



Comprehending and recommending planning policies and proposals for making planning sensitive to ensuring accessibility of persons with disabilities in Indian cities

-by Parul Sharma¹

Summary

Over the past few decades, the Asia-Pacific region especially the developing countries like India has witnessed significant social development driven by economic growth, which has generated new jobs, increased labour incomes, strengthened social protection systems, and improved access to basic services and other amenities. Nevertheless, India continue to face a wide range of systemic challenges that undermine inclusive and sustainable development. For example, the devastating social and economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to plague the subregion in the near future. In addition, widening inequalities continue to drive social divides and

¹ Mr. Parul Sharma is a Ph.D scholar at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. He is a global accessibility consultant and was earlier an expert on Urban policies and Disability inclusion (LNOB) at the UNESCAP and a Regional Advisor to UN-Habitat while working on mainstreaming LNOB in national urban policies and programmes in various South Asian Countries.

Author-Parul Sharma, Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

International E-Journal: Disabilities Studies, Special Education & Rehabilitation.

Vol- 7, No.1, 2023. ISSN: 2455-8001 (Online)



disproportionately impact the most discriminated and marginalized individuals and communities in society.

Similarly, governments across the Indian cities are yet to address worsening environmental crises. Climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss are projected to negatively transform the lives of people across Indian cities and require interventions and transitions of an unprecedented scale. In particular, climate change and environmental degradation can have disproportionate and severe impacts on persons with disabilities. The pandemic has also added urgency to close digital gaps.

Fifteen percent of the global population has a disability, which will only increase with aging demographic trends. The elderly population is expected to rise to 1.4 billion by 2030 and 2.1 billion by 2050. Half of the world's population already live in cities and cities will play an increasingly crucial role in promoting inclusion and addressing the needs of a rapidly changing demographic. As technology advances and assistive technologies are developed, disability will become increasingly common and cities must be transformed to be inclusive of everyone. The Capability Model argues that disability is not the attribute of the individual, instead it is created by barriers that exist in the social environment and therefore requires social change. When barriers exist, inclusive communities work to transform the way they are organized to meet the needs of all people by mobilizing social, political, and economic factors to identify and eliminate participation barriers. Radical inclusion is a framework aimed at eliminating the barriers that hinder individuals and communities from reaching their full potential. It goes beyond full participation to create inclusive systems that promote equity and resilience. Inclusive communities aim to remove barriers that perpetuate poverty, inequality, disempowerment, isolation, and exclusion.

Unsustainable planning practices can have a significant impact on the lives of city inhabitants who are marginalised, either through identity or economic status. These practices include those commonly associated with developing cities according to an economic growth-promoting model, such as the construction of new transport infrastructure designed for private transport (e.g. highways), as well as middle-high income housing complex development, and the provision of

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Vol- 7, No.1, 2023. ISSN: 2455-8001 (Online)



new secondary and tertiary industrial spaces in urban centres. These practices can lead to the exclusion of citizens who cannot meet the requirements of participating in the city as it exists, for example those with limited access to transport such as those on the periphery of urban areas. Inclusive urbanisation seeks to address issues in access to urban services and the equitability of the urban socio-economic structure through ensuring that all participants have access to the same level of services and opportunities as each other. Most often this manifests through ensuring that rights for marginalised or previously-excluded groups, such as persons with disabilities, women and children, migrant workers or refugees, are accounted for in planning policies, and plans that may exclude these groups are modified to accommodate them equally.

Planning for interventions in urban planning to improve inclusivity can take several forms. Firstly, removing exclusivity in existing urban planning regimes and practices can have a significant effect. This can include reviewing processes to ensure that formalisation of land rights for inhabitants can be acquired more easily, as well as improving the spatial mobility of groups which previously did not have access to the formal economy through location. This can also include the provision of improved provision of health and social care to ensure that existing informal care obligations do not impede access to work. Secondly, improving access to information flow and knowledge exchange between disadvantaged groups and urban planners is critical to ensuring that development occurs not just for the already privileged. Stakeholder participation is increasingly incorporated into city planning processes; however this process needs to be conducted with the best interests of marginalised or excluded groups at heart. Inclusive urbanisation does not derive automatically from including all groups in urban planning discussions, with actions needing to result from the participation process to achieve development for the groups involved.

The present research paper articulates at planning policy recommendations to build back better and co-design the world at scale to ensure that no one is left behind. Persons with disabilities face dramatically higher poverty rates than the overall population. In some countries, poverty rates can be double that of persons without disabilities. This has further consequential effects on people's health and their opportunities for education. Persons with disabilities also face digital barriers due to inaccessible websites or apps providing city services as well as barriers in the physical

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environment. In many cities, a lack of enforceable accessibility standards, lack of strict regulations, and lack of training, tools, and guiding documents impede progress.

The research paper provides the policy recommendations for building a municipal or urban governance model and urban planning framework that empowers people to live the types of lives they value, that unlocks everyone's capabilities. This is a necessity and a prerequisite to create scalable, robust, resilient, and services that are provided without profit to all members of a society. Systems, agencies, or organizations that are antifragile benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and are enhanced by risk and uncertainty. Governments, private individuals, corporations, and civic organizations should approach risk and uncertainty as opportunities to identify and enhance failures or weaknesses in vital infrastructure, enhancing a system capable of serving us for the future we need.

Introduction

The urbanization of the world's population is accelerating. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations Member States pledged to reduce inequality in all its forms through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while ensuring that no one will be left behind (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2023). Over the past decades, the Asia-Pacific region has made considerable strides in social development, driven by aggregate economic growth. This growth has facilitated better quality of life through an increasing number of social protection schemes, in addition to generating new jobs, increasing incomes, and improving overall levels of access to basic services and other opportunities.

Despite this sustained economic development and substantial reduction in poverty, socioeconomic inequalities, gender discrimination, and lack of access to clean water and urban services continue to exist depending on several factors, including wealth, gender, residence, and education levels, among others. High levels of inequality impede economic progress, negatively affect social cohesion and continue to marginalize vulnerable populations thereby posing a formidable barrier to sustainable development.

The marginalisation of communities that arises from a lack of access to the formal services of the city leads to an inability for these communities to improve their circumstances easily. Indeed,

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marginalised communities commonly do not have access to the means of further development and improvement of their situation. This can be due to the formal laws and rights afforded to citizens of the city, or due to economic factors such as a lack of access to free capital. A lack of access to formal rights to land, or the means to own land, often precludes a lack of access to other formal rights of the city, e.g. formal citizenship, or a formal postal address for access social services or utility services, such as piped water or electricity. The danger exists in the current state of urbanisation practices for development to be legitimised only for the emerging middle classes, without being inclusive for all residents of a city

Within the marginalized populations, persons with disabilities were some of the most vulnerable and affected, having suffered differentiated and intensified impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of preparedness and resilience towards the public health crisis, in the Indian cities, exposed persons with disabilities to even greater and more complex vulnerabilities during the pandemic.

A brief on Urbanization in India

As per National Census 2011, India has approximately 2.68 crore persons with disabilities which amounts to 2.21% of the total population. With an estimate of around 25% of India's population needing universal accessibility to live independently and with dignity, there is a clear need to emphasize 'accessibility and inclusion' in the urban environment. Universal Design principles and rights of persons with disabilities need to be considered at all levels of a policy or project cycle - at the design, planning, budgeting, procurement, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages.

India is a signatory to the United Nation Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008 and India's future demographic projections show an increasing trend towards ageing, disabilities, health limitations and new demands of societal transformations. The question is how to prepare our urban environment and urban planning frameworks for the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, children, elderly, women and humans with other limitations amidst fast changing times? An obvious answer would be through being sensitive, being professionally aware and

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through implementing the idea of accessibility for all in every facet of the nation's development including urban infrastructures. Citizen behaviour and attitudes driven by social model approach instead of a medical or charity model approach to persons with disabilities, would play a critical role in shaping inclusive urban transport and barrier free environments in Indian cities for the future. Towards this vision, the Government of India has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which acts as a legal and human rights instrument to strengthen the socio-economic development and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities. The government has further promulgated the Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act) which emphasizes accessibility in transportation infrastructure, public buildings, new constructions, sanitation facilities, educational institutions, and digital information, products, and services. The Government of India also launched the Accessible India Campaign (AIC) in 2015 with specified targets and timelines for making Indian cities accessible for persons with disabilities. The three main pillars of the campaign are the Built-Up Environment, Transportation Systems, and Information & Communication (ICT) ecosystems.

In view of above, it is necessary that the urban infrastructure, amenities, and public spaces often lack the fundamental aspects of inclusive design for equal access to all. Significant gaps also exist in data collection and management and spatial assessments from the lens of disability inclusion. The existing legislation must be translated into holistic projects informed by the needs and demands of persons with disabilities for local implementation.

Existing policies of Government of India for promoting accessibility

A literature review of the existing policies of Government of India for promoting accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in Indian cities has been discussed in the following sections of this research paper. The functions and policy interventions of various planning agencies involved in promoting accessibility have been studied. Furthermore, the various parameters and indices being used by these planning agencies for promoting accessibility for persons with disabilities have also been studied and presented. An attempt has also been made to explore and outline the institutional framework which addresses the needs of the Persons with Disabilities and takes initiatives for

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promoting accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in urban areas. Some of the planning agencies studied are as below:

Planning Agencies

- Regional Planning Board/ Authority
- Development Authority
- State Government's urban development department
- Financial Institutions
- Local Body
- Public Sector Undertakings
- Statutory Bodies

Various Ministries of GoI involved in Physical Planning:

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation
- Ministry of Railways
- Ministry of Jal Shakti

In addition to these agencies, various levels of plans in hierarchy of urban development were also studied to explore as to which all accessibility parameters are used in which level of plans. Various plans are listed as below:

Perspective Plan- Long Term Perspective Vision document, Concept plan, Mission statement

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Regional Plan - Regional Plan (Mobility 1), Sub-regional plan

Development Plan – District Development Plan (Mobility 1), City/ Metropolitan Development Plan (Mobility 2) , Master Plan, City Utility

Local Area Plan - Town Planning Schemes, Zonal Plan /Sub-city plan, Ward Committee Plan, Coastal Zone Mgmt Plan, Urban Redevelopment Plan

Special Purpose Plan- CDP, CMP, CSP , Heritage conservation plan, Slum redevelopment plan

Annual Plan – Investment/ Audit Plan

Project / Research – DPR, Schemes, sub-projects

Stakeholder Survey and Analysis

The following section discusses the survey questionnaire followed by preliminary findings. The complete survey of around 400 urban practitioners including 35 persons with disabilities was done and the survey questions asked and findings are presented as below:

Survey Questionnaire

The Survey questionnaire is as below:

Name:

Email:

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1. What is the kind of Disability you have?

- a. Locomotor Disability
- b. Hearing impairment
- c. Visual impairment
- d. Others, please specify:

2. Are you in any of the following agencies? Please tick and specify the exact name of the organization.

- a. Development authority
- b. Urban local body
- c. State government agency or department
- d. Regional planning board or authority
- e. Central government agency
- f. Central ministry
- g. Service provider agency

3. Do you look after the spatial planning and development needs of persons with disabilities (PwDs) when formulating urban policies and plans?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No idea

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4. Have you ever reviewed the Accessible India Campaign or Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No idea

Provide reasons for the chosen option in detail:

5. Have you reviewed the Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No idea

Provide reasons for the chosen option in detail:

6. Do you have any family, friends, colleagues, etc. with disabilities?

- a. Yes
- b. No

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c. No idea

If yes, explain her condition and your contribution:

7. **What according to you are the different barriers a person with a disability might face in a building, an area or and a city?**

- a. Difficulty in accessing public transport options/ infrastructure available in a city
- b. Inaccessible public spaces/ public buildings in a city
- c. Inaccessible street infrastructure
- d. Lack of Safety and Security
- e. Lack of access to accessible Sanitation services in public places
- f. All of the above

8. **Do you think that the current planning policies and proposals are sensitive to ensuring accessibility of persons with disabilities in Indian cities? If yes, please provide evidence.**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No idea

9. **Do you think retrofitting a building, an area or a city has the same scope of ensuring accessibility as an accessible design/ development plan?**

- a. Yes

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- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No idea

10. Do you know of any universal accessibility guidelines provided by the Government of India?

- a. If yes, specify the title of the guidelines:
- b. No

11. Are you aware of the “Harmonized Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Environment for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly People” provided by Government of India?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, can you list any three important provisions of these guidelines?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

12. Universal Design concept caters to all people regardless of age, gender, ability. Do you think people like elderly, children, pregnant women, persons with temporary mobility limitations, etc. should be considered as stakeholders when framing guidelines?

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- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No Idea

13. How important is it to include policies based on the concept of accessible and universal design and Harmonized Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Environment for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly People as a part of a development plan of a city?

- a. Not required
- b. Could be optional
- c. Compulsorily required
- d. Any other, please specify:

14. On the scale of 1-5 where do you position yourself for planning and encouraging universal design principles while preparing a development plan of your city?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5

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15. Do you think that the existing planning policies and organizations have the capacity to promote accessibility needs for persons with disabilities in urban areas?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. No idea

Please provide reasons for the chosen option:

16. In your opinion, what are the main challenges in your city in order to ensure equitable participation of persons with disabilities to take benefit of public services and opportunities? Please explain in detail.

17. Could you share a policy or program that your city has implemented to support effective and equitable participation of persons with disabilities in public arenas and community spaces? Please explain in detail.



18. How planning agencies can effectively contribute to actualizing the interests of the persons with disabilities?

- a. Set up a separate section in the existing planning organization
- b. Create a city level new and independent organization
- c. Employ more planners with disabilities in the existing planning organization
- d. Any other action, please specify:

19. Can you recommend a planning policy or proposal for making urban planning in India sensitive to ensuring proper accessibility provisions for persons with disabilities? Please explain in detail.

20. Would you like to make suggestions to planning educators for protecting the interests of the persons with disabilities? Please explain in detail.

21. Please recommend how accessibility for persons with disabilities can be realized within the existing planning frameworks and practices in the Indian cities? Please explain in detail.

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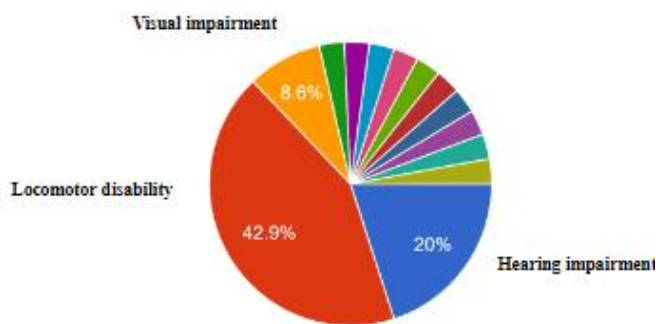
International E-Journal: Disabilities Studies, Special Education & Rehabilitation.

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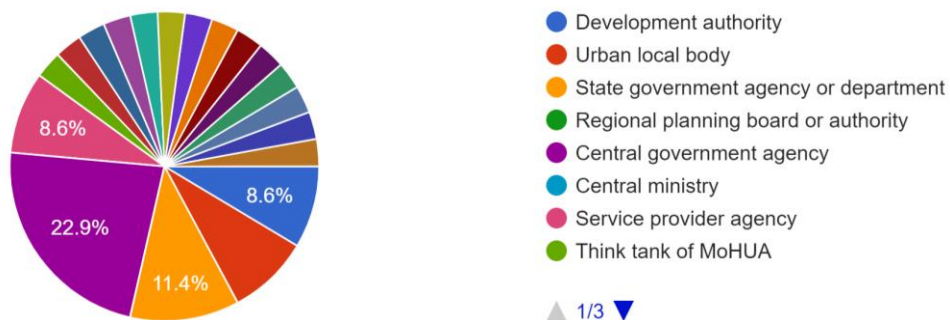


The preliminary findings of the Survey

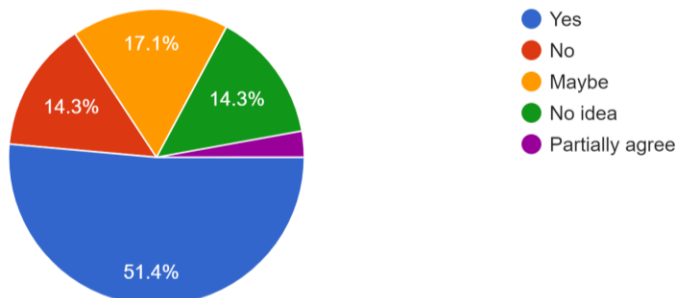
The present section outlines the findings of the objective 3 (undertaking empirical studies for comprehending spatial planning policies, statues and practices in a case study area). Persons with disabilities opined that there is lack of commitment to implement the policies and respect for the laws. Also there is a lack of sensitivity towards vulnerable sections of societies, especially persons with disabilities. There is need for sensitizing the policymakers to embed accessibility as a key principle in national and local urban policies and programmes. PwDs also see that 'Planning Frameworks' can act as a guiding tool but actual incorporation of accessibility elements and on ground implementation can be effectively made only by the agencies working at ground level on making provision and maintenance of urban infrastructure. PwDs also highlight that the agencies granting approval for construction activity such as urban local bodies and development authorities can ensure strict compliance of accessibility norms to promote accessibility. The preliminary findings of the survey are as provided below:



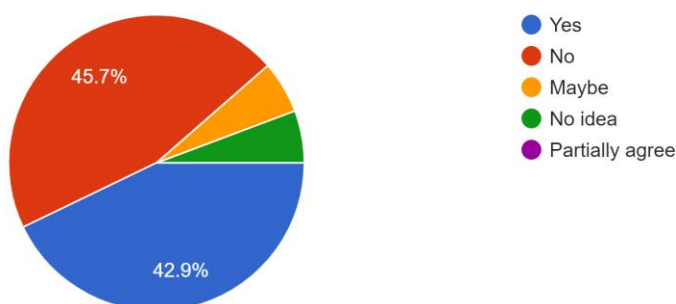
Around 35 responses have been received till date from persons with disabilities and 365 from urban practitioners. Maximum respondents were having locomotor disability (42.9%) followed by around 20% having hearing disability and around 8.6% persons with Disabilities having visual impairment.



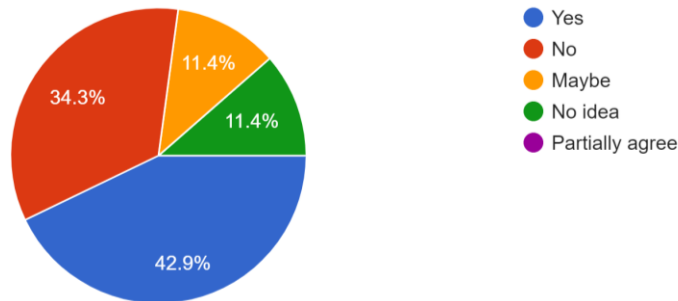
22.9% of the respondents were from Central Government, 11.4% from State Government and 8.6% each from Development Authorities and Urban Local Bodies in India. The respondents also included persons with disabilities who are working as administrators/ urban practitioners in government sector.



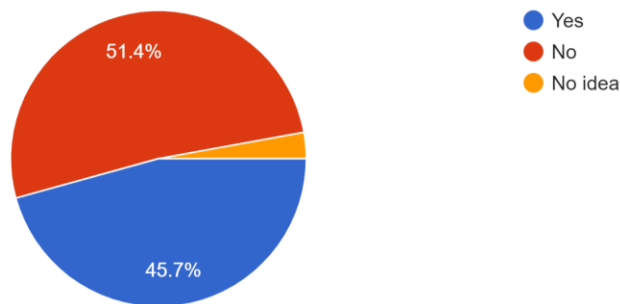
Interestingly there were 51.4% of respondents who agreed that they look after the spatial planning and development needs of persons with disabilities when formulating urban policies and plans. There were 2.9% of respondents who partially agreed when replying to this question. Some respondents highlighted that they do it by having policy provisions and reinforce them by incorporating into design and policy planning wherever applicable.



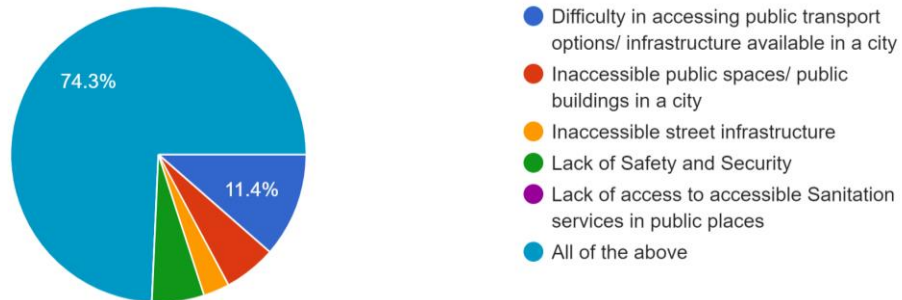
Around 42.9% respondents agreed that they had reviewed the Accessible India campaign. It is to highlight that 45.7% people who responded didn't reviewed the campaign



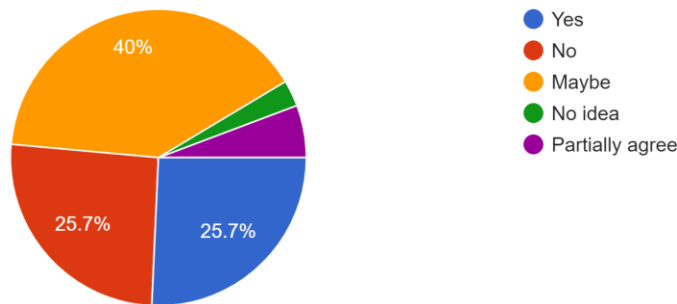
Interestingly, same percentage (42.9%) who had reviewed the AIC campaign had also reviewed the RPWD Act, 2016 and almost double the no. of people who had no idea about AIC, doesn't know about the RPWD Act, 2016



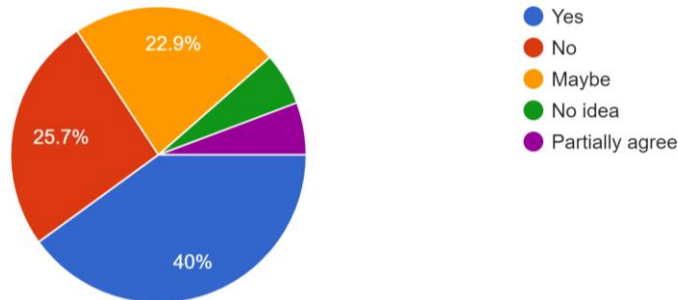
45.7% respondents agreed that they have someone in their family, amongst friends/ colleagues, who has a disability. In most of these cases respondents extend their moral support and assist in travel



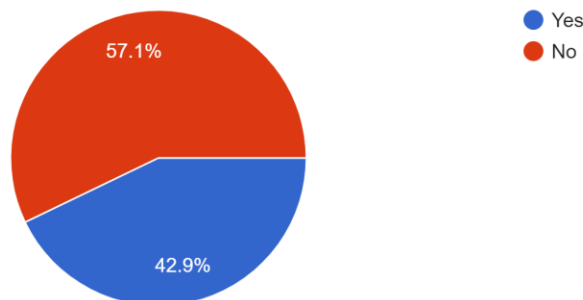
74.3 % respondents agreed that persons with disabilities faces problems in accessing public transport. public spaces, accessible sanitation services, have safety concerns and experience inaccessible street infrastructure



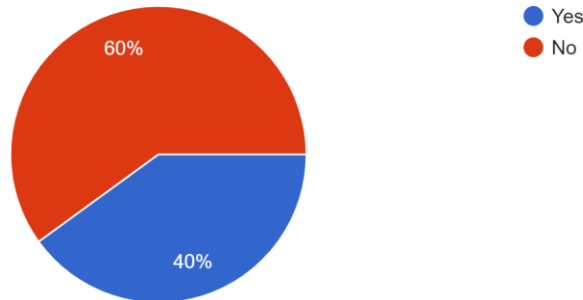
Equal number of respondents (25.7%) expressed their agreement/ disagreement when asked if current planning policies and proposals are sensitive to ensuring accessibility of persons with disabilities in Indian cities. Interestingly, 40% of respondents were not sure on this issue.



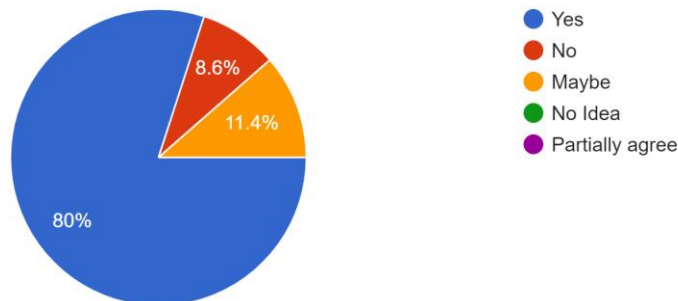
40% of respondents agreed that they think retrofitting a building, an area or a city has the same scope of ensuring accessibility as an accessible design/ development plan and almost equal number of respondents were either replying “No” or “May be”



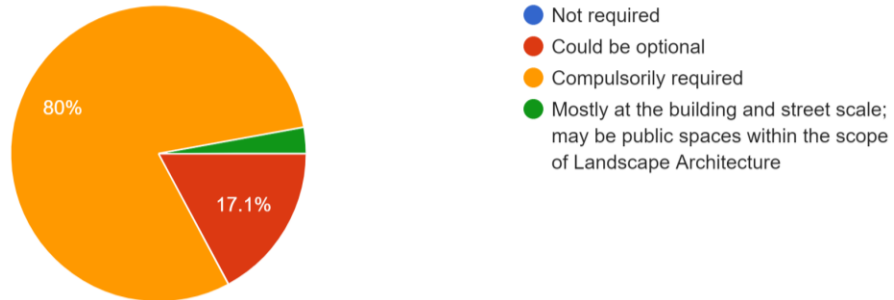
Around 57% of respondents didn't know about any universal accessibility guidelines provided by the Government of India. This highlights need for Capacity assessment and development for staff on disability inclusion



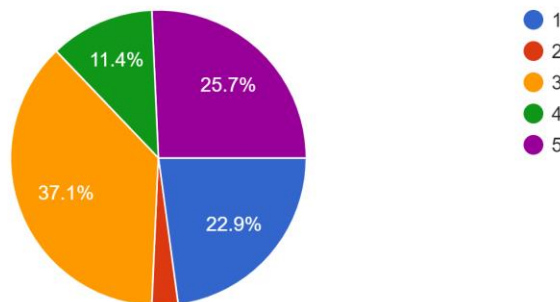
60% of respondents were not aware of the “Harmonized Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Environment for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly People” provided by Government of India. This highlights need for Capacity assessment and development for staff on disability inclusion



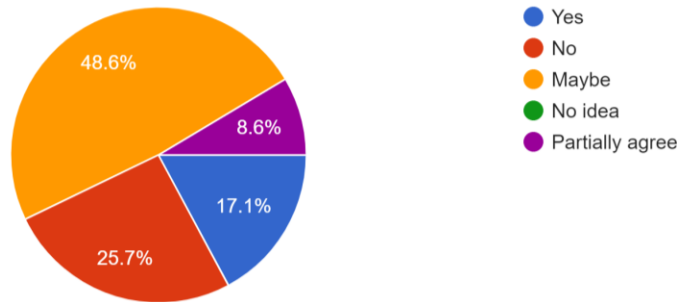
80% of the respondents agreed that Universal Design concept caters to all people regardless of age, gender, ability and elderly, children, pregnant women, persons with temporary mobility limitations, etc. should be considered as stakeholders when framing guidelines



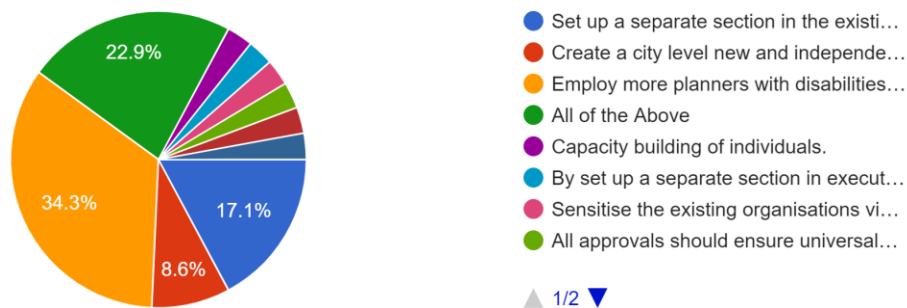
80% respondents agreed to include policies based on the concept of accessible and universal design and Harmonized Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Environment for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly People as a part of a development plan of a city



Majority of urban practitioners were of the view of being in a position for planning and encouraging universal design principles while preparing a development plan of their city. 22.9% were not confident about same. This puts emphasis on Disability-inclusive strategic planning



Only 17.1% of respondents think that the existing planning policies and organizations have the capacity to promote accessibility needs for persons with disabilities in urban areas. This requires capacity assessment and development for staff



34.3% respondents replied to have more planners with disabilities in decision making positions to promote accessibility through planning agencies. The survey revealed that engaging with diverse communities and stakeholders to co-design and co-create urban solutions that meet the needs and preferences of a wide range of individuals. Also investing in technology and digital literacy programs to ensure that all citizens have equal access to the benefits of new technologies. Developing policies and programs that support the participation of underrepresented groups, such as women, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities, in urban decision-making processes and innovation initiatives. Persons with disabilities should be engaged along the supply



chain, and organizations representing the needs of persons with disabilities need to enter partnerships with urban practitioners, institutions, development agencies, ULBs and the developers within the construction industry.

As the survey and policy analysis reveals, there are several vital elements that will help summarize all the insights gathered in the previous sections of this research paper. To achieve accessible, inclusive and sustainable urban transformation and urban planning in Indian cities, the following key elements should be prioritized:

Accessibility: Ensuring that cities are physically and digitally accessible to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds is essential for promoting greater inclusion and participation. This can involve designing infrastructure and public spaces that are physically accessible, as well as implementing policies and technologies that support digital accessibility.

Affordability: Ensuring that cities are affordable for all residents, particularly those with low incomes or marginalized backgrounds, is crucial for promoting greater social and economic inclusion. This can involve implementing policies such as rent control or inclusionary zoning, as well as investing in affordable housing and other social infrastructure.

Inclusivity: Building inclusive cities requires considering the needs and perspectives of all residents and ensuring that policies and interventions are designed to support the full participation and belonging of all members of the community. This can involve implementing participatory planning processes and engaging diverse stakeholders in decision-making.

Sustainability: Ensuring that cities are environmentally sustainable is essential for building long-term resilience and addressing global challenges such as climate change. This can involve implementing green infrastructure, promoting sustainable transportation options, and adopting energy-efficient technologies

Inclusive city planning In India and Climate Change

Author-Parul Sharma, Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

International E-Journal: Disabilities Studies, Special Education & Rehabilitation.

Vol- 7, No.1, 2023. ISSN: 2455-8001 (Online)



The cities In India we live in today continue to be largely inaccessible, unaffordable, and restrictive, leading to the intentional and unintentional exclusion of marginalized groups. This is the result of decisions made by various entities that influence the design of cities and create a sense of either exclusion or belonging. The lack of accessibility in the built environment perpetuates inequity and marginalizes difference, such as the exclusion of people with disabilities in employment due to inaccessible workplaces.

Globally significant problems such as climate change require new approaches to urban planning and design as well as transformative interventions. The necessity of these interventions is driven by a variety of existential challenges to existing infrastructure and involves new and more inclusive approaches to urban governance, policy, and design. Each of these approaches when applied to climate adaptation, net-zero carbon policy requirements, or broader sustainability initiatives must also consider radical inclusion as a cross cutting theme for shaping the future of cities:Climate change and its impacts can disproportionately affect marginalized communities so ensuring that climate adaptation policies and sustainability initiatives are inclusive is critical. The following are examples of how accessibility and inclusion can be incorporated into governance and urban policy approaches to strengthen core outcomes and safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities:

Building coalitions: In building coalitions to support climate adaptation and sustainability policies, it is essential to ensure that the voices and perspectives of marginalized communities are heard and included. This should involve engaging with disability rights advocates, community organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that policies are designed to meet the needs of all members of the community.

Educating the public and conducting outreach: Educating the public and reaching out to communities that may be impacted by climate change and sustainability policies can help to build support and ensure that the policies are designed to meet the needs of those who may be most affected. This can involve providing information through public campaigns, public forums, and social media, as well as engaging with community leaders, hosting public forums, and conducting surveys to gather feedback from community members.

Developing partnerships: Developing partnerships with businesses, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders can help to leverage resources and build support for policy initiatives that

Author-Parul Sharma, Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

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promote sustainability and radical inclusion. This can involve partnering with organizations that serve marginalized communities, such as disability rights organizations or organizations that work with low-income populations.

Providing data: Providing data on the experiences of marginalized communities, the costs and benefits of policies and the impact of policies on different stakeholders can help to build support for policy initiatives that promote radical inclusion. This can involve collecting and analyzing data on the impacts of climate change on different communities and sharing that data with policymakers and the public.

Engaging with the legal system: Engaging with the legal system to ensure that climate adaptation and sustainability policies promoting inclusion and accessibility are legally sound and can withstand legal challenges is also important. This can involve working with legal experts to develop policies that are legally defensible and engaging with the legal system to defend those policies when they are challenged.

Fostering a culture of inclusion: Finally, fostering a culture of inclusion within city government and among the public can help to build support for policies promoting inclusion and accessibility. This can involve training city staff on inclusive practices and values, as well as promoting a message of inclusion and accessibility through public outreach campaigns.

Conclusion

Coordinating efforts to improve and scale up disability-inclusive urban development can spur innovations in other areas of urban policy, such as poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, access to inclusive education, increasing participation, and decreasing the digital divide. In doing so, it helps eliminate the root causes of persistent inequality, marginality, and dependence not only for persons with disabilities but for other marginalized groups as well. Equitable access would translate into access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications.

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Barrier free mobility and accessibility in digital transformation efforts can undoubtedly help improve transparency, accountability, and reach of public services to all. The future is accessible only when we adequately resource and incentivize context-specific solutions to the urban challenges our cities face in their post pandemic recovery. Accessibility is not an abstract concept. It provides a framework to develop a fairer social contract that leads to more significant equity among people. It also encourages the formation of better and more transparent planning of our urban environments that consider all citizens' needs and input.

Universal design and multidimensional and cross-sectional analysis are powerful concepts that make an access and equity an integral part of everything we create.

Based on the previous sections, policy recommendations have been outlined below for mainstreaming LNOB and promoting disability-inclusive urban development in Indian cities. The policy analysis shared in this paper reiterates the need for inclusive urban planning initiatives, for implementing SDGs and making Indian cities accessible and inclusive. To achieve this, ground level and policy implementation efforts needs to be strengthened further as these could significantly contribute to reinforcing SDG implementation efforts at the national and local level. Governments in various cities in India may consider the following recommendations to target barriers that inhibit the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the development process:

Commit to disability-inclusive urban development and SDG implementation at national and local levels.

These could include aligning implementation plans for the SDGs and establishing a mechanism for the engagement of representative organizations of persons with disabilities to participate in policymaking, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This may include ensuring universal accessibility in built environments, housing, public buildings, recreational spaces and basic urban services, such as sanitation, water, health, education, transportation, emergency and disaster response, resilience-building and ensuring access to service, information and communications.

Address the disproportionate rate of poverty of persons with disabilities.

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Concerted measures are required to develop and implement comprehensive poverty reduction policies and measures for persons with disabilities, taking into consideration the multiple dimensions of poverty and social protection measures.

Provide persons with disabilities, of all ages, with educational and economic opportunities.

As the cities endure changing demographic structures and a contracting working-age population, concerted efforts to increase the economic participation of persons with disabilities could augment gross domestic product.

Ensure that a strong national coordination mechanism is in place.

This will promote good governance, multi-ministerial cooperation and enhanced capacity to facilitate disability-inclusive urban and socioeconomic development.

Enable the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the political process and in decision-making processes.

Policy measures to increase the meaningful representation of persons with disabilities in parliaments, political parties, national gender equality mechanisms, decision-making processes and governance at all levels are needed. There is a need in the region to generate consensus on the definitions and methods of collecting disability statistics, and thereby enhance the reliability and comparability of such data. This would be crucial data to design, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of disability-related policies and programmes.

Develop a multi-stakeholder approach to review the implementation and progress of planning policies and city master plans

Multi-stakeholder engagement, including from the government, DPOs, international organization and development agencies, is required to leverage the expertise and insights of each sector to facilitate barrier free and disability-inclusive urban development in the South Asian region.

Make provision for adequate Municipal Financing

Advocate for inclusive-budgeting practices that allocate specific funds for disability-responsive infrastructure and services and prioritize projects that enhance accessibility, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible public transportation. Also encourage partnerships with private businesses to fund and implement disability-inclusive projects. It is also proposed to offer incentives to businesses that invest in accessible facilities and services and establish grant

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programmes to support businesses and municipal projects that focus on creating accessible infrastructure.

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