

The Art of Curating an Accessible, Safe & Inclusive City

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1 ABSTRACT

Building Accessible, Safe, & Inclusive Indian Cities (BASIIC) is an action research programme implemented by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India. It intends to bring in a paradigm shift in the urban planning and design process by incorporating the tenets of universal accessibility, safety, and inclusivity as the first principle across three levels of government and a wide range of relevant stakeholders. It is supported by the Department for International Development of the UK Government funding through an accountable grant to NIUA.

The programme developed through the process of co-creation and multiple rounds of consultation with the key relevant stakeholders and beneficiary groups highlights the value of working with target beneficiaries - persons with disabilities, elderly, women & children (People) as change agents. The transformation in action is the identification of existing gaps in policies and guidelines (Policy) relevant to the above beneficiaries and demystification to a larger group of stakeholders. Outcomes envisaged include more accessible, safe, and inclusive placemaking (Place) for a better quality of life and liveable communities & neighbourhoods.

This curation of accessible, safe and inclusive cities through People-Policy-Place (P3) in a collaborative manner with all the quadruple helix actors - government, civil society, academic & research, and industry/start-up on-board is a step towards sustainable development goals.

Keywords: India, inclusive, safe, accessible, persons with disabilities

2 INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is characterized by rapid economic growth, industrial development and aspiration to reduce poverty. Urbanization intends to achieve an improved quality of life, attributes to better employment & education, socio-economic growth, ease of availability of products, higher level of facilities and services, and provisions of recreation, and entertainment. However, the complex structure of urban societies often leads to the marginalization thus creating inequality and discrimination. This includes transportation, healthcare, and social welfare among many other services, which may not always be empathetic to the needs of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, elderly, women, and children.

Higher densities, stress on available resources, and degrading quality of environment have already made urban living in Indian cities quite challenging in itself and it is particularly true for these vulnerable groups. Lack of universal design is a challenge in most of the public buildings including schools, banks, offices, and public open spaces. Restricted mobility, dependence on others, lack of sensitivity among fellow citizens, create a sense of insecurity and isolation among these vulnerable groups, impacting their physical as well as mental health. Abuse, social stigmas, and exposure to accidents and crime have created a sense of fear. The estimates point out that around 25% of India's population would need universal accessibility to live independently and with dignity, making it imperative to emphasize on 'Accessible and Inclusive component' as the right path for achieving sustainable development.

3 BASIIC PROGRAMME

National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) in collaboration with Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and support from the Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK Government is implementing the programme "Building Accessible, Safe & Inclusive Indian Cities (BASIIC)" through a Technical Assistance Support Unit (TASU) established at NIUA. The principal goal of BASIIC is to build the capacities of Indian cities to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of the persons with disabilities (PwDs) and vulnerable sections including elderly, women, and children. It aims to homogenize the relevant definitions and concepts and to holistically build the capacity of practitioners to plan and implement the tenets of universal access and inclusiveness. The programme shall also actively work to gather the key

stakeholders on a common platform and demonstrate innovative solutions – technologies, programs, and service delivery models in the realm of universal access. It will develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for pilot cities to assess and improve their standards of universal access and inclusivity and promote replicability in other Indian cities.

3.1 Key objectives

- Revision and integration of the policies, guidelines, and standards for universal access, safety, and inclusivity to all but more so for Persons with Disabilities and vulnerable sections- (Policy)
- Mapping the areas of opportunity in implementation of policies and provisions at the city level and replicable solutions for making cities more accessible and inclusive for PwDs - (Place)
- Empowerment of practitioners and relevant communities (professional and citizen-led) through peer-to-peer learning, knowledge management and capacity building for long-term sustainability - (People)

3.2 Key focus areas

- Universal Design & Accessibility projects (Pan city/ Area-based), Safety Initiatives (Spatial and social), Inclusive Policy & Guidelines for persons with a disability, women, elderly, and children in the urban areas (especially smart cities), Use of assistive technology and IoT in Urban development; Social security & Schemes

4 CURATION THROUGH CO-CREATION

The programme intends to pursue the approach further and bring in a paradigmatic change in the existing urban planning and design process by assimilation of the tenets of universal accessibility & safety, ultimately leading to a holistic approach towards inclusive development. Adopting the UNCRPD motto of "Nothing for Us - with Us", the programme is entirely designed through the process of co-creation and participation and activation of a continuous dialogue among various relevant stakeholders. Pre-emptive and participatory planning, Capacity building of the urban policymakers and practitioners as well as strengthening the existing legislative framework through advocacy initiatives are among some of the transformational approaches adopted by the programme to achieve the expected outcomes.

The process of co-creation as adopted by the programme is a five-step progressive approach to Engage, Understand, Ideate, Define, and Validate and has been reflected in the aim and objectives of the programme. The genesis of the programme is based on the recommendations given in a consultation held in September 2018. It highlighted legislative framework and guidelines, inclusive design & planning, institutional arrangement & capacity building, awareness generation, up-gradation of ICT components in smart cities, and regular monitoring and evaluation as six major areas of interventions.

The follow-up consultation held in September 2019, resulted in finalization of the programme framework and tenets through the process of co-creation.

5 THE ART OF CURATING AN ACCESSIBLE, SAFE & INCLUSIVE CITY

The process of curation under this programme is structured around three key areas – People, Policy, and Place that are critical for an accessible, safe, and inclusive city.

5.1 People

Marginalized or under represented communities can be broadly categorized into following two vulnerable groups, based on

- Socio-Economic Characteristics – like caste, race, income
- Demographics/ physical & emotional state of a person- like disability, age, sex, etc

The programme targets the vulnerable groups belonging to the second category as the beneficiaries. The vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities, elderly, women, and children often faced discrimination due to a lack of access to the opportunities of personal growth. Limited or no accessibility of the built environment, from housing to street designs, to public buildings and public open spaces, and limited

inclusion of the policies and urban services including water & sanitation, healthcare & education systems, and livelihood opportunities, barriers to information and technologies, have hindered their path of empowerment. The cultural attitudes including negative stereotyping and social stigma and exposure to crimes, abuse, and accidents have further led to their marginalization in the urban areas. It is in this context, that a need has been identified to adopt a bottom-up approach of ideation of innovative ways to improve access to build environments, basic services, emergency response, and information for targeted vulnerable groups. The needs and potential of each individual are different depending upon the types of disability, age, sex as well as socio-economic status. The huge diversity among the target groups makes it important as well as interesting to include their participation in the art of curation of accessible, safe, and inclusive cities.

Since its inception, the program has managed to identify and connect with important stakeholders and the opportunities for the National Institute of Urban Affairs to leverage its strengths in the area of accessibility, inclusivity, and safety, especially in the evolving urban ecosystem. The programme has associated itself with the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Government of India and Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, and has represented itself at various platforms. Disable person organizations (DPOs), Civil Societies, research organizations, and private entities working actively in the field have been identified, consulted, and engaged over time.

The program currently finds itself at a critical juncture, where validation of its understanding of the sector, highlighting the areas of priority, and forging partnerships for achieving envisioned objectives are its primary objectives for success. Moreover, with the BASIIC program, NIUA at an institutional level intends to mainstream the dialogue on accessibility, safety, and inclusivity in the urban context. It is in this context that the need for a variety of time-critical consultations with the identified stakeholders at the city, state, and national levels is critical. These consultations have made "People" Participation a significant part of the programme which will directly or indirectly feed into the programmes intended outcomes, support partner cities in their plans, and subsequently, fortify NIUA's role in the urban narrative of "Cities for All".

5.2 Policy

India is a signatory to the 'Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region' (2000). It also signed the 'Biwako Millennium Framework' (2002) for developing an inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society. The 'Biwako Plus Five' (2007) further efforts towards an inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific'. India has also ratified the 'UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (2008). In the revision of relevant acts, as a response to the participation in the UNCRPD, the need components of accessibility, safety, and inclusivity of disable persons in the built environment have been stressed.

Under the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006), PwDs are recognized as valuable human resource for the country, underlining the need for the creation of a facilitating environment that provides equal opportunities and focus on the protection of their rights. National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, Government of India has been emphasizing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) goals/targets to be reflected in all state/ local government programs and policies. The SDG 10 signifies "equal opportunity" to all which strengthens the need for inclusivity of the unprivileged and the vulnerable including the Persons with Disabilities.

Some of the key urban missions of Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Government of India - Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM-U), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U), Smart Cities Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) promote accessibility and inclusivity practices in the development process. Enforcement and implementation on the ground is seen as the major challenge with varying impact. It is, therefore, required to clearly define the extent of inclusion and accessibility provisions to ensure stringent implementation.

Following are some of the observations derived based on a detailed review of the existing acts, policies, and guidelines as well as global treaties and conventions. It highlights participation and consultation of the stakeholder as one of the key components to achieving inclusivity in the policies and schemes.

(1) The need was felt for a comprehensive and holistic approach towards universal access, safety and inclusivity into the urban development, better incorporation and cross-referencing among the different

guidelines, integration into the statutory system, and participation of the stakeholder in the development process.

(2) Community integration, the extent of involvement, engagement, and participation of an individual in the same manner as the typical citizen in the community, is an important issue for individuals with disabilities, the elderly, women and children.

(3) Critical role of sensitization and awareness among the citizens.

5.3 Place

A systematic review and analysis of the current and proposed projects of all 100 Smart Cities in India was conducted to understand the potentials of partnership. Among the shortlisted cities, Varanasi has been selected as the first Partner city for BASIIC. As a part of the technical assistance to cities, TASU has identified a 5-point engagement strategy –

(1) Review of DPRs, Project Specific Report, Policy Brief for planning, and designing cities ‘accessible for all’

(2) Capacity development of the City Stakeholders on universal design/inclusive planning and design principles

(3) Implementation of the pilot interventions in the cities

(4) Cross learning from other smart cities about similar interventions

(5) Setting up of Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation Mechanism

6 CITY AUDITS ON BASIIC TENETS

A comprehensive audit is also planned to be conducted in the partner cities. This will assist in drawing insights on the current status of accessibility, safety and inclusivity of city-level infrastructure. The audits will support the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in –

- Understanding the major gaps around the accessibility value chain
- Planning for the demonstration of innovative solutions in the ULBs
- In developing a sound monitoring system for accessibility in the city
- Bridging the gap between policy/guidelines and implementation at a city level

7 CONCLUSION:

The process of co-creation will also bring in a sense of ownership among the stakeholders. Addressing equitable participation by ensuring information is available in accessible formats, accessibility of public and private transportation, inclusive opportunities for civic, cultural, education and voluntary engagement and barrier-free and enabling interior and exterior spaces, which will trigger the cyclic effect of the tenets of accessibility, safety, and inclusivity and ensure all persons can participate in urban transformation and make productive contributions to society, thereby creating “Cities for All” in its pristine form.

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