

Press Release

New Studies Reveal Impact of Climate Risks for Young Children and Pregnant Women across public spaces in Indian Cities

Workshop in Delhi sheds light on the critical intersection of public spaces, climate change, and air quality concerning the well-being of children and their caregivers across 21 Indian cities.

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New Delhi, India: Alarming insights emerged about the heightened climate vulnerabilities for young children and pregnant women, particularly in the urban Indian contexts, during a critical workshop organised by **ICLEI South Asia** and the **National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA)**, held at the Dome Hall, Ambassador Hotel, New Delhi, on Wednesday.

The workshop highlighted findings from two studies, carried out over two years between January 2022 and December 2023, that revealed how young children and pregnant women are disproportionately affected by climate change, air pollution, and inadequate access to public spaces that cater to requirements of early childhood development (ECD) services. The studies, focusing on '**Young Children and Climate**' and '**Usage of Public Spaces by Young Children, their Caregivers and Pregnant Women**', highlighted that these vulnerabilities are not just immediate concerns, but have long-term implications on the growth and success potential of children.

The day-long event brought together experts, policymakers, and community representatives to discuss findings from two significant studies, to elucidate the pressing issue of climate change and its impact on these vulnerable groups (the studies cover a variety of income groups, genders, age among others parameters).

The "Study on Young Children and Climate" (SYCC), spearheaded by ICLEI South Asia along with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar, IIT Kharagpur, and IIT Roorkee, and **funded by the Van Leer Foundation**, is a groundbreaking initiative in India that stands out for its dual approach: reviewing existing secondary data and gathering extensive primary data from four Indian cities - Delhi, Gandhinagar, Kharagpur and Roorkee. *"The study focused on the significant challenges of climate change and air pollution, particularly evaluating their impact on young children aged 0 to 5 and their caregivers, mainly around ECD sites. The study's methodology is thorough, encompassing the assessment of the urban heat island effect and forecasting the future implications of climate change on these vulnerable groups,"* said Emani Kumar, Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia.



The second study, conducted by ICLEI South Asia and Ipsos Research Pvt Ltd, and funded by the Van Leer Foundation, analysed the use of public spaces by young children, their caregivers, and pregnant women across 18 Indian cities*. Employing household surveys and interviews with city officials, it explored trends in public space utilisation, identifying key barriers and opportunities. The findings, aimed at guiding policymakers, emphasise the need for child-friendly, accessible urban environments, and are set to be widely disseminated to inform future urban planning decisions. *“The study's outcome is set to significantly influence policy decisions, emphasising the need for public spaces that are child-friendly and accommodate the needs of caregivers and pregnant women,” added Kumar.*

The research extensively involved consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders, including citizens, civil society organisations, and government officials at various levels. *“Our efforts have to be multifaceted, encompassing collaborations with various sectors to enhance nutrition, protection, and education, and to ensure safe and healthy environments focusing on the importance of embedding the needs of young children and their caregivers in urban planning. Recognising these unique challenges faced by children and their caregivers in urban settings, Van Leer Foundation is also focusing on the importance of nature and public spaces in child development,” said Ipshita Sinha, India Representative, Van Leer Foundation.*

Dr. Debolina Kundu, Director, NIUA, said, “We're confronting the challenges faced by over 500 million children globally, tackling issues from inadequate public spaces to the health crises exacerbated by climate change. Our focus has to be unflinching - to ensure that every child, especially the 12.7 million urban migrants grappling with severe health conditions, have access to clean, safe, and nurturing environments. This workshop is not just timely, it is a clarion call for action - to build cities that are not only sustainable but also empathetic to the needs of their youngest.”

A key finding was the variation in risk levels and adaptive capacities across different cities, affecting young children and caregivers in diverse ways. Even essential ECD sites, while relatively more protected, still expose young children to harmful pollutants and high heat levels, the study said.

“Through a series of strategic initiatives – from Mission LiFE’s holistic strategy in reducing carbon footprint and increasing green energy to revolutionising agricultural practices for food security, and from integrating climate change into our health policies to prioritising children's well-being in urban conglomerates – we are forging a path toward a resilient, sustainable future. Our efforts are amplified by a strong foundation in advocacy, Information, Education, and Communication (IEC), and cutting-edge research, ensuring that every step we take is a leap towards a safer, healthier world for our children,” said Dr. Sumita Ghosh, OSD (Health), NITI Aayog.



The success of any proposed solutions pivots on three critical factors: community engagement, continuous monitoring and evaluation of action plans, and collaboration at various levels including international, regional, and sub-national.

The workshop also highlighted an urgent need for detailed research to deepen our understanding of how climate change affects pregnancy health and the development of young children. The event concluded with a strong message for the need to empower communities with information and tools for advocacy and to foster collaborations for further research.

**The study 'Usage of Public Spaces by Young Children, their Caregivers and Pregnant Women' was conducted in 18 cities, using household surveys by assessing and evaluating trends in utilising urban public spaces by young children and their caregivers. In order to make the study geographically representative, surveys were conducted in northern, southern, eastern, western, central and north-eastern cities of India, covering population sizes of all ranges i.e. greater than 40 lakh, between 10 lakh-40 lakh and less than 10 lakh. The identified cities for conducting the study included: Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Indore, Bangalore, Lucknow, Vijayawada, Raipur, Surat, Chandigarh, Guwahati, Jaipur, Shimla, Bhubaneswar, Jhansi, Shillong and Dimapur.*

About ICLEI South Asia

[ICLEI South Asia](#) is the South Asian arm of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, a global network of more than 2500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, we influence sustainability policy and drive local action for low-emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient, and circular development. ICLEI South Asia works to support cities on multiple aspects of sustainable development, in order to achieve tangible improvements in regional and global sustainability through local initiatives.



About Van Leer Foundation

VLF is an independent foundation working worldwide to inspire and inform large-scale action to improve the health and well-being of babies, toddlers and the people who care for them. It provides financial support and expertise to partners in government, civil society and business to help test and scale effective services for young children and families.

Contact

For more information or interview requests:

Avantika Arjuna | Assistant Program Coordinator at ICLEI South Asia
+91 9769687592 | avantika.arjuna@iclei.org

Badri Chatterjee | Senior Communications Manager at ICLEI South Asia
+91 9769687592 | badri.chatterjee@iclei.org

Kaushani Banerjee | Communications Manager at ICLEI South Asia
+91 9769295022 | kaushani.banerjee@iclei.org

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