

*All India Institute of Local Self-Government organised the fourth webinar in the series of monthly webinars on 'Localising SDGs' in collaboration with CityNet. The webinar based on the topic 'Imperatives of Building Inclusive Cities' was organised on September 28, 2021*

#### TEAM URBAN UPDATE

**T**he panel of the event consisted of Dr Dnyaneshwar Mulay, Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); Rushda Majeed, India Representative, Bernard van Leer Foundation; Arbind Singh, National Coordinator, National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI); and Sneha Gupta, President, Indiability Foundation. The event was moderated by Abhishek Pandey, Editor, Urban Update.

Pandey began the discussion and said that building inclusive cities is important as urbanisation is expanding with full pace and cities contribute to almost 55 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Asia. A big population of the cities in India is living in informal settlements which are in need of proper housing, sanitation, sewage management, etc. Public spaces

are also not inclusive for every section of the community and human rights is an important component of liveable cities which has not been addressed extensively, he added.

Dr Dnyaneshwara Mulay began by speaking about inclusivity as the basic concept on which cities should form in present times. Building human beings in these cities is more important and should follow the principle of Mahatma Gandhi to develop people of a region and address their shortcomings. Smart cities should be accessible to vulnerable sections of societies such as the elderly population, children, women, and people with disabilities (PwDs), he added. One of the major differences between the cities of India and other countries is the presence of extreme poverty. He added that although the Government of India has formulated various programmes for

cities and their holistic development, the implementation of these policies still remains a problem. Resettlement of people due to development of the region is also plagued with loopholes as private builders and stakeholders exploit the poor. Inclusivity is all about compassion and equality among all sections living in a society, he added.

Rushda Majeed continued the discussion by introducing the Bernard van Leer (BvL) Foundation, which has been working for children since decades, and how cities can be made inclusive for them. She added that early childhood is important and maximum development of a child's brain is done only at this stage. She introduced the concept of Urban 95, which entails building cities keeping in mind the height of 95 centimetres (cm), which is the standard height of a three-year old child, as per World Health



**EXPERTS DISCUSS NEED TO BUILD CITIES-FOR-ALL**

Organisation's standards. The project mostly considers core areas such as public spaces, mobility, neighbourhood planning, and air quality, she added.

Majeed added that BvL Foundation sees through the lens of healthy child development, including the services for babies and toddlers, service for caregivers, family-friendly planning and design, and healthy environment for children. She also cited various examples where the foundation has worked with cities such as Mumbai, Pune, and Udaipur, in order to intervene and develop the public spaces for children in parks with dedicated playing spot and necessary amenities. Talking about some changes in the existing system, she said, "For example, we can work on the timing of red signals at traffic lights. We can increase the timings of red signals so that someone holding a child or carrying a baby can cross the road easily."

Arbind Singh was the next panellist to speak. He began by talking about the urban informal sector and said that the first thing to improve when we talk of inclusive cities is the exploitation of the informal sector by police, municipal officers, etc. He added, "The country has a law on street vendors and their management which mandates that there has to be a town vending committee and 40 per cent of the members should be street vendors. It also says that no decision should be taken without due approval of all its members, with municipal commissioner as chairperson. This is a first-of-its-kind act which mandates citizen participation." However, most of the town vending committees do not fulfil the criteria set by the Street Vendors Act (SVA) 2014, he added. He also emphasised the importance of Grievance Redressal Cell (GRC) headed by the District Judge and mandated by the SVA 2014, which is an important body as far as the needs of street vendors are concerned.

Singh added that until the livelihood of the informal sector is improved, inclusivity in Indian cities is a far-fetched dream. The urban economy is all about the livelihood of people as



a majority of migrants move to cities in search of work, whether it is street vendors or other job seeking population, he added. There are loopholes as far as the GRC is also concerned as many street vendor representatives complaint about the absence of an office for the GRC and lack of attention on the part of the administration. Cities are the engines of growth but these engines should be available for everybody and not limited to the rich and privileged section, he added. Singh said, "We need ambitious municipal officers who feel seriously about the inclusivity of cities and everybody has the right to live with equality."

Sneh Gupta talked about the disability scenario of the country and talked about how inclusive cities with space for disabled can be made a reality. She explained the taboo attached with PwDs in relation to the names they are called, the stereotypes concerning them being ineligible for equal opportunities, etc. She added, "Education is really important for children, irrespective of their disabilities, and just 21 per cent of the total Indian schools comply with the education standards for disabled children. This number goes on decreasing as we go from primary (60.47 per cent) to higher secondary (5.07 per cent) and universities (one per cent)." She added that the overall mission of Disability Foundation is to integrate children with physical disabilities into the mainstream society at a normal footing.

Gupta talked about the social change program initiative named 'Image',

which stands for Indian Mixed Ability Group Events. It is more of a skill development platform which uses sports and other activities and which emphasises on youth with disabilities so that they can spearhead their own social inclusion. She added that through 'Image', the disabled children will be integrated into the economy and they are taught that in order to be included in the mainstream community, they have to be productive. Sports and plays are used in the programme to teach them the importance of leadership, respect and communicate without the need of verbal medium. She added that these disabled children have impacted the lives of many in various sectors such as healthcare, where they made tip-tap hand washing booths for villagers and the results were more than satisfactory. Similar initiatives are being taken in the fields of education and gender, disability awareness, environmental awareness, etc. Gupta also showed a short video to the panellists and attendees which showed these children with disabilities and their achievements in various fields, including personal agriculture farming, education, and sports.

Through the webinar, Urban Update brought to the limelight the importance of thinking about everyone while planning cities. We must understand that in any urban settlement, there is diversity in the way people interact with their surroundings. And these surroundings must be developed appropriately to facilitate interactions of different kinds. ■