

VOICE FOR CHANGE

Urban Poor Children
Redefining Safe Spaces

A Praxis Publication (2015)

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Voice for Change: Urban Poor Children Redefining Safe Spaces



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
Setting the context	2
"A safe space is..."	2
"Most of the public places are unsafe, not only because of the fear of someone harming us, but because of the fear that no one will stand up for us."	3
"Even our homes cannot be called completely safe"	5
Barriers and Aspirations	7
"Everything maybe unsafe but some things can change"	7
"There is never enough water for everyone"	8
"Once we have regular water supply, we can talk about other things related to water"	9
"Bad sanitation affects us the most"	10
"Why can't we have toilets which are clean and don't smell?"	11
"So many children have drowned in overflowing drains - we are scared to step out in the monsoon"	12
"Bins that everyone can see, and which are cleaned regularly"	13
"Private developers construct large, multistoried complexes and gated communities in our open spaces"	13
"Open spaces where we can play without being stopped"	14
"We are often unknowingly mistreated when we use public transport facilities"	16
"Roads should be brightly lit, well-ventilated and spacious"	16
"Is darkness better or electric shock?"	16
"Metered, regular supply"	17
"I fear I will return home to see it razed"	18
"My house should be bigger than the Taj Mahal"	19
Getting our collective voices heard	19
Annexure 1: Acknowledgements	21



Preface

Praxis – Institute for Participatory Practices is a not-for-profit, autonomous, development organisation, committed to the democratisation of development processes. It is devoted to advocating for community-led development initiatives and governance practices that centralise the perspectives of marginalised groups. In order to do this, Praxis endeavours to identify opportunities and forums in which vulnerable and excluded groups are able to voice their concerns and aspirations in a meaningful way.

Set against the context of a growing interest among global civil society and state actors on the process to decide what should replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015, a United Nations High-Level Panel has been constituted with three co-chairs, the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Indonesia and Liberia. The High-Level Panel has come up with its report of recommendations in this regard.

Praxis is part of the Participatory Research Group of the Participate initiative co-convened by the Institute for Development Studies, Sussex (IDS), and the global civil society campaign Beyond2015. The ongoing participatory research projects are gathering perspectives on the post-2015 debate from the people most affected by poverty and exclusion.

As part of various initiatives to influence Post-2015 development agenda, Praxis has produced a “Voice For Change” series that attempts to enhance the participation of vulnerable communities to analyse, dialogue and voice their perspectives on development goals. Praxis acknowledges that participation is not a technical or a mechanical process that can be realised through the application of a set of static and universal tools and techniques, but rather a political process that requires challenging the existing power structure. It sees communities not as objects but as agents of change.

The fourth issue in the Voice For Change series, 'Urban poor children redefining safe Spaces' is focused on children and their understanding of safe spaces and their aspirations for each of the spaces like water, sanitation, housing, open spaces, power and road and transport.

It is the result of a series of engagements with these groups and attempts to amplify voices of these communities on issues underlying these questions. Also appended are audio-visual materials in the form of a participatory video and digital stories, which were created by some homeless and slum resident children in Delhi.

Praxis acknowledges the valuable contributions of Bernard van Leer Foundation, Humara Bachpan Campaign, participants of the Participatory Video process, organisations that helped us access these children and all the children who shared their experiences to help produce this document.

Pradeep Narayanan
Director, Research and Consultancies

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CEO

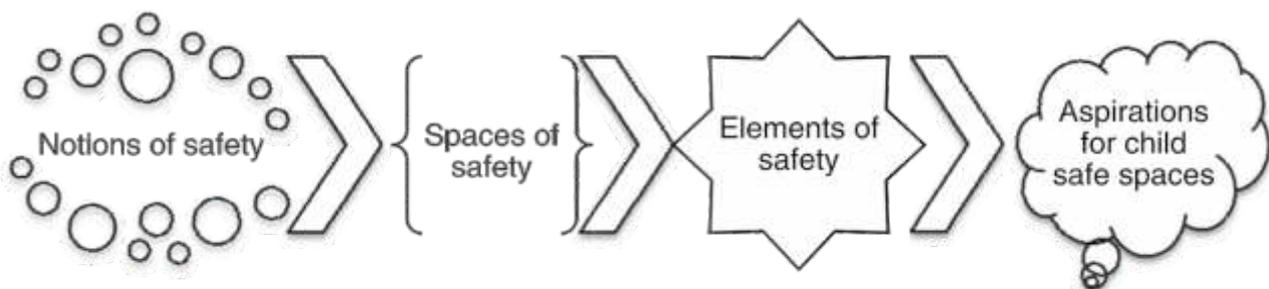
Setting the context

In light of the global trend of increasing urbanisation, cities need to emerge as spaces that cater to and nurture the varied needs and aspirations of the diverse categories and groups of people living in them – men, women, children, disabled and high and low income groups among others. However, in reality, primary and secondary data reveal that cities lend themselves as spaces of exclusion especially for the urban poor and particularly women and children, whose vulnerability is compounded due to their age.

Children living in cities are exposed to different spaces in their childhood - home, playground, streets, bye-lanes, schools, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres, parks, bus and railway stations, markets, residential homes and many more. The quality and environment of spaces play a crucial role as it determines the level of participation in and interaction with the space. Unique needs of children such as railings for staircases, easy-to-reach taps and switches, compound walls around the school, toilets that are not in secluded areas and grass in playgrounds become some of the participation and use determinants.

This document is based on a series of participatory exercises facilitated with young urban poor children (including the homeless). It includes a) detailing of interactions facilitated with young children and their collectives, by developing social maps and aspirational maps of spaces children accessed, b) digital stories that children created about their notions of safety and recommendations for making infrastructure more child-(and thereby community) friendly and c) a process facilitated for scripting and developing a participatory video by young children on public spaces that are important to them. Names of children quoted in the document have been changed to protect their identity.

The document takes the reader through the following sections:

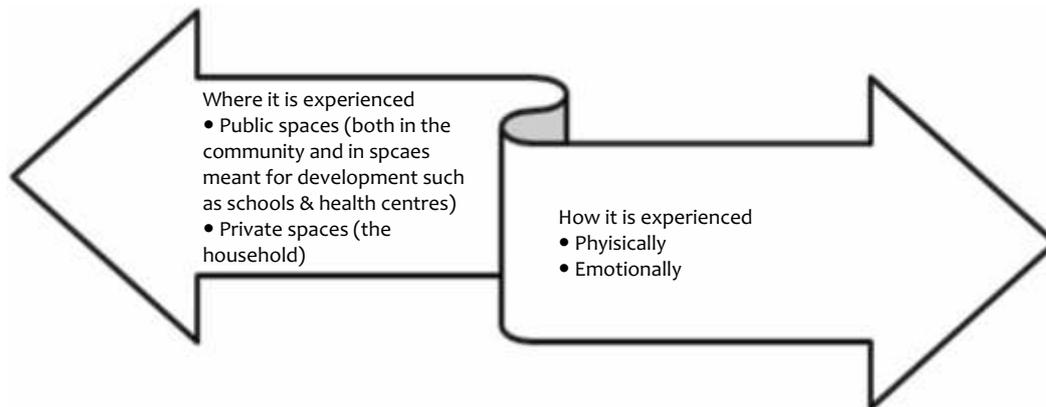


“A safe space is...”

“A safe space is where I know I will not be hurt by anyone and if I get hurt, I know there will be someone to help me”, said Sunita. Rama added, “I feel secure at home as I can talk to my mother and father if there is anything that disturbs me”. A group of ten girls (between 11 and 18 years of age) from Shivangla, Uttar Pradesh, explained that a safe space is perceived as a space free from harm. Respondents from Indira Market, New Delhi, also explained their perception of a safe space. Radha said “A safe space is where I will not be harmed”. Suneeta adds “I feel safe at home as I can behave freely and be myself at home. My parents protect me”.

Safe spaces are recognised by children as a non-negotiable and this is echoed by the child protection discourse as well. However, the concept of safety varies from individual to individual and is rooted in the context that they live in. Interactions with diverse sets of children in various contexts over a period of time revealed the multitude of ways in which this is experienced. It includes:





“Most of the public places are unsafe, not only because of the fear of someone harming us, but because of the fear that no one will stand up for us.”

Children list different kinds of dangers they face in unsafe spaces. These range from eve teasing, molestation, rape, kidnapping, physical abuse and acid attacks. Anuja, a 16-year-old girl from Andhra Pradesh narrated her story on the concerns of safety and unsafe situations. She says, “boys tease me on my way to school and the bus conductor touches my hand in the bus in an inappropriate manner and has often misbehaved while handing over the tickets”. She bore it all silently and could never muster the courage to protest. The image alongside enlists the spaces that girls considered safe and unsafe (this image is from a discussion in Andhra Pradesh).

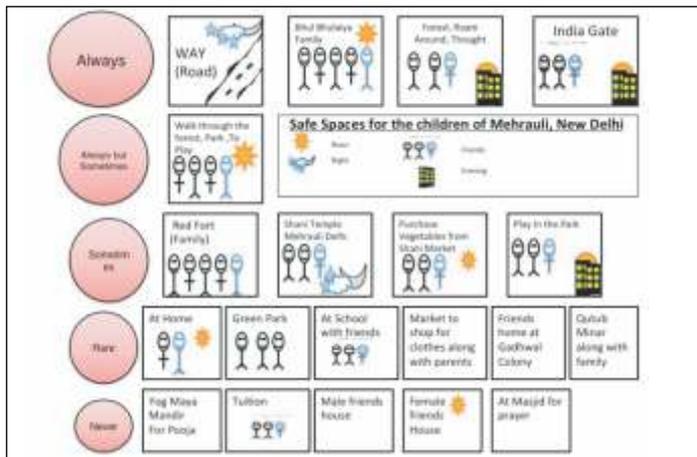


A group of seven children (ages between 8 and 14 years) who collect scrap from Sarojini Nagar Market, New Delhi, explained how they moved around only in groups out of fear. Sheela mentioned “there are children who have ventured out alone and have been abducted, raped and also killed”. Raju said, “A nallah that runs along the place is (perceived to be) haunted. A boy who went there alone was found dead. Girls move around in groups in the morning to collect scrap. They fear for their safety, especially on account of the boys under the influence of alcohol who frequent that area”.

Kamli, a respondent at a session with Class 6 students in a school for tribal children in Odisha, said “we are afraid of lonely stretches of the road as there are chances of being kidnapped by strangers”. She and her classmates recounted two such incidents: “There was a case in the neighbouring village where a man kidnapped a Class 5 boy and performed human sacrifice on him. One girl was kidnapped in a different village and found murdered. We are afraid of being kidnapped by someone”.

Vikas said of the street leading from his home to the market “becomes unsafe only after 7 pm. Until then, I do not have any fear”. Kavitha, on the other hand, says, “any space would become unsafe, if 'aise ladke' (such boys, referring to rowdy boys) are there.” A group of girls from Indira Market, who considered their homes as safe spaces, spoke of alcoholism and the violence they faced at the hands of drunk fathers.

Ejaz (18 years old) and Sharukh (17 years old) sell clothes on a pushcart beside a street near the Community Centre in New Friends Colony, New Delhi. They point out that the area around the neighbouring school was very unsafe for girls. There were cases of eve teasing and stalking.

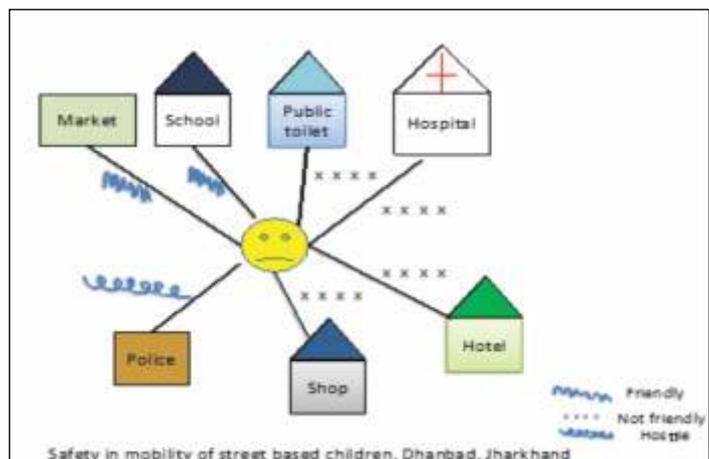


This is a matrix showing the frequency of violence against children in Mehrauli, New Delhi. According to the respondents, eve teasing was common on the main road. Children complained that "some boys intentionally touch girls who pass by the road". Children were scared to go to the nearest forest even during the day as there have been several incidents of molestation, as well as murder.

"The spaces that children fear the most are the market area and the village which is near it as a lot

of people assemble there and if we are not in a group then there are chances that we get kidnapped and trafficked", they shared. "They are also scared to go alone to the pipe from where they sometimes fetch water where instances of violence have occurred sometime".

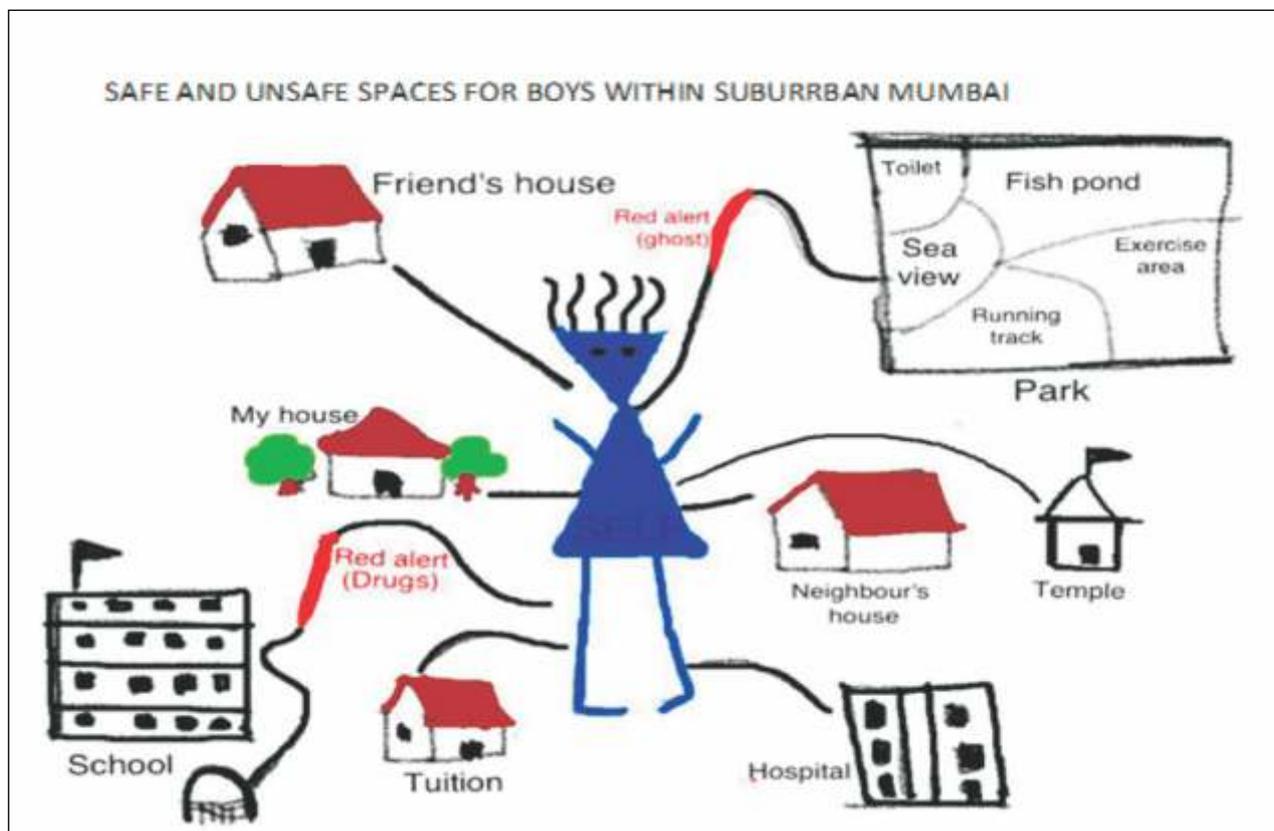
Anju and her friends in a slum in Mumbai shared, "Streets are not safe as boys/ men deliberately try pushing and teasing. The path to the community toilet, the park, the small hotels/eateries surrounding our homes, the streets around the petrol pumps and other shops are not safe either". The image alongside is a representation of how children in Dhanbad perceive safe spaces. Girls in multiple locations expressed how they have been eve teased,



pushed and touched deliberately by older boys, standing/ sitting around in groups, at these spaces. Most of these boys smoke, drink and consume ganja (weed). Some of the comments passed at the respondents when they pass by these boys are "lipstick", "Nepalese", "hairband" and so on. At times, there are older boys too, as also drunken men who sit and leech at them when they pass by. Women/ girls avoid going to the places were men chat. Moreover, at night, these areas get lonelier. Without street lamps, it simply becomes more unsafe.



While girls shared more instances of feeling unsafe and vulnerable, boys too shared their perception of unsafe public spaces. They resonated most fears that the girls shared (except that of eve teasing). The image below details some additional notions of safety and lack of safety expressed by boys:



This map was made by a group of boys in suburban Mumbai. The two areas they marked off as dangerous were the route to school (Red Alert – Drug Junkies) and the route to the park (Red Alert – Ghost). The other place they find somewhat difficult to access is their tuition class because the physical condition of the road there is particularly bad. Although this group had shared that the police take bribes and cook up complaints against people, they did not find approaching the police station in itself a difficult exercise.

They identified the road just outside their school, the Sunday market, the route to the community toilet, the park, the small hotels/ eateries around their homes, the streets around the petrol pumps and other shops as unsafe areas. They expressed how girls are eve teased, pushed and touched deliberately by older boys, standing/ sitting around in groups, at these spaces. They also mentioned that verbal abuse and teasing is rampant even within school premises.

“Even our homes cannot be called completely safe”

In discussions with children, what emerged across all locations is the fact that at times, they experience a feeling of lack of safety in their homes as well. In a discussion with 20 children in a slum in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, they shared contexts at home that might cause fear. These are detailed in the table below:

Place	Those afraid	Reasons
SPACES		
Toilet	Girls: 3 Boys: 4	During discussions all children said they were scared of using the toilets (often adjacent to their homes) They were afraid to use it at night, because of fear of darkness, ghosts, snakes and frogs. Most stories about ghosts were told to them by elder siblings, parents or grandparents. One student had read about ghosts. Two boys claimed to have seen ghosts when they were with their uncles.
Bed room/ bed	Girls: 3 Boys: 1	Fear was associated with sleeping outside in the open because of reasons above. In addition, there was the fear of falling from the cot or being suddenly awoken from sleep. None had experienced any kind of bad touch or unpleasant experience. They were also scared of contact with low hanging or live wires.
Garden/ backyard	-	No fears associated with this space
Well	Girls: 6 Boys: 5	The children said they were afraid of the well because it is very deep and you cannot see the end. They are afraid of falling. They are also scared of frogs and snakes around the well. One girl said she was thrown into the well by her father because she did something wrong. She said the well was shallow, so she climbed out of it soon after
Kitchen	Girls: 6 Boys: 4	The children said they are afraid of the kitchen mainly for the fear of hurting or scalding themselves.
PEOPLE		
Parents	Girls: 1 Boys: 4	Parents scold both boys and girls who do not listen to them. Rest are not scared of them but they are aware that they will scold or beat them if they are naughty. Both boys and girls get scolded and are also beaten from time to time.
Elder siblings	Girls: 1 Boys: 1	During discussion everyone said the elder siblings, especially elder brothers beat the younger siblings – both boys and girls. The triggers were of disobeying mother (mainly for girls) and roaming outside the house (mainly for boys) 4 boys said they played till 7 pm. Most of the girls returned earlier if they went out to play as there was work at home. Both boys and girls come back home to study. Girls also had to finish work before they sat down to study.

Some children in other locations, like Radhika in Ahmedabad, shared that often drunk fathers subjected them, along with their mothers, to repeated physical abuse/ beating in the house. Many children like her had come to believe that violence and abuse at home by fathers was quite normal.

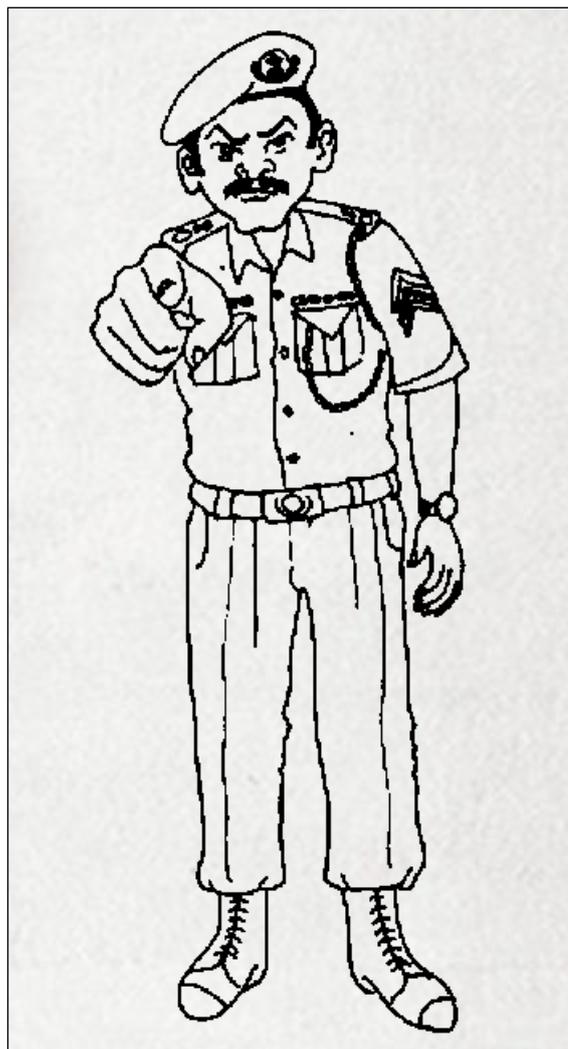
For children who are homeless, the street and public spaces become their home. Such children, rendered vulnerable by poverty or adverse circumstances, often find their available spaces further encroached upon and violated.

Sultan, who stays at Kota railway station in Rajasthan, has three siblings. He sells fruits for a living. The children are constantly harassed by the police, who threatened to shut down their business if they did not pay them an amount. Similar is the story of Ishwar, who always faces problems from the railway police personnel. He studied up to Class 6 and ran away from his house in Gangarampur, Bihar. He used to sell water bottles on the railway platform. Once a railway police force official caught him and asked him for Rs. 20. He denied having money despite having some. He was severely beaten and lost the money as well. When he went back to his business and made a small profit, he



gambled the money and with the Rs. 60 he earned, decided to start a peanut business. Once again he was harassed by the police for bribes. When he didn't pay, his goods were damaged and he was thoroughly beaten. Since then he fears the police and even the sight of them makes him shudder. A group of children who live at the New Delhi Railway Station said they were afraid of policemen as well. They reported frequent harassment by policemen, including verbal and sexual abuse, snatching money, beating and even giving them electric shocks. The police harassed them regularly.

Ranjita lives at Malda railway platform (West Bengal) with her younger sister. Ranjita had lost one leg in a train accident. She begs at the station with her sister. She does not trust any vendor. She trusts nobody except the other platform children. While interacting with them, Shahnaz says, “This is not at all safe for the girls. If we stay here for long, we will become sex workers just as all the girls who have lived here before have”. Similar is the fate of many girls across the country. Rani, now in her early 20s, used to live on the streets of Sholapur. She was barely into her teens when she was gang raped. “I used to live on the streets with my mother and my younger sister. Men would come and abuse us verbally and sexually.” She eventually got into sex work, but her mother and younger sister still live on the streets.



The absence of safety in public spaces manifests in different ways. These include an increase in crime, exposure to unpleasant or life-threatening incidents at two extremes of the spectrum. However, the less direct results of absence of public safety translate into the restrictions on choice, mobility and decision-making. While this happens in the case of boys too, it becomes much stronger among girls as they grow up. Whereas, boys find freedom with age, girls get handed over from one 'protector' to another – from a father to a brother to a husband.

Barriers and Aspirations

“Everything maybe unsafe but some things can change”

Through the detailed interactions with young children, some specific elements of daily living emerged as unsafe across locations. Children across the country shared specific issues related to each of these aspects as well as some ways to overcome these obstacles which render these elements unsafe or unusable. These elements include:



Water

Sanitation (toilets and drains)

Open spaces

Transport

Power

Housing



“There is never enough water for everyone”

Though urbanisation is known to ensure better access to safe water, urban poor children continue to endure many hardships, including the non-availability and inadequacy of water, poor quality of available water and the time and energy spent in fetching water. Children mention various issues related to water – from poor quality of available water to inadequate or no supply and inaccessible sources.

Children in Swarnim Nagar, Ahmedabad mentioned that they had to purchase water even to go to the toilet. “We are forced to buy water packets. Toilets do not have water supply”, says Tejas. Absence of water connection in bathrooms and toilets was particularly problematic for girls. Kavita and Madhavi share, “We feel embarrassed when we have to go and fetch water from outside to go to the toilet”.



Children from various locations complained of inadequate water supply. Non-availability of adequate water was a big issue in New Seemapuri. Rajiv observes, “There is hardly any water in the summers.” Dheeraj complains, “Water is supplied only twice a day and there is never enough for everyone”. Fights over water are common. Gautam, the member of a Child Club in Bhubaneswar, says “the ratio of taps to households is 1:10”.

Children often complain that they had to wait in long queues to fetch water. “It takes hours to fetch water... the queue is so long”, commented Rubina, New Delhi. Geeta complains “It is boring to stand in the queue.” And Payal points out, “We also miss out on studies as we have to wake up very early to fetch water.” Mallika, from Kannagi Nagar (Chennai), says, “I can never study in the morning. I have to go to fetch water.” In Moosaram Bagh of Andhra Pradesh, Neeraja shares “It is difficult and tiring to carry pots of water home”.

At some locations, children mentioned that the sources were far off. Girls in New Seemapuri, Delhi, complain of distant taps from which they had to fetch water. “We have to cover a long distance to fetch water and the journey is not safe”. Girls from Berhampur, Odisha, also shared that fetching water was a problem because of the distance.

Piped water supply remains a dream for children from several settlements. Some portions of New Seemapuri are completely dependent on water tanks. Vijay of Pattinampakkam, Chennai, says, “Municipal water is not pure and safe. We have to buy water bottles”. In Bawana, too, drinking water was not safe. It was supplied through a pipe bored into the ground.



Children from Delhi were also concerned about wastage. “A lot of water gets wasted due to leakages”, observes Abhay. Another added, “Sometimes water also gets wasted when adults fight over it”.

“Once we have regular water supply, we can talk about other things related to water”

Several water-related aspirations were raised by children. The sheer availability of water was an aspiration for a majority of children from several locations. “Every house should have regular water supply” insisted children. “Those households which have to use common and shared toilets should also have water supply” observed others. “A proper house with regular water supply” was mentioned by Neeta in Bhavnagar and echoed by several children as an aspiration. In New Seemapuri, Ranjit said, “All houses should be serviced by water tanks”. Mohan added, “Water tanks should be filled as soon as they are empty”. Meera from Chennai was emphatic about, “tap connections for every household”. Children from Mankhurd spoke of the aspiration for “A space to fill water and a tap with water throughout the day and year.”

Children who voiced their concern over poor maintenance of water storage facilities said, “Tanks should be regularly cleaned”. Sohail shared that “Water tanks should be properly covered”. Children discussed how covering water tanks could check breeding of mosquitoes and prevent diseases.

Ravi from Pattinapakkam, Chennai, aspired for clean water and said “we should have a centralised mineral water plant in the slum”. In Delhi, Manoj advocated for a “punitive fine or wastage of water”.

“Bad sanitation affects us the most”

Sanitation issues seem to weigh heavily on the minds of children of the urban poor. In several exercises conducted with different groups, problems associated with no toilets, inaccessible toilets, dirty toilets, dysfunctional toilets, garbage, overflowing drains, no drains and stagnant water among others emerged as areas of immense concern and relevance for children.

At many locations children defecated in the open. At Bawana, Gopal said “We defecate in the park and the area near the drain”. Ram, one among a group of children from Moosaram Bagh in Vadara Basti in Andhra Pradesh who use the nallah (open drains) for defecation, says “It is dangerous. We fear falling into the nallah”. Sheetal, another girl from the group, observes “Boys can watch us...it is embarrassing.” Shefali spoke of the fear of snakes in the vicinity of the nallah. Children from Pattinapakkam, Chennai, who sometimes use the beach for defecation said “There have been incidents of children being swept away by the waves”. “There are also water snakes” said Karthik. At the JNNURM site in Dwarka, children were not familiar with the idea of segregated spaces marked out as a bathroom and/or a toilet. At Berhampur, Odisha, Bipin explained why they defecated in the open despite availability of a public toilet. “The toilet complex has only four toilets. It is in a state of repair and younger boys are scared of crossing the busy road across which it is located”.

In the section below, experiences shared by children regarding what renders available community and public toilets inappropriate to use have been detailed.

Children spoke of the non-availability of water in toilets as a big problem. In Swarnim Nagar, Ahmedabad children abhorred the foul smell from the public toilet and they explained that this was because there was no water supply. “People have to buy and carry water packets to the toilets” shared Mamta. Girls in Berhampur, Odisha, mentioned that water was available in the community toilet only during certain hours.

Children from several locations mentioned unclean toilets as an impediment. “The public toilet is too dirty to use. We prefer defecating in the open near the park” observed Imran at one location. “That place stinks!” remarked Raja, referring to the public toilet near his slum. “The mobile toilets are filthy. They are not cleaned regularly”, observed Rajiv from New Seemapuri, Delhi.

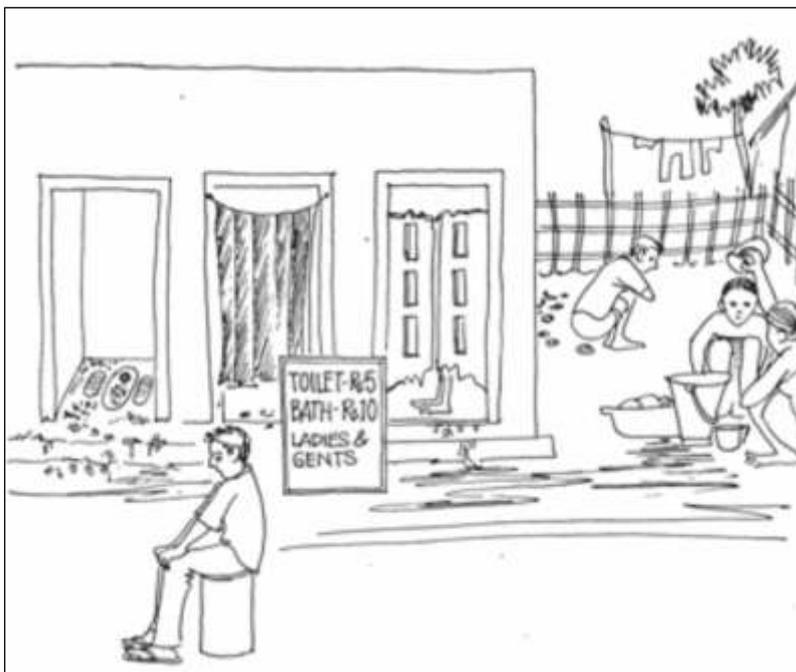
In an exercise conducted with children from Pattinapakkam, Chennai, the long queues and the fee charged at the public toilet were mentioned as the reason why children did not like/feared using the toilets. “I have to wait a while for my turn to use the toilet” said Yakub from Pattinapakkam “... and the queue is very long”. Rajini mentioned “I get late for school if I stand in the queue”. Inadequate number of toilets for settlements along with inadequate number of toilet seats in existing public and community toilets were stated as the reason why men and boys prefer defecating in the open. Gayatri, an older girl child said “We (girls) do not have a choice (of open defecation). We have to wait even if we get late for school”.

The fee charged at public toilets was a recurrent issue raised in all interactions conducted at several locations. Children from Pattinapakkam, Chennai, mentioned that they paid Rs. 3 per use, while those in New Seemapuri, Delhi paid Rs. 2 per use. “Its unfair to be asked to pay to use such dirty toilets” remarked Aruna.

Children also spoke of basic infrastructure, such as adequate number of lights, functional taps and doors, lacking in



public toilets. “The doors are broken. How can I use the toilet? Anybody can see through”, said Madhavi. Boys in Berhampur spoke of the “metallic doors which had corroded from the bottom, offering no privacy”. Speaking of broken toilets, Juhi of Maharashtra Nagar, Mankhurd, Mumbai said “We feel scared of falling in. We have heard about some children who have”. Girls at several locations spoke specifically about how inadequate light within the toilet complex as well as on the road approaching the toilet made them feel unsafe. At Indira Market in New Delhi, Sheena said “The road leading to the community toilet has no lights. We feel scared using it after dark.” Children in Delhi mentioned hanging wires in the toilet pose a danger”.



Eve teasing and harassment was common in the vicinity of the public toilets. Girls in the age group of 11-18 in Mumbai said, “After dark, the public toilet is not safe. We have to take out mothers along”. Others added, “It is not safe even in the afternoon. We get teased and harassed by boys if we go alone”. Girls in Andhra Pradesh reported “Boys tease girls who use the Sulabh.

Accessibility of public and common toilets was also problematic for children. The community toilet at Berhampur, as mentioned earlier, was located across a busy road and children faced problems crossing over to it. Girls from Berhampur spoke of the difficulties in walking down to the toilet frequently during menstruation to change pads. This was echoed by many other girls, who added that appropriate disposal mechanism for sanitary pads and no space to dry menstrual cloth, were other issues they faced.

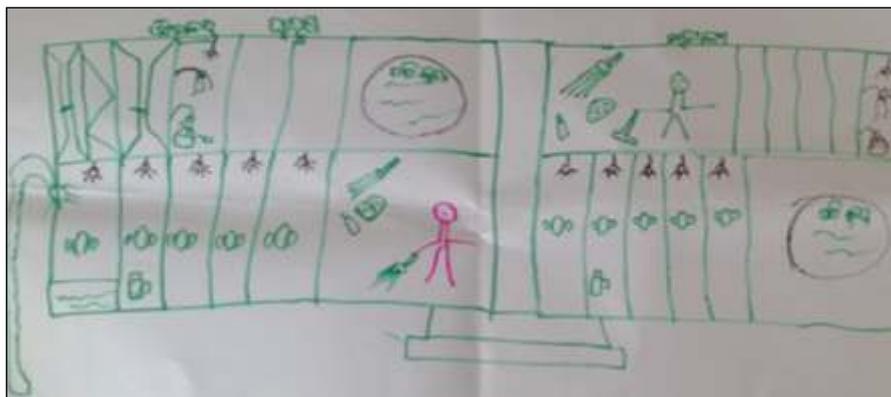
“Why can't we have toilets which are clean and don't smell?”

Children articulated varied aspirations regarding what an ideal toilet and bathing space should be. Most aspirations were about basic necessities and infrastructure like adequate water supply, functional taps, proper doors with latches, adequate number of toilet seats, lights, soap and most importantly cleanliness and proper maintenance. “All bathrooms and toilets should have proper water connections” said children in Delhi. Children aspired that every toilet should have “doors with latch”.

Sohail and his friends in Delhi shared, “there should be separate toilets for children and the differently abled. The differently abled need Western style toilets. And children need toilets which are smaller so they are not scared of falling in”.

In Berhampur, a group of boys described their concept of an ideal sanitation space as one that “should have gender

segregated sections, door of each enclosure made of a durable material and should lock well; water taps, a mug for water and light which on one can steal in each toilet. There should also be a cleaner who lived on the premises so that maintenance was not an issue....” They also aspired for “separate and



covered bathing units with lights, doors that locked well and a bucket and mug inside each bathroom made of a durable material and chained so that it could not be stolen”.

Some aspirations were rooted in the context in which children find themselves - children pointed out that there should be no user charges for community and public toilets; there should be separate doors for entry of men and women; separate toilets for men and women; and there should be street lights on the road to the toilet. That community and public toilets are not 'safe spaces' was reinforced by the fact that children mentioned that policemen should be stationed in the vicinity of public toilets. The aspiration of “an approachable sulabh in charge who can receive and act on complaints” was also mentioned. Adequate space was mentioned in the visualisation of an ideal toilet.

“So many children have drowned in overflowing drains – we are scared to step out in the monsoon”

Absence of drainage facilities was often cited by children in the course of discussions on public spaces. Shilpi in Fatehwadi, Ahmedabad said, “Our locality has no drainage”. Anamika commented, “During rains we cannot step outside the house because of water logging”. In Berhampur, Odisha, Shiangi shared, “There is no drainage system. There are only small drains that people have themselves made”. They spoke of the problem of mosquito breeding due to stagnant water.

Open drains at Pragjyotish Housing Complex Society, Guwahati, resulted in accidents, reported children. Ruhul said, “There have been accidents, especially after dark”. One group of children from Andhra Pradesh also mentioned cases of children falling into drains and dying. “Since there is no fencing, there is always the risk of children drowning in drains”, said Bhaskar from Moosaram Bagh, Vadara Basti, Andhra Pradesh. “Drains and sewer lines do not have covers”, observed Jyoti at Bhubaneswar.

One group of children from Andhra Pradesh mentioned overflowing drains as a big problem. “When it rains, the drains overflow and the filthy water enters my house”, said Vikas. Priya said, “Water from the taps flows to the garbage bin and often creates a mess and slush which makes it difficult to cross the road”. Blockages were reported to be common in Kannagi Nagar. The drains in Bawana were overflowing and choked. Waste was littered all over and the pit system was used.

Children at various locations aspired for better drainage. In the process conducted with children at New Delhi, a child said, “There should be better drains so that water does not stagnate on the roads.” Kannan of Kannagi Nagar



mentioned, “Drainage could be made systematic through a big bore well pipe. Once a week it should suck the water, and maintain cleanliness”.

“Bins that everyone can see, and which are cleaned regularly”

Children at New Seemapuri complained that the park was used to dump garbage. Madhu observed, “It is very bad during the rains when the garbage starts rotting”.

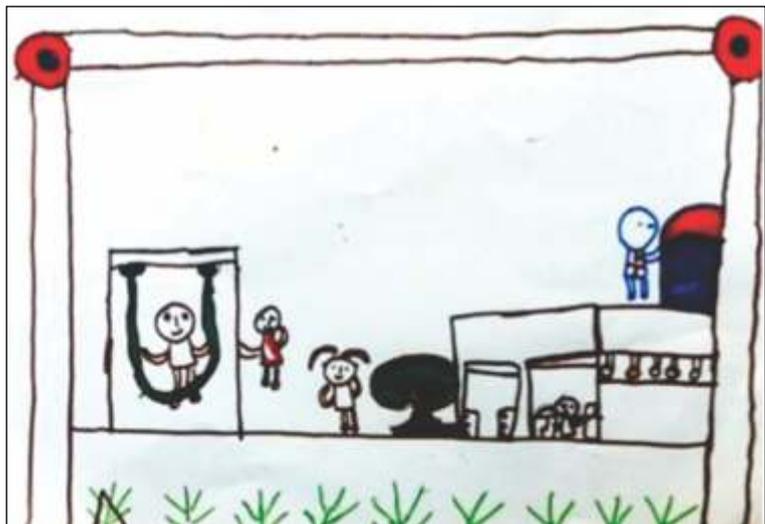
Children from Bhubaneswar observed that people were forced to throw garbage on the streets because there were not enough dustbins. Children also narrated how they got reprimanded when they objected to people throwing garbage on the roads, in parks and other open spaces. “When we ask them not to (throw garbage) we are scolded and yelled at and sometimes abusive language is also used”.

Children at some locations were concerned about the contamination of soil and environmental pollution resulting from inappropriate garbage disposal. Members of a Child Club in Bhubaneswar said “This (cutting of trees) has led to water accumulation. People also throw garbage in them (holes from where trees have been uprooted) and this has polluted the soil”.

Gopal in New Delhi aspired for “A big disposal bin on road side so that waste can be thrown into it”. Sagar mentioned, “There should be a dustbin placed on the side of the roads”. In Andhra Pradesh, children wanted the garbage bins to be located at a distance from the nallah. “Garbage should not be thrown in the park” observed children at New Seemapuri, Delhi.

“Private developers construct large, multistoried complexes and gated communities in our open spaces”

Open spaces in cities are increasingly becoming out of bounds for children of the urban poor. Cramped in ever shrinking slums and resettlement sites, in single room houses which barely have enough space to accommodate entire families, children rue the fact that even parks and playgrounds are either unavailable or inaccessible. In some areas that were visited, children had no open spaces to play in. “The narrow lanes between rows of houses are the only open space available for children to play in” observed Rakesh from Bawana, Delhi. Children in Swarnim Nagar, Ahmedabad, also had to make do with small spaces right outside their homes. “There is no playground in our area” said Sanjay regretfully. Members of a Child Club in Bhubaneswar explained that in the absence of a playground in the vicinity of their homes, they are forced to play on roads and this often results in accidents. They had several such unfortunate incidents to narrate.



Children across locations spoke of parks and playgrounds as dirty spaces full of garbage and litter. “People throw

trash in the park” said a several child from New Seemapuri. Out of four parks in the area, two had been turned into dump yards explained Pradeep. “There is garbage, stagnant water and stones in the playground” said Tushar from Maharashtra Nagar, Mankhurd. In Swarnim Nagar, Aditi mentioned, “There is a lot of garbage and stones in the park. We often get pierced through slippers while running around.” In Fatehwadi, Ahmedabad, Gowardhan had this to say about the open space used by them to play “There are not too many trees for shade and it gets very hot. The ground is strewn with garbage, has several pointed stones. It gets slushy during rains. There are scorpions and snakes and during summers there is fear of being attacked by big monkeys.” Girls mentioned the added fear of stray dogs.

Infrastructure-related problems mentioned by children included absence of benches, broken benches, no or broken swings, no drinking water and no garbage bins in parks and playgrounds.

Children came up with various explanations as to why they considered parks as unsafe spaces. In New Seemapuri, children said: “The park is not safe. Drugs are sold there”. Rahul further said that “The police supports them (drug peddlers), and take bribes from them and let them do what they are doing”. Children from Pattinapakkam, Chennai mentioned that though they loved going to the park, they were scared because “Drunk men hang around near the park”. In Maharashtra Nagar, girls reported that “Older boys and men gambled in the garden”. Besides, girls at most locations spoke of the problem of eve teasing which rendered parks and playgrounds inaccessible for them. “Boys sing suggestive songs and make us feel uncomfortable” said a Mariam from Maharashtra Nagar.

The fact that girls are increasingly losing access to parks and playgrounds is alarming. The two parks in New Seemapuri, which have not yet been turned into dump yards, are both frequented only by boys. A girl said “We do not have any space to play.” Another observed “We have to make do with the road”. In Moosaram Bagh of Andhra Pradesh too girls played in the bye-lanes while only boys went to the playground. In Maharashtra Nagar, Mumbai, girls mentioned that their parents had forbidden them from visiting the ground near their settlement. “My father says that it is not safe for girls”, said Meeta. Suneeta observed, “Girls above the age of ten cannot go to the garden.” “Boys shoo us away and throw cricket balls at us. Even my brother discourages me from going to the playground” observed Yasmin from Fatehwadi.

“Open spaces where we can play without being stopped”

Children at various locations mentioned their aspiration for clean and safe open spaces where they could play. In Delhi, children mentioned that every cluster of 100 people should have “a playground near every block”. They further elaborated that parks should have “benches for children and others, swings and sidewalks”. They should have “ample grass and trees” and “boundary walls on all sides”. The image below details the range of things children aspired for in open spaces:

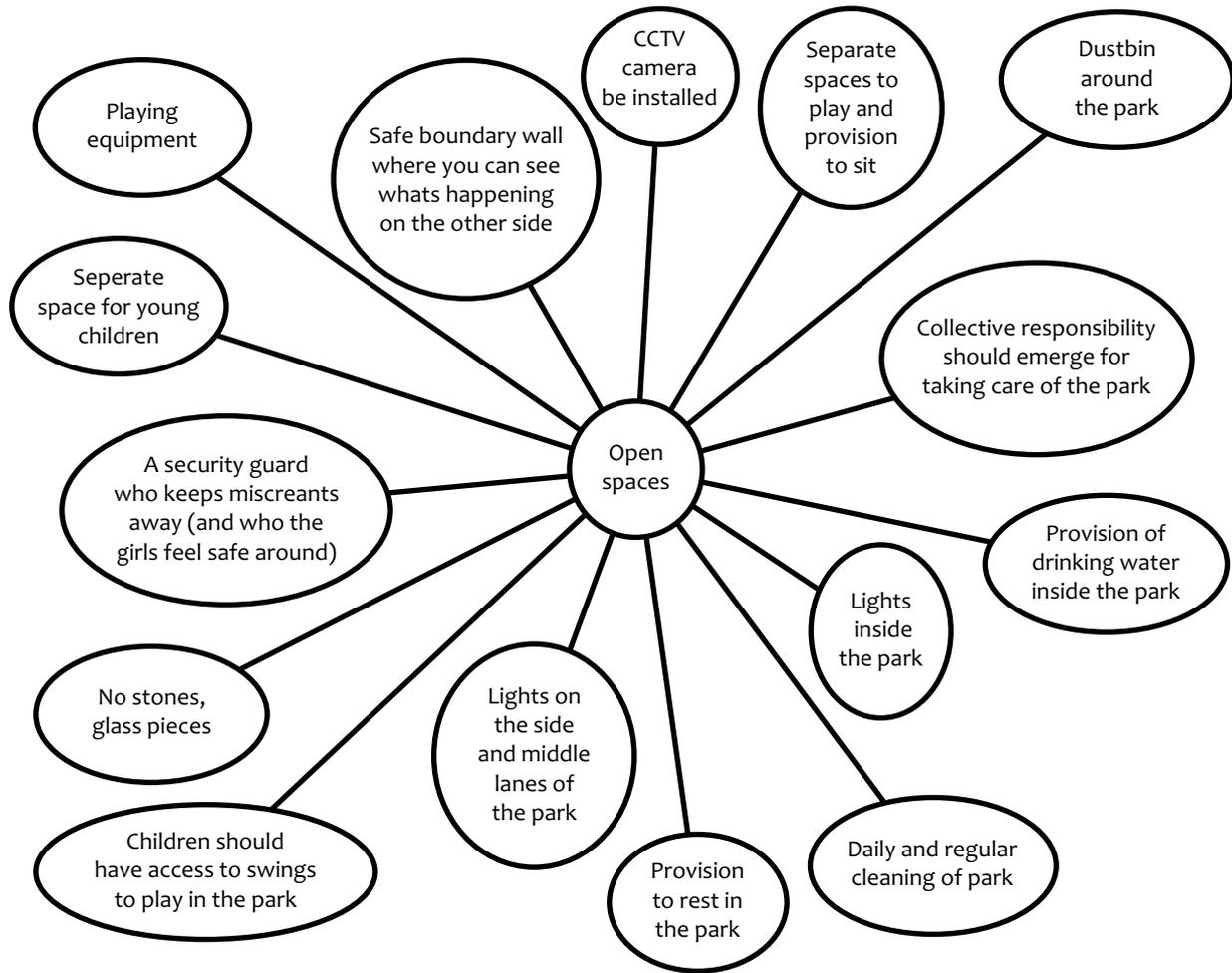
“There should be separate parks for girls”, said girls of New Seemapuri, Delhi. Similar aspirations were voiced by girls in Fatehwadi in Ahmedabad. “We want separate play spaces for girls and boys”.

“We are often unknowingly mistreated when we use public transport facilities”

Children living in grim circumstances in cities explain what hinders their use of public transport, further undermining their ability to access services. Children discussed several issues related to transport and roads.

Girls of Fatehwadi, Ahmedabad, listed auto- and bus stands among spaces that evoked fear and discomfort. Geeta





explained why they disliked autos. “Auto-rickshaw drivers stuff the rickshaw with so many people. I feel suffocated inside”. Ranjan from Moosaram Bagh, Andhra Pradesh, said “Sometimes, the conductor screams at us because he is frustrated with the crowd in the bus”. Another group of children mentioned that buses were also always overcrowded. “Trains are also dirty and overcrowded” said a child from Swarnim Nagar, Ahmedabad. In Moosaram Bagh, one group commented: “The buses have a bad smell and are not clean.” Children feel very suffocated in such instances as people fail to see them in the crowds and they get pushed around even more. Apart from overcrowding, public transport also lacked basic infrastructure like lights and fans. Children stated that their heads would spin due to the heat and said that government should provide fans on buses. Children in Delhi also mentioned that absence of lights and fans in buses was a problem.

For some groups, access to the bus stop was an issue. Children in Moosaram Bagh, Vadara Basti, Andhra Pradesh, said they had to walk 2 km to catch a bus. Kunal mentioned “The bus stop is too far from the basti. I get exhausted reaching there.” Besides, children also mentioned that bus stops did not have basic infrastructure and were in a state of disrepair. “The Bus Terminal is damaged. It doesn't even have electricity”, observed Vijayam from Kannagi Nagar, Chennai.

Children spoke of the bad state of roads. “Sometimes accidents happen due to bad roads” In Kannagi Nagar, a child

described the mud road as a problem for children. “The mud road is in very bad condition”. Inadequate street lights often came up in discussions with various groups. Children in Delhi mentioned dark subways as a problem. “The subway is haunted. It is dark inside” observed Shalini. Some spoke of the dangers of potholes. “I am very scared of potholes on roads.”

Crossing roads becomes particularly problematic for children in cities. Children from Ahmedabad mentioned “Pedestrians have been hit and injured by vehicles”. Children from New Delhi spoke of how the absence of foot over bridges made it difficult for them to cross roads. “I cannot cross the road. There is too much traffic and no foot over bridge” observed a child. In Pattinapakkam, Chennai, too, children mentioned the difficulty in crossing roads because of the traffic.

Children from Swarnim Nagar, Ahmedabad, explained that roads were unsafe because of the fear of accidents and kidnapping. “A boy was kidnapped last year” said Madhav. Children mentioned the problem of eve teasing and thefts. “Pocketmari is common”. Children of Kannagi Nagar, Chennai, also thought of buses as unsafe because of the fear of theft. In New Seemapuri, though, transport was not mentioned as a problem, children said “The problem with the bus is that boys tease us and there are also pick pockets.” The group in Andhra Pradesh said “...But what we fear most is boys trying to come close and touching us and troubling us.” Eve-teasing on buses was also mentioned by girls of Berhampur, Odisha.

“Roads should be brightly lit, well-ventilated and spacious”

In the discussions at New Delhi, children listed aspirations regarding roads. “Roads should have street lights” observed Sheelu. Kasturi mentioned “There should be dividers on the road, or at least a painted dividing line”. Among other aspirations that were listed were “Sidewalks/footpath for the children to walk easily on the roadside” and “a foot over-bridge so that children can easily crossover the road during traffic”. Several children mentioned the need for zebra crossings and sidewalks.

“There should be ample car parking spaces made available and separate provisions for cars, buses and cycles”, according to Kali.

“The railway station should have three gates and it should be bigger” observed a child at New Delhi. Buses should have “a person to monitor theft and eve teasing” commented Vandana. “Metros should have sensors”, observed Aamir, “similar to the ones submarines have so that it would be able to identify objects 0.5 to 2 km away and avoid accidents”.

Children of Kannagi Nagar aspired for “Special public buses for school-going children”. The problem of safety weighed heavily on their mind. “Only if we have quick and safe access to school can our minds be free for studies” observed Kaveri. One group of girls from Andhra Pradesh aspired for separate seats for girls. Another group from Andhra Pradesh mentioned “Police patrolling to check eve-teasing”. Across several locations, children aspired for more security on road and in public transports. “There should be guards on the main road” observed children.

“Is darkness better or electric shock?”

By and large, lack of power supply did not seem to be an issue with children from urban slums. But at some locations, children complained of frequent power cuts. Children from Swarnim Nagar said: “There are very frequent power



cuts, especially in summers.” Ami complained “Power cuts in summers cause a lot of discomfort”. Several groups stressed on the fact that interruptions in power supply affect their studies. Members of Khushiyon Piladinon, a child club, said, “Power cuts at night affect our studies”. Others spoke of how they fear accessing public spaces during power cuts.

Children at several locations spoke at length of the dangers of loose electric wires hanging from poles and open transformer boxes. Talking about the danger, Neha from New Seemapuri, said “The wires from poles hang very low and this creates the risk of fires.” Recalling an incident, a child said “Once during heavy rains, the open transformer boxes got filled with water. It not only caught fire but the loose wires hanging around led to sparks and affected the whole area. We couldn't move out of our houses for a couple of days.” Children from Andhra Pradesh also spoke about the fear of electrocution from the live wires that hang loose in the slums. “I fear getting electric shocks from the wires”, said one child. Sumita added, “It is especially dangerous during the rains.” “It is particularly risky for children” said Ajay. Children narrated the case of how a live wire burnt down three houses. Thankfully, the members escaped unhurt in that particular instance, they said. In the discussion on issues related to power supply, Kunal from Delhi also mentioned the fear of being exposed to “electric shock from low hanging wires or open wires and open switches”.



Children from Delhi were particularly concerned about **no or inadequate lights** on streets, lanes, home, hospitals etc. “Our colony is not lit properly” said one child. Manju noted “The lanes near our colony are dark and it is scary”.

Children of Kannagi Nagar, Chennai, explained that most houses had **illegal power connections**.

“Metered, regular supply”

Children of Kannagi Nagar, Chennai aspired for **legal electricity connections** provided by the government. “Every house should have a proper electric meter provided by the government”, observed Karuna.

Children from several locations stressed on the dimension of safety. Children from New Seemapuri, Delhi said, “Low hanging electricity wires should be fixed”. In Andhra Pradesh, Pallavi demanded “safe electric supply”. Mukesh said “Proper and safe electricity supply and wiring was essential”. “There should be safe electric wiring”, observed Umesh from New Delhi. Gargi said “Switch-boards should be in good condition and not broken”. Children stressed on the need for proper electrical connections and poles. They wanted cables to be placed at higher position and no live wires to run through their homes. Barkha mentioned “barricading transformers” to avoid accidents.

Children from Delhi spoke of the aspiration for adequate lights on roads and lanes for greater security. “The lanes

and roads should be properly lit in order to be safe for children”. “No power cuts at night” was demanded by Shreya from Delhi. Several groups spoke of their aspiration for uninterrupted power supply.

Several other aspirations were also mentioned. Children in Delhi observed that “Electricity should be generated from water, wind and solar energy”. Some spoke of using garbage to generate electricity. They said that every cluster of about hundred people should have an electricity office, so that people could report problems conveniently. Children mentioned the aspiration for electric meters to be installed in all houses at subsidised rates. It was mentioned that lights in common areas should have secure fittings to avoid theft.

“I fear I will return home to see it razed”

Inadequate space, broken doors, no windows, no toilets, no piped water supply, erratic electricity - children from various locations mentioned several issues with regard to housing. The most disturbing emotions expressed by children however, were those related to the fear of eviction. Children feared their houses being razed by bulldozers. In Maharashtra Nagar, Mankhurd, Anjana said “Every day I fear that when I come home I will see my house razed to the ground by bulldozers.”

Children seemed wary of the fact that their homes were not permanent. Some children mentioned that they lived in kutcha houses. Radhika in Fatehwadi, Ahmedabad, said, “The roof leaks during rains.” She also complained, “The house gets very hot at night”. Children in Kannagi Nagar, Chennai, also complained of roofs leaking during rains.

Children expressed unhappiness over the fact that there was **not enough space** within the house. Children in Kannagi Nagar, Chennai, seemed particularly constrained by the lack of space in their houses. Priyanka said, “My house hardly has enough space to sleep”. Shikha added, “It becomes particularly difficult when relatives come visiting.” Children from New Seemapuri mentioned that they felt embarrassed calling their friends over. “I fear my friends in school will make fun of me because my house is so small”. Madhuri from New Seemapuri mentioned, “It is difficult to study in a one room house.... especially when the TV is on” Children from Pattinapakkam,



Chennai, also shared that the lack of space affected their studies. “Our houses are too small” they observed.

Children seemed unhappy with the **poor condition** of their houses. A boy in Swarnim Nagar said, “The walls are so weak that they break when we hammer nails.” The **lack of basic infrastructure** in houses was repeatedly mentioned by children – electricity, water, toilets, bathrooms. Power cuts made children feel unsafe at home. Jaya from Ahmedabad, explained, “We feel unsafe and scared when it is dark... when there is no electricity”. Boys also spoke of frequent power cuts. Children feared fires caused by firewood used for cooking and gas cylinders. “We are worried about gas bursts – it happens a lot”, observed a child from Maharashtra Nagar, Mankhurd.



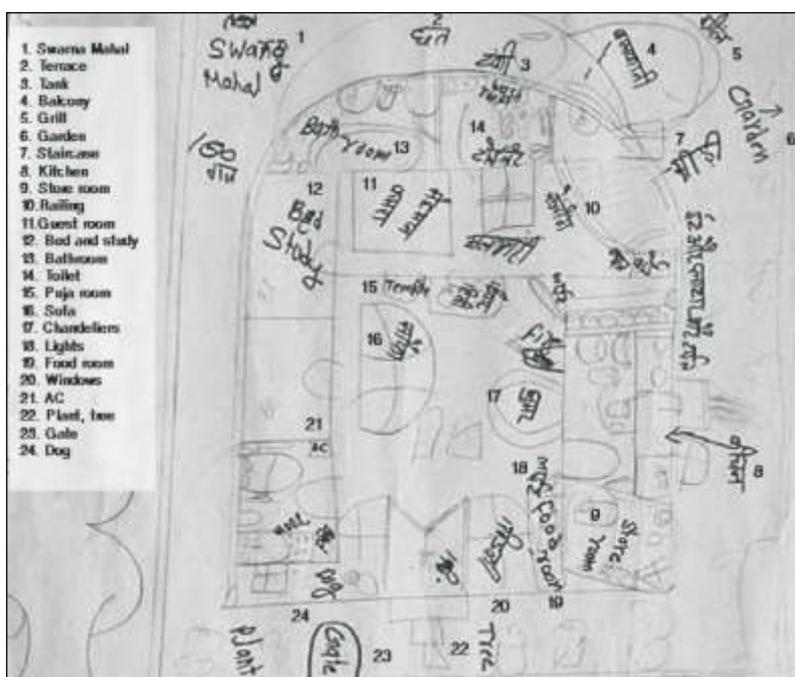
“My house should be bigger than the Taj Mahal”

At many locations children expressed the aspiration for **well-ventilated houses**. In Kannagi Nagar, children said, “It is suffocating inside the house. There are no windows”

“Everyone should have a well constructed house”, mentioned children from Andhra Pradesh. Boys in Berhampur described their image of an ideal house - “a small house with a kitchen space, proper ventilation, a separate space for children to study, a big bedroom which could accommodate all family members, a toilet and separate bathroom, good drainage pipes, a dustbin outside each house, a terrace with a reasonably high parapet”. Children in Delhi said that a house for six members should have at least two rooms – one each for adults and children.

Children in New Seemapuri described at length their aspirations regarding their dream house, 'Swarna Mahal'.

The 'Swarna Mahal' is in fact an epitome of all that children living in urban poverty aspire for. “A big house with enough space to accommodate everything we want, more than 100 'gaj', made with cement, fully 'plastered', rooms designed with 'tiles', and windows, three bed rooms, one guest room, one big drawing room, one big drawing room and a kitchen. Every room would have doors as well windows, a box bed so that everything could be easily managed inside the room, a fan, lights, as well as an air-conditioner. The kitchen would have an 'electric chimney', racks for keeping spice-containers, an LPG cylinder, a fire extinguisher just outside the kitchen, a



big sofa in the drawing room, 'deewar wala t.v. (wall-mounted television)' with a Dish antenna connection, a big beautiful 'jhumaar (chandelier)' hanging from the ceiling, a small temple, a dining room, a small store room, an automatic washing machine to wash clothes in and a sewing machine for stitching clothes... Every room would have doors and windows, two washrooms – one for bathing and the other an Indian style toilet with a wash basin, mug and buckets, a bath tub, a geyser, wash basin, a garden around the house with many trees and plants, a place to dry clothes, a park right outside the house and a closed underground drainage system.”

Getting our collective voices heard

In order to see a resolution of issues listed above and aspirations shared by children go to its next logical step, a few beginnings have been made. Several NGOs and civil society campaigns that support children's issues have collectivised children and facilitated the articulation of issues faced by them at various forums where potential action can be taken. Children have also participated in forums to influence thinking in global development. A few Government and Municipal entities have shown an interest in these and a willingness to alter the way they work.

Trainings have been conducted with interested individuals from Government departments to guide creation of urban safe spaces.

Several civil society organisations and campaigns, in recognition of the advantages of collectivisation, have created ways for children to come together as a group and act to leverage strength in numbers.

Child Clubs have been facilitated across several urban locations in India by Humara Bachpan Campaign, which is a national campaign working on issues of living conditions for young children in urban poverty, and Divya Disha, an organisation working with children in Andhra Pradesh. The campaign calls for inclusion of child-friendly components in the urban renewable policies. The issues of concern to children are discussed by the Child Clubs and attempts are made to collectively arrive at solutions for these issues.

Organised into Child Clubs, children from slums have found a voice to articulate their concerns about issues affecting their lives. They have used different methods to get authorities to listen, take note and act. Writing letters to those in authority has been used as a means to generate concern over various issues and find solutions. Children from Gyanmanjari and Bapuji child clubs wrote to the mayor of Bhubaneswar about the absence of dustbins in their area; children from Agragami wrote a letter on the absence of covers for drains; members of Khushiyon Piladinon wrote about the absence of street lights in their area and how this compromises the security of children. Children of Khushiyon Piladinon also wrote to the Commissioner of Police about the need to ensure safety and security of children after an incident where a six-year-old girl in their slum was abused and murdered.

Child Club members in Odisha as well as Andhra Pradesh have also made it a point to meet various officials in an effort to find solutions to their problems. They have met the Mayor, Corporators and police officials. One child mentioned having met the Chief Minister to get a house sanctioned under Rajiv Aawas Yojana. Children have also interacted with leaders of political parties during camps facilitated by the Campaign.

Children have discussed water related issues and apprised the Assistant Commissioner of their problems and even pressured Municipal authorities to ensure regular garbage removal from their locality. When the Child Club members questioned Municipal staff, they said that they cannot carry so much garbage in their trucks. The children remarked, “They do not take even though government has said that it will pay according to the weight of the garbage. One of the Child Club members called the toll free number. The person on the other end listened and then cut the line without responding. The child feels it is because people do not take children seriously. Child Club members also took up the issue of low hanging wires. They sought the help of the community and the lineman, took up the matter with the police and approached the Commissioner.

Children have acted as an interface between the community and government officials, by forming linkages and supporting community mobilisation processes. Similarly, child reporters in some places have also brought their issues to the centre-stage in respective areas.

Being organised into Child Clubs has given to children the vision and determination to spread awareness about the need to keep the surroundings clean. Members of Khushiyon Piladinon went around trying to convince people about the need for cleanliness and proper garbage disposal. Children have also taken part in rallies.

Children have also innovatively used digital technology, to create films and digital stories that highlight their issues.



These have been shared at several international platforms where issues in the context of Post-2015 have been discussed. Children have also participated in policy-making spaces such as contributing to the Ground Level Panel, a group of 14 people living in poverty and marginalisation who created a post-2015 agenda by people living in poverty. It was a process that deliberated on and came up with responses and recommendations to the United Nations High-Level Panel report on the post 2015 global development framework.

Several public officials have had the opportunity to engage directly with young children and listen directly to their voices, but often, many Government officials do not find themselves in a situation like this. Immersive capacity buildings have been organised on Child Participation in Urban Planning, facilitated with representatives from the Planning Commission, Ministry of Urban Affairs, and Municipal Corporations, Government bodies associated with urban renewal or development schemes and Consultants involved with preparation of City Development Plans and Detailed Project reports. Such processes of sensitisation of duty bearers have built realisation and commitment to include children in processes of developing City Development Plans (CDPs) and Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) – documents expected to be evolved for most urban planning and renewal schemes.

While these are small steps towards realising the aspirations of children, they are firmly of the belief that if everyone stop seeing children as mothers and workers of tomorrow but instead as citizens of today, this reality will not be difficult to achieve. As mentioned in the participatory video, “issues that affect adults affect children in a more forceful way. So their interests should be given precedence.”

It is only when children are seen as partners in change, that their contribution in building urban spaces that are safe for them as well as other marginalised groups will be fully and effectively utilised.

Annexure 1: Acknowledgements

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About Praxis

Praxis - Institute for Participatory Practices is a knowledge-based, not-for-profit development support organisation, registered in 1997 under the Indian Societies Registration Act of 1860. Since its humble beginnings, Praxis has emerged as an independent one-stop centre for undertaking action research, training and documentation dealing with multiple facets of participatory development. Our work vindicates the growing mandate across geographical boundaries that for development to be sustainable and equitable, there is an urgent need to ensure good governance practices and processes. Our strategic networking capability with like-minded people and organisations helps maximise our outreach and increases manifold the impact of our interventions.

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