S T O R I E S   O F
C H A N G E

2019-2020

Case Studies on
Development Action and Impact

Azim Premji University Publication

1.2 When Youth Lead Change:

Tracing the journey of a promising Mumbai youth collective

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), Maharashtra[2]

Abstract

This case study examines the assertion and exercise of young people's citizenship rights. Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) works to enable marginalized youth self-determine the course of their lives through collective action. This involves the right to associate, to participate, and to undertake action at different levels, from the individual to the family unit, from the community to the larger society, city, and beyond. The process of building youth collectives has driven change,[3] and we will highlight the formation and evolution of one such youth group, the Malvani Yuva Parishad, and the setting up of associated city-level groups to bring about change and to make an impact.

2 Contributed by Doel Jaikishen, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA).
3 Youth collectives bring youth together to develop their articulation of demands, help them build popular support, work on shared objectives, and drive action through collective participation.

When Youth Lead Change - Introduction: Celebrating youth

Asma and Zarin, members of the Malvani Yuva Parishad (MYP), returned home on 12 August 2018 after a long but exhilarating day. They had spent the day with other young people from across Mumbai and Navi Mumbai (Ambujwadi, Parel, Charkop, Lallubhai Compound, Vile Parle, Belapur, etc.) observing International Youth Day 2018. Along with their peers, they organized games, discussions, and sporting events across neighbourhoods in the morning. In the evening, they attended a city-level event on the theme "Safe Spaces for Youth", where a panel of experts from different fields and young people discussed how they could all work together. The day's events saw the active participation of over 300 youth from multiple youth groups across the city.[i]

Just four years ago, Asma and Zarin could not have imagined organizing such city-wide youth discussions and activities. They could not have thought that their small group meetings in the balwadi (child care centre) near their home could coalesce into something so much larger and purposeful, with the promise of driving more change. As girls from marginalized backgrounds struggling to complete their education, hoping to support their families, and trying to avoid harassment and the unwelcome male gaze, they were fighting too many social pressures already. They could not have thought that one day boys would be their partners in bringing about social change through a collective to which they all belonged.

To understand how these changes took place, let's go back in time and examine the site of youth engagement and the prevailing urban realities at the time.

Where it all started: Malvani

Malvani, a suburb area in north-western Mumbai, lies to the west of the Malad Creek and near the corporate park, MindSpace. To the west, along the coastline, lie the lands owned by the Navy while to the north are the Malvani fishing village and Marve village. The

nearest railway station is Malad (about 3.6 km from the main entry into this neighbourhood). Malad occupies an area of 2.82 sq. km, which is densely populated, with an estimated 3,95,000 individuals residing in 27 settlements.[ii]
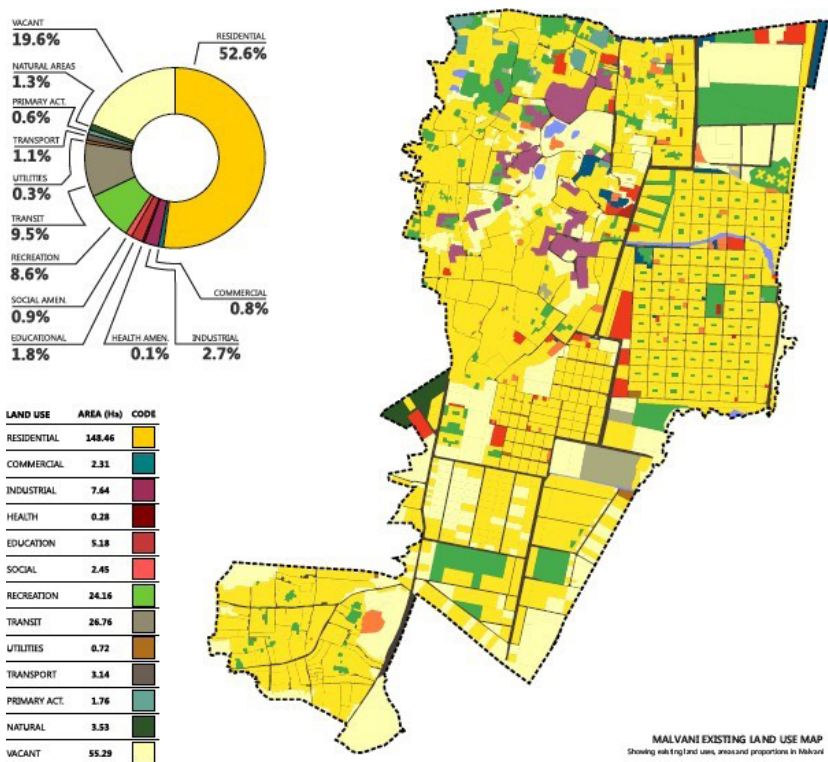
A 1924 map of Malvani shows the area as predominantly marshland, except for the north-eastern side which is marked as a reserved forest. A 2019 map shows the vast changes the area has undergone since the 1920s. Since the 1970s, the number of settlements has increased rapidly, mostly in the form of resettlement colonies. The Sanctioned Development Plan (1991–2001), Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, allocated large areas for public housing. Some years later, the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) developed the MHADA Colony, offering housing for low-, middle-, and high-income groups. Since the 1990s, more people from marginalized backgrounds have started moving to Malvani in larger numbers and settling in New Bhabrekar Nagar, Ambujwadi, and Azmi Nagar. These settlements have grown rapidly and uncontrollably, constituting an urban sprawl populated mostly by historically marginalized communities living in high-density bastis (informal settlements), and dealing with scarce resources and abysmal standards of living.

When Malvani features in the news today, the most common words and phrases used in reference to it are: forced eviction, disease, poor sanitation, poor garbage management, lack of access to basic facilities, school dropouts, crime, violence, rioting. In the popular imagination, the people living in Malvani are seen as "encroachers" and "illegal citizens", and the prevailing development narratives of the city have further rendered invisible the struggles of the people living here, pushing them to the margins.[iii]

Despite some efforts in recent years to address the demands of residents, much needs to be done before even basic public amenities can be provided. A large share of the local population comprises migrants from other parts of the country who lack legal entitlements mentioning their current place of residence or who may have been dispossessed of such documentation due to repeated forced

evictions. This often becomes another reason to deny people their right to live and work in the city, even though it is their labour that sustains and powers the megacity of Mumbai.

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) began its interventions in Malvani in 1998. Our work is focused in certain neighbourhoods and is aimed at empowering local people and facilitating their access to universal human rights and basic services. The youth have been an important segment we engage with, and the criticality of our interventions with them is explained in the next section. Our efforts have focused on strengthening the youth and building their capacities to facilitate their collective action and active engagement for social transformation. Our work with the youth has led to several ongoing outcomes at different levels, because we continue to engage with them to further their empowerment process.

LAND USE	AREA (Ha)	CODE
RESIDENTIAL	148.46	
COMMERCIAL	2.31	
INDUSTRIAL	7.64	
HEALTH	0.28	
EDUCATION	5.18	
SOCIAL	2.45	
RECREATION	24.16	
TRANSIT	26.76	
UTILITIES	0.72	
TRANSPORT	3.14	
PRIMARY ACT.	1.76	
NATURAL	3.53	
VACANT	55.29	

VACANT 19.6%
NATURAL AREAS 1.3%
PRIMARY ACT. 0.6%
TRANSPORT 1.1%
UTILITIES 0.3%
TRANSIT 9.5%
RECREATION 8.6%
SOCIAL AMEN. 0.9%
EDUCATIONAL 1.8%
HEALTH AMEN. 0.1%
INDUSTRIAL 2.7%
COMMERCIAL 0.8%
RESIDENTIAL 52.6%

MALVANI EXISTING LAND USE MAP
Showing existing land uses, areas and proportions in Malvani

Map 1. Malvani: Existing land use map (Source: Malvani People's Plan, KRVIA and YUVA, 2014)

Photo 1. Inside Malvani (Source: YUVA)

Why engage with youth?

According to a recent UN report, India is home to the world's largest youth population, numbering 356 million people in the age group 10–24 years.iv Every fifth Indian is an adolescent (10–19 years) and every third Indian is a young person (10–24 years).v A youth-dominated demographic offers innumerable opportunities and challenges for India. Investing in the health, education, and well-being of this young generation, and upholding their rights and prerogatives, are critical for the country's future. High numbers of young people could translate to immense productivity if their potential is tapped effectively. However, in the absence of meaningful employment, the result could also be large-scale unrest. Young people are important change agents, imbued with energy and the will to work for the betterment of their societies and communities. Yet attempts to silence their voices, and even misdirect their efforts, could result in a frustrated and cynical populace, which may further extend the cycle of hate and intolerance.

Over the years, young people have been subjected to repeated manipulation by those in positions of authority to suit their own vested interests. Their poor knowledge of, and their lack of access to, opportunities (economic, educational, social, etc.) have been used to maintain the status quo, denying them a chance to pursue better prospects and the right to the full exercise of their rights as citizens. In the absence of conscientization and lack of power, the youth are exploited by sections that benefit from manipulating and subjugating them. For instance, the government of India's Skill India programme, which aims to skill 402 million youth by 2022, was found to have substandard training, assessment, and certification standards, even though the targets were reported as having been achieved.vi Similar piecemeal and superficial attempts at youth work are likely to be projected as efforts that instruct the aimless, and correct ignorant or deviant behaviour, instead of encouraging the youth to come on board as active participants and contributors in the development process.

In the case of Malvani too, the youth are among the most vulnerable groups in the heterogeneous communities. They are doubly marginalized, cut off from mainstream society economically and socially, as well as on religious grounds, and face discrimination from their own people. Without adequate access to education and employment opportunities, they are trapped in their present circumstances, unable to develop as conscientious and empowered citizens, and thus the cycle of deprivation is repeated unceasingly.

To address the issue of youth inequality, and to facilitate the positive, disruptive power of youth through means that are driven by and centred on the youth, YUVA has been furthering its engagements in this space. Our interventions are based on core democratic values, accountability in governance, and youth participation for youth development. Our vision is to enable young people to achieve their potential, to capacitate them to be a part of the problem-solving process, and to help them take ownership of the movement to eventually drive it independently and take it forward. Our primary goal of encouraging and facilitating active youth participation is

based on the belief that those who face problems first-hand are best suited to tackling these challenges themselves, with adequate training, support, and knowledge.

YUVA's work with youth is one of its core interventions. The organization was born in 1984, emerging from a youth work project that began in the bastis of Jogeshwari, a western suburb of Mumbai. Our keen observation of, and our participation in, the urbanization and development processes across the country (especially in Mumbai) and our engagements with multiple stakeholders have deepened our understanding of youth-related concerns. This allows us to better strategize and to equip ourselves so we can engage more effectively with this growing and dynamic population and facilitate the co-creation of just and inclusive cities. Youth citizenship is conceived of in the broadest sense, and its importance is stressed repeatedly to ensure that the youth are fully aware of, and are active in demanding, their citizenship rights. Over the years, our work has also diversified in response to the needs of young people. The full effect of this has been elaborated in the 'Early Achievements' section of the case study.

Initial findings in Malvani

In 2014, YUVA conducted a baseline surveyvii of nearly 4,200 youth (between the ages of 15 and 29) in Ambujwadi, the largest basti in Malvani. We discovered that 61 per cent of the surveyed youth had dropped out of the formal education system as they were uninterested in it, while 17 per cent had been forced to drop out due to early marriage. Among the respondents, 45 per cent were not earning and 65 per cent of the total surveyed women were homemakers. When asked about their area of interest, only 10 per cent spoke about it and mentioned their preferences. The majority of the respondents wanted to learn how to operate a computer, and the second highest demand was for tailoring classes. Many respondents did not specify any vocation, but expressed interest in picking up a skill that could offer them the means to a sustainable livelihood.

Thanks to our long association, extensive engagement, and concerted efforts, we have learned a great deal about the emergent challenges facing youth and other community members. The youth took their time to engage with us, and we in turn were careful not to rush or push the process, but to remain supportive facilitators. It was especially challenging to engage with young girls, as many of them had never left their homes. Their life was mostly spent within the four walls of their home, which made it difficult for outsiders to interact with them. We began slow but extensive engagements with parents along with the other community youth to help them better understand and appreciate the work we were doing in the community. This helped develop trust and build relations, and gradually many parents began to allow their daughters to leave home and be a part of community youth meetings.

Theoretical context

YUVA's work with youth has a multipronged approach and follows a number of frameworks that have been specifically adapted to the unique requirements of Malvani. These are in line with YUVA's methodology:

- A 360-degree integrated development model at the basti level involving interventions in interrelated domains empowerment, habitat, livelihood, governance—to ensure comprehensive change

- Formation and strengthening of networks and collectives as a key solidarity-building strategy to address the issue of shrinking democratic spaces for Indian civil society

- Policy research and advocacy based on evidence-based knowledge to drive dialogue on inclusive and equitable policymaking

The youth work in Malvani, which is part of our larger engagements with youth across the city and beyond, is located within

this framework. Our work focuses on ensuring young people's agency while imbuing them with political consciousness, and offering them space for critical reflection, for asking questions, and for engaging in purposive action in pursuit of their self-determination. It is guided by the principles of justice and participatory democracy. It seeks to enable the empowerment of marginalized populations to uphold their citizenship rights and all related responsibilities and obligations. Our work is aimed at engaging youth in city-level networks, campaigns, and advocacy to highlight critical issues that affect people in urban spaces.

Interventions are focused on supporting the empowerment of young people at both the personal and collective levels. In addition to developing rights-based empowerment processes, attention is also devoted to education, skill enhancement, and capacity building, so that the youth can become economically independent and are capable of exploring sustainable livelihood options. To enable structural transformation, the creation of networks with other civil society partners, government departments, the private sector, and

YUVA's framework for working with young people :

Empowerment	*Values*	*Development*
• *Association and Participation*	• *Democracy*	• *Career Guidance*
• *Leadership building of individuals and collectives*	• *Gender Justice*	• *Scholarship support*
	• *Social Justice*	• *Continued Education*
• *Developing political consciousness*	• *Environmental Sustainability*	• *Skill training for employment*
• *Critical reflection and questioning*	• *Secularism*	• *Facilitating marketing linkages*
	• *Scientific Temper*	

other stakeholders is encouraged and undertaken. Underlying these efforts are the values that we hope that this work instils in the youth—values of democracy, gender justice, social justice, environmental sustainability, secularism, and scientific temper.

YUVA's practice of youth-oriented work is aligned with Trudi Cooper's "framework for positive sceptical reflection", a method aimed at improving the youth work model via critique, instead of just offering critique.[viii] Doubt and scepticism are looked upon positively and are connected to reflective practice, aimed at encouraging youth workers (and youth in association) to question established norms and practices and at identifying contradictions, so that they may "usefully guide decision-making".

The practice of constant critical questioning and reflection makes the model of youth work flexible and adaptable in a rapidly changing world, ensuring its enduring relevance and value.

In his essay "Whatever happened to radical youth work?", Tony Jeffs raises an important concern, that is, how youth work is being increasingly driven to devalue the power of the collective, focusing on the individual instead, and attempting to reinforce the idea that individuals are subject to control and powerless in the face of larger systems.[ix] In the Indian context, given the threats to freedom of expression, attacks on people's identities, attempts to control contrary opinions and suppress dissent, and attempts to present a simplified and homogeneous view of diverse and complex realities, there are concerted attacks at multiple levels. In these situations, while it is imperative to promote and uphold individual identities, it is equally important to ensure the creation and strengthening of collectives that can resist political pressure and take forward people's struggles. Given the limited autonomy of young people, along with diminishing spaces for their participation in democratic processes, collective agency has a huge role to play in the assertion of youth citizenship, especially in the context of multiple urban realities such as the informality of the housing and labour sectors, inequality, discrimination, and marginalization of the urban poor.

Our work with youth is also closely allied to an understanding of how "gendered structures of constraint work in different circumstances", to understand how marginalized female youth are affected by the resources they are provided, and how this in turn shapes their capabilities. The growth of individual capabilities is "difficult to observe and measure", but the impact on women's agency and the outcomes that can be achieved as a result (social change, personality development, and so on) are studied and assessed. Our work finds close parallels with what Naila Kabeer states in her essay: "to distinguish between practical livelihood achievements . . . and more strategic changes that touch on underlying power relations and hence have implications for the structures of constraint".[x]

YUVA's work with youth is in contrast to Brian Belton's notion of "relative political neutrality",[xi] as the clear objective of our engagement is enhancing political awareness among the youth. They are encouraged to engage in critical thinking, even to challenge the long-held views of youth workers if these ideas are found to be unsustainable or impractical, and to question them within a participatory democratic framework to arrive at different, unexpected, or unanticipated outcomes. The politicization of young people is viewed positively so that they can reflect on, and act to combat, the different kinds of discrimination they face, to tackle issues of inequality, and deal with questions of injustice. This helps us work towards the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its mission to "leave no one behind", with a renewed commitment towards the Sustainable Development Goals.[xii]

The Malvani Yuva Parishad : A brief history

When we began engaging with the youth in Malvani in 2013, our objectives were clear. We aimed to empower the youth and facilitate the setting up of collectives that would allow young people to take control and ownership of their own rights and demands. We wanted to capacitate the youth and engage them in 360-degree development models and advocacy.

Our initial engagements were focused on establishing relations with the youth and listening to them and their concerns as supportive members. At that point, there were a few local youth groups in the area, and many of the youth had never interacted with people from outside their immediate group or circle of acquaintances.

After a few initial meetings convened by YUVA, the youth from the three bastis of Bhabrekar Nagar, Ambujwadi, and Charkop decided to perform a street play dealing with the issues they faced; they intended to travel to different bastis and speak to their own people. The first play, Dastak, based on the daily harassment faced by girls in public spaces, was enthusiastically rehearsed, and over the next two months 84 performances of the play took place during weekends. Many mistakes were made in those initial days. The presentation skills were amateurish, as the youth were largely self-taught. However, a positive outcome was that a number of young people who watched the play expressed willingness to be associated with these youth. "I must have watched Dastak at least eight to ten times, but from a distance. There was something about the play that attracted me, but I wasn't sure what it was, or how I felt about it. At that point of time, I was quite a different person. I used to catcall girls myself," says Bala Akhade, a member of Malvani Yuva Parishad, as he reminisces about those early days.

Photo 2. From its early days, the Malvani Yuva Parishad has been performing street plays to creatively highlight critical urban issues, especially those concerning the youth (Source: YUVA)

Inspired by the willingness of the youth to engage with one another, a day-long workshop was organized for them soon after. It was attended by 117 youth who participated in identity-building and leadership activities all day. Following this, the youth began developing a loose collective while being active in their respective bastis.

Efforts at youth mobilization continued throughout, with a special focus on reaching out to marginalized youth across communities (adolescent girls, religious minorities, urban poor, deprived castes), and activities were especially planned keeping in mind the interests and concerns of the youth. Exposure visits helped in the early group-building process. These visits were to sites where movements had originated, and to towns where leaders were born. They were organized to acquaint the youth with the life and struggles of revolutionaries and change agents such as B. R. Ambedkar, Savitribai Phule, Shivaji, Birsa Munda, and Fatima Sheikh.

A number of courses were started in the community over time in response to the increasing demand for skill training as well as the increasing interest in empowerment initiatives. Tailoring courses, beautician classes, and mehndi classes helped draw girls (even those who had never left their homes before) while computer and mobile-repairing classes were more popular with boys. Introducing courses for girls that conformed to traditional gender stereotypes and expectations was a conscious decision, as it made it easier for the parents to permit their daughters to leave the confines of their home. These were looked upon as safe occupations for women, and even if they were not allowed to apply for job placements following the conclusion of the course, they could potentially set up home businesses with the knowledge and training they had gained. Once the youth started attending the various courses regularly, it was easier to encourage them to attend youth group meetings and to gradually draw them into the youth engagements then taking place.

Meetings with the youth were regularized, so that they fell into a regular pattern of seeing one another, and feeling sufficiently comfortable in each other's presence to voice their feelings and

Photo 3. Exposure visits are an important medium of learning and interaction for the members of the Malvani Yuva Parishad (Source: YUVA)

concerns without any hesitation. While girls were uncomfortable talking out aloud in the initial meetings, over time they became more relaxed and expressive in front of the group. They gained self-confidence as they began to express themselves not just in their youth group, but also at home, in school, and in other places.

The youth were encouraged to question their existing beliefs and to participate in discussions on gender, democracy, values, and the issues they confronted. Youth groups were also encouraged to reflect on the identity of their collective. Games were a useful medium to engage them and help build teamwork and solidarity, with the participants sometimes not even realizing the power of their collective action until much later. For instance, two teams competed to create the longest line of members without using any external items. Dupattas, shoes, and laces came off, and the youth laughed as they got into the spirit of the game. They approached each other with a hitherto unexperienced sense of freedom and openness, thereby laying the foundation of strong friendships that were built over time.

To strengthen the groups further, 40 youth from different youth groups attended a workshop to set up a youth forum for Malvani.

While the discussions initially took time to shape up, in the end the various youth groups felt the need to merge, and thus the MYP formally came into being in 2014. The members discussed various names for the new body and finally settled on the MYP after a vote.

Learning in the MYP has never been restricted to the four walls of a classroom. Rather, learning takes place through street plays, exposure visits, film screenings, interactive activities, and other formats that have evolved over the years. For instance, an exposure visit to Pune during which girls were denied access to a traditional training facility for men led to a discussion on gender once they returned home. As the youth began to meet more regularly and gained confidence, they began to ask what they could do to improve their communities. Often, the youth also questioned the YUVA staff about their thoughts and ideas, and minor disagreements took place. YUVA's role as a facilitator and not as a driver of the programme remained clear, however, and helped the youth determine the course of action they would take to resolve various issues.

As the group grew in strength and capability, meetings started taking place regularly, without facilitation from a YUVA staff member. The youth became more process-oriented and systematic in conducting their meetings, preparing an agenda for items to be discussed, recording the minutes of each meeting, setting a quorum of members for each meeting, etc. They undertook mapping exercises of their surroundings to better understand the use of local spaces and neighbourhood resources.

Four years after its establishment, the MYP has made many interventions in the local community and even beyond. Let's look at some of their major achievements.

Early achievements

The MYP has been a strong driving force in the life of the youth of Malvani. The group's presence, growth, activities, and engagements over the years have impacted the life of young people on a personal and social level, as described below.

Personal and family-level changes

Developing selfhood: Perhaps the most transformative impact of the MYP has been its influence in shaping the life of its members. The development of individual identities, along with the formation of the identity of the youth group, have been important achievements. Various interventions to empower individuals and develop their personhood were implemented. The development of the culture of the group and its alignment to a set of core values have also been prioritized, to ensure that the group remains a sustainable entity.

Youth group members mention the sense of responsibility that the MYP has imbued in them. "When I was selected as the treasurer of the group in 2014, my excitement knew no bounds. I was so happy to have been selected for this position," says Asma Ansari. The MYP's active efforts to deal with their issues have developed a sense of ownership in them. The members have also been collaborating with YUVA, helping in co-creating activities and processes. Some senior members of the MYP have worked as volunteers on different YUVA projects, contributing their understanding and knowledge to further social transformation efforts.

When some MYP girl members attended their first workshop out of Mumbai, they mentioned the sense of freedom and rush of confidence they experienced. For many years, they had felt that they didn't have the agency to leave the confines of their home. Moreover, as interactions between boys and girls grew, they gained a broader understanding of gender relations and dynamics, and interacted with each other freely, without any awkwardness.

Providing livelihood opportunities (especially for girls) to tackle the issue of early marriage: Youth in Malvani often face discrimination, because of the areas from which they hail and their lack of access to educational and employment opportunities. This results in unequal access to the job market. Moreover, in many areas of Malvani, girls are married off early (even before they reach the legal age of marriage, that is, 18 years). They are restricted to the house from a very early age, and their life holds no promise of economic independence.

To encourage such youth to take up livelihood-generation opportunities, various courses were organized for them. Each course was also designed to introduce many value-based concepts. A segment of the class would be devoted to games and activities that helped develop identity and leadership skills. Even after the course was over, the local youth tried to stay in touch with their fellow course attendees and to engage with those who hadn't joined the youth group already.

Shortly after a few batches of the courses ended, they gained a reputation for offering much more than skill training, and this attracted more youth who sought to sign up for the courses. The MYP played a major role in getting young people together to engage in a co-learning and sharing process with one another, thereby democratizing the process of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing. To ensure accessibility and convenience, they organized classes in places close to people's homes.

Developing critical urban perspectives: The urban landscape is being rapidly transformed, and it is important to understand the various overt and covert processes at play to better grasp how one should react to changing circumstances and how one should work most effectively to achieve the ideal of a just and inclusive society. The MYP members have attended a range of workshops, interactive sessions, and trainings to further their knowledge of the urban landscape. Some MYP members have attended YUVA's City Caravan, a course on co-creating inclusive cities with the help and involvement of youth, to better grasp the complexities of the urban environment and the individual's role in it. As all the movements and campaigns of the MYP are located in the urban sphere, the youth, based on their engagements and experiences, are constantly offering fresh perspectives and ideas, and engaging with the urban with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. The youth members have been participating in a range of workshops and training sessions. Two youth have attended international workshops so far and presented their ideas before the global community, three youth have been a part of national conferences, and eight have represented the MYP at the state level.

Community-level changes

Controlling drug abuse: Drug abuse has been rampant in the community for years. The MYP members decided to stage a street play on this topic to sensitize the community, and they mapped all the local shops selling intoxicants. They engaged with different stakeholders in the community, from school teachers to civil society partners, to decide how the issue could be collaboratively tackled. The play was performed a number of times and was appreciated by the community. However, it was not easy to always nab the drug dealers, as they were closely connected to many community members and managed to evade the MYP members each time.

Photo 4. Asma Ansari (second from right), Malvani Yuva Parishad member, participates in a session on youth work at the World Urban Forum 9, Malaysia, 2018 (Source: YUVA)

On one occasion, a youth member was attacked by a group of addicts. The youth group lodged a complaint with the local police and received police protection for some time. The area where the attack took place was a disused space, frequented by addicts. The youth members thought of reclaiming this space by cleaning it at first, and then using it for their play activities. Over time, this incident led to one of their most powerful movements to date, the city-wide claiming spaces movement (elaborated in the next point).

Claiming spaces for play, self-expression, and creativity: Children's right to play is an inalienable right.[xiii] However, lack of play spaces in the city and lack of access to such spaces is a reality. For many years, the communities in Malvani had demanded spaces that could be used by children and young people in an inclusive and democratic way. In 2016, the youth in the area reclaimed a space for play in Block III which was earlier used by addicts and miscreants, changing the formal use of the space for the creative development of the local youth and children. This space is now frequented by 40–50 children and youth. The community has also started conducting its activities here, helping the space develop in an inclusive manner. News of the early successes of the claiming spaces movements spread to other parts of the city, with the youth sharing their experiences at a city-wide youth forum facilitated by YUVA in 2017. Multiple spaces are being reclaimed by the youth and are being used as safe spaces for self-expression and for the exercise of associated rights.[xiv] This is an ongoing movement which is being taken forward by multiple youth groups. The MYP intends to actively participate and support others within the network to ensure the growth of safe spaces for the city's youth and children.

Towards a more gender-just community: Earlier, many girls from the local communities were not allowed to leave their homes, except to go to school, or to help their parents with household chores. Their cloistered lives at home stunted their intellectual growth and limited their potential. They had no space where they could express themselves and engage with other youth. As the MYP continued with the performances of its street plays across communities, conducted games and activities with the youth, and launched newer engagements and initiatives, the girls gradually started joining the group. YUVA's youth work staff also made it a point to visit homes in the community and speak to the families about letting their daughters spend time in the community centres and with the youth groups. It was challenging to convince the parents to make the attitudinal and mental shift, but gradually more girls joined the MYP and participated actively in various processes.

"My studies had stopped midway, and my life was only restricted to the house. When I started engaging with the youth group, I felt encouraged to see others in similar situations. The first few street play rehearsals that I was a part of got me quite nervous. Over time, I developed a lot of confidence and now I even go to homes in the community and encourage parents to let their daughters spend time with the group," says Zarin Ansari, a member of the MYP since its inception.

The MYP is an important platform for members of the opposite sex to interact with one another and to better understand gender perspectives and nuances. These aspects are presented as a natural part of life, and as an integral component of youth work, through games and honest discussions on sexuality, love, and relationships. Discussions on the identities of individuals belonging to gender-minority groups, and the challenges they face, have broadened empathy and understanding towards them.

Girls have begun to take a stronger stand in demanding their rights and this has had a positive impact on families and communities. Parents are now more accepting of daughters choosing to continue their studies. Some have supported delaying the marriage of their daughters and encouraged them to become economically independent instead. The community earlier was far more averse to the prospect of young boys and girls intermingling, but today they are largely accepting of such interactions. They no longer call out and shame the youth when they see members of the opposite sex together. Thanks to more discussions and presentations on sexual harassment, the community has started taking active measures to help set up safe spaces, and catcalls directed at girls on streets have been drastically reduced. Girls who earlier used to take long, circuitous routes through the neighbourhood just to avoid the gaze of men and boys can now move about much more freely.

Promoting religious tolerance and harmony: Given the vulnerable positions and minority identities of many of the people residing in Malvani, and their limited social interaction with each other (which often does not extend beyond the scope of their work, trade, or

employment), religious tension is ever present in these settlements, and often breaks out into the open. As Bala says, "My uncle had been suggesting that I move to Malvani for many years, but I was unsure because the area that he was recommending had a Muslim-majority population. Even after I eventually moved, I would not really interact much with the youth here." Bala was not alone in feeling vulnerable and unsafe. Many others shared his fear and distrust.

After years of engagement, and through different mediums (community meetings, activities, competitions, debates, street plays) and creative messaging, the youth now regularly interact and communicate with one another, and now it is they who propagate the message of communal harmony. Their sincere efforts to foster peaceful relations with neighbours have inspired other youth to join their ranks to take the message to other communities. Every year, the youth organize iftaari celebrations during the month of Ramzan. During the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi they perform street plays in the local mandals, reaching out to more community members in the process. Festivals of different religious communities are seen as opportunities to unite people.

Towards systemic changes

Promoting awareness of and action for basic rights, and enabling access to welfare measures: The youth continue to engage with their community members on universal human rights, and the need to fight for them. They have participated in efforts to resist forced eviction by the municipal authorities, thanks to their knowledge of legal and other processes, and they have actively taken up the filing of Right to Information (RTI)-based applications to extract vital information related to their community. They are constantly organizing workshops and training programmes for themselves and their family members, to better understand how their rights can be upheld and protected.

Access to safe drinking water is the most pressing concern in the settlements in Malvani. Children and youth are most affected,

because the need to collect water means sacrificing their time, juggling their schedule, and compromising their education to make sure that their families have enough water for the day. When the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) finally initiated applications for water connections, the youth played an important role in facilitating the process and simultaneously participated in a larger city-level campaign for equal water access in bastis of Mumbai. They remain committed to movements in the city that can further their demands, lending their support and amplifying people's voices so that they can be more heard more widely.

Another issue faced by many people in Malvani is the provision and supply of rations. The MYP decided to do something about this. First, they engaged with shop owners and deepened their own understanding of the country's public distribution system (PDS) through regular discussions and informative sessions. Following this, they began making simple presentations to their communities at night, so that friends and relatives could attend these events after the day's work. The youth shared important information and discussed various legal provisions designed to ease the public's access to the rationing system. The MYP members engaged with community members, especially women and girls, through door-to-door campaigns in different societies and imparted useful information that the community could act upon.

Engaging on policies and plans: During the revision process of the Mumbai Development Plan, officially known as the Revised Draft Development Plan 2034, the youth articulated their demands creatively through a city-level campaign addressed to the local government.xv They not only demanded land reservation for amenities like open spaces, study centres, and community centres (which were their immediate needs), but they also raised awareness of the importance of planning issues in the larger community. They organized campaigns on the Revised Draft Development Plan 2034 to inform and educate the public, initiated dialogue within the community, and conveyed the results of this dialogue to the local government. Thanks to their experience with the MYP,

and particularly their learning about spatial distribution in their neighbourhoods, the youth were able to think at a macro level. In 2017, with the support of YUVA, they began a campaign to reclaim spaces, both open spaces and commons, for recreational and other needs (elaborated earlier in this section). They have since claimed spaces in and around their neighbourhoods, along roads, and under flyovers. These spaces were either being misused or were unutilized. In addition, their active engagement in local governance through the planning process motivated them to advocate for changes in the way land is used and to handle, negotiate, and propagate the issue in their neighbourhoods.

So far, over 1,000 youth have been trained across Malvani, five job fairs have been held, and over 250 youth are employed in different capacities post-training. Over 150 youth have received scholarships. More than 100 youth have returned to the Open University or enrolled for distance-learning modules, having dropped out of the formal education system earlier. Our work has been taken forward by more than ten partners over the years.

Challenges and conflicts

It had been months since the MYP had been set up. Multiple discussions and activities had been organized. The youth had participated actively, encouraged others to join them, and sought the support of the community to take their efforts forward. However, something was amiss. The MYP still did not have a distinct identity of its own.

To address this issue, YUVA facilitated another workshop on building the identity of the MYP. Sessions were organized on the importance of constitutional values, and the formation of one's personal identity was connected to one's larger identity as a citizen of the country. An election was held during the workshop, and a body of leaders was elected for the MYP. While these initial steps in identity formation were being implemented, internal conflicts

started brewing. A few members were unhappy with the leadership structure and decided to break away from the MYP. This was an important lesson for the MYP, as the group had been focusing on participatory and democratic processes from the start. Yet, even while the MYP had been observing these values, a section of the youth had been feeling isolated. This was an important moment for the group to step back and assess what steps could be taken in the future to get everyone on the same page and work together, to the extent possible. The youth discussed how the leadership skills of certain youth members had been prioritized and how it was necessary to focus on building a second line of leadership as well.

Youth from different areas, with conflicting interests and contrary points of view, also fell into disagreements many a time. However, as they engaged with each other in organizing more campaigns and movements, the youth discovered more common ground between themselves and were able to interact with each other with more maturity and mutual respect.

These are some of the challenges that were encountered in the early years of the functioning of the group. As it grows and evolves, the MYP is bound to face newer and more difficult challenges, and these will need to be tackled accordingly.

Learnings

Based on YUVA's engagement with youth empowerment processes, we assumed that we would be able to engage with youth in Malvani in a gradual process of transformation. However, our path with the youth from Malvani has taken a different direction. Over the last few years, traditional "influences" have changed and there has been a major change in the local political landscape. The influence of social media, increasing saffronization of the body politic, and a deepening sense of insecurity among minority communities are some of the everyday challenges faced by youth. In response, we have changed our methods of engagement to address contemporary issues. To better facilitate and empower the youth, we have been constantly updating our training and facilitation processes and

adapting them to the unique requirements of local communities. Learnings from our engagements with the MYP have also helped us implement changes in our interactions with other youth groups across the city. These new flexible and adaptable approaches have also helped bring separate groups together to form city-level forums, offering platforms for freewheeling discussion and debate.

Youth trained by YUVA are now training new batches of youth through refresher camps and orientation sessions. Encouraged by the efforts of YUVA in actively taking up their issues, other youth have approached the organization and shared their ideas about how issues they are facing could be similarly tackled by the collective to which they belong or one that they seek to form. For instance, girls in Malvani repeatedly raised the issue of male domination in personal spaces. This eventually led to the formation of another youth group (Nakshatra) that focused exclusively on issues faced by girls and women. The group launched simple but effective initiatives like the rating-card campaign on the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule, a champion of women's rights. On this day, girls created a rating card for their mothers and went from door to door, thanking their mothers for supporting them. The campaign ended on an emotional note, with many of the mothers pledging to support the empowerment of their daughter.

Our initial engagements in Malvani were focused more on efforts to empower the local youth. YUVA referred interested youth members to skill-training courses run by other organizations. However, as YUVA's interactions with the youth in Malvani developed, the demand for skill training in addition to empowerment initiatives grew. It was important for YUVA to adapt its interventions to take into account these requirements of the youth and to empower them in a more general sense so they could deal with emerging challenges and ensure their economic independence.

Earlier, the interventions facilitated by YUVA were focused more on building knowledge to address issues faced by people in the community. Over time, the focus has shifted. Now more attention is paid to developing personal capacities, particularly those related

to life skills and attitude development. Sessions on developing one's thoughts and approaches, i.e., understanding how internal, mental, and attitudinal changes can drive and achieve more lasting change and support knowledge-building and skilling initiatives, are already in place. Additionally, sessions on skill development are related to individual areas of interest (such as puppet making) and those that strengthen advocacy efforts (such as video-making and photography).

Conclusion

The MYP is currently engaged in drafting its constitution and vision document, so that these can serve as the guiding light for all future engagements of the group. The youth are detailing plans on how their values can be grounded more firmly and taken forward in their work on different issues across sites. The MYP plans to register itself in the near future. The members are ideating on ways of developing a stronger presence in the city, expanding the operations of the group, engaging in networking activities, and working with more stakeholders to achieve social change. A third line of leadership is also being developed and trained, so that strong leadership at different levels is available when needed. The individual growth of youth members is another priority area.

Photo 5. Malvani Yuva Parishad members celebrate the third foundation day of the organization, 2017 (Source: YUVA)

Youth transformation remains the long-term goal of YUVA's youth work. To achieve this, the first step was establishing the MYP and facilitating the participation of young men and women in a large low-income neighbourhood where young people do not have the opportunity nor the means to fulfil their potential. As this case study shows, the first outcomes of this process were changes at both the individual and family levels. The next round of changes took place at the community level. This transformation was based on the acceptance of various religious identities among the local communities, challenging of gender norms, understanding of urban plans for localities prepared by municipal bodies, challenging of corruption in the public distribution system, and so on. These changes have enabled the youth to engage with government systems, bureaucrats, the police, the media, and other stakeholders. This process of change is gradual but ongoing. It reinforces our belief in the theory of change in our engagements with young people. It also motivates us to do even more to facilitate the processes of youth empowerment in Mumbai.

Acknowledgements

[i] Shirodkar, S. (2018, August 18). Engaging on safe spaces for youth. YUVA blog. Retrieved from *https://medium.com/@yuvaonline/ engaging-on-safe-spaces-for-youth-7a65a2c3f6f3*

ii KRVIA and YUVA (2014). Malvani people's plan. Mumbai: KRVIA and YUVA. *http://yuvaindia.org/wp- content/ uploads/2017/03/Malvani-Peoples-Plan-Complete.pdf*

iii D'Souza, D. (2015, December 15). It isn't a slum demolition— it's the destruction of homes and lives. Scroll.in. Retrieved from *https://scroll.in/article/775747/it-isnt-a-slum-demolition-its-the-destruction-of-homes- and-lives*

iv Economic Times (2014, November 18). India has world's largest youth population: UN report. Economic Times. Retrieved from *https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/ india-has-worlds-largest- youth-population-un-report/ articleshow/45190294.cms*

v Chandramouli, C. (2011). Adolescents and youth in India: Highlights from Census 2011. Census of India, 2011. Retrieved from *http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011- Documents/PPT_ World_Population/Adolescents_and_Youth_in_India_Highlights_ from_Census_2011.pptx*

vi Mallapur, C. (2017, July 26). High targets and wasted funds: The problems with the Skill India programme. Scroll.in. Retrieved from *https://scroll.in/article/844871/high-targets-and-wasted-funds-the-problems-in-the- skill-india-programme*

vii YUVA (2014). A situational analysis of health, education and livelihood in Ambujwadi. Mumbai: YUVA.

viii Cooper, T. (2012). Models of youth work: A framework for positive sceptical reflection. Youth and Policy, 1(109), 98–117. Retrieved from *http://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/ uploads/2017/06/cooper_models_of_youth_work.pdf*

ix Jeffs, T. (2002). Whatever happened to radical youth work? Concept, 12(2). Retrieved from *http://concept.lib.ed.ac.uk/article/ view/2363/3483*
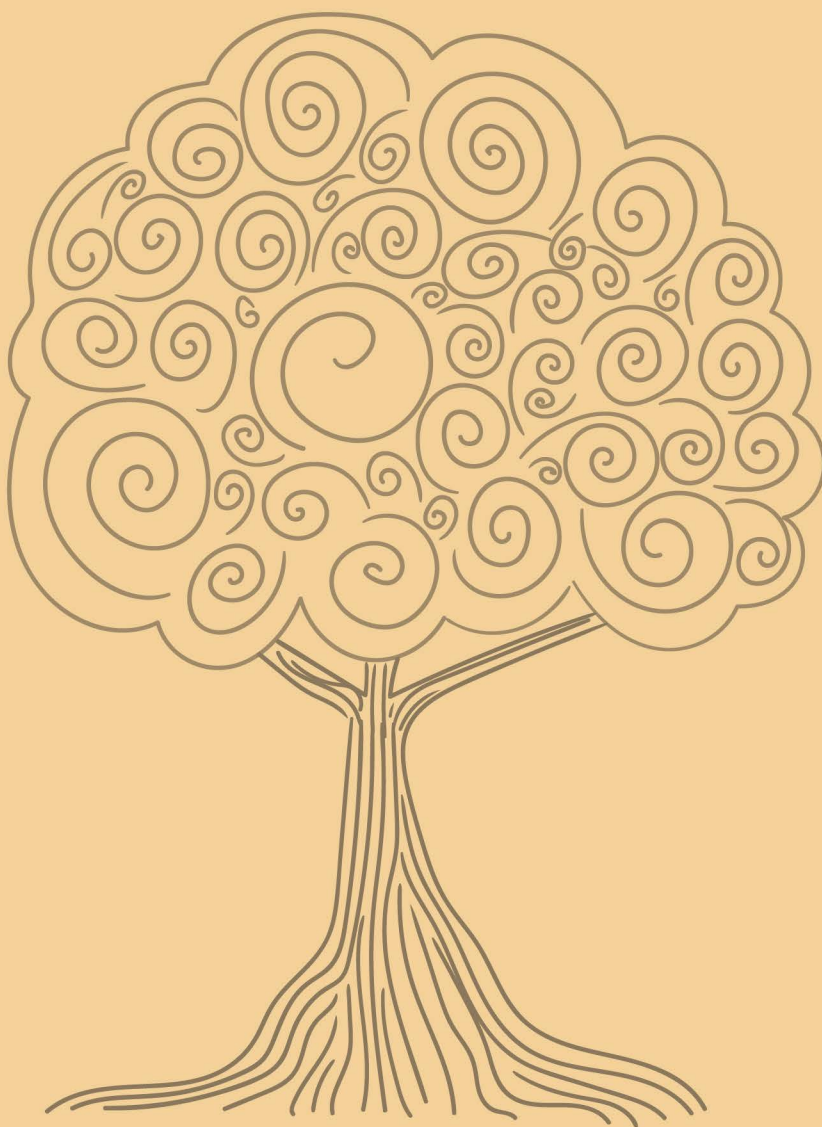
x Kabeer, N. (2018, September). Gender, livelihood capabilities and women's economic empowerment: Reviewing evidence over the life course. Gender & Adolescence: Global Evidence. Retrieved from *https://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Economic-Empowerment-Report-WEB.pdf*

xi Belton, B. (2010). Radical youth work: Developing critical perspectives and professional judgement. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.

xii Leave No One Behind Partnership (n. d.). Leave no one behind: Why we've come together. The Leave No One Behind Partnership. Retrieved from *https://action4sd.org leavenoonebehind/*

xiii S. Chatterjee. (2013, October 17). For healthy development, give children their right to play. Hindustan Times. Retrieved from *https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/for-healthy-development-give-children-their- right-to-play/story-ANsmgHd4mnxxVINUZEpp1J.html*

xiv Yuvaonline (n.d.). #UprootedChildhoods—Claiming spaces for play. YUVA blog. Retrieved from https://medium.com/@yuvaonline/claiming-spaces-for-play-a1f543c5eebb

xv Marina, J. (2018, September 6). Young people's participation: Critical for responsive city planning. Urbanet. Retrieved from https://www.urbanet.info/mumbai-youth-participation-urban-planning/

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), Maharashtra

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) is a non-profit development organisation committed to enabling vulnerable groups to access their rights. The organisation envisions to end poverty and

promote human rights in the developing world with focus on urban poor, natural resource management and people- centric urban governance and planning. Founded in Mumbai in 1984, currently YUVA operates in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Assam and New Delhi.

YUVA wants to create a space for engagement with the urban poor so that they can participate in decision making for themselves. Towards this YUVA plans to build organizations of people for direct action, conduct popular education for building awareness, to undertake conscientization through training process, to provide access for the fulfilment of basic rights and needs. YUVA encourages the formation of people's collectives that engage in the discourse on development, thereby ensuring self-determined and sustained collective action in communities. This work is complemented with advocacy and policy recommendations.