

Press Release

## Goa Child Rights Commission Calls for Integration of Children's Vulnerabilities in Urban Planning and Environmental Design

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

February 23, 2024

Panjim: The Goa State Commission for Protection of Child Rights has urged policymakers, urban planners, and community leaders to prioritise the health risks children face from pollution, climate change, and unsafe living conditions in their strategies.

During a workshop on Friday, **Peter Borges, Chairperson, Goa State Commission for Protection of Child Rights** emphasised the need for a child-centric approach in urban planning and environmental design. *“Understanding children's vulnerabilities are crucial when designing environments for them. This includes considering their physical vulnerabilities, such as health risks from pollution and climate-related phenomena, and psychological vulnerabilities, such as the impact of living in unsafe and unstable environments. For instance, children living on the streets or in precarious situations face enormous risks, often overlooked in city planning. We also need to rethink how we define and create child-friendly spaces, considering physical inclusivity for children with disabilities and other vulnerabilities,”* he said.

The above statement was made and findings from two studies were presented in Friday's workshop in Panjim, hosted by ICLEI South Asia and Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited.

The two studies were carried out between January 2022 and December 2023, focusing on **'Young Children and Climate'** and **'Usage of Public Spaces by Young Children, their Caregivers and Pregnant Women'**. Their findings revealed how children (aged 0-5) and pregnant women are disproportionately affected by climate change, air pollution, and inadequate access to public spaces that cater to the requirements of early childhood development (ECD) services. The findings show that these vulnerabilities are not just immediate concerns, but have long-term implications on the growth and success potential of children.

These details underscore the urgency for tailored urban planning and policy interventions across cities, aimed at creating safer, greener, and more child-friendly environments, and for mitigating climate-related risks for our youngest citizens.



**Sanjit Rodrigues, Managing Director, Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited** said, “By 2050, almost 70% of children would live in urban areas in India. This is a significant proportion and highlights the urgent need for child-compliant urban planning, public space design, and policymaking. These studies highlight a subject that is complex, encompassing social, economic, and political dimensions. I'm particularly interested in understanding the equity in our open spaces, considering all children, and whether these spaces are universally accessible. Let us make tangible improvements, even if they seem small, such as enhancing the safety of parks. In Panaji, we're committed to implementing these guidelines and showcasing them as successful examples for other cities. Let us walk the talk and emphasise the importance of action and implementation in creating better environments for our children.”

This pivotal workshop in Panjim marks the fourth in a series, following the first three held in Guwahati, Kochi, and New Delhi, where stakeholders—including policymakers—converged to brainstorm solutions and recommendations for creating climate-resilient and child-friendly public spaces. Through working groups, technical presentations, shared experiences, and case studies, it's been highlighted that young children, caregivers, and pregnant women, while not specifically targeted in climate actions, are often only considered as a subset of the wider population, underscoring a need for more focused policy inclusion.

Experts, policymakers, and community representatives discussed the findings of the two significant studies and the pressing issue of climate change and its impact on these vulnerable groups (the studies cover a variety of income groups, genders and age groups, among other parameters).

*“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.**

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.

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.

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 studies highlighted.

The workshop also highlighted an urgent need for detailed research to deepen 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.

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*\*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.*

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### **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.

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