

CITIES BY ADOLESCENTS: DESIGNING AN INCLUSIVE URBAN FUTURE

Connect Karo - Session Debrief





ABOUT CONNECT KARO

Connect Karo is WRI India's annual flagship event that brings together Indian and global leaders and policymakers, peer organizations, donors, and stakeholders to discuss critical issues related to sustainable cities, clean energy, food, land and water and climate action. A vibrant dialogic space, this is a platform that allows policymakers, investors, philanthropists and business leaders to engage with practitioners and researchers to seek out nuanced, contextualized solutions to the most urgent challenges of our time.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The **Safe, Vibrant and Healthy Public Spaces** initiative aims to drive systemic change by enabling two Indian cities (Jaipur and Bhubaneswar) to employ innovative and interactive tools for the development of adolescent-oriented public spaces, which will result in better health and well-being outcomes. This is being done through an assessment, design and improvement approach using the public space assessment (PSA) framework, tactical urbanism approach and capacity building of city officials. As Public Space Ambassadors, adolescents have been co-leading these efforts with local/city partners in the focus cities.



ABOUT THE SESSION

The session **Cities by Adolescents: Designing an Inclusive Urban Future** aims to present adolescent-led co-creative public space development as a catalyst to overall adolescent well-being, especially for adolescents in low-income group (LIG)/Vulnerable communities, during climate stress. The session seeks to spotlight adolescents’ experiences through their involvement in the project, to amplify their voices as they underline the link between quality public spaces and their overall health and well-being; especially in the case of representation from underserved communities.

Key objectives

- Understand the challenges around inclusion of adolescents in urban development and urban governance ecosystems.
- Comprehend the current urban governance mechanisms for adolescent inclusion in urban development.
- Understand how adolescent voices can be systemically incorporated into data-led urban development practices shaping adolescent lives.
- Outline the plausible approaches for moving beyond health benefits of green spaces towards making visible health impacts on adolescents.
- Reimagine cities, physically and socially, to ensure adolescent well-being is centered within our responses to current and future climate crisis.

Agenda

TIME	SESSION NAME
4.00- 4.05 PM	Session introduction
4.05- 4.15 PM	Keynote address
4.15- 4.30 PM	Interactive session: City Spaces and Adolescents
4.30- 4.45 PM	Presentation: Co-creating Safe, Vibrant and Healthy Public Spaces, Tales from Bhubaneswar and Jaipur
4.45- 5.30 PM	Panel Discussion and Q & A: Cities by Adolescents, for an inclusive urban future

Participants

Participants ranged from professionals working in the development sector, representatives of start-ups working with urban public spaces, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and students.

The idea of the HCA II Project is to create a shared language that reflects the collective aspirations of the youth, while ensuring this shared language percolates from the local to the global.



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The keynote address started with the observation that the uncertainties of our times, political, economic, social exacerbated by climate unpredictability and increased disruptions by climate extreme events is greatly impacting the well being of adolescents. However, she presented the positive stories of everyday young heroes from across the globe who when given agency and opportunity leveraged it for positive change. She cited examples from Indonesia where youth were able to create indicators for change that were later incorporated in local plans; Liberia where the youth called for people not to steal their peace; Bolivia where Youth Council could participate in the La Paz constitution and city plans, and Africa where young people advise the UN Habitat and sit on the Youth Advisory Board.



She congratulated the SVHPS team on the notable success of the Public Spaces Assessment Framework (PSAF) co-created by adolescents in Rajasthan and Odisha. The keynote concluded with a call for action to the audience to create champions in corridors of power to make space for young voices to be a part of decision making and taking on more agency.

Achieve SDGs

The UN Decade for acceleration of achieving the SDG needs to be embraced and actioned in the Global South.



Listen to youth voices

The UN General Assembly Summit of the Future highlights the need for youth voices in shaping urban futures.

Create youth agents of change

Young people must not just be seen as engaged participants but rather as active agents in reimagine and redefining urban environments.



WRI India is leading the session **Cities for Adolescents-The NexGen Agenda** at the **World Urban Forum 2024**, championing for youth voices in decision making.

INTERACTIVE SESSION: City Spaces and Adolescents

The interactive session was designed to engage with the audience, especially the adolescents and introduce the idea of the importance and relevance of adolescent inclusion in urban public space development. The format of a quiz was taken as a subtle way to not only engage the audience but also break some pre-conceived notions on adolescent presence in the urban population.

1. What is the population (%) share of adolescents in India ?

- A. 30-40 %
- B. 20-30 %
- C. 10-20 %

21% of India's population (253 million) are adolescents (Source: UNICEF)
Majority of the crowd chose the right answer.



2. Why do you think there is a need for public spaces catering to adolescent needs in the city?

Public spaces are not only essential for adolescents to unwind and express their opinions, but also to reconnect with nature

spaces promote social interactions, provide opportunities for leisure, and serve as an escape from daily pressures.

Public spaces also offer a unique environment where people from different ages, castes, and genders can come together, building a sense of community and inclusivity.

3. Do you observe specific distinctions between adolescents with different genders or with disability, in accessing and using the public spaces in your cities?

Girls often face restrictions when accessing public spaces at night or if the location is too far, whereas boys encounter no such limitations.

Girls often feel unsafe in public spaces when there are few people around or when the area is poorly lit. Personally, I often choose not to go out due to these safety concerns.

When it comes to people with disabilities, there are very few facilities available in public spaces. Additionally, many people are not aware of or attentive to their needs, often failing to acknowledge or accommodate them.

4. Have you been a part of community or city authority interactions for the improvement of your neighborhood in the city? If yes, then in what ways?

Yes, I have been part of such discussions. We have visited OTDC Department where we had conducted a public space audit along with the officials for their campus.

As part of Raahgiri, we sensitized community about inclusive Public Space through different engagement activities, by blindfolding them, teaching them sign languages etc.

I also got an opportunity to work with women from SHGs, MASS Members, and Anganwadi workers where we discussed our concerns within the public spaces, and what we envision for them.



PRESENTATION:
Co-creating Safe, Vibrant and Healthy Public Spaces
Tales from Bhubaneswar and Jaipur

Team WRI India provided an overview of the project to the audience through a presentation, following which, the adolescents involved in the project presented their perspectives and voiced for adolescent friendly public spaces. They spoke about how they have benefited from the project, such as gaining confidence, public speaking skills, exposure and access to varied parts of the city, that they would not have had otherwise.



Jaipur Story

The project has given Tanish a platform to learn, contribute to society, and champion for children's rights to public spaces. Engaging in workshops, community meetings, and training sessions has boosted his confidence and inspired him to raise awareness for the needs of children and adolescents in their community.

Growing up I noticed that the basic right to play is often neglected, and no one listens to kids' needs.



The project provides us an opportunity to learn and contribute meaningfully to society.



The project provided me a platform to express, and voice needs in front of community, decision makers etc. boosting my confidence.



This project made me realize that we can work towards making society more inclusive and responsive to the needs and rights of children and adolescents.

हमें चाहिए ऐसा park जिसमें उड़ती हो तितलियाँ
हमें चाहिए ऐसी जगह जिसमें हो हमारी दुनिया
हमें चाहिए ऐसी कालोनी जिसमें हो सुरक्षा हमारी
हमें चाहिए ऐसी दीवारे जिसमें खिलते हो फूल बोहोत सारे
हमें चाहिए ऐसी गालियाँ जिसमें चलते हमें डर ना लगे
हमें चाहिए ऐसी जगह जहाँ हममें कोई फरक न करे
हमें चाहिए खुली जगह जिसमें हो शुद्ध हवा
स्वस्थ वातावरण हमें है भाता
ऐसा जब हमारा जयपुर बन जाता
शिक्षा का हो संसार हमारा
जिससे भविष्य में हो उजियारा

Bhubaneswar Story

Sonali's involvement in the project led to her role in the Governance Council, where she got opportunities to collaborate with city stakeholders to address adolescent needs and improve public spaces. The project has helped her develop skills such as public speaking and community outreach which helps her voicing for sustainable solutions at the grassroots level.

As GC members we could contribute to the planning and design of activities on the ground.



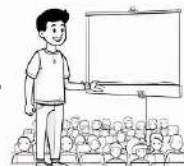
GC provided us opportunity to engage with city stakeholders, including the Bhubaneswar Municipal Commissioner and other key officials, to discuss the project and seek support for various issues.



GC enabled us to learn from each other's best practices (both the cities) and co-create solutions.



My engagement in the project has significantly enhanced my public speaking skills, boosting my confidence to speak in large platforms like CK2024.



PANEL DISCUSSION: Cities by Adolescents, for an inclusive urban future

The panel discussion emphasized that the climate crisis is a child rights crisis. It also highlighted that if the future cities are not redesigned through the climate lens they will not work. There is also not only a lack of data that represents the needs and aspirations of children but also a lack of platforms for young people, policy makers and city authorities can come together to engage with climate change. The work on the ground reflects the need to drive for having children and adolescents on the table while also the potential for public spaces to become entry points to creating child friendly cities. In conclusion, cities conducive to the needs of the children must be informed by the adolescents themselves.





What are the systemic barriers that prevent active and meaningful adolescent participation within the urban development ecosystem? What are some of the steps that should be taken by urban decision makers?



Ensure that adolescent voices are heard. This is crucial as per the Human rights perspective

Ensure that child participation is a standard component of local governance



Ensure resources reach the vulnerable populations through statutory earmarking of budgets.



Adolescents have a legal and moral right to live in a clean, sustainable environment.



The digital, green, and care economies will rely on young people - the next human capital, to derive growth.



Hyun Hee Ban
Chief, Social Policy, UNICEF
India

If a city is designed to be good for children and adolescents, it inherently becomes a better place for everyone.



What are the ways we can reimagine cities, physically and socially as we push for low carbon, inclusive and resilient urban environments, to ensure adolescent well-being is centred within our responses to current and future crisis?

It is essential for future cities to include safety and accessibility as their prime agenda.



Co-creating public spaces with community involvement ensures they meet diverse needs.



Unless cities are reimagined through the lens of climate change it is not possible to design for the future.



Relying on a single "nice" public space is insufficient, scaling and distribution are key.



Rogier van den Berg
Global Director - Sustainable
Cities, WRI

Netherlands tops the list of Happy Cities because adolescents have freedom of speech and independence to move freely.



Anshul Tewari

Founder & CEO, Youth Ki Awaaz

Urban local governments must engage youth in decision-making, support youth-led initiatives, and invest in capacity building. A centralized platform for sharing youth perspectives is essential, alongside a shift from top-down to inclusive, participatory decision-making.



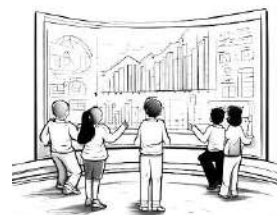
Can you elaborate on what mechanisms the framework offers to operationalize and sustain this collaboration and for what? How is this a win-win for involved stakeholders?

There is lack of platforms where young people, policy makers and city authorities can come together.



Urban local governments (ULBs) need to implement structured engagement plans to include youth voices in decision-making.

Investing in the capacity building of youth is very crucial.



There is a need for a data commons platform to centralize and share information on youth perspectives and climate issues.



Dharitri Patnaik

Founder Chairperson, Humara Bachpan Trust

Patnaik advocates for having children/adolescents on the table to address issues on data collection and create mandates for furthering children / adolescent inclusion in decision making.



From ground experience, can you share insights on existing data inequalities that are preventing inclusive decision making for adolescent well-being? What are the ways in which adolescent voices can be systemically incorporated into data frameworks?

As a nation, we struggle with both the quality of data and the tools needed for effective data collection.



Proper funding and specific sections in budgets for adolescent-focused schemes are essential for influencing effective policies.

Adolescent voices need to be there in every forum, their voices need to get exclusive place on the table to drive meaningful change.



Without policy mandates, data alone does not drive change.





What actions can be taken while developing safe, vibrant and healthy public spaces, to ensure we move beyond assumptions of health benefits of green spaces towards making visible health impacts on adolescents living in urban areas?



Public spaces in slums or vulnerable communities face significant issues such as violence, malnutrition, and health problems like diarrhea.

The key motivations for cities to invest in public spaces include improving health and safety, followed by providing recreational opportunities.



To strengthen our case for investing in public spaces, we need to highlight impact stories that demonstrate how these spaces positively affect communities, particularly focusing on health, safety, and overall well-being.



Dr. Sudeshna Chatterjee
Program Director, Sustainable Cities & Transport, WRI India

To support investment in public spaces, we should highlight stories showing their positive impact on community health, safety, and well-being.



What is the role of HCA initiative in fostering innovation, within adolescent led data collection and participatory approaches to build an inclusive and diverse cohort of adolescent who can meaningfully contribute towards shaping cities of the future?

It's essential to encourage more participatory approaches in urban planning



We should explore global events to amplify youth voices and address their needs more effectively.



Tailoring engagement methods is important for more involvement of adolescents in urban development processes.



Meaningful participation is crucial, and a local-to-global approach is needed.

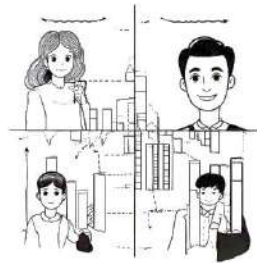


Jaya Srinivasan
In-Country Manager India, HCA-II, Ecomys UK Ltd.

Public spaces may not immediately come to mind when discussing health, but they play a critical role in addressing various aspects of adolescent well-being.



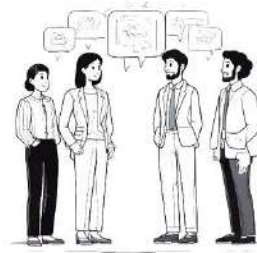
Data plays a critical role in informed and effective policy making, especially for policies directed towards adolescents.



The current climate crisis has created a unique need to reimagine our cities to be more productive, climate-resilient, and liveable in the future, for which, we need to put people, nature, climate at the heart of all urban processes.

Adolescents need to be treated not just as passive recipients of urban services, but also as vital stakeholders, active participants, and inheritors of our cities. Planning and governance processes need to reflect this.

For any planning process to be more inclusive, it is necessary to not only understand the dynamics of the current ecosystem but also to create a newer network that has wider reach and access.



In a post COVID world, the relationship between health and public spaces has become a widespread topic of discussion. However, this connection is not often made explicit.



A local-to-global approach emphasizes the need for solutions that start at the grassroots level but are scalable to larger contexts. Collaboration across multiple sectors—urban planning, public health, education, environmental protection, and governance—is vital for bringing innovative and "out of the box" strategies. Each sector offers unique insights and expertise, which, when integrated, can produce holistic, more effective solutions for creating healthier, safer environments.

SUMMING UP

The session highlighted the vital role of adolescents in shaping urban futures, highlighting that a sense of ownership over public spaces encourages them to proactively improve their environments. To frame more effective policies, there is a pressing need for better disaggregated data on adolescents to address their specific needs. Additionally, the speakers emphasized on democratic platforms that facilitate adolescent decision-making, supported by dedicated budgets and inclusive governance structures to enhance participation. Empowering young people to actively participate in shaping their communities not only benefits them but also leads to more vibrant and resilient cities.

Key Takeaways

- A sense of ownership over public spaces encourages adolescents to proactively improve urban futures.
- Better disaggregated data on adolescents will help frame more effective policies.
- The climate crisis is also a child right crisis, and climate impacts on younger people must be mapped.
- democratic platforms for adolescents' decision making, dedicated budgets, and inclusive governance structures will enable greater participation.
- Highlight impact stories on how spaces co-led by adolescents improve health, safety and well-being.

At Connect Karo 2025, we will be presenting our on-ground work of implementing adolescent friendly public spaces involving adolescent public space ambassadors, in the two cities of Jaipur and Bhubaneswar.



PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

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WRI INDIA

**CONNECT
KARO** 2024
for People, Nature & Climate



**Safe Vibrant and
Healthy Public Spaces**

Bhubaneswar | Jaipur

» Fondation Botnar initiative



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