

Facilitating children's participation in the urban

A toolkit for practitioners



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Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) is a non-profit development organisation that helps vulnerable groups access their rights. YUVA encourages the formation of people's collectives to engage them in the development discourse. This work is complemented with advocacy and policy recommendations.

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Facilitating children's participation in the urban

A toolkit for practitioners



About This Toolkit

This toolkit offers a conceptual framework to guide children's participation, with practical and easily implementable exercises. It has been derived from YUVA's experiences of working with children across communities and cities in India since the early 1990s, and focuses on how the quality of children's participation can be improved while supporting children's collectives.

Who is this for?

The toolkit is intended for all organisations working directly or indirectly with children and children's groups. It can also be used by governments, policymakers, civil society organisations, and any other entities/individuals keen to better understand the child participation landscape and how efforts can be taken to promote initiatives in this space.

How is it structured?

The toolkit is divided into six chapters:

Chapters I–II elaborate on urban realities experienced by children, national and legal policy frameworks in place for children (with a focus on objectives versus actual implementation status).

Chapter III talks about child participation as a right, and why enabling participation for children is so critical.

Chapter IV focuses on the six kinds of interventions to promote children's participation, with practical exercises for each that can be easily undertaken.

Chapter V elaborates on how one such children's collective—Bal Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan (BASS)—has been able to help in the realisation of children's rights through sustained participation.

Chapter VI concludes the discussion, reiterating the role of different stakeholders to enable participation to help co-create inclusive and safe cities for children.

How should you read this toolkit?

While the toolkit can be understood in its totality if it is read serially, readers could also head to separate sections directly based on their areas of interest. The application of the frameworks and exercises is meant to be taken up flexibly, adapted as per the needs of the implementing agency/organisation and in line with its mission and vision and the goals of the child-centric programme. The frameworks described can be applied in a range of settings, from formal training facilities to non-formal classes.

Let's stay in touch!

As the child participation space is an evolving and dynamic area, the tools described here also undergo frequent adaptation. We would love to know how you are able to implement these tools and practices in your own organisation, to further our work in this area and adopt innovative approaches. To share your thoughts, please write to us on communication@yuvaindia.org.

Acknowledgements

This toolkit has emerged from years of engaging with children, and in that sense is as participatory in form as the primary subject it deals with. It has emerged from a collaborative learning and action process, a large part of which has been passed down as a rich oral tradition over the years.

There are many people who contributed to this body of knowledge, and we apologise for not being able to list each name separately. Thank you to all the children associated with Bal Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan (BASS) over the years and their facilitators, who have spent time engaging on and furthering child participation processes. Thank you to all the organisations and networks who have shared their knowledge with us over the years and allowed us to contribute to their sessions as well. Thanks to UNICEF for their unstinting support over the years. A special thank you to the current BASS members who have helped us better understand what works and what doesn't work when facilitating child participation processes within the current context we work in. We look forward to taking ahead these efforts in the coming years and improving and learning from child participation endeavours.

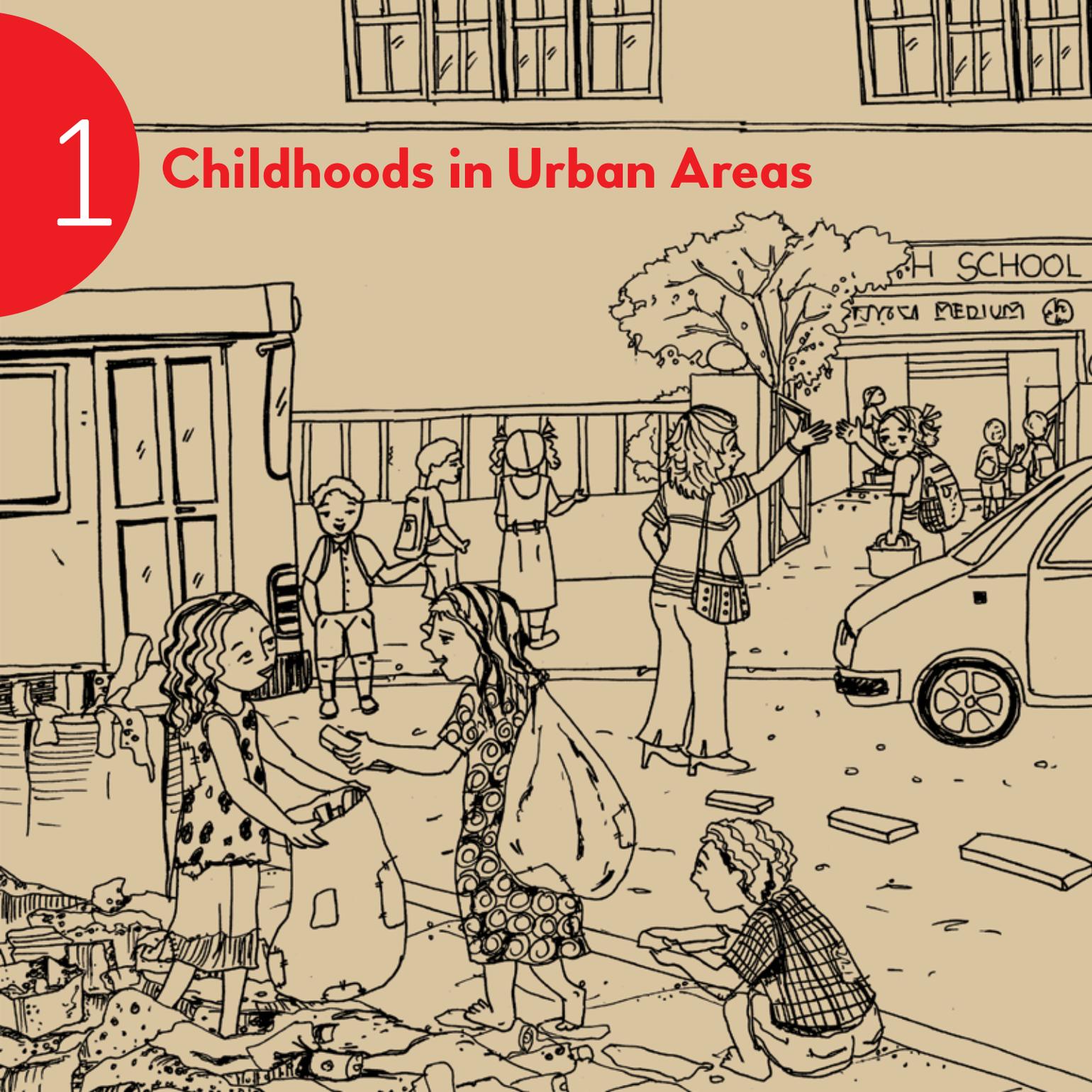
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1

Childhoods in Urban Areas



Urban inequalities

From 360 million in 1951¹ to 1.3 billion in 2018, India's population has rapidly grown four times since independence. Urban India's population has risen at an even faster rate—five times since 1961². Currently estimated to be 377 million, it is expected to grow to 600 million and contribute to 75 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030.

The Indian economy has also seen rapid growth, particularly in recent decades. However, the benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed across the population. Urbanisation has led to tremendous pressure on basic services and urban infrastructure, including water supply, sewerage, drainage, garbage disposal, housing, public and recreational spaces, and transport. It has also exacerbated poverty, pollution and crime³. Studies show poverty is decreasing at a slower rate in urban areas than the overall average and that inequality is increasing and more evident in urban areas than in rural areas⁴.

One of the reasons for lower poverty alleviation rates in urban areas is the inability of the poor to secure well-paying sustainable livelihood options and reduce the inequality gap. Vulnerable groups based on caste, class, geographical location or gender are exploited and have been excluded from the benefits of economic development⁵. This has led to an estimated 76 million urban poor. 17.4 per cent of total urban households are slum households across 63 per cent of India's towns⁶.

Children's everyday realities

Urbanisation has significant implications on the growth and development of children. In India, children make up 34 per cent of the total urban population and of the 128.5 million children living in urban areas, around 7.8 million children under the age of 6 years live in abject poverty in slums and have limited availability and access to rights and resources⁷. The lack of data on children up to 18 years of age living in poverty reveals the invisibilisation of the issue, making it difficult to estimate the extent of deprivation and its impact on children. Marginalised children are particularly susceptible to poor health, crimes and abuse such as trafficking, child labour and sexual abuse, and have limited access to basic services, educational opportunities and recreational spaces. Let's take a deeper look at the current state of basic services and infrastructure for India's marginalised children.

Quality and access to healthcare

Despite some improvements in healthcare access and quality, there are not enough primary healthcare centres (PHCs) in urban India, the existing ones are understaffed and the focus of care is curative, largely ignoring preventive health. Furthermore, the cost of healthcare in private health institutions and overcrowding in public hospitals lead the urban poor to consult unlicensed and untrained healthcare providers. Childhood mortality indicators such as under-five mortality rate, infant mortality rate, and neonatal mortality rate are alarming and much higher for the urban poor than the overall urban averages⁸.

The state of nutrition

While many central and state initiatives have attempted to tackle food security, proper nutrition is still a major issue in India. In urban areas, over 32 per cent children under five years are underweight and 39.6 per cent are stunted. The inequality divide is stark with regard to food and nutrition as six out of 10 children under five years are stunted in the lowest wealth index as compared to 2.5 children in the highest index. While malnourishment is prevalent among the poor, middle and upper middle classes are increasingly faced with problems of child obesity⁹.



Homeless children, Matunga, Mumbai

Photo credit: Dhanraj Shetye

Water, sanitation and hygiene problems

Lack of potable water, open defecation, problems of garbage disposal and sewage can lead to the spread of diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid, cholera and malaria. According to the 2011 Census, around one in five households in urban areas do not have a toilet and the number of urban dwellers practising open defecation has increased from 140 million to 169 million between 1990 and 2008. Half a million children under five years die in India due to diarrhoea, often caused by lack of proper sanitation facilities¹⁰ and studies show that children living in slums are more likely to suffer from diarrhoea than in non-slum areas¹¹.

Education facilities

Right to Education entitles children below 14 years to free and compulsory education. However, government funded pre-school education (PSE) facilities are negligible in urban areas and only 31 per cent schools in these areas have such facilities. The growth of population in urban areas has not resulted in a proportional growth in enrolment in urban schools or the number of education facilities and teachers. Frequent relocation of the urban poor also hampers children's education¹². In urban India, 77 per cent children between 5–18 years have access to educational institutions, yet 23 per cent (22.72 million) are out of school primarily due to poverty or economic constraints¹³.

The state of child protection

In many cities, trafficking, rape, forced labour, infanticide and child marriage are rampant. Women and children are particularly susceptible and may be subject to multiple forms of abuse. The clandestine nature of these crimes, augmented by the poor implementation of laws, make it difficult to know the magnitude of such abuse. Recently, the National Crime Record Bureau mentioned how crimes against children have increased by 11 per cent from 2015–16¹⁴.

Housing shortage

With increased migration of people to cities in search of better jobs and opportunities, urban areas are facing a severe adequate housing shortage. There is an estimated shortage of 10–18.76 million units of low cost houses per year¹⁵. As a result, many of the urban poor have resorted to living in inadequate conditions in slums, on the streets, etc. One in every eight children in urban India stays in slums with dismal living conditions¹⁶.

Access to public spaces

Safe and accessible public spaces are important for overall development of a child, to help in expression, promote participatory democratic approaches, and for healthy living. With rapid urbanisation and land becoming increasingly scarce, open or public spaces are disappearing, appropriated by those in positions of power. Children, therefore, have less access to open spaces such as parks, playgrounds and recreational spaces, and their physical and emotional growth is being stunted in the process.

Given all these systemic gaps and inadequacies a lot remains to be done to counter the existing threats to children's growth process and development in urban areas. For children to grow in a safe, healthy and enabling environment, access to proper nutrition, healthcare, water, sanitation, hygiene, adequate housing and education, as well as protection from exploitation, abuse and disasters is imperative.

¹Government of India, *Census of India, 1951*

²PwC and Save the Children, *Forgotten Voices: The World of Urban Children in India, 2015*, <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/urban-child/urban-child-india-report.pdf>

³Planning Commission, 'Urban Infrastructure, Housing, Basic Services and Poverty Alleviation', *Eleventh Five Year Plan*, http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/11th/11_v3/11v3_ch11.pdf

⁴IFAD, *Asia's Rural-Urban Disparity in the Context of Growing Inequality*, Katsushi S. Imai and Bilal Malaeb, 2016 <https://www.ifad.org/documents/36783902/40280999/Katsushi+S.+Imai+Asia%E2%80%99s+rural-urban+disparity+in+the+context+of+growing+inequality.+pdf.pdf/6794d72d-bb83-40de-88bb-abae47ca45e6>

⁵UNESCO, *World Social Science Report, 2016: Challenging Inequalities; Pathways to a Just World, 2016* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002459/245944e.pdf>

⁶PwC and Save the Children, *Forgotten Voices: The World of Urban Children in India, 2015* <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/urban-child/urban-child-india-report.pdf>

⁷National Institute of Urban Affairs, *Status of Urban Children in India, Baseline Study 2016, 2016* https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/Status_of_children_in_urban_India-Baseline_study_2016.pdf

⁸PwC and Save the Children, *Forgotten Voices: The World of Urban Children in India, 2015*, <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/urban-child/urban-child-india-report.pdf>

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹National Institute of Urban Affairs, *Status of Urban Children in India, Baseline Study 2016, 2016* https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/Status_of_children_in_urban_India-Baseline_study_2016.pdf

¹²PwC and Save the Children, *Forgotten Voices: The World of Urban Children in India, 2015*, <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/urban-child/urban-child-india-report.pdf>

¹³Government of India, *Census of India, 2011*

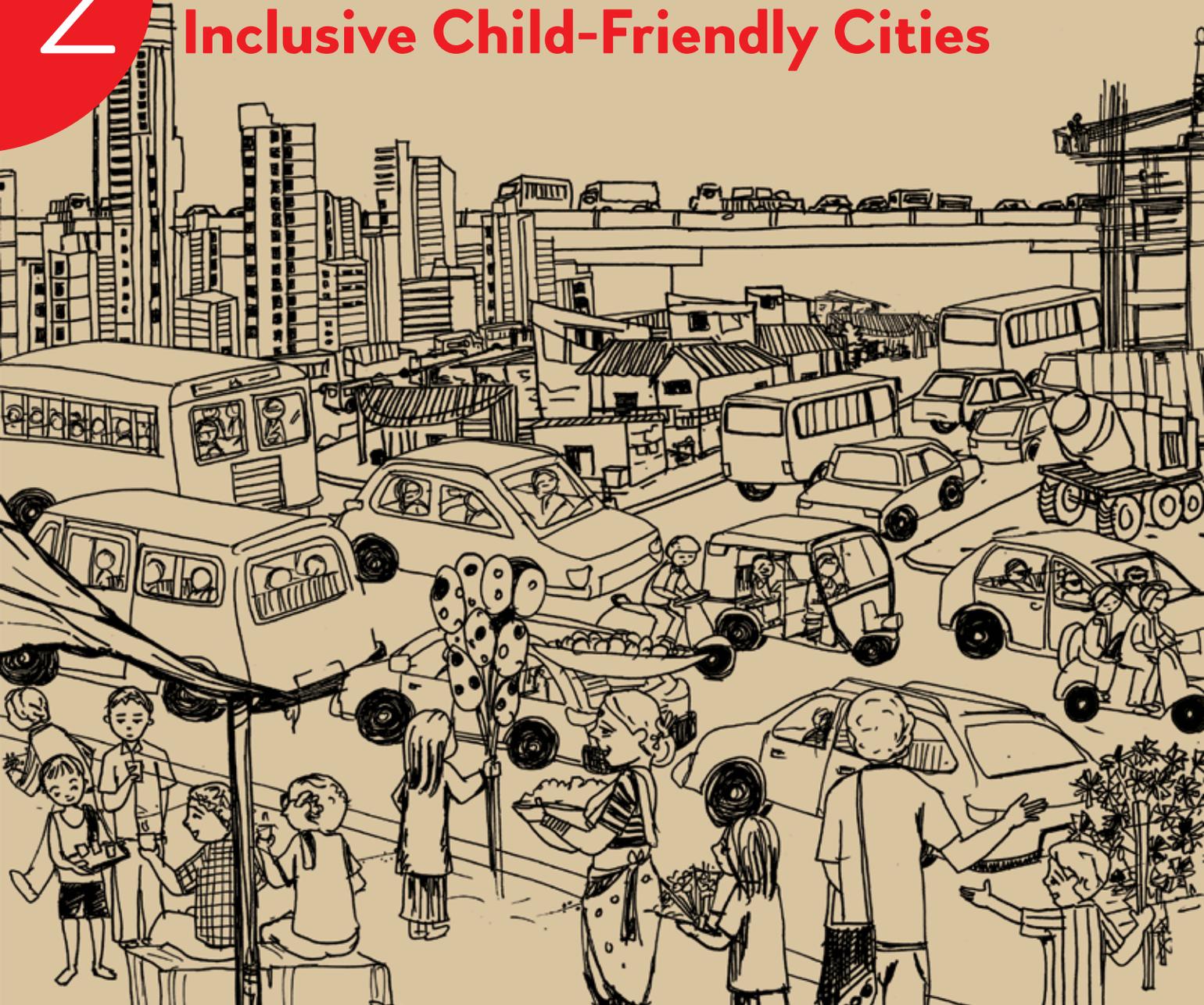
¹⁴The Quint, *Crimes against Children Up by more than 500% in Last Decade: NCRB, 19 March 2018*, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/crimes-against-children-up-by-500-percent-in-last-one-decade>

¹⁵Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, 15 November 2017 <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=173513>

¹⁶Government of India, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, National Buildings Organisation, *Slums in India, A Statistical Compendium, 2011*, http://nbo.nic.in/Images/PDF/Slum_in_india_2011_english_book_23_May_12.pdf

2

Towards Safe and Inclusive Child-Friendly Cities



The co-creation of safe and inclusive cities includes improving living conditions of all urban inhabitants, ensuring that their rights are upheld, as well as empowering disadvantaged groups in urban areas. In addition to its commitment to international treaties, which find expression in domestic policies and programmes, the Government of India has also launched various urban development programmes to mitigate system gaps and address issues faced by urban children. Let's take a look at some of the major international and national frameworks intended to usher safe and inclusive child-friendly cities so far.

International frameworks

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Included in the convention are goals to encourage children's participation in local governance, a child-friendly child rights legal framework, a comprehensive strategy for building child-friendly cities, and mechanisms to ensure consideration of children's perspectives and to assess the impact of law, policy and practice on children.

Sustainable Development Goals

The government has aligned its planning framework to the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 11, which requires countries to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable', reflecting a commitment to improving development and quality of life for children.



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

New Urban Agenda

In 2016, the New Urban Agenda was globally adopted by 167 countries (including India) at the United Nations Habitat III Conference, committing to the 'leave no one behind' vision¹. Many of the sustainable development goals adopted relate directly and indirectly to the children, be it 'No Poverty' (Goal 1), 'Zero Hunger' (Goal 2), 'Good Health and Well-being' (Goal 3), 'Quality Education' (Goal 4), and others. As an international framework formulating how cities should be planned and managed to best promote sustainable urbanisation, the New Urban Agenda seeks to create a mutually reinforcing relationship between urbanisation and development and also looks at democratic development and respect for human rights as well as the relationship between the environment and urbanisation.

National schemes

Smart Cities Mission

The Mission recognises children as key stakeholders, highlighting the need for walkable localities, the preservation and development of open spaces such as parks, playgrounds and recreational spaces, the expansion of housing opportunities for all as well as other necessities such as water, electricity, waste management and sanitation. However, according to the Standing Committee of Parliament, only 1.83 per cent funds released for the Smart Cities Mission has been utilised and only 3 per cent identified projects have been completed so far². Further, the Mission has led to heavy land acquisition, natural resource exploitation, displacement, impoverishment, environmental degradation, and unemployment.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)

AMRUT aims to develop infrastructure for robust sewerage networks and to improve water supply in 500 cities, and takes into account specific needs of children. It also aims to create and upgrade green spaces, parks and recreation centres, as well as reduce pollution by encouraging public and non-motorised transport.

AMRUT's implementation progress has been slow with more than 50 per cent of the projects still under tendering or in the development stage. Furthermore, only 22 per cent of the Mission's committed central funds have been released and only 28 per cent funds utilised so far.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

This Mission aims at eliminating open defecation and promoting good sanitation and is particularly important from the context of children's health, development and living conditions. The Mission led to the construction of 44,87,289 individual household latrine (IHHL) units (70.23 per cent of the targeted 66,42,221) and 3,09,578 community or public toilets (60.97 per cent of the targeted 5,07,750). However, though the success of this campaign hinges upon getting people to use the constructed toilets, only a meagre 8 per cent funds have been directed for this purpose³ and it is still unclear whether the campaign has managed to change people's attitudes and approach towards sanitation.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)

PMAY proposes to construct 20 million houses in 500 cities, comprising 18 million slum and 2 million non-slum households by 2022 and will give urban children access to decent living conditions. However, by 2018, only around 40 lakh houses were sanctioned in the country and a total of 3,39,345 houses have been completed so far (1.6 per cent of the original target of 20 million). Furthermore, of the completed houses, 13 per cent are unoccupied, bringing up questions of accessibility and affordability of these houses. One of the biggest drawbacks of this scheme, however, is its failure to adopt a human rights approach, i.e., it looks at housing as a marketable commodity instead of a basic right, which may well lead to tenure insecurity and discrimination against the poor.

Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)

With a duration of four years and funding worth INR 500 crore, this scheme focuses on holistic development of 12 identified heritage cities by supporting the development of core heritage infrastructure projects including physical, institutional, economic and social infrastructure.

It is evident that while many of these schemes will directly impact children, the magnitude of their impact and derived benefits depend on the extent of their effective implementation, which has largely been less than hoped for. Additionally, it is well-known that children experience cities differently from adults and therefore, their concerns and needs from urban areas are also different from what policy-makers and urban planners usually have in mind when designing urban spaces.

While some of the issues faced by urban children have been addressed through the earlier-mentioned schemes, the needs and opinions of urban children have often been ignored in urban planning processes as well as in mainstream discussions. Successful attempts to include child participation in urban planning have been few and far apart, such as giving space for children's suggestions and objections to the Proposed Draft Development Plan for Mumbai 2014–2034. Yet, creating safe and inclusive child-friendly cities necessitates taking into account the needs of children in urban planning and governance through participatory and democratic processes right from the initial conceptualisation stages. It also encourages children to discuss the challenges that they face and provide solutions, and facilitates the integration



Children play in cramped spaces, Vashi Naka, Mumbai
Photo credit: Dhanraj Shetye

of child development with government schemes and policies, leading to overall city development. Ultimately, child-friendly cities that address infrastructural deficiencies and create healthy environments benefit other vulnerable groups as well such as women, the elderly and disabled people.

To work towards the mission of safe and inclusive cities, the role of a supportive national and international policy framework is extremely crucial, along with stringent monitoring and evaluation of programmes and their status of implementation, to ensure that system gaps are mitigated and the issues faced by all are addressed. On-ground child participation models furthered by civil society organisations and other actors can also help set up safe and inclusive child-friendly cities.

¹ New Urban Agenda adopted at Habitat III, UN Habitat, <https://unhabitat.org/new-urban-agenda-adopted-at-habitat-iii/>

² Bhatnagar, Gaurav Vivek, 'Smart Cities Mission: Study Points to Lack of Focus on Marginalised Communities', *The Wire*, 23 June 2018, <https://thewire.in/urban/smart-cities-mission-study-points-to-lack-of-focus-on-marginalised-communities>

³ Dash, Mamata, 'The Long and Difficult Road to a Swachh Bharat', *The Wire*, 27 May 2015, <https://thewire.in/2539/the-long-and-difficult-road-to-a-swachh-bharat/>

3

Child Participation as a Right



Relooking UN conventions

Child participation is crucial to the promotion of children's rights as well as a key guiding principle of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the international treaty that seeks to ensure the rights of all children around the world and which has been ratified by India. Article 12 of the UNCRC not only gives children the right to express a view on issues affecting them but also confers on them the right to have that view given due weight according to their age and maturity and that children should be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them¹.

Child participation via group activities, Lallubhai Compound, Mankhurd, Mumbai

Photo credit: Paula Bronstein, Photojournalist



The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment no. 12 has provided guidance on how Article 12 should be interpreted and implemented in a range of settings, including in public decision-making. It states that 'the child's right to be heard imposes an obligation on State parties to review or amend their legislation to introduce mechanisms providing children with access to appropriate information, adequate support, if necessary, feedback on the weight given to their views, and procedures and complaints, remedies or redress'². The Convention, therefore, recognises children as right-holders and actors of change who are entitled to be heard and can influence or participate in decision-making. Closely linked to this principle is Article 15 of the UNCRC which gives freedom of association rights for children, ensuring their right to meet together and join groups and organisations, thereby enabling opportunities for expression of their views and engaging them in governance and decision making.

'Participation' in all its hues

Such participation in decision-making includes different levels of engagement. Children's participation in advocacy work will have to be adapted to their capacities and needs so that they can proceed with confidence, knowledge and make the best use of the opportunity to participate meaningfully and voluntarily. The principle is based on the idea that children are exposed to situations, challenges and solutions that they can share with policy makers and administrative bodies, which may be valuable in creating frameworks and laws that affect children. Combined with the other principles of the Convention including freedom of expression, access to information and knowledge of rights, this will allow children to be able to meaningfully participate, know their rights, voice their opinions and contribute to change.

It is important to remember how layered and unequal children's participation can also be, to actively work towards a more equitable environment. Among participating children, those who are younger, belonging to minority families, disabled, or poorer often get a lesser chance at expressing themselves. The objective of child participation should be that even the last child is made an active participant in proceedings, committing to the United Nations goal of 'leave no one behind'.

At the same time, participation cannot be forced. Children should be treated as partners in the process, and be engaged respectfully. To promote greater participation among children, it is important to select a suitable time when children are free from school and other responsibilities so that they find it easier to make time for their collective and meaningfully engage with one another.

Participation in its holistic sense also demonstrates a joint commitment by multiple stakeholders to ensure that this process remains ongoing and is not exercised only in rare and one-off instances. It is also important to identify risks children face when in participatory processes, so that adequate child protection frameworks can be developed to address emerging challenges.

Despite system gaps and a lack of participatory processes, there are many efforts being made across India to promote children's participation in political and local administrative processes, leading to the creation of safe and inclusive child-friendly cities. We shall discuss these in more detail in Chapter V of the toolkit. First, let us take a look at processes that can facilitate and support children's participation.

¹ *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, November 1989*

² *UNCRC General Comment No 12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, 1 July 2009, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>*

4

Processes for Facilitating Children's Participation



Children's participation can enrich decision-making processes, broaden perspectives (of children and adults) with space for expression and listening, and ensure that planning processes are aligned to children's needs and requirements. Prior to enabling processes for participation, however, it is essential to map community resources available for children to better understand how interventions can be connected to the specific local context for maximum effect.

This chapter lays out the processes for facilitating children's participation focusing on six major types of interventions: mobilisation, group building, developing attitudes and perspectives, engagement with systems, leadership building and encouraging sustainability of processes. These interventions should be planned one after another, building on the learnings from the previous stage to take forward efforts or may overlap in some cases, based on context and suitability.. For each stage, indicative activities have been suggested, which may be replaced by others to achieve the intended objectives. Let us take a closer look at each stage.

I. Mobilisation

Why is mobilisation important?

Mobilisation engages children in the process of change, and enables the facilitator to better understand children's unique needs and requirements. At an individual level, it widens the child's network and association, driving a stronger connect with processes.

It helps the child explore and locate himself/herself in the larger discussions and action. At a group-level, it builds support for collective empowerment and drives children's participation and ownership of initiatives.

This refers to the act of bringing children together to enable them to work towards mutually decided objectives. Mobilisation forms the basis of collectivisation, serving as the first important engagement strategy to build popular support and drive action through people's participation. The mobilisation of children is critical to drive inclusive change.

How can we mobilise children?

Mobilisation can be furthered by using any/all of the following strategies:

- Interactions with children at spaces where they are comfortable (in the form of discussions, games, etc).
- Garnering the community's trust and support, in turn encouraging parents/guardians to let the children spend time with the mobilising group (via home visits, parent interactions, etc.).
- Connecting with children's groups and identifying potential leaders (via events/activities, etc.).

- Using Centres as mediums of mobilisation (scheduling a time-table of activities, play events, life skills sessions, etc. to establish regular contact and relations with children).
- Connecting with other child-centric systems and institutions in the community (such as *anganwadis*, tuition classes, local organisations, etc.) to plan collaborations.

Indicative activities/exercises to further mobilisation

Activity 1.1 Live snake and ladder game

Ask the children to throw the big dice in turn, move on the board as per the number on the dice, and follow the instructions given on the squares they land on.

Materials

Printed snake and ladder board (8 ft * 10 ft) with positive messages on child rights (in place of ladders) and violations (in place of snakes), a big dice.

Time

1 hour 30 mins

Expected outcome

An enjoyable and meaningful interaction, expected to pique the children's curiosity, increase their awareness and make them eager for more such activities to be organised.



Activity 1.2 Creating a family tree

Visit a child's home and note the living environment, state of the family, etc.

Encourage the child to draw a tree (also known as genogram) depicting family members and relationships. This can be constantly updated and detailed with further interactions.

Expected outcome

Rapport building and trust with the child and his/her family

Materials

Paper, colourful pens

Time

30–60 mins approx.

Facilitator's note:

Be open and accepting of the realities of the family, and take an approach of genuine interest in knowing the child and the family.

Activity 1.3 Community resource mapping

Meet the children at a feasible community space. Tell them about the activity objective—community mapping with their help.

Let the children guide or even draw the community map on the ground with chalk or on chart paper, marking existing resources like *anganwadis*, lakes, mangroves, well, etc. The children could also map safe and unsafe community spaces, spaces for play, etc.

Additionally, a child-led community walk can further ideation, helping the children detail the map.

Materials

Colourful chalk and writing surface or chart paper and colourful pens

Time

2 hours

Expected outcome

Rapport building among children, and between children and the facilitator begins. The children share community and personal experiences, even highlighting important subtleties that are otherwise missed out.

Why is group building important?

Group building encourages the process of collectivisation and prioritises the impact of democratic collective action. It is a vital component to initiating and facilitating the process of children's participation, helping children support and encourage one another to voice their opinions. At an individual level, it builds self-confidence and self-expression capabilities, and connects children to larger perspectives, developing their sense of ownership and responsibility, and promoting their leadership skills.

II. Group building

This refers to the act and practice of facilitating and encouraging the formation of children's groups, so that they can derive strength from their collective presence, and utilise energies to share responsibilities and drive initiatives



How can group building be promoted?

Group building can be furthered by using any/all of the following strategies:

- Conducting preliminary ice-breaking exercises and activities to help in group formation (such as participatory profiling).
- Engaging in needs assessment and participatory problem mapping with children as supportive facilitators, with objectives and findings aligned to child rights.
- Ensuring regular and sustained interactions and engagement with the group (via a range of activities, value-based games, etc.).
- Strengthening group formation and participation through comprehensive strategies, action plans, etc. and focusing on group sustainability efforts and action.

Indicative activities/exercises to further group building

Activity 2.1 Participatory profiling exercise

Step 1: Preparing the questions

- Ask the children seated in a circle what they would like to know about each other and note their suggestions on a chart paper.
- When questions are repeated or reaching an exhaustion point, use the cue cards to probe for more questions.
- Create a list of 20–25 such questions

Step 2: Getting to know each other better

- Now pose these questions to the group one by one and ask the children to form groups with those who have the same/similar answer and notice how the groups keep changing.

Aids

Simple cue cards (with age, birth month, ID documents possessed, etc. mentioned) and more complex ones (describing community condition, life aspirations, etc.)

Materials

Chart paper, marker

Time

2 hours

Facilitator's note:

Document important profiling information observed through the different rounds of questions asked and groups formed as activity proceeds.

Expected outcome

This activity allows for group profiling and knowing each other in a more participatory way rather than just introduction by name.

At the end, the group will know more about one another, helping them connect easier on similarities and differences, beginning the process of group formation.

Activity 2.2 Cross the line

Share the following instructions:

- Every time a question/statement is uttered, each child decides its applicability to his/her life. If applicable, he/she crosses the line and faces the rest of the group for about 15 seconds or so, till the facilitator says 'thank you' and the participants return to their original positions.
- During the game, there should be complete silence and only the facilitator is allowed to speak.

De-brief: Ask the children how they feel after the activity. Some of the questions that can be asked are:

- How does it feel to be on one side of the room while the rest are on the other side? How do you perceive the other side?
- What do you infer from this activity about your community and surroundings?
- Was there any point when you intentionally did not want to step on the other side of the line?

Expected outcome

Group members feel closer to one other when they know more deeply about each other's identities and experiences. Some participants may start crying or have an emotional outburst during/after the game, and that is okay. Ensure they feel better eventually during the debrief session.

Aids

A set of pre-decided questions/statements.

Example:

- Do you live with your parents?
- Have you been to school?
- Have you faced gender-based discrimination?
- Have you faced caste-based discrimination?

Materials

Chalk/rope/tape to make a line

Time

1 hour 30 mins

Facilitator's note:

This activity should be conducted only when the group is in an advanced stage of formation, as it is important for the members to know and trust one another.

Activity 2.3 Mood-o-meter

Create a set of emotion cards. Be creative in depicting a range of emotions on the cards. Take the help of children to make this a diverse collection.

Place the emotion cards in different parts of the room and ask the children to stand near the emotion they feel today.

Ask them to talk about the different emotions they know about. They can also describe what makes them feel particular emotions. For instance, a pat on the back by a parent/teacher makes them feel proud and happy. When playing with friends, losing a game makes the children feel upset and angry.

Ask the children if they can differentiate between negative and positive emotions? How do they deal with their emotions, particularly the negative ones?

Aids

Charts cut into faces depicting different emotions such as angry, sad, happy, etc.

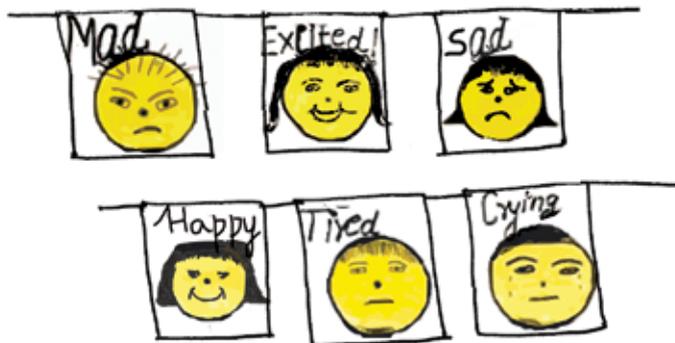
Time

45 mins

Expected outcome

This activity can help children understand and express their feelings and emotions with their peers.

Together, they understand what situations can make them harbour negative emotions and how they can deal with such situations (eg. response to violence among friends, in families)



Activity 2.4 Four pockets

Tie the rope across two poles in the shape of a cross ('X') about 2.5–3 metres from the ground.

Divide the children into two or three teams, with at least 10 members in one team. Share the following instructions:

- Each team member should pass through each of the four pockets, going through each pocket at least once, without touching the rope or the pole. If they touch either, the member has to start all over again.
- Each team gets a time limit of 15 minutes to pass as many members as possible.
- The teams can creatively think of how they can pass members through the pockets. While the lowest pocket presents the least challenge, the other pockets require teamwork to allow the members to pass.

Materials

A rope/thick string, two poles rooted on level ground

Time

1 hour 30 mins

Debrief: After the game the teams sit together and discuss what was good about their strategy, what didn't work, what were the values that were kept in mind during the game. Step-by-step they go over the game they have just played and talk about the different roles they each played during those 15 minutes.

They also discuss whether it was necessary for the teams to get competitive. Was there any scope for collaboration instead, to allow everyone to pass?

Expected outcome

A spirit of teamwork and collaborative effort is inculcated and promoted in the group as they work together on a common strategy plan, helping the children open up and become freer with one another. The game also exposes the challenges when working in a team on tasks that have a strict timeline. How can a group work successfully and achieve their targeted goals in a satisfactory manner, given the deadline constraints?

III. Developing attitudes and perspectives

Why is it important to develop attitudes and perspectives?

With the development of attitudes and perspectives, children's cognitive, psychosocial and interpersonal skills are made more powerful and impactful. As children develop their own capacities, they are able to connect individual thoughts to larger micro and macro perspectives, helping in proactive, meaningful and deliberate participation, and strengthening of collective thought and action. With enhanced skills and capacities, children can develop their sense of agency and decision making capabilities too.

This refers to efforts taken to empower children by helping their attitudes and perspectives develop for better expression and action. It stems from the belief that given the right opportunities, knowledge and appropriate support, children's skills and capacities can blossom and they can participate in informed decisions relating to their life. Various personal growth strategies are promoted among children to strengthen their competencies, communication skills, and problem-solving and negotiation capabilities.

How can we encourage the development of attitudes and perspectives?

Children's attitudes and perspectives can be developed by using any/all of the following strategies:

- Developing and implementing context-specific child-centric materials and modules (such as life skills modules, leadership training, etc.).
- Introducing life skills to the group, particularly the skill of critical thinking. Exposure to books, films, brainstorming activities can help the group develop critical thought.
- Drawing links between macro and micro concepts, linking larger issues to on-ground and immediate/intimate experiences of children, helping them draw connections to apply knowledge (this can be done through community-based projects, exhibitions, etc.).
- Encouraging children to share learnings from other child-participation modules and other associated exercises they have been a part of, to make it a co-learning process which could also better cater to unique local requirements.

Indicative activities/exercises to further attitude and perspective building

Activity 3.1 Who's the furthest?

Setting up the game:

- Place around 50 marbles/stones in a circle. From the circumference, measure steps outwards (7, 15, 25, and 40) and draw 4 straight lines at these points
- Divide the children into 4 teams. Each team stands behind their respective line.
- The team closest to the circle gets the full stationery pouch, the next team gets a thick marker pen, the third team gets the sketch pen and the fourth gets the small pencil.

Share the following instructions:

- Each team must try to collect as many marbles as possible while standing behind their demarcated line by pushing the marbles out of the circle. They can throw/roll the tools given to them for this.
- The game is played turn wise. The team closest to the line gets to play first. One member hits the marbles, and then we move on to the next team.

The game continues till all the marbles/stones are pushed out of the circle.

Materials

50–70 marbles (or small pebbles/stones), a thick marker, a thin sketch pen, a stationery pouch containing some weights, a small pencil

Time

1 hour

Expected outcome

This game attempts to demonstrate social access and social justice, and the case of inequalities that abound in life.

The marbles/stones denote the resources in society, available for all yet in limited quantities. The position of each team denotes different classes and castes. The team closest to the line and having the pouch as tool is likely to win always.

The group reflects on values and how they play out in society and in their own lives. Social justice is often denied to groups that are most weak and vulnerable, like children, and thus, effective measures need to be taken to ensure access to social justice, freedom and dignity for all.

Activity 3.2 Problem tree

Divide the children into groups of 5–7 members, and share the following instructions:

- Each group should discuss the problems children in the community face, and take up the most pressing problem
- The group should draw a 'problem tree' with the tree trunk representing the central problem identified. Problem effects/consequences should be depicted on the fruits, and their causes are to be written on the roots. The thickest root should be the one which, if removed, would solve most parts of the problem
- Each group needs to present their work to the other groups

Expected outcome

The children engage consciously and start thinking critically.

Through the discussions, they also share their own context-specific experiences. They learn from each other through the group sharing and presentations.

Moreover, a direction of future work for the group is also being simultaneously identified.

Aids

A list of questions/statements

Materials

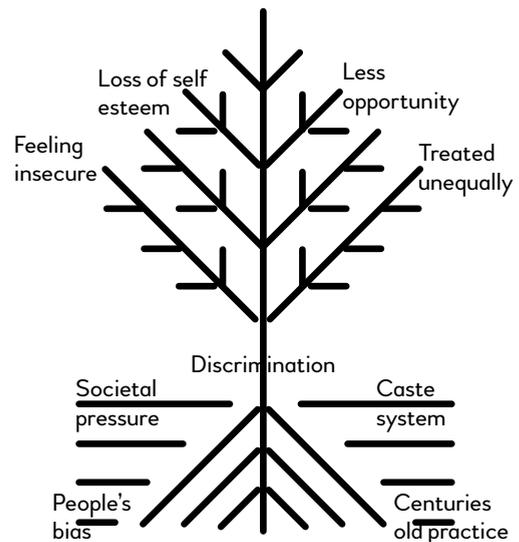
Chart paper, colour pencils, sketch pens, marker

Time

1 hour

Facilitator's note:

Allow the groups to work on their tree uninterruptedly, with facilitation in case of doubts



Activity 3.3 *Kaam ka daam* (The price of work)

- Introduce the activity objective—today we are going to talk about ‘work’.
- Ask the children to list on a chart paper what they consider as work. Prompt them if needed (for instance, who cooks food for you at home? who cleans the house? who does plumbing work?) All work roles that they see around them or they have heard of can be listed.
- Once this is done, ask any two children—one girl and one boy—to volunteer for the activity. They have to stand in front of the group and play the role of a husband and wife.
- Announce one work task, for example, dropping the child to school. Let the group decide which of the volunteers will do this work. If the group says it's the wife, then the girl playing the wife's role gets one chocolate. Announce more tasks and let the children decide.
- Once the game is over, discuss why certain jobs were assumed to be more suitable for the husband or wife. Do we see this world-over? Why is this the case?

Aids

A list of questions/statements

Materials

Chart paper, a bag of chocolates

Time

2 hours

Expected outcome

This activity helps the children understand how gender stereotyping has severe implications on work roles, leading to an understanding of unpaid labour or the ‘labour of love’, attributed to women's work.

Why is it important to engage with systems and stakeholder?

By forming alliances and partnerships with the government and other relevant stakeholders, children can demand that responsibilities towards child rights are prioritised at all times and upheld. Engagements of this nature also promote the development of child-centric programmes and policy. They serve as mutually reinforcing relationships, driving strength from better knowledge and understanding of one other. Over time, collective engagement can ensure better governance and accountability, and help develop inclusive urban spaces

IV. Engagement with systems/ stakeholders

This refers to developing meaningful partnerships and collaborations with a range of relevant institutions and stakeholders, such as government legislative bodies, executive systems and officials, judiciary bodies, policymakers, civil society organisations, communities, and other stakeholders committed to child-centric development

How can we engage with systems and stakeholders?

Engagement with systems and stakeholders can be furthered by using any/all of the following strategies:

- Maintaining and strengthening relations with stakeholders by engaging with them regularly on important civic concerns.
 - Creating common platforms and forums for interaction between children and stakeholders (eg. Bal Sabha, a forum where children directly voice and share concerns with multiple relevant city-stakeholders such as representatives from the public health department, the police, municipality, etc.).
- Supporting and implementing child-related government schemes on-ground with child participation, and sharing implementation status, gaps, and redressal recommendations with relevant stakeholders.
 - Publicity of children's collective activities through different mediums (eg. newsletter, rallies, photo exhibitions, street plays, etc.), so that stakeholders can be present at relevant programmes and engage with the children.

Indicative activities/exercises to further engagement with systems and stakeholders

Activity 4.1. Children's government

The role of different local government officials should be discussed with the children. After this, 5–7 children can volunteer to take up the post of different officials for half a day. As they perform their duties, the children should also record their own observations and note whether they are able to address the community children's concerns as officials.

A short programme can be conducted later where the children share their experiences of role-playing with the local authorities they were pretending to be (eg. the police, community development officer, health officer, etc.) present as chief guests to listen to their efforts.

Aids

Sashes with different official government posts mentioned on each

Time

Half day activity, with programme on a later date to share observations

Expected outcome

Children understand systems and governance first-hand, and systems officials become aware of the work of children's collectives and better understand the importance and role of child participation in governance through a child's perspective.

Activity 4.2 Bal Sabha

Organise a Bal Sabha, a forum where children lead the discussion, engaging with relevant city stakeholders on civic concerns.

As panelists, the children present their concerns and are asked questions which they respond to. Other important stakeholders are invited, and requested to respond to the statements made by children.

A charter of children's demands is created and shared with relevant authorities, and regular follow-ups are planned.

Time

2–3 hours

Expected outcome

Children interact with systems representatives closely, and articulate their needs and requirements clearly. It is a starting point in building relationships with governance systems.

V. Leadership building

Why is leadership building important?

Leadership building among children helps ensure that the collective remains a child-led entity. At an individual level, it develops confidence and ownership in children, encouraging peer-to-peer learning as they work on child rights objectives. As children's leadership skills develop, they blossom into confident leaders of tomorrow. Focus on their leadership capabilities helps them transition into responsible youth and conscientious citizens.

This refers to the process of engaging with children to develop and enhance their leadership skills, so that they can lead and guide other children towards mutually decided tasks and goals.

How do we promote leadership building?

Leadership building can be furthered by using any/all of the following strategies:

- Identify existing child leaders
- Engage with potential child leaders on intensive capacity building processes. Emphasise on action-focused processes and experiential learning, focused on 'doing' rather than on the theoretical and conceptual understanding only. In this way, children have an experience of the process and are able to understand leadership in a deeper, more personal way.
- Leverage on existing groups to build a larger collective (for instance, area-wise groups can form a bigger group), and strengthen the role of leaders to guide the larger collective



Indicative activities/exercises to promote leadership building

Activity 5.1 Leadership tower

Divide the group into 3 teams. Each group should have a leader. Take the leaders aside separately, and to each of them assign one of the following leadership styles—authoritarian/dictatorship, permissive leadership and democratic leadership. Tell the leaders that they have to be in character as per the role assigned to them (eg. authoritarian—demanding, calling the shots, taking decisions alone; permissive—disengaged; democratic—discussing and engaging, inclusive and participatory). The leaders can now go back to their respective groups, but should not share this information with anyone.

Share the following instruction: Each team needs to build the tallest tower using only the given material (paper cups, plastic straws, newspaper, cello-tape and scissors) within 20 minutes.

Once the time ends, congratulate the teams for their efforts and ask them to go around and see each other's work.

Debrief: Discuss the process of work just completed. Ask the teams how they accomplished the tasks, rate their participation in the group, how was the leadership process, what were their learnings and challenges?

Materials

9 paper cups (3 per team), newspapers, plastic straws, cello-tape, 2 pairs of scissors

Time

2 hours

The first two teams may have had problems with their leaders and might have some interesting things to share. Make sure the comments are about the nature of leadership and not of a personal nature.

Disclose to the group all the types of leaders that existed during the game. Which leadership did they prefer? Which leadership worked? What are, therefore, the traits of a good leader?

Expected outcome

The group understands the importance of leadership and the different leadership styles. They experience what it feels like to work under different kinds of leaders.

Activity 5.2 Democratic child elections

Mutually decide with the group how their leadership structure should be (eg, 5–6 members, with half representation of girls, may be a good number).

Ask the children who among them feels like they can hold the post of a leader. Allow the children to voluntarily come forward. Around 10–12 representatives could lead a group of 50–60 children.

Ask the volunteer leader representatives to prepare a brief manifesto on the lines of, 'What are my plans for the group, if I am elected? Where will the group be, how will it progress? etc.' They should present their manifestos within 30–40 minutes.

Ask the other children to vote for the candidate they feel will lead the group well.

The children are given 10 minutes to write one name on the chit of paper which they place in the secret ballot box and the facilitator marks their right index finger nail with the black marker to indicate that they have cast their vote.

The votes are counted and 5–6 candidates with the highest number of votes win the election.

After a few days of the election, hold a meeting with the elected core committee to plan the activities and agenda of the group.

Materials

A ballot box, black marker, paper squares to write the name of the representative, pens

Time

2 hours

Facilitator's note:

This activity would be more effective if followed by a session on leadership processes and styles.

Expected outcome

Children learn about democratic election processes and the value of their vote to elect their leaders. Leaders are accountable to the members and take ownership of the processes.

Why is sustainability of processes important?

By focusing on sustainability of processes, children's sense of ownership about their collective is strengthened, and they are invested in promoting ways of working that can sustain itself from one generation of children to the next. The focus on sustainability also ensures that the project and implementing agency limitations are secondary to the larger process of organising children, which continues despite the hurdles faced. Finally, long-term benefits of the child participation programme become evident when focusing on sustainability of processes.

VI. Sustainability of processes

This refers to ensuring that the child-centric participatory processes are strong enough to sustain themselves over time, and are capable to adapting themselves to the emerging requirements of the times ahead.

How can we promote sustainability of processes?

Sustainability of processes can be furthered by using any/all of the following strategies:

- Building ownership among the children to drive the processes systematically, with a focus on its sustainability.
- Building a second line of leadership within the children's collectives so that processes continue smoothly even when the leaders are absent or leave the group.
- Linking the work of collectives to other groups and systems functioning that adopt the processes.
- Facilitating transition of children from children's collectives into youth groups.

Indicative activities/exercises to promote sustainability of processes

Activity 6.1 Claiming spaces

Claiming public spaces like society offices, parks, etc. which have collective community ownership and can be used as a meeting space for children's groups

Children's groups approach the concerned authorities and ask them for permission to use the space for a particular time for children's activities.

Expected outcome

The community ownership of children's processes will increase. These spaces will become reserved for children, for some time at least. New leaders from the community members will emerge to take charge of processes.

Activity 6.2 Newsletter printing and distribution

Ask children to write articles on their work, their take on issues faced by children in the community, etc.

Form an editing committee among children, and also some youth who can help in the process, and ask them to design the newsletter

Print the newsletter and distribute it to stakeholders, community members and others at a nominal fee of INR 10–15 a copy.

Expected outcome

The writing and articulation skills of children improves and they are able to work in teams and communicate their work to people. It is also a source of fundraising.

Activity 6.3 Street play

Children can script their play on different topics, such as child labour, environment, etc. and perform at different events and platforms.

Expected outcome

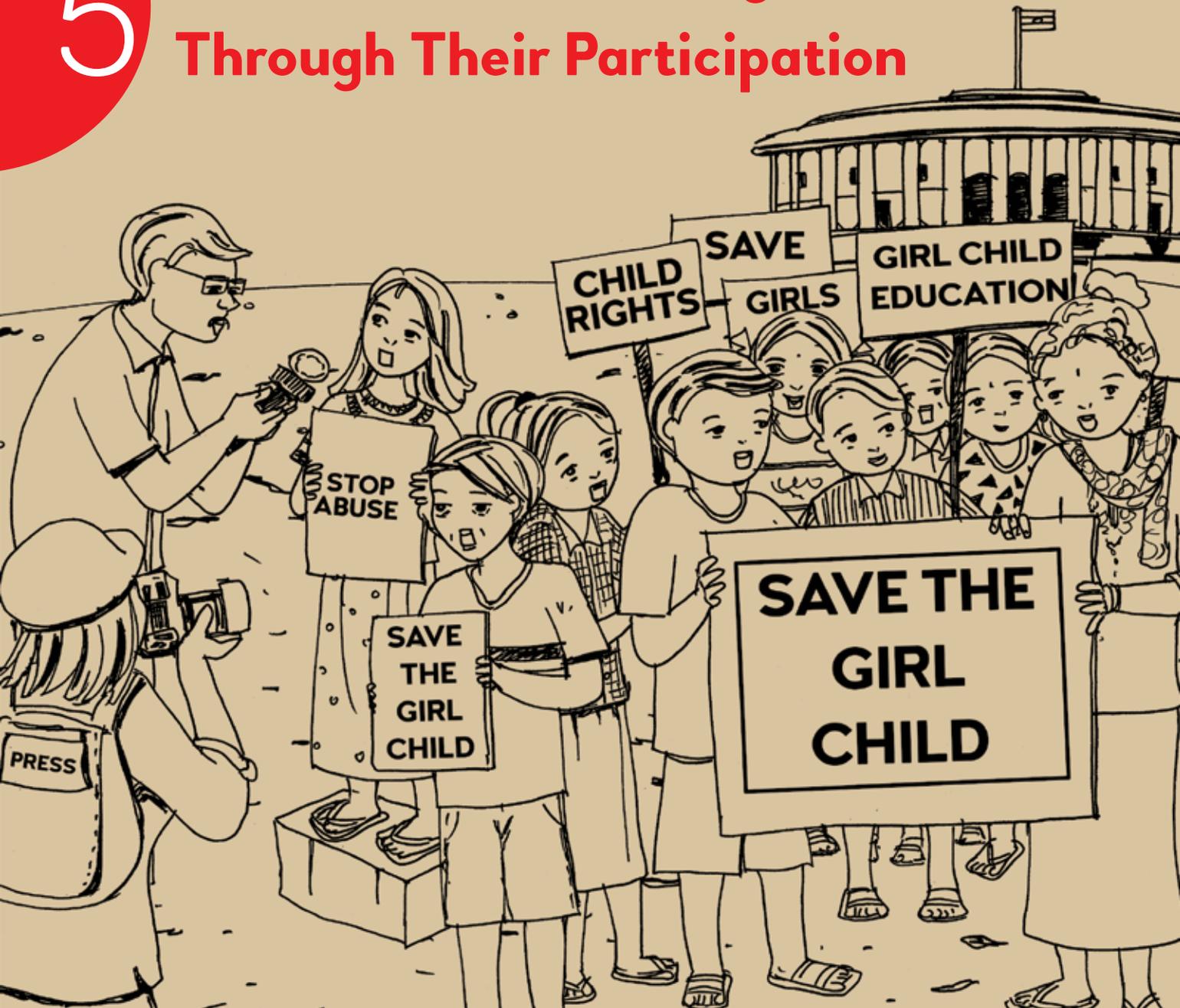
Street plays offer a double-benefit. They are an effective tool for generating and spreading awareness, and also help improve the presentation skills and confidence of the child actors involved. Street play performances are driven by teamwork and enhance the group's visibility and identity as a collective.



Performing a street play in Mumbai

5

Children Transforming Cities Through Their Participation



A promising change maker group: The case of Bal Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan

Bal Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan (BASS), a children's collective working on community-based child rights issues, was set up over two decades ago, facilitated by YUVA in communities where interventions are with children. The group is collectively owned and run by the children themselves. Over the years, generations of young ones across the city have joined hands to fight for and claim their rights. Children's participation in this group has been a rewarding and empowering experience for most of them who have seldom had a platform to voice their concerns.

BASS comprises of children from marginalised families, drawn from different parts of the city. Most of the children reside either in informal settlements (Ambujwadi, Malwani), on the street (in Dadar, Matunga, etc), or in rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) sites (such as Lallubhai Compound, Mankhurd), locations marked by inadequate living standards. Children grow up in cramped and unsafe surroundings, lacking spaces for study, play, leisure, or even privacy. Children are often voiceless and vulnerable in these surroundings, unable to articulate their concerns, and their physical, mental and emotional well-being is affected in the absence of adequate homes. In these trying circumstances, the BASS collective hopes to empower children, helping them find a voice to articulate their needs and fights for their rights, in turn inspiring other children to join hands and drive change.

Key objectives of BASS

- Building on the children's own understanding of child rights and creating awareness among other children about their rights.
- Understanding and networking with government and non-government systems/entities/ individuals to work towards the shared goal of realisation of child rights and the setup of child-friendly cities.
- Representing children's opinion on different policies directly or indirectly affecting them and acting as a pressure group to lobby on behalf of children.
- Highlighting instances of child rights violation in the city, and taking action wherever possible.

Over the years, BASS has developed three generations of child leaders, encouraging the formation of children's groups from socially marginalised communities. BASS groups meet regularly in communities, highlighting issues faced and developing solidarity to actively work on issues being faced. The collective operates on a democratic principle, driven by a Constitution they have drafted together which outlines their objectives, rules and regulations. Group leaders are chosen by the ballot process, and their manifesto guides the group's functioning. The group takes charge of organising different events in the community, mobilising the children's support and encouraging their participation.

Key BASS initiatives

Since its formation, these are some of the major initiatives taken up by BASS across the city:

Leading campaigns on important social issues affecting children and the community

BASS groups in different areas of the city have held up a mirror to society, talking about the menace of eve teasing (catcalling), child abuse, drug abuse, unclean surroundings (with problems of open drains, garbage management), child labour and other issues faced in the community via planned campaigns. The campaign has functioned as a democratic forum, helping children discuss these issues, better understand how they violate child rights in the community, and spread this message among themselves and community members. The children have been a part of community-led monitoring efforts, helping map malnourishment levels in their community, and better understand waste practices around them.

BASS members have made use of innovative mediums such as rallies, street plays, posters, etc. to spread word on social issues and begin a constructive dialogue with multiple stakeholders. For instance, the children participated in Missing Ambujwadi, a campaign which questioned why Ambujwadi found no space in the city's Development Plan. Among the 1,000+ postcards sent to the authorities as part of the campaign, the children wrote over 300 of the postcards themselves.

Building alliances with multiple stakeholders and systems to drive change at scale

While working with children in the community and attempting to expand their presence, BASS groups have also built networks with their own cooperative society members, the police, health officials, local

leaders, media and other stakeholders. This has helped them take forward their demands and share their concerns with the right people who can support them.

For instance, the BASS groups in Ambujwadi have articulated the need for a mobile Child Resource Centre for those children who can't attend the Centre, and they have expressed the need for library and recreational spaces near their homes, speaking to the local representatives to act on their concerns. They have also engaged with the police and other civic authorities, taking forward the dialogue on housing and demands for better living conditions. Their demand for clean and safe child-friendly communities is critical, and their participation is important for the effective functioning of the Community-level Child Protection Committees (CCPCs). BASS leaders have also appeared on local news channels in the city, talking about their struggles and achievements so far towards accessing child participation, and how they plan to take ahead their efforts.



BASS members using posters to spread awareness

Expressing demands in their own voice in the city's Development Plan, preparing election manifestos, and representation at other forums

Facilitated by YUVA, BASS groups from across the city and other children's collectives presented suggestions and objections to the Proposed Draft Development Plan for Mumbai 2014–2034, requesting for an adequate home for each of them. The BASS collective of Lallubhai Compound, Mankhurd, also made recommendations to the same Plan, meeting the MLA to present a petition to build a pedestrian bridge over the railway line which they need to cross every day to go to school, often resulting in accidents.

Before the 2014 general elections, the BASS members had also prepared a detailed election manifesto, highlighting their needs and requirements and shared it with corporators and local government representatives. They have been systematically following up on their demands, taking proactive steps to ensure that they are fulfilled.

Developing children's expressive capabilities has been an important objective for BASS from the start. In 2002, the BASS core group organised a day-long festival for children, which culminated with a 'Children's Charter of Demands' on education, housing, health and basic services, and rights to a child-friendly city, presented to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and other important stakeholders.

In 2017, children from across the city belonging to different BASS groups and children's collectives spoke at YUVA's Bal Sabha against the many injustices they have to tolerate, their right to an adequate home and the impacts on them when their rights are violated. The Sabha was a platform for children to directly voice their concerns and discuss them with multiple stakeholders present. The children expressed their need for privacy, spaces to be made available to them for studying, recreation and playing, and for rehabilitation to occur within the same area, as school and livelihood opportunities are adversely impacted when families move far off (as in the case of Lallubhai Compound).

Reporting cases of child rights violations

Over time, the BASS group members and other children in association with them have also taken up the reporting of cases of child abuse, child labour, missing children, the case of children not going to school, etc. Their rights awareness has helped them understand injustice more keenly, and they have actively taken steps to try and redress wrongs experienced by other children. The children are also expected to be a part of community and ward-level child protection committees, many of which are still in the process of being formed. While children are also supposed to be a part of school management committees, their involvement has not been very strong in this so far.

Amira's story

'I joined BASS when I was 10-years-old', says Amira. Her family was one of many shifted to New Bhabrekar Nagar in the 1990s, living in inadequate homes with hardly any basic amenities and services. Amira joined BASS hoping to improve the lives of children and the state of the community. She took on many leadership roles over the years, guiding and learning from child-centric activities. She also participated in the child governance activity, role-playing as an official for a day. 'Thanks to our active participation, we have been able to assert



Amira (centre) working with youth group members

our demands, and quite a few have been met too', she says. Amira has gradually transitioned into the youth group and is currently playing an important role there. She has also worked as a teacher in the community's *balwadi* and taught tailoring to adolescent community girls. 'BASS has played a major role in developing my confidence, knowledge of leadership and life skills', she says, acknowledging how the collective has helped her grow as a person.

BASS exemplifies how children can engage in child-led development processes, and raise their voice to express their concerns as well as those of other children. The collective has played a major role in developing children's confidence and personality. It has helped develop a visible sense of solidarity among children from different backgrounds, helping them understand and contribute towards supporting each other's struggles. With their first-hand understanding and practice of participatory, democratic processes, the children have been able to assert their rights as citizens and take steps towards influencing more inclusive policies, especially those that relate to children.

6

Towards Safe and Inclusive Child-Friendly Cities



The process of child participation can succeed in a holistic sense when different stakeholders are able to work together, keeping the child's concerns at the centre of all engagements. Participation should be child-driven, child-friendly and inclusive, keeping in mind the evolving capability of the child and the right processes should be used to promote participation.

Overcoming limitations in scheme implementation

In India, repeated budget cuts to the Integrated Child Development Scheme have meant that *anganwadi* (early childcare centre) operations have been stymied. Existing funds have often been unutilised as well, compounding challenges. The Integrated Child Protection Scheme continues to struggle as well, given the lack of funds. Additionally, staff handling these crucial child protection and welfare roles are often not adequately trained, failing in their duties to handle context-specific children's challenges. Moreover, there are frequent reports of the staff being diverted from regular roles to administrative duties, given the severe resource crunch¹.

While budgets are limited, making it difficult to ensure positive scheme outcomes, the larger issue remains that of systemic commitment to change. Unless political will and attitude towards child participation and protection improves, it will be difficult to ensure holistic and lasting change in children's lives. Stringent monitoring of schemes and increased government accountability can help ensure that the universal commitment to child rights is upheld.



Photo credit: Paula Bronstein, Photojournalist

Calling for meaningful participation

Children's role in governing bodies (from the Child Protection Committee to the School Management Committee) should not be tokenistic. Ideally, children who are a part of these spaces should be representatives of children's groups, and not just be selected in their own personal capacity. Moreover, children's role at each stage needs to be legitimised and strengthened, so that their capacities are further strengthened through repeated engagements and they are able to assert their demands at multiple levels, and actively work towards them being addressed.

While attempting to increase children's participation in the city and district-level task force, it is also important to strengthen their participation at the national and international level, with adequate attention to their development and capability to address challenges at every stage. With the promotion of children's role in advocacy (at the local, national and international stage), their concerns can be given due space so that adequate action can be taken.

Trained and ethical facilitation is key

Alongside efforts to promote child participation, it is very important that adults' training on facilitation methods be strengthened, to help them interact and engage with children in a manner that promotes more participation and helps in the setup of a safe, enabling space for children. From the beginning, facilitators need to be open to discussing the children's fears and expectations, so that they are aligned to what the child participation programme aims to deliver and the children are assured of the intent of the implementing agency/organisation/entity. Moreover, there is a need for facilitators to develop a clear understanding of the concept of child participation so that the focus is on true child participation, with the children driving and owning the processes instead of them being driven and owned by the adult facilitators.

It is very important to ensure ethical facilitation of children to drive the process in its truest sense. As the children represent their issues/concerns at different forums, they may face resistance from different quarters. Facilitators should engage in age-appropriate facilitation, and adequate training and support should be extended to children to help them address challenging circumstances and potential backlash. On no account should children be instrumentalised and be made to engage on objectives that would benefit other parties.

Measuring outcomes is critical

The process of facilitating child participation should be made accountable and measured, to ensure that the process moves towards achievable outcomes (such as developing children's capabilities, facilitating the setup of sustainable collectives, etc.) and has the best interests of the child at the core of all interventions. To facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of programmes, it is important to establish 'outcomes' of each activity in measurable terms at the start, and regularly monitor implementation versus outcomes achieved. A thorough documentation of the programme will help assess whether child participation is being enabled inclusively by the implementing entity or not. Alongside, the documentation of barriers to participation, challenges encountered, learnings and achievements, will help ensure a holistic perspective of the child participation landscape.

All the outcomes related to the processes of enhancing children's participation should be measured holistically. The inclusion of children in monitoring and evaluation processes is essential. This will also enable them to understand the results generated by their participation. As children map process outcomes, they should be exposed to background efforts taken to promote their participation at each stage (in collectives, child protection committees, school management committees, etc.) getting a wider perspective of the principles and actions supporting child participation.

The power of collective efforts

Child participation is a shared responsibility. It can be best realised when different stakeholders—parents, communities, schools, government bodies, elected representatives, the media, juvenile justice systems, and others—work together towards child participation objectives. While parents can contribute with positive parenting efforts, clear communication with children, identifying risks early and so on, the community members and *anganwadis* can extend a protective environment for children and connect them to wider supportive networks that uphold child participation. Representatives from the government should be open to incorporating and acting on children's concerns to set up enabling environments. The Juvenile Justice Act should also be implemented in its true spirit, so that children's participation and protection efforts are prioritised across the various structures and by the different functionaries.

¹ The Indian Express, Anganwadi officers diverted to WCD dept, Manish Sisodia orders action, 14 December 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/anganwadi-officers-diverted-to-wcd-dept-manish-sisodia-orders-action-5492756/>



This toolkit, derived from YUVA's experiences of working with children across communities and cities in India since the early 1990s, offers a conceptual framework to guide children's participation, with practical and easily implementable exercises. It focuses on how the quality of children's participation can be improved while supporting children's collectives in the urban.

