



A study of Existing plans and Policies and planning agencies looking after the spatial planning and development needs of persons with disabilities in Indian cities

- by Parul Sharma

Summary

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.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by nearly all United Nations Member States, has been a pivotal catalyst for change, driving national legislation and policy change globally. However, progress has been uneven, with persistent or widening gaps in critical areas such as education, , food security, health, employment and poverty reduction.

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Persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Their life experiences, overlapping identities and varied contexts shape the types and intensity of barriers, costs and inequalities they face. An intersectional approach is crucial to understand how factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, the type of and level of support required, and barriers faced combine to affect inclusion. ‘One-size-fits-all’ approaches are inadequate, and creating inclusive systems and societies requires adaptations to reflect the diverse experiences of persons with disabilities across the life cycle.

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 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.

Inclusion is not merely an aspiration, but a fundamental human right. It requires ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, abilities or circumstances, are recognized, respected and afforded equitable access to resources and opportunities. Inclusive societies are better equipped to leverage the strengths and contributions of all their populations, enhancing their ability to withstand economic, environmental, social and other shocks and respond to technological shifts, climate change and other global trends. However, exclusion has significant economic consequences. For instance, underemployment of persons with disabilities costs up to 7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in low- and middle-income countries. Economic losses are even greater if considering other sources, such as the opportunity costs of unpaid care and support that is provided primarily by women and girls. The journey towards a truly inclusive world for children and adults with disabilities – who represent more than 16 per cent of the world’s population – is marked by both remarkable progress and persistent challenges. In preparation for the Global Disability Summit 2025, it is imperative to reflect on the advancements made, acknowledge the remaining gaps and chart a course for transformative action. This report, drawing from global consultations and the expertise and previous reports of various United Nations agencies, civil society, Organisations of Persons with



Disabilities (OPDs) and academia, offers a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape and proposes pathways to accelerate inclusion.

The present research paper articulates at the existing literature in detail to ascertain the work, which has been done till now for facilitating and promoting accessibility in Indian cities. The planning policies, existing plans, planning frameworks and urban practices were studied in the context of accessibility. The literature review was done in detail under this objective articulating at the need for future urban development in Indian cities to be sustainable and inclusive. Critical review of existing planning policies, plans and institutions was done to explore why it is essential for accessibility to be given serious consideration and proactively promoted in the urban discourse. This paper also discusses the existing international and national frameworks that promote accessibility as a matter of human rights, an economic and a social development imperative in the achievement of the SDGs and other internationally agreed development goals. This objective also makes an attempt to analyze as to how does the master plans in Indian cities address disability needs and embed accessibility. The research paper concludes by proposing 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 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.

The Background

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.

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, 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 review of Persons with Disabilities in India

According to Census 2011, there are 2.68 crore (26.8 million) people with disabilities in India who constitute 2.21 per cent of the total population. Out of the total population of persons with disabilities,



approximately 1.50 crore (15 million) are men and 1.18 crore (11.8 million), are women. According to a World Bank report, the number of persons with disabilities in India range from 55 – 90 million. However, a few advocacy groups argue that the number of persons with varying degrees of disabilities, including those with mental health disorders is much higher, and closer to 150 million. In order to give focused attention to policy issues and meaningful thrust to the activities aimed at welfare and empowerment of the persons with disabilities, the Government of India established a separate Department for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) on 12 May 2012. The Department acts as a nodal agency for matters pertaining to disability and persons with disabilities, including effective, closer coordination among different stakeholders, such as relevant Central Ministries, State/Union Territory Governments, NGOs, etc., in matters pertaining to disability issues. The Department has also developed an online management information system to provide a disability-inclusive framework, at the national level, and coordinate with relevant state governments and central ministries to ensure that LNOB is realized as a key principle in all the urban policies and programmes across the cross-sectoral project cycles. The Government of India ratified the UNCRPD, in 2008, and notified the comprehensive Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD) which replaced the earlier Persons with Disabilities Act 1995. This new Act in India is in line with the UNCRPD, of which India is a signatory. The new law not only enhanced the Rights and Entitlements of persons with disabilities but also provided effective mechanisms for ensuring their empowerment through physical, digital and social inclusion into society. India has been strengthening its physical, social, and ICT infrastructure to meet the international commitments made on mainstreaming disability in all forms of service delivery to its citizens. The Government of India is now stepping up its efforts and making significant strides in the implementation of disability-inclusive policies for physical and digital inclusion of persons with disabilities across various plans, policies, programmes and services being offered by the various central and state government ministries/agencies and private agencies in India. The Government launched its signature programme, the Accessible India Campaign, in 2015, to promote accessibility and safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities.

Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, “Annual Report 2020-2021”, New Delhi. Available at <http://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/upload/uploadfiles/files/MinistrySocialJusticeAREGLISH2020-21Final.pdf>. Note: ‘Crore’ is a unit of value often used in the Indian subcontinent and is equal to 10 million. World Bank, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region “People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes”, July 2009. Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/577801468259486686/pdf/502090WP0Peop11Box0342042B01PUBLIC1.pdf>



The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) is the central ministry responsible for urban development in India and is focused on embedding inclusion and accessibility across all its policies and projects keeping in mind the needs and rights of the persons with disabilities, marginalized and other vulnerable groups. MoHUA is advocating to mainstream disability in various national flagship urban missions, such as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-Urban), Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), and Smart Cities Mission for comprehensive improvements in the quality of life of the persons with disabilities in urban areas. MoHUA has also revised the National Building Code to make mandatory requirements in conforming to accessibility standards and provisions as mentioned in the RPWD Act 2016.

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. Some cities, within the Asia-Pacific region, have the capacity to generate new modalities and innovative solutions for the implementation of sustainable development initiatives. At the same time, some cities require support to address barriers in terms of capacities, financing, governance, access to appropriate and affordable technologies, and data availability. Sharing good practices among cities is critical to maximize the impact of the SDGs and create a more sustainable future for all. Lessons learned and good practices can be drawn from and exchanged between these countries to design and implement pro-equality programmes and policies.

Moreover, investments and innovations in technology, by governments, are reshaping the way policymakers see urban development, and how citizens can get to work, access public services, and generate income. Under the SDGs umbrella, technology shifts are creating an unprecedented opportunity to implement SDG 11 on inclusive and resilient cities, in partnership with local governments. Empowering local governments and local communities in implementing the SDGs will also contribute towards improving human rights, ensuring good governance, enhancing civic engagement, and furthering inclusive economic growth. As technology becomes more embedded in urban areas, policymakers must take a rights-based approach to the way cities are built.

Government of India, “ATAL Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation”, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2016. Available at <http://amrut.gov.in/content/>

Government of India, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. Available at <http://mohua.gov.in/cms/hariday.php>



Good practices from South Asian countries highlighting approach towards promoting accessibility

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Good Practice 1: Banjarmasin City, Indonesia

Leave No One Behind (2019)

SDG Targets: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3

Stakeholders involved: UNESCO, City Government of Banjarmasin, Kota Kita Foundation

Brief Description:

Banjarmasin is the capital city of South Kalimantan, Indonesia. The city covers an area of 98.46 square kilometres (38.02 square miles) and had an estimated population of 657,663 in 2020. The Banjarmasin City Government has been working to reduce the gap in the city's disability data, improve evidence-based governance, and support advocacy for inclusive cities. The city developed a disability-inclusive framework based on the shared understanding that the reliable, disaggregated and fit-for-purpose data is essential for the design, implementation and evaluation of any policy that aims to promote social inclusion of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

Vanesha Manuturi, "A Step Towards a More Inclusive Banjarmasin", KOTA KITA, 6 October 2021. Available at <https://kotakita.org/a-step-towards-a-more-inclusive-banjarmasin>



The Participatory Data Collection and Mapping Methodology used in this project has already been applied in Surakarta, in Central Java, and represents a scalable model that can be replicated in other cities of Indonesia. Through a partnership arrangement with other members of the Network of Mayors for Inclusive Cities, the project also aims to strengthen the relationship between city authorities and citizens living with disabilities, using a collaborative methodology. The disability-inclusive framework was intended to be a larger process of building capacity to collect more rigorous data on disability in cities, in line with internationally adopted policies

agendas or regulations. This not only contributes to mainstreaming the discourse on disability rights in cities, but also aims to refine data-oriented and evidence-based planning processes.

Good Practice 2: Bangladesh

The Power of Water for All (2017)

SDG Targets: 6.1, 6.3

Stakeholders involved: Powwater

Brief Description:

Powwater is a social business that sells drinkware products and gives the proceeds to help increase access to affordable and clean drinking water. Powwater has worked to finance a project in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, to establish water filtration systems giving access to clean water for over 3,000 people at an affordable price for many years to come. Adequate volume of sales has made the operation self-sustaining, thereby serving more people with clean water every day. Powwater's innovative model for sustainable development has curated incredible results within its first year of business. What has proven to be important is a recognition of and focus on not just water scarcity and contamination, but also the many additional challenges which are inherently linked. The combination of enhanced collaboration with local partners, as well as proper engagement of local community members, provides the proper backdrop to overcome these multifaceted challenges and allow for water solutions to last.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Case Study: Powwater: The Power of Water for All". Available at http://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Powwater%20Case%20Study_SDG%20Help%20Desk.pdf. World Bank, "Liaoning Urban Transport Project". Available at Development Projects : Liaoning Urban Transport Project - P041890 (worldbank.org)

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**Good Practice 3: Liaoning, China****The Liaoning Urban Transport Project (2005)****SDG Targets: 11.1, 11.3****Stakeholders involved: International Development Association - World Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development****Brief Description:**

Liaoning is a coastal province in North-East China that is the smallest, most populous and lies at the southernmost tip in the region with a population of 42.59 million in 2020. The Liaoning Urban Transport Project demonstrated the role of disability-inclusive public participation processes in supporting accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons. Although initial proposals focused on urban development and road expansion, public consultations led to increased emphasis on improved and accessible sidewalks, pedestrian needs, secondary roads, and improved traffic management. The focus of the Liaoning Urban Transport Project was to: a) alleviate bottlenecks in the road system; b) increase efficiency and effectiveness of public transport services; c) improve maintenance of road investments; d) improve environmental sustainability of project investments; e) improve operational efficiency and safety of the road system; and f) strengthen local capacity for urban transport system management. The project supported the development of infrastructure, services, and institutions in the cities of Shenyang, Fushun, and Anshan. The project augmented the urban road network through the construction of additional capacity in the principal east-west corridors, provided additional crossings of the railway lines, provided exclusive bus lanes, and strengthened local capacity for the management of urban transport operations and services through studies, technical assistance, and training.

Brisbane City Council, “Disability, Access and Inclusion”. Available at <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community-and-safety/community-support/disability-access-and-inclusion>

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Good Practice 4: Brisbane, Australia

The Inclusive Brisbane Plan (2019-2029)

SDG Targets: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3

Stakeholders involved: Brisbane City Council

Brief Description:

The Brisbane City Council has been actively advancing the Inclusive Brisbane Plan 2019-2029 to promote Brisbane as a city for everyone and is helping ensure that everyone feels that they belong in the society, regardless of age, ability, or background. In 2012, the Council launched its first access and inclusion plan and seniors' strategy, which improved the quality of life of many residents. Some initiatives include making provisions for wheelchairs and prams, increasing accessibility to community halls and city buses, A holistic family support system that addresses both the practical and emotional needs of families is crucial. Services that offer counselling, respite care, financial support, and peer networks can make a profound difference. Creating spaces where families can openly discuss their experiences, share their stories, and receive advice can help alleviate feelings of isolation and empower families to advocate for their loved ones.

Lessons learned and recommendations

This section provides a set of recommendations (in long term and short term) and proposes policy measures to be followed by the city/ local governments and identified stakeholders. These recommendations are based on the strategic policy interventions, deliberations with the government officials, urban practitioners, policy makers, DPOs and detailed assessment of good practices from various Indian cities.

To ensure a more resilient and disability-inclusive urban development, various learnings such as effective coordination across ministries and administrative levels and with the organizations of persons with disabilities have been outlined below. This would be crucial to ensure that disability inclusion and LNOB related policies are coherent and are mainstreamed throughout urban management processes in the Indian cities.

A major lesson learned while developing this report is that despite making notable advancements in certain Goals and targets, the Indian cities at the current rate of progress cannot attain any of the 17 SDGs by 2030.

Progress in terms of the SDGs has varied across Indian cities with wide variations in terms of Goals and



targets. It is to mention that for some Goals and targets, the progress has reversed. It is to also highlight that many Indian cities have taken concrete steps to set up national institutions and frameworks to implement the SDGs. These include establishing intragovernmental agency coordination, formal platforms to institutionalize implementation of the SDGs, ensuring policy alignment, undertaking priority-setting and designing road maps. Major efforts have been made across countries to involve stakeholders in the implementation process and follow a collaborative approach to Leave no one Behind in the public policy process. The Indian cities are facing challenges adapting the SDGs at the national level and ensuring its disaggregated and inclusive implementation. Indian cities have taken initiatives to implement and monitor the RPWD Act 2016 and the SDGs at sub-national (state, district, local) levels. However, the implementation of the SDGs in a more inclusive manner is proving to be a significant challenge. Attaining the LNOB aspirations call for further actions and measures about the identification of local priorities, engaging local stakeholders and addressing the needs of the marginalized groups. The common elements discussed in this section are based on study of precedents from other countries to mainstream LNOB in various stages of urban policy cycle and strengthening MRV systems in selected cities. Some recommendations which needs immediate attention are as listed below:

- Organizing capacity building workshops for training of trainers and sharing the good practices in Indian cities.
- Facilitate more intense exchange of peer professionals
- Use the above for future programming, especially discussions on smart cities programming and LNOB
- Setting up an Academy on Disability Inclusion to ensure that there is a core team to streamline and package learning modules

There is a need for capacity development of national and local government officials, urban practitioners, related stakeholders and minimizing the data gaps by augmentation of statistical systems to collect and integrate disability-disaggregated data (that are interoperable and comparable across sectors and administrative levels). It is to emphasize that the national and local governments should adopt a twin-track approach to mainstream disability-inclusion. This would highlight the need for the national and local governments to work closely with the persons with disabilities and their organizations to make the right real, as we build back better in the post COVID-19 world and leave no one behind. In the case of many of the SDG indicators, there is a significant absence of good quality data. Data is only available for the assessment of approximately one-third of the targets (50 out of 169 targets). More investment is needed to strengthen national statistical capacities. With the available data, trends can be analysed for only half of the indicators, and availability of data across countries is highly uneven.



At national level there is a need for taking up collaborative initiatives on information generation, exchange of ideas, technology and knowledge transfer, developing partnerships, and transferring good practices. However, there is an opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas and collaboration across the Indian cities. There is a need to draw synergies and leverage regional and local initiatives for more active support towards the implementation of the SDGs. It is revealed that national and local governments have much to learn from one another concerning SDG adoption and implementation, mobilization of funds through innovative tools, effective monitoring of progress and generation of data. While governments are responsible for protecting and ensuring the realization of all rights for all persons with disabilities, achieving inclusion requires a whole-of-society approach, involving the private sector, communities, families, OPDs, civil society and development agencies, among others. Even where government resources are more limited, authorities can prioritize core programmes supporting persons with disabilities and their families and initiate removal of barriers across sectors. They can facilitate mobilization of all stakeholders by providing quality data; removing administrative obstacles and reducing costs of interventions; incentivizing positive actions and coordinating contributions of public entities, civil society and the private sector; and fostering meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

Recognizing the diversity of contexts, resources and constraints, the conclusion proposes a set of differentiated recommendations for governments, OPDs, development agencies and other stakeholders to accelerate inclusion in a diverse and changing world around the following:

- Harmonize laws and policies with the CRPD and in close consultation with OPDs, including in response to global trends (e.g., technology, climate change, migration).
- Strengthen data systems to generate and use data and evidence for designing and monitoring inclusive policies and programmes.
- Mainstream accessibility and inclusion across all sectors, with dedicated funding and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms.
- Identify and address individual support needs to enable access to a comprehensive package of inclusive,
 - accessible services, including assistive technology, care and support, and social protection.
- Scale up financing for disability inclusion, which will involve tracking expenditures, closing funding gaps, and leveraging and optimizing use of public, private, domestic and international resources.
- Ensure meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in their diversity, with representation of OPDs in decision-making, and engagement in policy monitoring.
- Promote collaboration and coordination among governments, OPDs, civil society, development agencies, and the private sector to drive innovation, share best practices, and ensure accountability for disability inclusion.



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