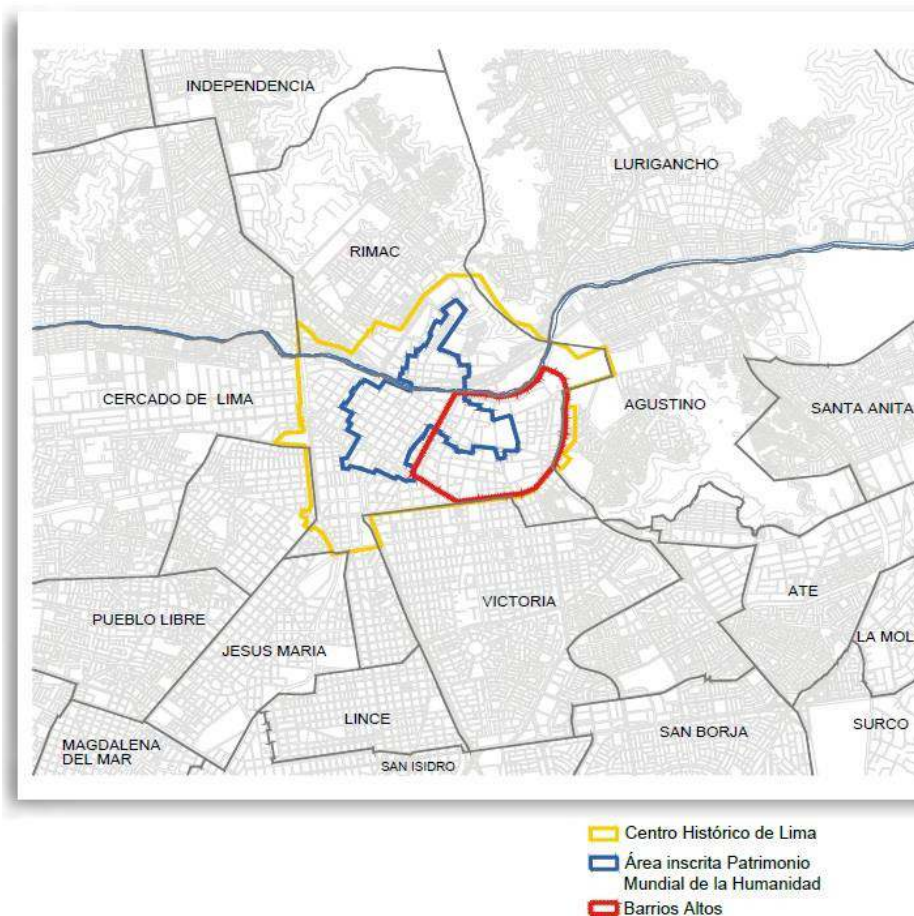


Figure 3: Central Historic Districts and Barrios Alto

Image credit: Angie Shimabukuro, “Barrios Altos: Characterizing of a set of traditional neighborhoods within Lima’s Historic Center.” *Revista de Arquitectura* 2018;17 (1), accessed July 8, 2021, <https://dx.doi.org/10.14718/Rev-Arq.2015.17.1.2>.

needs of young children. For instance, introducing mounds of earth and grass in parks provided features for unstructured play that were stimulating to toddlers learning to walk. Giraldo agreed, and her department became a stronger player within the growing coalition.

Vera, head of the Municipal Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents Division, said she had explained to public officials and to the architects on the Urban95 team that “play is a language” and that even when babies and toddlers cannot speak, their actions provide routes to understanding. In play, “in interactions with others, with their caregivers, with other babies, other toddlers, the sense of social agency begins,” she recalled telling them. Children gradually develop “awareness of being a citizen.”

Adapting to context

The first Urban95 project highlighted needs to balance many competing interests and to adjust as more and more information became available. The team, which worked within the municipal ombudsperson division, had as its goal adapting a space within the History of Peruvian Medicine Park (Parque Historia de la Medicina Peruana) to serve children aged three years and under. The park was near a hospital, and families with children often waited there while relatives received medical care. People who lived and worked nearby visited as well. In addition to serving the needs of those two groups, the Urban95 team wanted to make the park more accessible to nearby nurseries and schools for educational activities, play, and events. Contreras had received a proposal from the CCC earlier, but the architecture collective’s emphasis on a permanent architectural transformation and the considerable budget involved led him to shelve it. In the second half of 2019, he asked the Urban95 team to develop a project that could be completed in a month and be replicable in other parts of the city.

To learn more about the preferences of families, caregivers, and children, the team turned to Aragón, the psychologist and anthropologist who had led the Opening Paths pilot with Cepero and had advised some of the earlier projects. The team consulted with community members and monitored the way people used the space, where they entered and left the area, when use of the park was heaviest, and other details.

The urban designers had to ensure they respected historical preservation rules that applied within the walls of the old city and the park as well because national and municipal laws set standards and restrictions that governed any public works in the area. The Municipal Program for the Recovery of the Historical Center of Lima (PROLIMA), an independent institution that preserved historical sites in the capital, for instance, stipulated that anything installed had to be easily removable and couldn’t exceed a meter and a half in height, or about five feet.

Balancing community requests and preservation rules, team members began to focus on creating what they called a *calm zone*—a space for parents, caregivers, and young children alike to slow down, relax, and enjoy some time away from the bustle of city life. Although permanent benches in an urban park with

greenery could accomplish such an aim, so could a resting spot along a hillside stairway. Natural materials like rock, wood, and sand were preferable to asphalt and plastic, and modest wooden decks around trees would give young children direct contact with nature.

Keeping costs low was essential. The lead designer, Walter J. P. Soto, an architect who also cofounded IntuyLab and was an Alto Perú and Urban95 nongovernmental partner, asked the City Services and Environmental Management Department whether he could visit its warehouses to see if there was anything he might use. That step served multiple purposes. First, it helped identify city workers who had experience in using and transforming the materials. It also educated the Urban95 management team on how to secure permission to include those city workers in project construction. Finally, it helped build an understanding of how to coordinate and collaborate interdepartmentally within the city government. Representatives of the Social Development Department began to attend meetings with other managers within the metropolitan government to discuss additional urban space projects.

With the calm zone proposal clearly developed, Vega and Soto began to discuss details with PROLIMA, the historical preservation group. The project won approval after they ensured that the materials they had chosen could be removed promptly when required.

There was one more challenge, however. Many homeless people also frequented the part of the park that the designers wanted to improve. The ombudsperson, Vera, and an experienced staff person worked with the city's social welfare services to find shelter for the people who camped in the space and to help them with relocation. They were able to use the project to help achieve that outcome, which Alvarado, deputy manager in charge of those services, had long championed.

Both Vera and Vaca Jones noted that projects like this one had features that helped people with diverse commitments—as champions of children, better health, the homeless, climate, education, or the arts, for example—come together as one. Changing urban planning and design to provide basic services, public spaces, and safe mobility as well as to advance early childhood development were as much matters of social justice as they were of social policy. The coalitions that formed enhanced longer-term sustainability because of the range of interests they represented.

When it opened, the new calm zone park had stone paths, mounds of earth and grass, decks around trees, and other features developed to stimulate early childhood development. Soto said parents, caregivers, and educators noted that many babies and toddlers played on their own during the test phase because the natural materials and configurations engaged them more actively than the usual playground equipment. The PROLIMA office eased the restriction on features over a meter and a half high after its staff saw how the children played, and it offered colorful umbrellas to hang high above the space (figure 4).



Figure 4: Calm zone in History of Peruvian Medicine Park

Image credit: Urban95 Lima and Bernard van Leer Foundation

<https://www.facebook.com/urban95lima/photos/pcb.601803293700404/601795360367864>

Providing new services

With one project complete, Contreras shifted the Urban95 team to the Maternal and Child Care Division, whose head, Chávez, had broad public-sector experience. Chávez oversaw municipal childcare centers in the Walled Lima district through which the city government provided services daily—from early morning to late afternoon—for more than 300 children ranging in age from six months to five years. The centers included nurseries and kindergartens. But the nurseries and kindergartens were not available to all families. Schools sometimes lacked space, and there were not enough private or nonprofit options to provide enough places for every child to attend. Chávez wanted to expand her division's Non-School-Attending Early Education Program to accommodate those left out.

Chávez agreed to launch a pilot project in another Walled City neighborhood in Barrios Altos: Jardín Rosa de Santa María. The aim was to create additional community center space where the city could provide maternal and child care services throughout 2019. As before, the first step was to approach the neighborhood council and community leaders, including church officials, with a proposal and an invitation to collaborate. Aragón recalled that the contacted people said they were thrilled because the metropolitan government had never before approached them to advise on project design or to participate in construction. Members of more than 80 families with young

children appeared at a community meeting and then worked with an architect and education specialist to codesign the space and the services available.

The project, called Lima Wawakuna, developed a *wamateca*, a children's room that was an indoor version of the calm zone. The room contained specially designed furnishings, toys, and books for families with young children, as well as access to support and counseling on early childhood development issues. (Both names, *wawakuna* and *wamateca*, were drawn from Quechua, the language that many highland people spoke. *Wawa* is the Quechua word for *baby*.)

Later, the project took on additional features, offering health counseling for families as well as activities such as safe outings for families, caregivers, and children. It restored and adapted a nearby park, which it called a *wawaparque* because of its focus on supporting autonomous play and learning activities for young children. Chávez and Aragón said that as the Lima Wawakuna pilot developed, not only mothers but also fathers as well as entire families assisted and made good use of the available counseling. For those reasons, Chávez took steps to expand the facility's mandate so that it could provide home visits for families of young children in the future.

Scaling and sustainability

Plans to celebrate on July 28, 2021, the 200th anniversary of Peru's independence presented a unique opportunity to fire up public recognition of early childhood development, to scale up initial Urban95 projects, and to foster stronger constituencies that could sustain the effort when another mayor took over. National planning for the celebration had started in 2016, and in the second half of 2019, Giraldo, manager of the City Services and Environmental Management Department, proposed to the city that Lima restore 54 public parks and spaces for the occasion.

Limeños to the Bicentennial—the name the city gave its program—promised to engage residents in renovating public spaces and/or introducing new features. Such a participatory approach was important, the city government explained in media releases,¹⁰ because it strengthened the sense of community, promoted a sense of neighborhood ownership, enhanced inclusion, and was more likely to create a continuing constituency for livable streets than could any initiative in which the government acted alone.

The unanswered question was whether this campaign could also incorporate Urban95 principles and help build momentum for the needs of families with young children. Giraldo asked Vega to help because he had coordinated effectively with many city departments earlier, including her own.

Vega said he accepted the opportunity with enthusiasm. The bicentennial program and the Urban95 programs agreed to collaborate on two more trial projects: one in Monserrate, in December 2019, and another in Santo Cristo, both of which were neighborhoods in the Walled City district.

Monserrate was a low-income area that was also the home of historic sites and businesses and known for its culture and tradition.¹¹ The project, a first step in renewal of the neighborhood, engaged the help of residents, who cleaned

shared spaces, built and installed planters with trees and flowers, and set up a community vegetable garden, or *biobuerto*. The tourism office organized a food festival with local businesses to celebrate the occasion. The Urban95 team established a calm zone—a smaller version of the one developed for the History of Peruvian Medicine Park—and added features to promote unstructured play. To maintain public support after the project's completion, the city sponsored workshops on topics specific to neighbors' interests, such as urban gardening.

The second project called on the Urban95 team to create a safe walking route in Santo Cristo, a neighborhood in the Barrios Altos area. On this occasion, Aragón also engaged members of the local community—especially parents and caregivers of young children—from the beginning. In early conversations, residents said traffic intersections near the subway station were so busy and the signals and signage so inadequate that families with children, as well as older residents, avoided the location whenever possible. To travel even short distances, including reaching the municipal child care center nearby, caregivers said, they preferred to take mototaxis, which they considered less dangerous than walking.

As these two projects moved forward, the metropolitan government began to adapt itself to work more effectively. The Santo Cristo project was the most ambitious so far with regard to number of departments and offices involved as well as size because it covered more than seven city blocks. Vega invited the collaborating partners to carry out their assessments on-site—a policy that produced valuable interdepartmental evaluations during the planning phase of projects, said Aragón. Furthermore, both projects used planters and other items made from reused pallets and discarded materials. The planters helped separate sidewalks from streets and improve perceptions of safety. Municipal gardeners from City Services and Environmental Management developed a talent for carpentry, designer Soto said. These activities helped persuade the mayor's office to create a municipal woodworking workshop that rapidly expanded the variety and quality of furnishings and other design elements the city could provide for communities.

The two collaborations also helped departments learn on the job and further strengthened ties between them and between the city and the Urban95 team, Soto said. He added, speaking of the Monserrate project, that it served as a “[business]-card-swapping party,” where team members could introduce themselves to department offices they had not worked with and could discuss potential future collaborations.

The Urban95 leadership team also used its communications capabilities to sustain momentum. Staff members took photographs of children using the newly refurbished spaces and shared the photos with municipal departments and local officials, Aragón said, which step helped public officials understand what Urban95 was about. She added that they made a special attempt to communicate closely with the Citizen Safety and City Services and Environmental Management departments, whose personnel included public safety officers and maintenance workers, who were centrally important. (Public safety officers were

empowered to assist people but had no enforcement power because they were not police.) Aragón said she met the officers and workers in person to stress that “because of them, the children could play and enjoy public spaces in the city”—a conclusion that may have seemed obvious but too often was left unsaid.

Cepero, the architecture professor who later helped lead Lima Urban95, said the safe walking route in Santo Cristo could be considered one of the Urban95 project’s “early wins,” because it convinced departments that early childhood development was important, that it entailed more than creating playgrounds, that it was productive, and that it offered an opportunity to work together.

Strengthening synergies

Sustaining the momentum of Urban95 across mayoral terms was crucial because senior city personnel rarely kept their jobs beyond the four-year term of the mayor who appointed them. Members of the leadership team explored three possible solutions. The first was to connect the program to a national early childhood strategy called Childhood First (Primero la Infancia), which the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion had announced in 2019. As was common in Peru, the strategy focused mostly on physical health, and the only reference to built environments was providing clean water to reduce rates of mortality in children under age five. Cepero and Chávez recognized that there was considerable room for local governments to propose additional elements. The Lima Wawakuna project, for example, could help expand the scope of the program and serve as a template for what local governments could implement with regard to improving built environments and providing services focused on early childhood.

The second approach was to build a cadre of civil servants in the metropolitan government who understood Urban95’s goals and could encourage constituencies to demand improvements focused on early childhood. For example, within the Social Development Department, Aragón began to train a team of five so-called social promoters—public officials who informed local communities about services and helped coordinate access to them. The social promoters’ job was to establish care networks that would help parents and caregivers stand up for their children’s welfare and help them voice priorities to district governments. Chávez and Aragón selected public officials who had strong experience in municipal government, with an eye toward maintaining focus and technical knowledge through changes in the city administration.

The Urban Development Department began to incorporate Urban95 principles into its own criteria for urban redevelopment projects and planned to formalize them via a municipal ordinance so that every public-space project the metropolitan government carried out in the city would include aspects that considered young children.

The third approach was to incorporate early childhood-development objectives into other city programs whenever possible. For instance, the short-term Childhood City: First Steps project was scheduled to end before the Santo

Cristo project was launched, but Limeños to the Bicentennial was expanding. The fortuitous convergence offered the chance to sharpen early childhood-development focus in the metropolitan government through dozens of projects—park by park and district by district—throughout the city.

The mayor’s office decided to appoint Vega to run Limeños to the Bicentennial and to base his work in the Municipal Metropolitan Department, which directed planning, implementation, evaluation, and oversight of the city’s many functions. Working from that department increased Vega’s authority to coordinate and work interdepartmentally. Vega accepted and brought Soto and others with him. Cepero became coordinator of Urban95 project as it entered a new phase.

The Urban95 team consulted with the Bernard van Leer Foundation when it proposed these changes. The foundation decided to create a new and smaller partnership with the metropolitan government, which supported the adoption of Urban95 principles into the bicentennial public works program and provided approximately 182,000 euros to add to the 1.1 million euros (US\$214,000 and US\$1.29 million, respectively, at 2018 exchange rates) that the city government had pledged for restoring and improving 54 public spaces. In addition, the grant supported a new technical team whereby the partnership could promote Urban95 principles across districts, could monitor implementation, and could assess the impacts of the public space projects.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Almost immediately upon joining the bicentennial project, Vega found himself facing a very different kind of challenge. A new coronavirus had appeared in China just before the start of the new year, and it had started to spread globally. On March 6, 2020, Lima recorded its first confirmed case of COVID-19. The national government declared an emergency and an obligatory countrywide mandatory lockdown—enforced by a curfew and threats of fines and imprisonment—that would last more than three months. Deep concern for vulnerable populations—considered at the time to include young children as well as older people—led to a decision to confine older citizens and minors to their homes, allowing them to be in public spaces for only one hour each day.

Few households had the means to sustain an extended lockdown. For those who lived at or near subsistence levels and depended on what they earned day to day, the choices were stark: break the rules at the risk of contracting the virus or stay at home without enough to eat and with no way to pay for rent or utilities. Children from low-income communities continued to appear in public spaces because they had to work or to panhandle, Vera said.

Iván Hidalgo, academic director of the Institute of Government and Public Management at the University of San Martín de Porres in Lima, told *Time* magazine: “The government’s [quarantine] strategy works for the 30% of Peru that is employed in the formal sector, that’s been growing economically, but there’s another 70% of Peru, which is informal, that doesn’t have access to basic services of health, education, nutrition, or to pensions and financial safety

nets.”¹² The same report said an estimated 44% of households had no refrigerator and had to shop for food each day.

The national government’s emergency rules blocked some of the strategies the city planned to use in response to the needs of the 70%. Specifically, turning child care centers, schools, and social services into sites for targeted food support and other assistance meant that children who accompanied their parents to these distribution points might be out on the street for longer than the hour a day the national law permitted, the city’s lawyers reasoned. Therefore, these centers could not remain open without breaking emergency health regulations.

The Urban95 leaders had had experience with skilled interdepartmental coordination, and they knew the communities in question.¹³ The mayor’s office approached Vega, who had been appointed coordinator of Limeños to the Bicentennial, as well as the managers of the departments of Education and Sports, and Economic Development. Those three public officials formed a response team that quickly created a program called Lima Takes Care of You (Lima Te Cuida) to provide humanitarian assistance at the neighborhood level—closer to people’s homes. Drawing on his experience in coordinating interdepartmental diagnoses for Urban95 projects, Vega recommended that the metropolitan government’s departments assess what they could contribute to each of the communities served by Lima Takes Care of You. If a proposed intervention included modifications to public spaces, Limeños to the Bicentennial stepped in to coordinate and ensure adherence to early-childhood-development principles when appropriate.

Because it was crucial to determine which neighborhoods needed the most help, Vega’s team approached Daniel Romero, a general director of the Metropolitan Planning Institute, an independent public agency that planned the comprehensive and sustainable development of Lima and its districts in coordination with public and private actors. Romero was tasked to collect and streamline relevant spatial and tabular data for computerized evaluation and distribution. Drawing information from the census and many other sources into an interactive database, he enlisted a few dozen staff members—and, later, a much larger group of hundreds—to walk the city and ensure the information was accurate and up-to date. His team then created a number of spatial dashboards and apps that the city could use to track cases, movement, policies, and other matters, Romero explained.

As a result of that work, the mayor’s office could now see where outbreaks were occurring and where households needed the most help. In a television interview, the mayor told the public that the metropolitan government had developed a territorial approach and would provide assistance where it was most needed, but he also cautioned that what his office could do was limited by the willingness of district governments to collaborate.¹⁴

Lima Takes Cares of You delivered its first relief services within weeks of the outbreak in the capital, though the services were initially doled out in a series of “dashes and sprints.”

As public facilities closed because of the pandemic, the Lima Urban95 program looked into how to continue providing counseling and services for young children and their caregivers. Surveying local communities, the team learned that enough neighborhoods had Internet access to make it worthwhile to move some aspects of the program online. The program began using social media posts and text messaging to provide health advice and to offer caregivers suggestions about how to help infants and toddlers continue to flourish. With support from online resources of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the program also offered online courses about early childhood development and care. Furthermore, it introduced caregivers to other helpful online messaging and videoconferencing services with which they might not have been familiar and helped them form their own virtual support groups. Vaca Jones, executive director of the foundation, explained that it was as important to promote changes in behavior as it was to redesign and improve urban spaces themselves.

Because the national emergency allowed children to be in public spaces only an hour daily, the Urban95 team developed guidelines for safe outings, which enabled small groups of children to visit a park near the Lima Wawakuna pilot site that was not normally open to the public. In another interdepartmental effort, the City Services and Environmental Management Department and PROLIMA helped establish the area as a designated safe zone for children. Last—and in collaboration with the Lima Takes Care of You program—Chávez and the Urban95 team decided to make the *wamateca* mobile. These children’s rooms, now on wheels, visited local communities and provided (1) health-care information, including guides on how to set up at home a calm zone for young children and (2) essential child services; for instance, the mobile units provided babies and toddlers with the recommended routine vaccinations that young children should receive.¹⁵

Lima’s Urban95 capacities helped the city respond to the pandemic, but the pandemic also moved Urban95 forward, expanding its dimensions and reach.

ASSESSING RESULTS

The broad ambition behind Urban95 was to use creative urban planning, public space projects, and service delivery to help scale assistance to low-income families with young children. For the strategy to work, the city government first had to develop the capacity to coordinate across departments and with districts and neighborhoods. At the beginning, the goals were to (1) set up a structure that would enable municipal departments, neighborhoods, and NGOs to collaborate effectively; (2) identify a method for working with communities and a path for scaling successful experiments; (3) establish a system for monitoring progress and for collecting evidence about what worked; and (4) find ways to ensure sustainability across electoral periods. From 2016 to early 2021, Lima Urban95 took some steps toward accomplishing all of those goals despite the need to contain a pandemic.

The municipal coordination structure came into existence informally at first. Then, in November 2020, municipal legislators of the Metropolitan

Council unanimously approved an ordinance that created an interdepartmental Lima: Early Childhood Development working group, led by Chávez, head of the Social Development Department's Maternal and Child Care Division. At that time, the city also contracted with Cepero to coordinate the Urban95 initiative, with the assistance of Patricia Quevedo, an early childhood and social innovation specialist who had participated in the school and was hired by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to work in the city government. Chávez retained convening power, but all three worked together to shape agendas and materials.

The municipal working group subsequently created thematic committees to tackle specific issues and foster cooperation and coordination across different parts of the city government. Responsibility for the development of metrics, for data collection, and for systematization of project knowledge and technical expertise lay with Quevedo. In addition, Chávez and the Urban95 team started conversations with the Ministry of Inclusion and Social Development on how local governments throughout the country could use the various replicable program components and expanded services to implement the national childhood strategy.

There was also considerable progress toward achieving the second goal. Having learned from earlier initiatives in some of Lima's districts as well as from two pilot projects undertaken in association with the two-month preparatory course, managers developed effective methods for collaborating with communities, built enduring relationships with NGOs, and fostered interest on the parts of participating metropolitan departments. By mid-2021, they had started to scale aspects of the program through Limeños to the Bicentennial to several districts besides Walled Lima. They also developed a plan to expand the services offered by Lima Wawakuna and to implement other Urban95 public space projects at 156 community centers throughout the city. The city's COVID-19 response generated and optimized spatial data helpful for targeting future work.

Monitoring progress and results proved harder to accomplish. Contreras said he wished that from the outset the Urban95 project had clarified metrics and how it would communicate accomplishments and transfer knowledge. Interrupted by the pandemic, this effort was still in its infancy. Paolo Marinelli, coordinator for monitoring and evaluation at the Limeños to the Bicentennial program, lent a helping hand by building on work Aragón had started. He began to create a dashboard, using business analytic tools, to provide a flexible and visual representation of data to support decision making and impact evaluation. Vaca Jones said that institutionalizing a culture of data that was comprehensive and rigorous—within both the metropolitan government and the government's collaboration partners—was a measure the Bernard van Leer Foundation used for assessing a project's success. Lima was still at an early stage, but it was beginning to make progress.

Finally, the Urban95 team took a number of steps to enhance the sustainability of their work after the mayor's term in office ended. They sensitized civil servants in several key metropolitan departments to the need to

improve access to services and both outdoor and indoor play spaces for low-income families with young children. They built networks within the metropolitan and district governments as well as with NGOs and issued guidelines for incorporating early-childhood-development indicators into their projects. And they built some of their priorities into other citywide initiatives.

The public recognized and appreciated many of the advances. For example, in 2020, citizen observatory Lima Cómo Vamos awarded its Walkable City prize to the metropolitan government and to Alto Perú and IntuyLab for their Urban95 pilot project called Opening Paths. The prize helped recognize the growing importance of coordination between disparate entities with a view to improve conditions for some of the youngest residents. The observatory noted how the project had not only improved the built environment but also raised levels of social and emotional support within the community and made connections between families and caregivers as well as with public spaces and children's services.¹⁶

There were strong indications that progress would continue. Because safe walking routes and safe play areas were so central to Urban95 as well as to Limeños to the Bicentennial and Lima Takes Care of You, Vega and his team also began to work with Peru's Ministry of the Interior on its Safe Neighborhood Plan (Plan Barrio Seguro). In the Jardín Rosa de Santa María neighborhood, mothers representing more than a thousand families collaborated with the city to create a new children's center and a park, and the community and metropolitan government worked together to establish a small police outpost in March 2021 as part of the ministry's preventive law enforcement strategy. Vega said the project—during which the metropolitan government coordinated with national ministries at the same time as it worked with its own departments and local communities—represented a “lesson in innovation for Lima.”

Urban95 also led to an unexpected benefit for Lima when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the capital in early 2020. Capabilities created through the program underpinned the metropolitan government's efforts to identify and support vulnerable populations and take steps to prevent the spread of infection. Vega said a crucial aspect of the metropolitan government's humanitarian assistance strategy built on what the Urban95 initiative had achieved through the Social Development Department.

REFLECTIONS

By mid-2021, despite the COVID-19 pandemic's continued challenges, Urban95 managers in Lima, Peru, applauded the program's successes but also recognized areas ripe for improvement.

Quality of communication loomed large as an important element of success in the founders' views. Carlos Contreras, who managed the Social Development Department, stressed the need for three levels of communication about any project: (1) political, focused on enlisting the top people in government as champions; (2) interdepartmental, to fully exploit the synergies of collaboration;

and (3) technical, to reach with clear instructions and guidance those who actually implement urban interventions. With regard to the first, Contreras said early childhood development remained a challenging political project because “children do not vote,” and the issues that concern them are rarely electoral priorities.

It was always hard to find support for policies that transferred resources between generations, said Roxana Alvarado, deputy manager of the Welfare and Social Promotion Office. The search for votes often caused politicians to overlook the fact that children are “future citizens,” she explained, but Urban95 established in Lima a long-term strategy that recognized its children and their development not only as future issues of concern but priorities for today.

Although senior managers agreed that the Urban95 program was understaffed and stressed the need for a larger interdisciplinary team that was less thinly spread across the implementation of various projects, they also offered several reflections on *positive* lessons learned.

The people most closely involved with Lima’s Urban95 program credited networks of public-spirited civil servants and citizens for the successes achieved. Patricia Quevedo, the specialist from the Bernard van Leer Foundation who helped to coordinate the Urban95 team, said the dreams and aspirations of the people who work in government or civil society push forward positive policy changes and accomplishments.

Others underscored the importance of participation for success. Aragón, an anthropologist and psychologist who was a member of the Urban95 team, stressed the need to engage residents from the beginning and suggested early community involvement was important to long-term sustainability. This kind of participation developed a sense of ownership and belonging, she said, and boosted community empowerment. Bernard van Leer executive director Cecilia Vaca Jones added that resident participation, which featured so centrally in Lima’s projects, was a valuable tool that other cities worldwide could learn to use to their benefit.

Vaca Jones pointed to another valuable type of participation. She stressed the need to “saturate the ecosystem” of stakeholders in order to find the right technical, governmental, academic, and community leaders and experts and bring them together to collaborate. By reaching out to nongovernmental organizations, private firms, university faculty, and others, it was possible to supplement city capacity, trigger innovation, and build a sense of collective spirit.

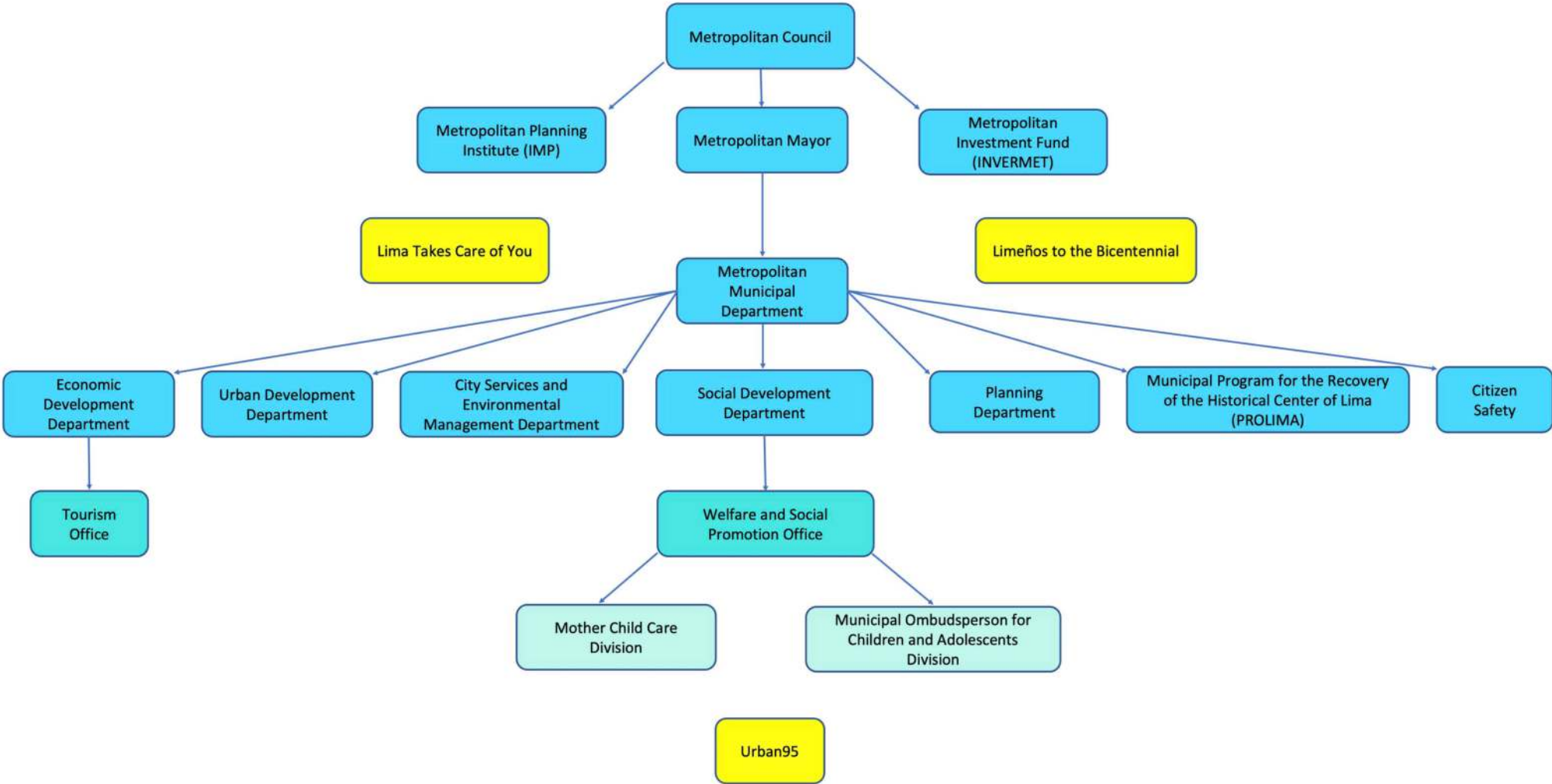
Virna Vera, head of the Municipal Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents Division, noted that connecting with people who share social causes was crucial. Others emphasized that people who championed a wide variety of ideals could see value in the Urban95 approach and that building a broad coalition of people committed to early childhood development, social justice, reduction of human impact on climate, and other causes strengthened the program’s appeal and would help sustain it in future years.

The managers also said that Lima introduced effective change because it did so gradually—through a series of demonstration projects that were initially modest but increasingly ambitious—rather than attempt to establish a sweeping campaign. José Cepero, an architect, cofounder of IntuyLab, and coordinator of the Urban95 team, cited an example. To win support from the frontline service from certain departments, he said, it was important to design projects that would require only minimal changes to everyday city maintenance activities. Others also emphasized that the mayor’s strategy enabled the city and its communities to learn and move forward together by making subtle but meaningful changes in their ways of doing things—one at a time—with each success underpinning the next step.

Pointing to another feature of the city’s approach, Carlos Javier Vega, former coordinator of the Urban95 team and metropolitan government coordinator of the Lima Takes Care of You and Limeños to the Bicentennial programs, said the pilot projects responded first and foremost to the characteristics of the city, the city’s governance, and local communities and were not bound to a specific model. The projects were nonetheless replicable and easy to scale. IntuyLab cofounder Walter J. P. Soto also reflected that by working flexibly with metropolitan and district departments as well as local communities and using what was at hand, Lima Urban95 projects had been able to “adjust to the organizational styles and goals of local governments” and set an example for “social and political innovation.”

“We are at the moment where we have created a methodology, a system . . . superclear roles, superclear actors, superclear indicators” that enabled Lima not only to care for local communities but also to “grow the impact of the work with families that have young children,” Vega said.

Exhibit 1: Lima metropolitan government



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