

Background Note

Roundtable to prepare a “Charter of priorities for children in urban India”

Urbanization in India

Articulating the urban narrative of ‘Cities as growth engines’ to ‘Cities as centres of inclusive development’

India's urban centres are starting to command more attention in the developmental discourse as well as in policy and priority setting. This is driven by two related trends: an increasing concentration of population as well as economic activity in urban areas, particularly since liberalisation (post 1991). As of 2011, 32 per cent of the population lives in urban areas. In addition, the economic contribution of urban areas has been rising significantly over the years; as of 2011 urban India contributed toward 63 percent of India's GDP and this is expected to rise to 75 percent by 2030.¹

In the past few years, India has seen a paradigm shift from an infrastructure driven urbanization to developing smart and liveable cities. The urban development discourse has changed from implementing infrastructure projects to integrated development plans, wherein different sectors including planning, design, management and governance are collectively working towards building ‘cities for all’. **This evolving paradigm offers an opportunity to regard “children” as the primary users of spaces, facilities and opportunities offered by cities.** With the push towards more and better infrastructure delivered through urban programmes like AMRUT, Smart Cities Mission, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Swachh Bharat Mission, the cities have initiated the drive towards better urban environment for families and children.

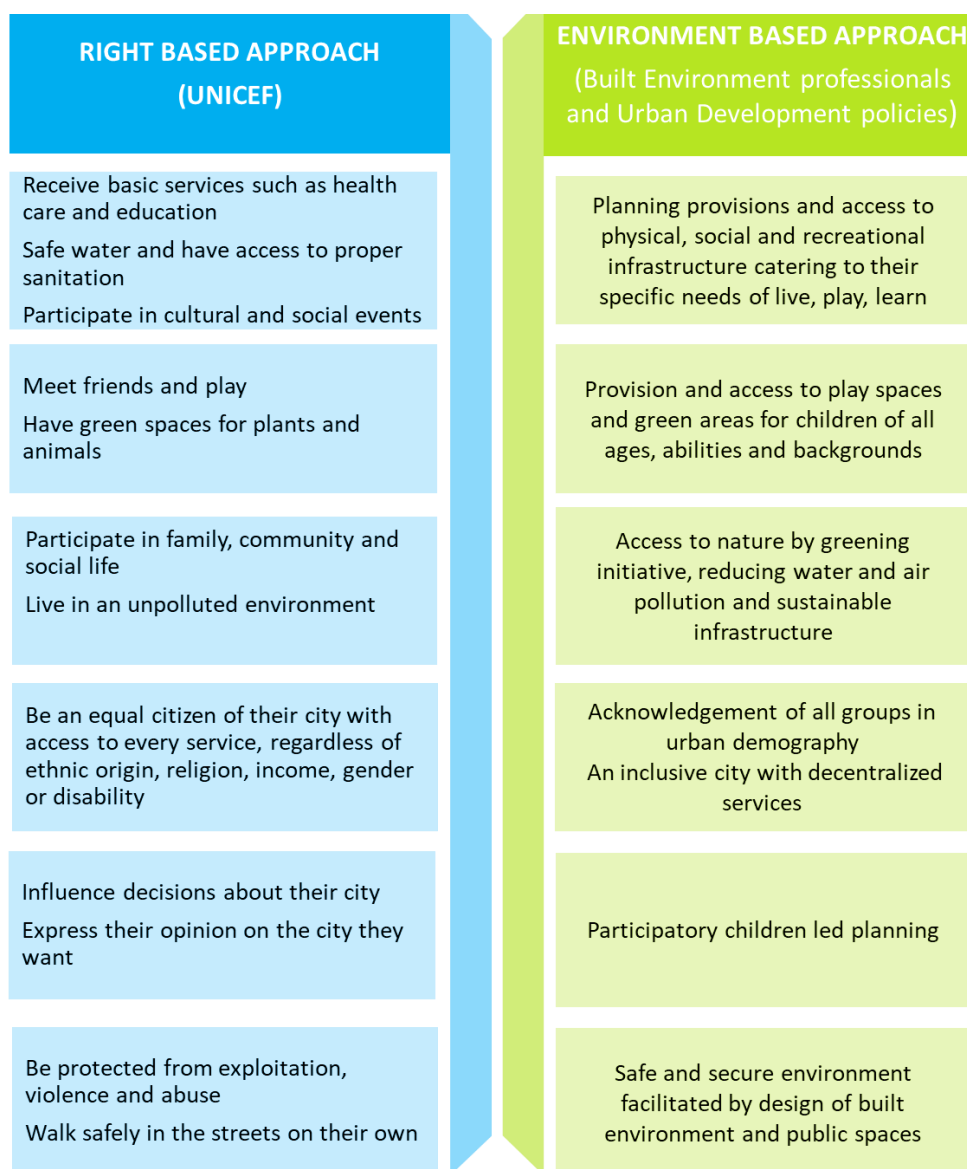
Some of the mission cities have already embarked on the path of making cities more responsive to the needs of residents. However, these are isolated, inspired interventions. Including children as one of the priorities of urban development agenda can generate a cumulative impact, which would bring about a more widespread, effective and lasting change.



¹ Smart Cities – Mission Statement and Guidelines. Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, 2015

Integration of the rights and environment-based approaches for making cities responsive to the needs of children

While the rights-based approach focuses on children’s rights to encourage local governments to make decisions in the best interest of children, the environment-based approach focuses on children’s physical and social environment². The idea of child friendly cities can only be realized if the rights of children are also translated into planning and design interventions for transforming the built environment in cities. This roundtable aims to converge the understanding and expertise from both approaches. In addition to the core group (it comprises the National Institute of Urban Affairs, Save the Children, UNICEF and the Bernard van Leer Foundation), there are representatives from a number of ministries and agents that have come together to deliberate and collectively create a “Charter of priorities for children in urban India”.



² Children in the vision of Urban India, 2019

<https://cfsc.niua.org/sites/default/files/repository/Children%20in%20the%20urban%20vision%20of%20India.pdf>

The representation from various departments and urban professionals participating in the deliberations are also a mix of specialists on both the rights and environment based approaches. The interrelationship between health and development of a child and the aspects of built environment design and urban planning can be reinforced through this convergence.

Broad strategies that can be adopted by the urban sector to prioritize children in the urban context:

Recognizing children as end users:

It is important to **recognize children as stakeholders and look at cities from their vantage point**. This requires:

- **Collecting data disaggregated on the basis of age, gender, abilities** etc. to deconstruct the standard age group of 0-18 years. This can help in segregating the specific and distinct needs of different age brackets, such as those of young children (0-5years), adolescents or girls etc.
- **Mapping this information spatially** can inform the decision makers (at the policy/program, city level/ local level) of the existing gaps in the essential infrastructure.
- **Recognizing children also necessitates including the family unit** while formulating urban programs/ policies, subsequently dictating planning, designing and development of cities in terms of policies on Housing, Public Spaces, Transport etc.

Involving children from inception of designing any program/intervention:

It is not only important to recognize children, but also to **involve them in shaping urban policies, environment and spaces frequently used by them**. It is important to involve children as:

- **Co-creators:** Globally, it has been observed that the places where children have participated in designing them are usually more successful; displaying increased footfall/ usage and better maintenance. Indian cities like Bhubaneswar have also adopted participatory planning and design as well as bringing children on board during implementation and seen a tremendous change in the usage of the space. Co creation inspires a sense of belonging among children and these spaces tend to become an asset for the community as well as the city.
- **Agents of change:** Children can act as a catalyst for any changes that are introduced through urban programs and policies. The sweeping success of Swachh Bharat Mission has demonstrated this positively, that more informed children can bring about behavioral as well as physical changes in cities. **In future, initiatives like children-led sanitation drives, bicycle-sharing programs for school children or awareness of environment conservation schemes could become the stepping stones for larger changes.**
- **Caretakers:** At local level, children can be looked upon as the custodians of the spaces and infrastructure used by them. Having children as a part of local associations/ management committees can give them voice a sense of ownership and bring out issues and possible solutions at the neighbourhood scale.

Urban programs can provide certain guidelines/ norms acknowledging children as an essential part of the representative population, thus bringing their needs into perspective.

Designing and planning for children and caregivers:

Assessing the vulnerabilities of children and designing for them can ensure universal accessibility and urban spaces that are inclusive and **responsive to the needs of all the other age groups and abilities also**. Thus, taking children and their families into consideration, specifically **while formulating built**

environment guidelines for neighbourhoods, housing areas, schools and early childhood centres, open green areas and play spaces and public infrastructure like streets, plazas, public/community toilets etc. can eventually work for everyone.

Age-appropriate planning and designing of spaces and infrastructure frequently used by children responding to the varied needs of different age brackets of 0-5 years, 5-10 years, 10-14 years and 14-18 years, also including the '9 to 0' age group, i.e. the pregnant mothers must be facilitated through design.

Planning guidelines and space norms for children related infrastructure such as early childhood centres, play spaces for all ages and abilities, maternity centres and baby clinics, child friendly public toilets etc., need to be included within the master plans or other urban development regulations.

At policy/ program level, operation and maintenance strategies besides the financial component can make implementation and sustenance of these projects more effective.

Engaging all the allied stakeholders:

To generate greater awareness and acceptance of this subject, it is important to engage with the various departments and different stakeholders to move on to collective thinking and effort and to amplify the voice on prioritizing children's needs in the urban context. It is important to bring on board:

- **Urban Local Bodies:** sensitizing the officials from urban local bodies and building their understanding of the role they can play in shaping child friendly cities.
- **Government departments:** Besides urban local bodies, **various allied departments** such as department of health, the environment department, department of education etc., all need to come together to shape urban planning and built environment design norms/ guidelines.
- **Institutions working on children's right:** The foundation for all the urban programs must include points from institutions working on ground with children, sharing multiple issues and vulnerabilities faced by children and their families. This can bring out not only the gaps in physical infrastructure, but also socio-cultural and behavioral patterns that need to be addressed; further, helping advocate for need in policy changes.
- **Caregivers including families, school authorities, ASHA workers, and early childhood experts:** Apart from child-rights organisations, caregivers, and education and support workers from schools and the community constitute the primary environment of children. Taking into account their views and concerns in shaping the built environment inclusive of children, may be through civil society organisations, is crucial to such urban planning exercises.

Focus areas for cities for effective implementation of these strategies:

Creating Data Baselines for children in cities: For creating a logical blueprint of a sustainable, safe and bright future for children in cities, we need city level baselines that comprise of data³ that is:

- **Disaggregated:** It is important to divide the homogeneous definition of children into smaller subpopulations such as children of different ages, with disabilities, street children, orphans etc.

³ Status of children in Urban India, Baseline study 2018, Second edition, NIUA 2019

https://cfsc.niua.org/sites/default/files/repository/Status%20of%20children%20in%20urban%20India_Baseline%20study%202018.pdf

- **Timely and regularly monitored:** Regularly updated datasets can help in forming the understanding of the current situation of cities and thus inform the decision-making.
- **Available, converged and correlated:** Government data from different departments under different ministries and schemes is generated on a regular basis but hardly used. A national data repository and various state and city level repositories must be set up so that data from all departments and schemes can be available on one common server.

Children in urban context are subject to multiple vulnerabilities ranging from health scares due to inadequate living conditions to threats to their physical safety because of rampant crimes and abuse, unchecked child labour and traffic fatalities. It is important to take into account these vulnerabilities to ensure effective solutions, such as:

Prioritizing families and children living in vulnerable conditions: One of the major reasons of the disease burden among children is inadequate living conditions. Therefore, it is important for the cities to take into account proportion of population:

- **‘Children in Street Situations’:** Findings from Save the Children India’s research⁴ reveal that the issues of street children are interlinked to urbanisation and are a result of several complex factors that interact with each other. For instance, a large part of the problem for street children seems to be located in the lack of shelter/affordable housing, which pushes poor migrant families to the margins (a study done by STCI in five cities⁵ indicated that 47% of the street children in these five cities were ‘children of street living families’). **This makes it important to enumerate these families and children to inform the decision makers and local bodies about the probable gaps in infrastructure.**
- **Access to basic services of shelter, health and education:** Due to lack of data and a permanently informal status, street children seldom have access to basic services. A technological mechanism that would facilitate access to services, could also help with social tracking of street children. A good example of this is the health smart cards - Bal Swasthya Card’19 given out for every new child born in Ahmedabad. These will not only help digitally track birth but also provide information of the child’s physical and mental growth and will keep track of vaccination dates.

Ensuring safety for children in public places: Safety and security in public spaces is major issue faced by Adolescents (particularly girls) in cities due to poorly lit lanes, poorly managed or overcrowded public places, over-crowded public transport, lack of awareness of child line numbers and inadequate support of police. If measures are taken to improve these aspects, cities would become a lot more liveable for children and adolescent girls.

- **Surveillance mechanisms to curb crime and abuse:** Besides ensuring natural surveillance through built environment design, surveillance systems like CCTVs must be installed across street/by-lanes and critical locations like markets, cinema halls, malls and important roads. All public spaces in urban areas must have proper functional lighting.
- **Safe mobility:** Redesigning streets for walking and cycling and making public transport safer for children by installing CCTV cameras, GPS and SOS button to alert the police control room, organizing sensitization programs of drivers and conductors and employing more women staff, especially on

⁴ Wings 2018, World of India’s Girls, Save the children
<https://www.savethechildren.in/sci-in/files/4d/4d92487b-e91d-4b8c-96e4-d581ffefced4.pdf>

⁵ Life on the street, Save the children
<https://www.savethechildren.in/sci-in/media/PDFs/LIFE-ON-THE-STREET-%28Final%29-Rev-4.pdf>

routes serving educational institutions like schools and colleges. If necessary, girls/ women-only transport services must be started by state governments to address any safety concerns.

Instructing cities to develop essential infrastructure for children and including norms for these facilities in Master plans/ City Development Plans and redevelopment schemes:

- **Public/ community toilets designed for children:** All public and community toilets should have a prescribed number of toilets designed for children. Standards for design and fitting of fixtures based on the anthropometric measurements for instance smaller squat plates, low height urinals and basins, low height soap dispensers etc. need to be followed. Provision of shared parent/children's cubicles with side-by-side adult and child pedestals in spaces that have children-friendly facilities. Safety measures like balancing and support handlebar at appropriate height and improved pit toilets with a stable base to prevent children from falling should also be provided. Funds from sub components of the Swachh Bharat Mission such as the National Bal Swachhta Mission and Swachh Anganwadis can be used for these.
- **Provision and awareness for menstrual health:** In order to promote the menstrual health of adolescent girls specifically ones who are uninformed, toilets with provisions such as availability of lady caretaker 24/7 and sanitary napkin vending machines must be provided. Some section of the IEC funds under SBM can be specifically used to raise awareness on menstrual health and hygienic practices among adolescent girls.
- **Formulating quality standards for early childhood services:** BvLF has been championing the cause of including very young children in planning and designing for cities through its Urban95 program. Indian urban areas, however, currently lack any space standards for regulating the design and development of early childhood infrastructure such as day-cares, crèches, kindergartens or playschools, thus compromising on the fundamental requirements of open spaces, child friendly toilets, safe drinking water, space for preparing meals etc.
- **Counselling Centres and Rehabilitation centres:** The cities must take account of the most vulnerable children such as children with disabilities, children who have faced any kind of physical/ mental/ substance abuse, children living in street situations and provide essential infrastructure such as counselling centres for these children and their caregivers, rehabilitation centres and shelters for children and their families integrated with basic education/ skill centres and health facilities.

Building resilience of children and families against disasters and climate change: According to UNICEF's publication, "Actions for children and youth resilience",⁶ children must be a priority before, during and after the disaster by incorporating Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) approach in implementing preparedness, emergency response and recover. This can be realized by ensuring proper pre disaster measures such as locating schools in safer areas (not in flood plains/ water logged areas), having proper safety measures in place (for fire, floods and earthquakes), enforcement of building codes and structural norms etc. to be mandated by the government.

Early warning systems and regular monitoring of environmental changes can prepare cities for tackling emergencies and natural disasters.

⁶ Actions for children and youth resilience, UNICEF

<https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/2276/file/PDF%20Actions%20for%20children%20and%20youth%20resilience.pdf>

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of programs/ interventions: Monitoring systems showcasing city's existing status on various fronts such as progress on flagship missions like Smart Cities and Swachh Bharat, air quality index at different points in the city, traffic management etc. have already been included by almost all the mission cities. However, there is a need for a transparent and accessible monitoring mechanism to be evolved by all the cities at the department level to track the progress of basic indicators of health, environmental pollution, safety, resilience and infrastructure (a good example is school GIS developed by NIC). This would help in tracking the progress a city is making and any gaps that need to be addressed. This would also help in demonstrating the impact of the various programs and interventions being undertaken by the city.

Budgeting and mobilising resources for children: Allocations made towards children's welfare should be identified within the overall budgetary allocation for the city/ urban sectors and must be diverted towards the priority areas as per the assessment of gaps. Assam and Odisha are presently making these assessments and have designated budgets for children, at the state level.

The scope of responsibilities of district-level child welfare/protection officers already present under the Department of Women and Child Development could also be expanded to monitor and evaluate for implementation of projects concerning children.

Initiative by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)

Besides, Child Friendly Smart Cities (CFSC) initiative at NIUA since last four years, ITC (Infant, Toddlers and Caregivers) Framework ⁷has been developed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), in partnership with BvLF which provides a set of documents that can be used to assess the existing conditions as well as find solutions that can be replicated according to the local context. These publications can help build capacities of the cities to create environments that nurture positive early experiences and protect against negative ones. The aim is to provide city managers with the tools and knowledge they need to apply the lens of infants, toddlers, and their caregivers in the planning and management of their cities starting from the Local Area Plans, neighbourhoods plans etc.

⁷ ITCN Framework by Bernard van Leer Foundation

<https://bernardvanleer.org/publications-reports/infant-toddler-caregiver-friendly-neighbourhood-itcn-framework-and-guidelines/itcn-policy-framework/>