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Local Governments for Sustainability
SOUTH ASIA

ARISE CITIES FORUM 2026

bharat to Antalya COP31

CONFERENCE REPORT

27-28 October, 2026 | New Delhi, India

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ARISE CITIES FORUM 2026

bharat to Antalya COP31

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Global Research and Technology Development Funded by UK Government

EACH

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GLOBAL COVENANT of MAYORS for CLIMATE & ENERGY

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PURPOSE

gef global environment facility INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

UN environment programme

URBAN SH/FT LIVABLE CITIES IN INDIA

Van Leer FOUNDATION

MECDM



Gino Van Begin, Secretary General, ICLEI; Dr. Debolina Kundu, Director, NIUA; and Emani Kumar, Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director ICLEI South Asia welcoming Tokhan Sahu, Hon'ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India at ARISE Cities Forum 2026

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ARISE CITIES FORUM 2026

The ARISE Cities Forum is a flagship forum for urban local governments in the South Asian region, with India at its centre, led by ICLEI South Asia. Held on 27–28 October 2026, the second edition of ARISE brought together governments, thought leaders, urban practitioners and stakeholders from the Asia-Pacific for two days of dialogue, innovation, and collaboration.

The forum featured a unique format comprising three plenaries and two Roundtables, and was attended by over 300 speakers and delegates across the two days.

The forum was inaugurated by Shri Tokhan Sahu, Hon'ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, in the presence of Shoko Ishikawa, Country Representative, UN Women India; Dr Debolina Kundu, Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs; Gino Van Begin, Secretary General, ICLEI; and Emani Kumar, Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia. Also present were Adv. Minimol V.K, Hon'ble Mayor of Kochi, India; Ismail Rafeeq, Hon'ble Mayor of Fuvahmulah, Maldives; Bhola Pokhrel, Hon'ble Mayor of Karjanha, Nepal; and Thinley Namgay, Hon'ble Mayor of Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhutan, representing urban leadership from across South Asia.

As the host city, Delhi had the opportunity to showcase Indian subnational and local leadership on a regional and global stage. The forum also brought together diverse voices from the Global South, including representatives of cities and provinces beyond India, reinforcing the importance of inclusive, multilevel climate action.

The deliberations of the forum culminated in the 'Delhi Declaration 2026: Local Action for Global Climate Goals', a collaborative outcome document shaped by mayors and leaders from around the world. The Delhi Declaration 2026 was formally released and adopted at the conclusion of the forum and handed over by Pravesh Wahi, Hon'ble Mayor of Delhi to Gino Van Begin, Secretary General, ICLEI, in the virtual presence of Samed Ağırbaş, COP31 Climate Champion, President of the Zero Waste Foundation, marking a key milestone in carrying the Forum's collective commitments and urban priorities forward to COP31 in Antalya.

ARISE AT A GLANCE

18+
Countries

25+
Partners of global and national repute endorsing the forum

50+
Cities

200+
Participants, including government representatives, thought leaders, academicians and youth representatives

100+
Speakers

3
Plenaries

12
Parallel Sessions

2
Roundtables

19
Launches

LAUNCHES AT THE FORUM

- Centre for Sustainable Urban Mobility and Integrated Transportation (SUMMIT)
- Investing in Climate Resilient Cities – State Level Project Pipelines: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana
- ICLEI South Asia Annual Report 2025–26
- Embedding Gender Equity and Responsive Transport – A Compendium of Case Studies for Gender and Mobility in India
- A Compendium of Case Studies for Mobilising Funds to Enable Integrated Planning and Infrastructure Development
- Policy Framework for Gender Equality in Public Bus Transport Systems
- Guidelines on Canal Restoration using Nature-based Solutions
- Poster Release – Early Action for Children's Health (EACH): Towards Heat Resilience and Clean Air
- Youth Hackathon 2026 Booklet
- Disaster Risk Reduction in Cities: A Training Manual for Local Governments in India
- Assessing and Managing Loss and Damage: Local-level evidence to inform global-level action in Gujarat, India
- Assessing and Managing Loss and Damage for Children: Local-level evidence to inform global-level action in Udaipur, India
- Global course on Urban Water Infrastructure Resilience
- Climate-Induced Disaster Resilience Planning Guidelines for Kakinada Municipal Corporation
- Nurturing Families: Parental Wellbeing Calendar 2027
- Parental Wellbeing: A Friendly Pocket Guide for Frontline Workers and Supervisors
- Heat Action Planning Methodology
- Heat Resilience in Buildings- A Practitioners' Guidebook
- Delhi Biodiversity Map

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

DAY 1 I TUESDAY | OCTOBER 27, 2026					
Room / Time	**Plenary Hall** (Silver Oak)	**Room A** (Silver Oak)	**Room B** (Magnolia)	**Room C** (Casuarina)	**Room D** (Marigold)
8:00 *onwards*	Registration and Tea				
10:00-11:00	**INAUGURAL CEREMONY: Silver Oak**				
11:00-11:10	INTERVAL				
11:10-12:00	**OPENING PLENARY: Global Ambition, Multilevel Action: The Urban Climate Resolve** Silver Oak				
12:00-12:30	Coffee/ Tea Break (Silver Oak lobby)				
12:30-13:30		**SESSION 1**			
		PARALLEL SESSION 1 Silver Oak **Climate Resilient Urban Water Management: Safeguarding High-Density Communities**	PARALLEL SESSION 2 Magnolia **Driving Sustainable Energy Transition in Cities: From Efficient Buildings to Clean Power**	PARALLEL SESSION 3 Casuarina **Nature-positive Cities: Delivering Global Biodiversity Goals**	PARALLEL SESSION 4 Marigold **BY INVITE ONLY** **City Narratives, Climate Cultures**
13:30-14:30	Networking Lunch (Silver Oak lawns)				
14:30-16:00		**SESSION 2**			
		PARALLEL SESSION 5 Silver Oak **Building Resilient Indian Coasts: Integrating Natural Systems, Local Knowledge and Livelihoods**	PARALLEL SESSION 6 Magnolia **The Urban Planning Paradigm: For Climate Resilient and Healthy Cities**	PARALLEL SESSION 7 Casuarina **From Voice to Action: Children and Youth focussed Climate Policies**	PARALLEL SESSION 8 Marigold **14:00-16:30** **BY INVITE ONLY** **Mainstreaming Climate into City Procurement Systems**
16:00-16:30	Coffee/ Tea Break (Silver Oak lobby)				
16:30-17:30	**PLENARY 2: Loss, Recovery, Resilience: The Urban Response** Silver Oak				
19:00 *onwards*	Networking Dinner (**BY INVITE ONLY**)				

DAY 2 WEDNESDAY | OCTOBER 28, 2026

Room / Time	Plenary Hall (Silver Oak)	Room A (Silver Oak)	Room B (Magnolia)	Room C (Casuarina)
8:00 *onwards*	Registration and Tea			
9:30-11:30	**PLENARY 3: Financing Climate Action: Shaping Instruments, Policies, and Institutions for Urban Transitions in India** Silver Oak			
11:30-12:00	Coffee/ Tea Break (Silver Oak lobby)			
12:00-13:30		**SESSION 1**		
		PARALLEL SESSION 9 Silver Oak **Reimagining Urban Mobility in India: Towards Inclusive, Sustainable and Accessible Cities**	PARALLEL SESSION 10 Magnolia **Decoding Climate Action in Urban Ecosystems**	PARALLEL SESSION 11 Casuarina **Circular Cities: Rethinking Urban Systems**
13:30-14:30	Networking Lunch (Silver Oak lawns)			
14:30-16:00		**SESSION 2**		
		PARALLEL SESSION 12 Silver Oak **Journey of the First 1000 Days: Paalan 1000 Integration for ECD Ecosystem Strengthening**	PARALLEL SESSION 13 Magnolia **Beating the Heat: Designing Cooler, Healthier Cities**	PARALLEL SESSION 14 Casuarina **From Knowledge to Action: How Asian Cities are Championing Inclusive Resilience**
16:00-16:30	Coffee/ Tea Break (Silver Oak lobby)			
16:30-17:30	**CLOSING CEREMONY: Delhi Declaration 2026: Local Action for Global Climate Goals** Silver Oak			

DAY 1

Tuesday
October 27, 2026

OPENING CEREMONY

SESSION DETAILS

Shri Tokhan Sahu
Hon'ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India

Shoko Ishikawa
Country Representative, UN Women India

Dr. Debolina Kundu
Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs, India

Gino Van Begin
Secretary General, ICLEI

Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

SPECIAL GUESTS ON THE DAIS

Adv. Minimol V.K
Hon'ble Mayor of Kochi, India

Ismail Rafeeq,
Hon'ble Mayor of Fuvahmulah, Maldives

Bhola Pokhrel,
Hon'ble Mayor of Karjanha, Nepal

Thinley Namgay
Hon'ble Mayor of Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhutan



LAUNCHES

- Centre for Sustainable Urban Mobility and Integrated Transportation (SUMMIT)
- Investing in Climate Resilient Cities – State Level Project Pipelines: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana
- ICLEI South Asia Annual Report 2025–26
- Embedding Gender Equity and Responsive Transport – A Compendium of Case Studies for Gender and Mobility in India
- A Compendium of Case Studies for Mobilising Funds to Enable Integrated Planning and Infrastructure Development
- Policy Framework for Gender Equality in Public Bus Transport Systems





KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The experiences, perspectives and priorities of local and regional governments across the Global South need to have a stronger presence on the global climate agenda.
2. Climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation are interconnected challenges that require stronger institutional coordination and integrated local action. This approach must also recognise the links between climate resilience and essential urban services, including public transport, safe streets, reliable water and sanitation, accessible public spaces and care services, ensuring that urban policies are inclusive and gender-responsive.
3. Cities need to develop urban development projects that are economically viable, attractive to investors, innovative and tailored to their needs. They must focus on the quality of their plans and use available resources efficiently.
4. Leveraging instruments such as the Urban Challenge Fund will be useful in attracting private and institutional investment towards economically viable urban projects that deliver tangible benefits for communities.
5. Using sex-disaggregated data, gender-responsive assessments and geospatial analysis will help identify gaps in urban services, understand differentiated climate risks and support evidence-based decision-making.
6. Platforms such as the ARISE Cities Forum and its outcomes, including the Delhi Declaration on Local Action for Global Climate Goals 2026, can help facilitate knowledge exchange, strengthen networks and bring the priorities and ambitions of Global South cities to the global climate agenda at COP31 in Antalya.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Tokhan Sahu

Hon'ble Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India

"From resolve to planning, from planning to implementation, and from implementation to results—that should be our way of working. Our goal is to build cities where development reaches every section of society and creates better opportunities for future generations."



Shoko Ishikawa

Country Representative, UN Women India

"It is essential that planning happens with women, and not just for them. Women's knowledge and experiences must inform city solutions rather than treating them only as vulnerable groups."



Dr. Debolina Kundu

Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs, India

"With rapid urbanisation and peripheral growth, India is at a critical juncture. Initiatives like the Urban Challenge Fund, creation of City Economic Regions, and financing measures for rural-urban development can be emulated by other countries in the region that are on similar trajectories."



Gino Van Begin

Secretary General, ICLEI

Cities are developing innovative solutions, building functioning partnerships and demonstrating pathways towards more resilient, inclusive and sustainable futures. Their experiences and priorities must have a stronger voice in global processes such as the UNFCCC COPs, and this is what the ARISE Cities Forum aims to achieve.



Emani Kumar

Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

The ARISE Cities Forum aims to amplify voices from the Global South so they are heard 'from Bharat to Antalya'. We will carry the Delhi Declaration, a key outcome of our collective efforts and a shared call for stronger local climate action, to the global stage at COP31 to make sure that the perspectives and priorities of our cities and urban stakeholders are heard loud and clear.



"Investing in Climate Resilient Cities – State Level Project Pipelines: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana" reports being released by dignitaries at ARISE Cities Forum 2026



From left: Hansa Patel, Emani Kumar, Ismail Rafeeq, Shoko Ishikawa, Gino Van Begin, Shri Tokhan Sahu, Dr. Debolina Kundu, Adv. Minimol V.K, Thinley Namgay, Bhola Pokhrel releasing ICLEI South Asia 2025-26 Annual Report

Plenary 1 :

Global Ambition, Multilevel Action: The Urban Climate Resolve

SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Gino Van Begin,
Secretary General, ICLEI

Panellists:

- **Philippe Sas**,
  Head of International Cooperation and Counsellor, Embassy of Switzerland to India and Bhutan
- **Sara M. Cohen**
  Head of Economic Affairs, and Economic Counsellor, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in India
- **Taina Dyckhoff**
  Head of Environment and Climate Division, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in India
- **Isabelle Tschan Harada**
  Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP India
- **Jesper Moller, Deputy Representative**
  UNICEF India Country Office
- **Nilesh Rajadhyaksha**
  Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat India
- **Ovais Sarmad**
  GCMA, F. IOD, Independent Adviser on Environmental Sustainability & Innovation; Former Deputy Executive Secretary, UNFCCC

As the global climate agenda moves from commitments to implementation, the urgency of translating international ambition into tangible local action has never been greater. The journey from COP30 in Belém to COP31 in Antalya presents an important opportunity to reinforce the role of cities and subnational governments in delivering national and global climate priorities. Cities are central to this transition—not merely as implementation sites, but as partners in shaping climate ambition, driving innovation, and delivering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development.

This high-level dialogue brought together national and subnational leaders, diplomatic representatives, and international development partners to reflect on how multilevel governance can bridge the gap between global commitments and on-ground delivery. The discussion explored how stronger institutional partnerships, international cooperation, and greater alignment between national priorities and local action can accelerate climate implementation across South Asia and the wider Global South.

Positioned within the larger global climate discourse leading to COP31, the session highlighted the urban climate resolution—a collective commitment to empower subnational governments and cities with the partnerships, capacities, and resources needed to translate climate pledges into measurable results. It also examined how international cooperation, city-to-city exchanges, and collaborative governance can strengthen the voice of local governments in national and global climate processes, ensuring that climate ambition is matched by collective action across all levels of governance.









KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Local action needs institutional and financial empowerment. Cities require planning authority, predictable funding and the capacity to raise and absorb finance.
2. Cities need to move beyond isolated, donor-driven projects towards long-term, integrated climate planning. This requires stronger institutional capacities, predictable financing and alignment of climate priorities with urban development plans and budgets.
3. Plans must translate into measurable improvements. This requires embedding climate priorities in long-term planning, linking them to budget allocations, and monitoring them through clear indicators and accountability mechanisms.
4. Success should be judged by benefits to people. Safer communities, uninterrupted essential services and improved resilience for vulnerable groups should guide implementation, alongside a positive narrative about climate action.
5. Cities need to be formally integrated into state and national climate planning, aligned with urban climate action plans and state strategies. This needs to extend into climate budget tagging and the integration of monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems at the level of Urban Local Bodies to strengthen implementation and accountability.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Gino Van Begin

Secretary General, ICLEI

"We need all institutions to align and empower national and sub-national governments with direct mandates, technical capacities and access to financing."



Philippe Sas

Head of International Cooperation and Counsellor, Embassy of Switzerland to India and Bhutan

"Switzerland's net-zero target for 2050 and India's ambitions for Viksit Bharat 2047 and net zero by 2070 offer an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and accelerate climate action at the local level."



Sara M. Cohen

Head of Economic Affairs, and Economic Counsellor, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in India

"Global climate cooperation is not a one-way street. Heat, drought, and extreme rainfall threatens buildings globally. We have lessons from India on community-driven recycling and scalable low-cost models, which we can very much learn from."



Taina Dyckhoff

Head of Environment and Climate Division, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in India

"There is a need for municipal climate and banking plans and project preparation facilities. We need standardised bankable project pipelines, and we also need financing opportunities."



Jesper Moller

Deputy Representative, UNICEF India Country Office

We need to direct the financing to where children are experiencing climate hazards and explore opportunities to track climate spending and budgets, and channel adaptation financing to local bodies and frontline services in high-risk areas.



Isabelle Tschan Harada

Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP India

National goals must reach cities through State Action Plans. On the other hand, city data, risks and innovation coming from cities must also inform state and national decisions.



Nilesh Rajadhyaksha

Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat India

There is a need to support cities towards long-term, outcome-linked capital investment planning that can help create a pipeline of projects amenable to hybrid financial structuring. This will require capacities to not only prepare projects or manage tenders, but also to plan for larger network benefits of blue-green infrastructure, navigate rapidly evolving green technology landscapes and make informed choices for their policies, programmes and investments.



Ovais Sarmad

GCMA, F. IOD, Independent Adviser on Environmental Sustainability and Innovation; Former Deputy Executive Secretary, UNFCCC

We need to get away from the doom and gloom of climate change to a positive narrative about climate action.



From left: Gino Van Begin, Philippe Sas, Sara M. Cohen, Taina Dyckhoff, Jesper Moller, Isabelle Tschan Harada, Nilesh Rajadhyaksha, and Ovais Sarmad.

Parallel Session 1:

Climate Resilient Urban Water Management: Safeguarding High-Density Communities

SESSION DETAILS

Welcome:

Bedoshruti Sadhukhan
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Addresses:

- **A.V. Ranganath**
  IPS, Commissioner, Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency, Government of Telangana
- **Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, IAS (R)**
  Former Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga

Panel discussion:
Rethinking Water: Floods, Water Security and Water-resilient Future

Moderator:

- **Dr. Victor R. Shinde**
  Head, Water and Environment, NIUA, India

Panellists:

- **Ganesh Paudel**
  Joint Secretary, President Chure Terai Madhesh Conservation Development Board, Government of Nepal
- **Rinsad Ahamed Mohamed Farook**
  Hon'ble Mayor of Puttalam Municipal Council, Sri Lanka
- **Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, IAS (R),**
  Former Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga, India
- **P.V. Subba Rao**
  Retired Chief Engineer, Water Resources Department, Tirupati, Government of Andhra Pradesh
- **Suresh Babu SV**
  Senior Director-Ecological Footprint WWF – India

Rapid urbanisation and competing demands for limited urban land are placing unprecedented pressure on natural ecosystems and urban water bodies. Rivers, lakes, wetlands, drainage channels and other blue infrastructure that historically supported water supply, groundwater recharge and flood management are increasingly encroached upon, fragmented or disconnected from urban drainage systems.

The session explored how cities can transition from reactive flood management towards integrated, inclusive, nature-based urban water resilience. It focused on the rejuvenation and reconnection of urban water bodies and their inlet and outlet channels, enabling them to function as the city's hydrological system. It also examined how redirecting appropriate stormwater flows into rejuvenated water bodies can support flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, ecosystem restoration and improved water security, while creating healthier, more live able urban environments. Most importantly, the session deliberated the role of communities in sustaining these interventions.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. It is imperative to adopt a systems approach to climate-resilient urban water management. To address urban issues related to water, it is fundamental to understand and work with the interconnectedness of different urban sectors, their interests, demands and impacts on water resources.
2. There is a need to integrate policy frameworks for various sectors such as urban planning, water, waste, climate change, disaster management, environment management, transport and industries, as these are interconnected.
3. An emphasis on NbS is key to achieving the targets set for urban water management and climate resilience.
4. Restoring and integrating traditional water conservation and management practices into urban planning can strengthen water security and build climate resilience.
5. Institutionalising integrated urban river management through dedicated Urban River Management Plans, and incorporating the protection and restoration of urban wetlands into city-level planning, can help safeguard high-density communities.
6. Incorporating nature-based solutions (NbS) into district river plans and integrated wetland management plans can improve ecosystem health, enhance biodiversity and strengthen climate resilience.

SPEAKER QUOTES



A.V. Ranganath, IPS

Commissioner, Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency, Government of Telangana

"Urban water management needs a proactive approach, that is, protecting natural systems before they are degraded. The power of public awareness and support can drive efficient implementation of urban water management."



Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, IAS (R)

Formerly Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga

"It will be interesting to explore how all river cities can come together to make a river city alliance, learn from each other and make sustainable urban river management plans."



Dr. Victor R. Shinde

Head, Water and Environment, NIUA, India

"The emphasis on Nature-based Solutions is a clever, intelligent mix for achieving the goals for urban water management."



Ganesh Paudel

Joint Secretary, President Chure Terai Madhesh Conservation Development Board, Government of Nepal

"Restoring traditional water systems is integral to comprehensive water security in the hilly regions."



Rinsad Ahamed Mohamed Farook

Hon'ble Mayor of Puttalam Municipal Council, Sri Lanka

"For sustainable water management, building long-term financing projects is an essential requirement for building a resilient future."



P.V. Subba Rao

Retired Chief Engineer, Water Resources Department, Tirupati, Government of Andhra Pradesh

"Adapting Nature-based Solution measures can improve groundwater levels, mitigate flash floods and enable better climate-resilient urban water management in cities."



Suresh Babu SV

Senior Director-Ecological Footprint WWF–India

"Urban water is complex, both hydrologically and in terms of governance. It needs an integrated approach that includes all actors, scales, and concepts."



From left: Bedoshruti Sadhukhan, Dr. Victor R. Shinde, A.V. Ranganath, Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, Suresh Babu SV, P.V. Subba Rao, Rinsad Ahamed Mohamed Farook, and Ganesh Paudel.

Parallel Session 2:

Driving Sustainable Energy Transition in Cities: From Efficient Buildings to Clean Power

SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Soumya Chaturvedula
Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Addresses:

Dr. Poorva Keskar
Director, VK:e environmental

Presentation: Opportunities and Enablers for Sustainable Energy Transition in South Asian Cities

Presenter:

Nikhil Kolsepatil
Senior Programme Coordinator (Energy & Climate), ICLEI South Asia

Panel Discussion: Decarbonising the Urban Built Environment: Scaling Sustainable Energy Transition in Cities through Policy, Technology, Finance and Partnerships

Panellists:

Dr. Jeevan Kumar Jethani
Senior Director, Ministry of New And Renewable Energy, Government of India

Akshima Ghate
Managing Director, RMI India

Dr. Poorva Keskar
Director, VK:e environmental

Karma Euthra
Executive Engineer, Sustainable & Resilient Building Division, Department of Human Settlement, Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Royal Government of Bhutan

Pramod Kumar Singh
Senior Director – Research & Programmes, Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy

The global energy transition is gathering pace, with a record addition of 692 GW of renewable capacity, and India is targeting 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030, a scale-up that will require large-scale energy storage deployments. As cities account for around 70 percent of global emissions, urban mitigation efforts are crucial to meeting these ambitious commitments. For the rapidly growing cities of South Asia, with much of their future building stock yet to be built, the design and energy systems of their built environments will play a significant role in shaping this transition.

City-level energy transition requires integrated action across multiple levels of governance, including national missions and programmes, state renewable energy and energy conservation policies, power distribution companies, and local policies and initiatives.

Buildings are at the heart of the urban climate challenge, and local governments are uniquely placed to drive the energy transition in cities by adopting energy-efficiency and renewable energy integration strategies, including energy storage for municipal buildings and facilities, and highlighting decarbonisation opportunities across different building typologies. Gaps in benchmarking energy-use baselines, technical capacity, enabling policies, and financing interventions highlight the need for coordinated efforts with subnational agencies and distribution companies to drive sustainable energy transition at the city level.

This session explored how local governments and distribution companies can scale up net-zero buildings and integrate distributed renewables and storage across the urban built environment and local distribution grids.

Organised with: ASIA LEDS PARTNERSHIP | UNOPS



From left: Soumya Chaturvedula, Akshima Ghate, Dr. Poorva Keskar, Karma Euthra, and Pramod Kumar Singh.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Cities and local governments have a critical role in accelerating energy efficiency, renewable energy integration, and net-zero buildings. Since the private sector creates roughly 93% of the real estate and building stock, successfully transitioning cities requires actively engaging, raising awareness, and supporting private developers.
2. Leveraging innovative financing mechanisms—such as municipal green bonds, blended finance, aggregation, and "as-a-service" operational expenditure (OPEX) models—rather than solely relying on grants, can successfully scale sustainable urban infrastructure and renewable energy integration.
3. It is essential to establish mechanisms for coordination between government departments, post-construction monitoring, and the allocation of implementation responsibilities, especially for policies like the Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) or Environmental Clearance Management Plans.
4. The circular economy can be mainstreamed in municipal infrastructure by using measures such as promoting the processing of construction and demolition (C&D) waste into products such as paver blocks and integrating recycled materials into municipal procurement policies through mandatory sourcing targets.
5. Cities can scale up urban heat mitigation solutions by implementing practical microclimate interventions such as cool roofs, shaded streets and connected green corridors, supported by innovative financing models. Pimpri Chinchwad's Harita Setu programme, funded through green municipal bonds, is an example.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Soumya Chaturvedula,
Director, ICLEI South Asia

Buildings are at the heart of the urban climate challenge, and local governments are uniquely placed to drive the energy transition in cities by adopting efficiency and Renewable Energy integration strategies, including energy storage for municipal buildings and facilities.



Dr. Poorva Keskar
Director, VK:e environmental

Buildings are major energy consumers. Reducing building-level energy use and cooling demand requires close engagement with private developers to mainstream green practices and influence design decisions from the outset.



Akshima Ghate
Managing Director, RMI India

Data centres must be viewed through a real estate lens, considering their impacts on land, water, communities and ecosystems. With many data centres coming up in severely water-stressed areas, cities must ensure that their scale and location accommodate carrying capacities and community needs.



Karma Euthra
Executive Engineer, Sustainable & Resilient Building Division, Department of Human Settlement, Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Royal Government of Bhutan

Mainstreaming energy efficiency and green buildings in urban planning and climate commitments is essential to achieving carbon neutrality. The challenge is to find the right balance between generalised frameworks and extremely high levels of ambition.



Pramod Kumar Singh
Senior Director – Research & Programmes, Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy

We must move beyond building-level interventions and adopt city-wide approaches to urban cooling, including district cooling systems and Cooling-as-a-Service models. This requires collaboration between local governments and electricity distribution companies to aggregate cooling demand, improve energy efficiency and optimise resource use.



Nikhil Kolsepatil
Senior Programme Coordinator (Energy and Climate), ICLEI South Asia

To realise energy and climate transition at the required scale, cities must drive a holistic transition across three core pathways: moving toward net-zero ready built environment that avoid carbon lock-in, scaling distributed renewables backed by energy storage and smart solutions, and bridging institutional silos by planning the city and its energy grid together.

Parallel Session 3:

Nature-Positive Cities: Delivering Global Biodiversity Goals

SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Dr. Monalisa Sen
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Address:

Dr. Vinod B. Mathur
Former Chairperson, National Biodiversity Authority, India

Panellists:

Adv. Minimol V. K.
Hon'ble Mayor of Kochi

V. Krishna, IFS
Former Dean, Forest College and Research Institute, Mulugu, Hyderabad

Yeshey Nidup
Architect, City Development Office, Gelephu Mindfulness City, Bhutan

Dr. Sumit Dookia
Associate Professor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University

Dr. Avantika Bhaskar
Senior Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme

Launch: Guidelines on Canal Restoration using Nature-based Solutions

With rising climate impacts, cities that harbour millions of people are increasingly exposed to climate disasters, making adaptation essential. Nature-based solutions are emerging as vital instruments for fostering resilience and play a crucial role in ecological restoration and promoting community well-being. Target 12 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework serves as a guiding framework for urban biodiversity conservation and integration.

This includes initiatives such as urban forestry, green infrastructure, watershed revitalisation, and landscapes designed to withstand and adapt to climate change.

The ecosystem-orientated approach yields greater benefits that simultaneously address mitigation, adaptation, and biodiversity protection within cohesive strategies.

The session explored the possibilities offered by the coexistence of natural and engineered systems. It also highlighted the importance of co-benefits, the value of natural assets, and biodiversity. The discussion further explored how Target 12 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework can serve as a guiding framework to balance urban ecology, resilience, and development.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Cities should develop measurable biodiversity targets, action plans and monitoring systems to track progress towards nature-positive cities. Tools such as Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (LBSAPs) and the City Biodiversity Index (CBI) can help assess and monitor improvements, as demonstrated by Hyderabad's CBI score rising from 36/72 in 2011 to 56/72 in 2022.
2. Mainstreaming nature into urban planning and municipal finance is essential. This included integrating urban nature action plans into statutory planning instruments, including master plans, and supporting their implementation through dedicated municipal budgets, CSR partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms such as green bonds.
3. Global frameworks, including COP decisions and the KunmingMontreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), have yet to translate fully into tangible action on the ground. Greater emphasis is needed on making targets such as Target 12 visible in people's everyday lives.
4. Cities can develop Urban Nature Action Plans informed by biodiversity assessments and natural asset mapping, and integrate them into statutory master plans. Tools such as LBSAPs, CBI, People's Biodiversity Registers and Local Area Plans can help identify priority areas for conservation and restoration.
5. Implementing context-specific NbS can help build nature-positive cities. Local interventions such as canal restoration, floating wetlands, desilting, tidal flow revival and riparian buffers in Kochi; Miyawaki plantations in Hyderabad; bioswales for rainwater harvesting in Gelephu; and the restoration of Khazans in Goa and high-altitude grasslands in the Himalayas are some successful examples.
6. Recognise and protect all urban spaces as ecological assets: Land perceived as vacant may play critical roles in water absorption and biodiversity conservation. Cities must protect, connect and improve access to green and blue spaces, ensuring they are inclusive and accessible to all, including persons with disabilities.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Dr. Vinod B. Mathur
Former Chairperson, National Biodiversity Authority, India

Every city should prepare an Urban Nature Action Plan, based on biodiversity assessment and natural asset mapping, identifying what must be protected and where restoration is needed, and integrated into the master plan in an inclusive way.



V. Krishna, IFS
Former Dean, Forest College and Research Institute, Mulugu, Hyderabad

Cities can become nature-positive when they have measurable data, action plans and funding. In Hyderabad, the city's green cover was mapped through satellite imagery with support from ICLEI South Asia. It was discovered that about 1.6 lakh acres of forest and protected areas exist in the Hyderabad Metropolitan Region.



Yeshey Nidup
Architect City Development Office, Gelephu Mindfulness City, Bhutan

Gelephu Mindfulness City is a city of the future that is being developed with nature at its core where about 40% of the city's land is planned as urban green space.



Adv. Minimol V. K.
Hon'ble Mayor of Kochi

Nature is integrated into the Kochi Master Plan (Water-Influenced Zones), municipal budget and a proposed Green Bond, with c-hed (Centre for Heritage, Environment and Development) acting as the city's R&D and implementation wing. The CSR-funded Subhash Bose Park is an example of the same.



Dr. Monalisa Sen
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Cities in South Asia are putting emphasis on blue-green planning and contributing to Target 12 of the Kunming Montreal Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.



Dr. Avantika Bhaskar
Senior Advisor, Indo-German Biodiversity Programme

Wetlands should not be treated as stand-alone assets. They are part of a wider ecosystem, and their management must bring together all departments and stakeholders whose decisions affect them, linking policy with programme delivery.



From left: Dr. Monalisa Sen, Dr. Vinod B. Mathur, Yeshey Nidup, Adv. Minimol V.K., V. Krishna, IFS (R), Dr. Avantika Bhaskar, Dr. Sumit Dookia releasing the Guidelines on Canal Restoration using Nature-based Solutions

Parallel Session 4:

City Narratives, Climate Cultures (Roundtable)

SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Gunjan Nanda
Co-Founder, Entertainment + Culture Pavilion

Framing Presentation:

Sayli Mankikar
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Roundtable panellists:

Nilesh Rajadhyaksha
Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat India

Nidhi Batra
Founder, Sehreeti Developmental Practices Foundation

Dr. Jana Das Chaudhuri
Urban Heritage & Sustainability Strategist and Steering Committee Member, HERITOPOLIS

Mandira Kalra Kalaan
Senior Director and Head of Office, Purpose India

Shivani Singh
National Urban Editor, Hindustan Times

Smita Rakesh
Director of India, The Earthshot Prize

Jayashree Nandi
Communications Consultant, UNFCCC

Sayli Mankikar
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Reethira Kumar
Senior Programme Communications Specialist, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

Culture and narrative are increasingly part of the global climate conversation and to how progress on climate action is understood and delivered. As the Paris Agreement moves towards its second Global Stocktake, there is growing recognition that climate action cannot be assessed only through emissions, finance, technology and policy commitments, but also through the social, cultural and institutional conditions that enable people and communities to act.

Culture shapes how communities understand climate risk, transmit knowledge across generations, hold institutions accountable, and imagine the futures they're willing to build toward. Yet it remains one of the most underutilised levers in urban climate policy and investment. This session positions culture as existing social capital and infrastructure–community spaces, local practices, creative practitioners, and the languages through which risk becomes locally legible–that climate delivery can draw on more deliberately.

The conversation connected the emerging global agenda around the Culture Global Stocktake for Climate Action (CGST) and UNFCCC's Entertainment and Culture for Climate Action (ECCA) Strategy with the realities of South Asian cities, while moving beyond narrative framing to position culture as an actionable lever for systemic urban resilience. It explored how these approaches can inform locally grounded climate action, aligned with the CGST, which will deliver its first stocktake at COP31 in Türkiye.



From left: Parneet Kaur, Nilesh Rajadhyaksha, Shivani Singh, Reethira Kumar, Smita Rakesh, Gunjan Nanda, Sayli Mankikar, Nidhi Batra, Dr. Jana Das Chaudhuri, Jayashree Nandi, and Mandira Kalra Kalaan.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Culture goes beyond communication and awareness-building; it can shape public engagement, influence behaviours and strengthen the wider ecosystem of locally grounded climate action.
2. Urban development is often driven by quantitative indicators and hard infrastructure priorities. Recognising culture as an integral part of urban resilience requires sustained engagement, patience and a more process-oriented approach to planning.
3. Creative approaches can bring communities and government officials together, surface everyday urban challenges and translate lived experiences into practical improvements in local planning and service delivery.
4. Climate reporting often focuses on extreme weather and its immediate consequences, with greater visibility given to rural and ecologically fragile regions. More attention should be given to human-centred climate stories emerging from cities and urban communities.
5. Culture is frequently treated as an afterthought in urban planning, despite its potential to strengthen community identity, enable collective action and support the resilience of communities facing climate risks.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Nilesh Rajadhyaksha
Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat India

"The magnitude of urban challenges in countries like India often requires delivering services and infrastructure at scale. Alongside these quantitative aspirations lies an opportunity to deepen the focus on the quality, inclusivity, and cultural dimensions of urban development. Integrating culture into urban planning and development is a thoughtful process that requires patience, rigour, and sustained commitment to creating cities that reflect the identities and aspirations of their communities."



Gunjan Nanda
Co-Founder, Entertainment + Culture Pavilion

"There needs to be a big-picture focus on the culture-climate gap in policy, which is what we're working on through the Entertainment + Culture Pavilion - to create space for artists and creative practitioners in climate forums such as COPs. It's imperative to guide the discussion through questions on storytelling, campaigns, pathways into global climate processes, and where culture-climate work could sit institutionally in cities."



Nidhi Batra
Founder, Sehreeti Developmental Practices Foundation

"Climate change cannot be addressed without bringing care and kinship to the centre of our relationship with the natural world…care is not merely an individual responsibility; it must also be embedded in the systems that shape our collective futures. This calls for a fundamental shift in our current planning and financing regimes, so that they recognise and invest in the relationships of care that sustain our ecosystems."



Dr. Jana Das Chaudhuri
Urban Heritage & Sustainability Strategist and Steering Committee Member, HERITOPOLIS

"Climate science helps us understand future risks through modelling, projections and vulnerability assessments. Indigenous and local knowledge help us understand lived realities through centuries of environmental observation, adaptation practices, stewardship traditions and cultural memory. Cities need both."



Mandira Kalra Kalaan,
Senior Director and Head of Office, Purpose India

Every urban crisis is intersectional and has multiple solutions. Culture and storytelling help make systemic issues visible and related to people's everyday lives, and open space for honest two-way dialogue between decision makers and communities.



Shivani Singh
National Urban Editor, Hindustan Times

Hard data and scientific research matter, but the best way to reach readers is through human stories. So, grounding those facts in human stories is essential to make the news coverage more engaging and easier to understand.



Smita Rakesh
Director of India, The Earthshot Prize

At The Earthshot Prize, we see thousands of solutions every year, and one thing stands out: the best climate solutions work because they are built on local knowledge and culture.



Jayashree Nandi,
Communications Consultant, UNFCCC

At COP31, cities and urban spaces are a focus area under the Action Agenda…The COP31 Action Agenda on climate-resilient cities will aim to drive transformation in cities by integrating energy-efficient design, passive cooling, low-carbon materials, and scalable finance, among several other interventions.



Sayli Mankikar,
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Culture is often treated as an afterthought in urban planning, despite its value as a tool for resilience and a resource for frontline communities. For example, during the Mumbai floods, historic places were used as shelters. Loss of cultural knowledge is a dimension of non-economic loss and damage. We need to call for the embedding of preservation of historic places and integration of cultural knowledge within climate planning.



Reethira Kumar
Senior Programme Communications Specialist, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

Communities across India have practised traditional, culture-based climate adaptation for generations. Yet, that wisdom reaches decision-makers as anecdote, rarely as evidence. Ahead of the Culture Global Stocktake, let's change that: pair lived wisdom with scientific data; and build a shared repository of culture-led practices showing what works, where, for whom and at what scale. Let creative storytelling carry replicable solutions as a public good, strengthening resilience across Global South communities.

Parallel Session 5:

Building Resilient Indian Coasts: Integrating Natural Systems, Local Knowledge and Livelihoods

SESSION DETAILS

Opening Remarks

Dr. Debolina Kundu

Director, NIUA, India

Moderator:

Dr. Shalini Dhyani

Principal Scientist, CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Institute, Nagpur

Panellists:

Dr. Ritesh Kumar

Director, Wetlands International South Asia

Dr. Saudamini Das

Professor, Institute of Economic Growth, India

Dr. Deepak Samuel V.

Scientist E and Project Lead, Conservation of Coastal and Marine Resources Division (CMR), National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), India

Ajanta Dey

Joint Secretary and Programme Director, Nature Environment & Wildlife Society

P Sangaradasse

Member Secretary, Town And Country Planning Department, Mahe Planning Authority, Puducherry

India's coastline spans approximately 11,098.81 km across 9 states and 4 union territories, with coastal districts home to nearly 15.5% of the national population, about 18.8 crore people. These coasts carry outsized economic weight. Fisheries and allied activities alone sustain close to 30 million livelihoods, and around 95% of India's trade by volume and 70% by value moves by sea. The National Centre for Coastal Research assessed 6,907 km of India's mainland coastline for 1990–2018, finding 33.6% eroding and 26.9% accreting, with the highest erosion in West Bengal, Kerala, Puducherry, and Tamil Nadu. The buffers absorbing these pressures are shrinking: coastal wetlands fell from 3.69 to 3.62 million hectares in a decade, with intertidal mudflats and salt marshes down 116,897 hectares and 5,647 hectares, respectively.

Mangroves are a rare exception, having gained up to 4,991.68 sq km since 2013, but they remain fragile as long as the mudflats and marshes around them keep disappearing. They provide flood protection benefits exceeding USD 65 billion a year worldwide, and India is among the countries where the most people are protected. The Global Wetland Outlook adds that each dollar invested in wetland restoration is estimated to return USD 5 to 35 in benefits, though conserving intact wetlands costs far less than restoring lost ones.

The session aimed to establish the evidence base and limits of nature-based and hybrid coastal defence approaches in India. It examined the technical and planning challenges of shifting from site-specific hard coastal defences to integrated, nature-based and hybrid approaches. The session examined where interventions such as mangroves, salt marshes, dunes, and reefs can provide effective protection, where engineered measures remain necessary, and how these choices can be informed by local coastal dynamics, erosion patterns, and ecosystem conditions. The discussion explored coast-scale planning, community knowledge, urban infrastructure integration, and the policy, financing, and institutional mechanisms needed to translate evidence into durable, context-specific solutions.

Organised with:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Natural ecosystems and built infrastructure are complementary, not interchangeable. Coastal protection strategies should combine appropriate engineering with the protection and restoration of functioning natural systems.
2. Plans need to shape real decisions. Coastal resilience guidance should feed into city master plans, development control regulations, infrastructure proposals, budgets and municipal projects, with performance and maintenance monitored over time
3. Communities should be co-designers, implementers and long-term stewards, not merely beneficiaries. Their knowledge and role in monitoring should be recognised, and projects should consider livelihood benefits, gender inclusion and affordability.
4. It is important to improve access to interoperable coastal data by bringing together Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) maps, ecosystem and vulnerability assessments, hydrological information and socio-economic datasets. Strengthening data-sharing across departments can help minimise duplication and complement scientific evidence with participatory community mapping.
5. Building long-term and community-centred programmes is essential. Coastal administrations should have mechanisms for community monitoring and stewardship arrangements; support livelihood-linked ecosystem services such as sustainable fisheries and ecotourism; assess blue-carbon and biodiversity-credit opportunities; and ensure that financing includes maintenance and benefits for the local people.
6. Linking ecological resilience, livelihoods and implementation is essential. Cross-departmental coordination, community stewardship, inclusive planning and long-term financing and maintenance are imperative for coastal resilience to move from plans and pilots to sustained action on the ground.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Dr. Debolina Kundu
Director, NIUA, India

"It is urgent to take proactive action, extend collaboration, break silos, and adopt a more integrated and inclusive approach to building resilient Indian coasts."



Dr. Shalini Dhyani,
Principal Scientist, CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Institute, Nagpur

"A lot of our development relies on coastal areas and hence it is strategically very important for the country. At the same time, these areas also host numerous highly vulnerable communities. Therefore, it is high-time we mainstream nature-based solutions in these coastal regions."



Dr. Ritesh Kumar, Director
Wetlands International South Asia

"Coastal resilience requires us to understand how natural systems function and integrate this knowledge into urban planning. Mapping coastal ecosystems and making this information accessible can support informed, inclusive and sustainable decision-making."



Dr. Saudamini Das, Professor
Institute of Economic Growth, India

"Mangroves don't just look green; they save lives. Even with 800 cyclone shelters, econometric models show mangroves protect nearly as many people as the shelters themselves. Therefore, natural capital and built infrastructure should work in a complementary manner rather than as substitutes of one another."



Dr. Deepak Samuel V.
Scientist E and Project Lead, Conservation of Coastal and Marine Resources Division, National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, India

“It is high time for convergence across government departments and institutions. Stakeholders must move beyond coordination and become an integral part of coastal planning. Breaking institutional silos, pooling fragmented data, and enabling its wider use are essential to informed decision-making, integrated investments and a unified approach to building resilient coastal communities.”



Ajanta Dey
Joint Secretary and Programme Director, Nature Environment and Wildlife Society

“Resilient coasts are not about a single project, but about continuing programmes. Communities must be empowered to co-design, implement and sustain conservation efforts over the long term. West Bengal’s Embankment Protection Committees (Aruni’r Dol) are examples of how community participation can be recognised and strengthened in protecting coastal embankments.”



P Sangaradasse
Member Secretary, Town And Country Planning Department, Mahe Planning Authority, Puducherry

“Before preparing a coastal resilience plan, we must understand the existing ground realities. A plan may look comprehensive on paper, but its success depends on whether it addresses the actual challenges faced by coastal communities.”



From left: Varsha Singh, Hansa Patel, P Sangaradasse, Ajanta Dey, Dr. Saudamini Das, Dr. Debolina Kundu, Dr. Deepak Samuel V, Dr. Ritesh Kumar, and Dr. Shalini Dhyani.

Parallel Session 6:

The Urban Planning Paradigm: For Climate-Resilient and Healthy Cities

SESSION DETAILS

Welcome and Introduction:

Avantika Arjuna
Assistant Programme Coordinator, ICLEI South Asia

Context-setting Presentation:

Dr. Sunita Purushottam
Country Managing Director, GBPN India

MoU Exchange

Memorandum of Understanding Exchange between Global Buildings Performance Network and ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, South Asia

Presentation: Healthy and Climate Resilient Affordable Housing: Experiences from Indian Cities

Presenter:

Monali Patil
CEO, MMR Division, AVP Realty

Panel Discussion: Bridging the Gap: Health and Climate-Resilient Urban Planning

Moderator:

Dr. Sunita Purushottam
Country Managing Director, GBPN India

Panellists:

Thinley Namgay
Hon'ble Mayor of Samdrup Jongkhar Thromde, Bhutan

Nirajan Jangam,
Acting Mayor, Dhulikhel Municipality, Nepal

T. Prateek Rao, IAS
Additional Commissioner, Gwalior Municipal Corporation

Prof. Preeti Negandhi
Professor and Chair, JSW Centre for Climate Change and Health, Public Health Foundation of India

Prof. Chetan Vaidya
Senior Urban Adviser

Cities are engines of economic growth and innovation, with large populations engaged in a range of economic activities that contribute to the country's GDP. Simultaneously, cities often face severe public health challenges arising from several factors, particularly poor planning, financial constraints, and limited capacity within city governments.

Alongside national-level guidance through various policies and programmes, urban planning and climate resilience are important pathways for promoting and enhancing public health at the local level. Decisions made during the planning stage often impact the quality of life of the citizens, their vulnerability to risks, and local environmental conditions. The session provided a platform to discuss the importance of integrating health considerations into urban planning .

This session explored how to integrate public health into climate-resilient urban planning. Drawing on experiences from Indian and international cities, as well as expert insights, the discussion examined approaches to embedding health in master plans and Climate Resilient City Action Plans.

Organised with:

GBPN | AVP



Exchange of Memorandum of Understanding between Global Buildings Performance Network and ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, South Asia

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Health and well-being should be placed at the centre of city master plans and Climate Resilient City Action Plans (CRCAPs), moving from reactive, sector-specific interventions towards proactive, integrated and cross-sectoral planning.
2. Residents should be engaged in identifying local priorities. City governments should leverage grievance redressal data and strengthen public ownership of urban assets to develop targeted interventions that deliver multiple benefits, particularly in smaller cities.
3. It is imperative to ensure that climate-resilient urban development is supported by financially sustainable projects, with clear pathways to mobilise investments and translate local priorities into implementable initiatives.
4. Cross-sectoral planning and closer collaboration among city departments and institutional committees are essential to address interconnected urban challenges through coordinated, holistic interventions.
5. Cities should integrate hyperlocal assessments into urban planning to address the impacts of densification, improve equitable access to public spaces and account for varying exposure to health and climate risks across neighbourhoods.
6. Cities should adopt integrated frameworks for healthy urban planning by applying the 6Ps approach – Planning, Pollution, Public Health, Public Policy, Public Actors and Private Actors – alongside the seven action areas for institutionalising healthy urban planning and integrating it into CRCAPs.
7. Cities should strengthen hyperlocal, data-driven planning and monitoring by developing ward-level action plans using grievance redressal data and local evidence to identify priorities.
8. Cities should leverage partnerships, innovative financing and climate-responsive design by mobilising support from NGOs, development organisations, central government and private actors to finance urban priorities.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Dr. Sunita Purushottam
Country Managing Director, GBPN India

“Health is both an input to and an outcome of urban planning. A city’s carrying capacity, shaped by its natural, ecological and environmental conditions and exposure to climate hazards, directly influences public health. The impacts range from immediate consequences, such as loss of life, to long-term effects, including non-communicable and vector-borne diseases, all of which carry significant economic costs and affect GDP.”



Monali Patil, CEO,
MMR Division, AVP Realty

“While focusing on environmental sustainability is essential, it’s also important to consider financial sustainability, discuss how people are going to manage environmentally sustainable housing. Cities must focus on making affordable housing viable for its citizens while protecting the surrounding ecology.”



Thinley Namgay
Hon’ble Mayor of Samdrup Jongkhar Thromde, Bhutan

“If we keep the community at the centre of planning, we can make our cities healthier, safer and more climate-resilient.”



Nirajan Jangam
Acting Mayor, Dhulikhel Municipality, Nepal

“Health is a key priority for us, with 30% of Dhulikhel’s budget allocated to the health sector and 99% of people covered by health insurance.”



T. Prateek Rao, IAS
Additional Commissioner, Gwalior Municipal Corporation

Gwalior's grievance redressal mechanism helps us understand where the problems are and direct our efforts towards improving service delivery.



Prof. Preeti Negandhi
Professor and Chair, JSW Centre for Climate Change and Health, Public Health Foundation of India

Hyperlocal evidence is needed, since every neighbourhood has a different temperature and humidity. We need to look at ward-level action plans and put health at the core of all city action plans.



Prof. Chetan Vaidya
Senior Urban Adviser

Economic development and urban development should go hand in hand, and we need to find ways to link the two.



From left: Avantika Arjuna, Monali Patil, T. Prateek Rao, IAS, Nirajan Jangam, Prof. Preeti Negandhi, Thinley Namgay, Prof. Chetan Vaidya, Dr. Sunita Purushottam, and Bhavya Kanneganti.

Parallel Session 7:

From Voice to Action: Child- and Youth-Centred Climate Policy

SESSION DETAILS

Welcome and introduction:

Sayli Mankikar
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Address 1 – Children and the Urban Climate Crisis: Evidence on Heat and Air Pollution, and what Child-Responsive Climate Policy requires

Yusuf Kabir
Programme Specialist – Climate and Environment, UNICEF India

Keynote Address 2 – From Framework to Practice: Embedding young people in Urban Climate Governance through the ACT Framework

Anshul Tewari
Founder, Youth Ki Awaaz

Moderator:

Shinjini Saha
Senior Project Officer, ICLEI South Asia

Panellists:

Ananya
Urban Youth Unit, NIUA, India

Muskan Lodhi,
Partnerships and Communications Manager, Bring Back Green Foundation

Seep Agrawal,
Lead – Volunteering & Strategic Partnerships, UNICEF India

Gunjan Nanda,
Co-founder, Entertainment + Culture Pavilion

Presentation by the winners of the ARISE Cities Forum Youth for Climate Hackathon 2.0 | Action-Oriented Transition: Translating Resilient, Scalable, and Inclusive Solutions for Circular Cities

Felicitation of Hackathon winners with the Ritu Thakur Memorial Award

Launches:

- Poster Release – Early Action for Children's Health (EACH): Towards Heat Resilience and Clean Air
- COP31 – ICLEI South Asia 2026 Youth Hackathon Booklet

Children and young people are among those most exposed to the climate impacts cities experience every day, and extreme heat and air pollution are the two they feel most directly. UNICEF reports that around 392 million children in India, about 92% of the country's child population, are exposed to extreme heat, and that heatwaves affected an estimated 54.8 million children in India in 2024 alone. Globally, about 2.3 billion children reportedly live in areas with unhealthy air quality, and air pollution was the second leading risk factor for deaths of children under five in 2023.

This session brought together three strands of work to change that. The first was evidence: what we know about how heat and air pollution affect children and adolescents in cities, and where urban plans and heat action plans still overlook them. The second was institutional practice: how a city government can embed young people in climate governance in a way that lasts. The third was culture and narrative: how storytelling, media and cultural expression shape what cities and communities believe is possible, and who gets to lead.

The discussion aimed to move from young people's voices to policies and plans that respond to their concerns. The deliberations focused on identifying partnerships between youth, city governments, media and institutions to scale up child- and youth-focused climate policy and also build approaches to embedding the youth in governance.

Organised with:

unicef
for every child



From Left: Seep Agrawal, Yusuf Kabir, Nirma Bora, Bedoshruti Sadhikhan, Emani Kumar releasing the Early Action for Children's Health (EACH): Towards Heat Resilience and Clean Air project poster at ARISE Cities Forum 2026

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. We need to move beyond tokenistic participation towards youth-led climate governance and establish formal mechanisms for young people to co-create, implement and influence local climate policies.
2. Climate communication needs to be made accessible and rooted in lived experiences. This means moving beyond technical jargon and abstract climate narratives by connecting climate action to everyday concerns such as health, livelihoods, migration, art and culture. Accessible communication can help turn climate anxiety into climate awareness and meaningful participation.
3. Institutionalisation of youth engagement through structured platforms and partnerships is imperative. Frameworks such as Youth ACT and platforms such as Eco-clubs for Mission LiFE can provide sustained opportunities for young people to shape urban climate policies and lead practical climate action across areas such as heat resilience, water management, waste and biodiversity.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Sayli Mankikar
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Organisational climate strategies must move away from top-down interventions (working for youth) toward co-creation (working alongside children and youth) on major environmental challenges.



Yusuf Kabir
Programme Specialist – Climate and Environment, UNICEF India

Infants and young children are disproportionately harmed by heatwaves and PM2.5 air pollution because they breathe faster than adults, possess higher metabolic rates, and have developing immune and organ systems.



Anshul Tewari
Founder, Youth Ki Awaaz

Everybody says that young people are important. But why is nobody taking their voices into account when decisions are made for young people?



Shinjini Saha
Senior Project Officer, ICLEI South Asia

It is crucial to bring the lived experiences of children and young people facing extreme heat and air pollution into the climate conversation, so that their realities inform how cities plan and develop climate policies.



Muskan Lodhi
Partnerships and Communications Manager, Bring Back Green Foundation

Engagement of youth delegates for negotiations is not possible at this moment. But hopefully in the next few years, in the next decade, we will get an opportunity to ensure young people are represented in negotiation groups.



Seep Agrawal,
Lead – Volunteering and Strategic Partnerships, UNICEF India

The idea is to mainstream youth and children's voices in the entire process and demystify climate change and make it easier for young people to understand and act on it within their own communities.



Gunjan Nanda
Co-founder, Entertainment + Culture Pavilion

"We need to connect creative practitioners across film, music, fashion, dance and visual arts with formal climate policy, making complex negotiations more accessible and relatable by bringing climate action into everyday cultural conversations."



From left: Shinjini Saha, Muskan Lodhi, Seep Agrawal, Gunjan Nanda, Ananya



From left: Yusuf Kabir, Muskan Lodhi, Emani Kumar, Sayli Mankikar releasing the COP31 – ICLEI South Asia 2026 Youth Hackathon Booklet

Parallel Session 8:

Climate Financing for Cities: Bridging Plans and Investments (Roundtable)

Organised with:

C40 CITIES

National Institute of Urban Affairs

50 Years Serving the Nation since 1976

C40 Cities and NIUA jointly convened a closed-door roundtable to bring together key stakeholders to discuss how climate can be systematically mainstreamed into city procurement systems across India. The roundtable aimed to identify: key drivers, enablers and priority areas for action; how existing programmes, resources, frameworks and partnerships can be strengthened and better aligned to support cities; and identify opportunities for agreement on priority actions, potential partners and next steps to scale up climate mainstreaming in city procurement.

SESSION DETAILS

Opening remarks

Dr Debolina Kundu
Director, NIUA

Roundtable speakers

Md Asif Raza
Lead- City Planning and Engagement, Climate Projects Preparation Facility (CPPF), NIUA, India

Sarika Chakravarty
Director of Implementation, C40 Cities

Aditya Sharma
Associate Director, PwC

Debarpita Roy
Lead – Research, Centre for Public Policy on Housing and Habitat, NIUA, India

Mahreen Mahto
Team Lead for the Sanitation Capacity Building Platform (SCBP 3.0) at NIUA, India

N. Mohan
Director (S&L), Bureau of Energy Efficiency

Akash Goenka
Senior Specialist – Buildings and Urban Cooling, NRDC India

Anil Kumar Choudhary
Chief General Manager (Technical), Energy Efficiency Services Limited

Kiran Avadhanula
Senior Sector Specialist for Sustainable Urban Development at KfW Development Bank (India)

Rakshada Rode
Project Lead, Sustainable Cities programme at World Resources Institute India

Dr Teresa Kerber
Project Director, GRC, GIZ

Vibhor Sood
Environmental Policy, Resources Efficiency Advisor, GIZ India

Nidhi Gupta
Associate Director, Environmental Design Solutions

Pankaj Gupta
Deputy Chief (I&D), Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council

Devashree Ragde
Manager- Climate Governance and Finance, C40 Cities



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Public procurement accounts for a substantial share of GDP and emissions, presenting a massive opportunity to use government demand to shift the wider market toward low-carbon and resource-efficient products.
2. Institutionalising green procurement requires deep, cross-departmental coordination among engineering, finance, environment departments, coupled with targeted capacity building, especially for smaller municipalities.
3. Clear policy mandates, standardised technical specifications, model tender documents, and reliable payment security mechanisms are essential to reduce the "fear of the unknown" and give suppliers the confidence to participate.
4. It is important to bridge the gap between climate commitments and procurement decisions through early alignment among municipal leadership, project teams and political representatives.
5. It is imperative to ensure that proposed solutions are financially viable and do not transfer disproportionate financial and implementation risks to suppliers, particularly through delayed payments and rigid contractual arrangements.
6. We must move beyond voluntary adoption by introducing mandatory climate-aligned procurement policies. Integrating green materials and energy-efficient technologies into national and state Schedules of Rates (SoR), with support from standard bidding documents and practical procurement templates, can simplify adoption by municipal authorities.
7. Mechanisms are needed to enable coordinated action among central and state governments, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), financial institutions and market aggregators. Policy mandates, municipal leadership, risk-sharing mechanisms and viability gap funding can collectively accelerate the adoption of climate-aligned solutions.









Plenary 2:

From Disaster Risk to Readiness: Cities as First Responders

The session deliberated on the urgent need to mainstream disaster risk reduction (DRR) considerations into urban planning, implementation processes and institutional frameworks. In most countries, recovery based on loss and damage assessments is primarily driven at the national level. In this context, the session focused on the complex challenges of assessing loss and damage in urban areas for evidence-based disaster recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation and considered how this could contribute to DRR in the long run.

The session showcased examples from cities where effective recovery interventions, specifically those informed by loss and damage assessments, have strengthened local disaster resilience. Experts from relevant sectors shared practical insights into the barriers, enabling factors, and opportunities for undertaking localised loss and damage assessments.

This session highlighted the importance of adopting an inclusive approach to disaster resilience that emphasises mitigation and preparedness, and draws on lessons from past experience. It also showcased ICLEI South Asia's efforts to develop a loss and damage assessment framework for urban areas that covers both economic and non-economic losses.

SESSION DETAILS

Introduction:

Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Address:

Amit Prothi
Director General, Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

Special Address:

Rita Missal
Member, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), India

Video messages:

Marco Toscano-Rivalta,
Chief, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UNDRR

Fatemeh Bakhtiari,
Senior Advisor – Climate Policy, Loss and Damage, UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre

Special Address:

Dr. Shehnaaz Moosa, Director, SouthSouthNorth

Launch of Global course on Urban Water Infrastructure Resilience

Raina Singh,
Lead Specialist – Capacity Development, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

Launches:

- Disaster Risk Reduction in Cities: A Training Manual for Local Governments in India
- Assessing and Managing Loss and Damage: Local-level evidence to inform global-level action in Gujarat, India
- Assessing and Managing Loss and Damage for Children: Local-level evidence to inform global-level action in Udaipur, India
- Global course on Urban Water Infrastructure Resilience
- Climate-Induced Disaster Resilience Planning Guidelines for Kakinada Municipal Corporation

Organised with:



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Economic losses from disasters are often several times the direct damage to infrastructure, as they ripple through supply chains, markets, SMEs and livelihoods. Reducing the duration of disruption directly reduces economic losses.
2. A comprehensive, sector-wise urban asset register, linked to people and services (including informal workers), is the starting point for any credible loss and damage assessment.
3. Recovery should be measured not only by the pace of rebuilding, but also by how well lives, livelihoods and infrastructure are protected in subsequent disasters. Resilience investments can be incremental, provided they are guided by evidence-based policy decisions.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Amit Prothi
Director General, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

When we talk about resilience, there are three dimensions to be considered. These include how long services are disrupted, how quickly they recover, and how well a city rebuilds.The faster all three can be achieved is what we call the resilience dividend.



Rita Missal
Member, NDMA, India

Cities' recovery should not be measured by how fast they are rebuilding, but rather by focusing on which services do not get disrupted in the next disaster.



Marco Toscano-Rivalta
Chief, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UNDRR

Progress must deliver tangible change. This change must be inclusive and shaped with women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, older persons, and youth as agents of change. Their knowledge, priorities, and leadership must inform decisions, implementations, and accountability. Third, legal clarity must guide practical action.



Fatemeh Bakhtiari,
Senior Advisor – Climate Policy, Loss and Damage, UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre

Infrastructure may be repaired, but people's lives and livelihoods may take much longer to recover. Loss and damage assessments must look beyond physical infrastructure to understand the longer-term impacts on people, livelihoods and communities.



Dr. Shehnaaz Moosa
Director, SouthSouthNorth

Disaster response must be guided by equity, not just equality. It is important to ask whether those communities (and developing nations) that lacked infrastructure and services before a disaster have them afterwards.



Raina Singh
Lead Specialist – Capacity Development, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

We're already seeing a lot of nature-based solution pilots in several cities …but scaling them from pilots to the city level is where the real work lies.



From left: Divya Prakash Vyas, P.V. Subba Rao, representatives from Kakinada Municipal Corporation, Emani Kumar, Amit Prothi, Rita Missal, Shehnaaz Moosa, Raina Singh, Bedoshruti Sadhukhan releasing Disaster Risk Reduction in Cities: A Training Manual for Local Governments in India; Assessing and Managing Loss and Damage: Local-level evidence to inform global level action in Gujarat, India; Assessing and Managing Loss and Damage for Children: Local-level evidence to inform global-level action in Udaipur, India; and Climate-Induced Disaster Resilience Planning Guidelines for Kakinada Municipal Corporation





DAY 2

Tuesday
October 28, 2026

Plenary 3:

Financing Climate Action: Shaping Instruments, Policies, and Institutions for Urban Transitions in India

As cities around the world face escalating climate risks, aligning capital with urban climate priorities has become essential for accelerating resilient urban transitions. Climate ambition set out in policy often fails to translate into bankable projects, leaving a persistent gap between what cities need and what they can finance. Closing this gap requires embedding climate considerations into municipal budgets, capital investment decisions and long-term development pathways, so that climate action becomes a core part of how cities plan, prioritise and fund infrastructure.

National governments are beginning to respond with dedicated urban financing frameworks. India's Urban Challenge Fund, for example, commits ₹1 lakh crore in central assistance to catalyse ₹4 lakh crore in investment, linking central support to at least 50% of project costs being mobilised from market sources.

The session explored how aligning capital with urban climate priorities can accelerate resilient urban transitions. It focused on embedding climate considerations into municipal budgets, capital investment decisions, and long-term development pathways, while examining the challenges, opportunities, and potential for mobilising strategic, scalable investments to build resilient, adaptive, and future-ready cities. The session sought to shed light on infrastructure and climate financing mechanisms, opportunities unlocked by blended financing approaches, the potential and limitations of market-based mechanisms, and the need for patient capital.

SESSION DETAILS

Context setting:

Dr. Ramesh Subramaniam
Global Director - Programmes and Strategy, CDRI

Keynote Addresses:

Dr Krishna S. Vatsa, IAS
Member and Head of the Department, NDMA, India

Jayesh Ranjan, IAS
Special Chief Secretary, Municipal Administration and Urban Development; and Special Officer, Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority Limits, Government of Telangana

Special Addresses:

M. Nagaraj
Director, Corporate Planning, HUDCO, India

Banchhanidhi Pani, IAS
Municipal Commissioner, Amdavad Municipal Corporation, India

Moderator:

Dr. Ramesh Subramaniam
Global Director – Programmes and Strategy, CDRI

Panellists:

H.E. Dr. Mumin Chen
Ambassador, Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India

Neha Kumar
Head – South Asia, Climate Bonds Initiative

Peter Hilliges
Country Director-India, KFW Development Bank

Sanjay Divakar Joshi
Principal Urban Development Specialist, Water and Urban Development Sector Cluster, Asian Development Bank

Monali Zeya Hazra
Director, Climate, India, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)

Hari Bhaskar
Manager – Energy (South Asia, South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Cities must establish dedicated structures such as Climate Action Authorities, Urban Disaster Management Authorities, and climate transition funds to sustain long-term resilience. Climate mitigation and adaptation cannot be treated as afterthoughts; they must be integrated from the inception of urban planning and infrastructure design.
2. Larger urban local bodies possess the capability to recover the costs of substantial infrastructure investments through local taxes and innovative financing without depending on sovereign guarantees. Capital is available, but the market urgently needs bankable, transparent projects with clear risk assessments, data metrics, and measurable outcomes.
3. Financial intermediaries (like HUDCO) and multilateral development banks play a crucial role in providing credit lines and programmatic approaches that extend financing to urban local bodies.
4. Clear green and resilience taxonomies, alongside credit-enhanced financial products, are essential for unlocking institutional capital at scale.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Dr. Ramesh Subramaniam
Global Director- Programmes and Strategy, CDRI

"The world of development finance faces a paradox: there is too much money, yet too little reaches the projects that need it most. While investors seek bankable ideas, cities and communities need finance to turn their ideas into reality. Bridging this gap is the real challenge."



Dr. Krishna S. Vatsa, IAS
Member and Head of the Department, NDMA, India

"As climate change intensifies disaster risks across our cities, building urban resilience is no longer optional. Mitigating these hazards requires embedding DRR, technical capacity, and long-term environmental planning into urban development from the very beginning, ensuring our cities are equipped to protect their communities and sustain future growth."



Jayesh Ranjan, IAS
Special Chief Secretary, Municipal Administration and Urban Development; and Special Officer, Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority Limits, Government of Telangana

"In Hyderabad, the three municipal corporations of the Core Urban Region (CURE) will dedicate 10% of their budgets to climate action through a Climate Transition Fund. A Climate Action Authority comprising primarily domain experts outside of the government will back the fund, so we can leverage climate finance at scale from financing institutions and market instruments."



M. Nagaraj, Director
Corporate Planning, HUDCO, India

"Traditionally, our urban infrastructure financing relied heavily on government guarantees and budgetary support. However, we have since shifted away from that model. To our surprise, we found that urban local bodies possess the capability to generate their own revenue, recovering our entire investment through property taxes alone in nearly half the scheduled time."



Banchhanidhi Pani, IAS
Municipal Commissioner, Amdavad Municipal Corporation, India

Ahmedabad's dedicated Net Zero, Environment and Climate Resilient Cell brings all municipal departments together to drive collective action towards carbon neutrality, climate resilience and a sustainable, low-carbon urban future.



H.E. Dr. Mumin Chen
Ambassador, Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India

Flood control is a critical national priority in Taiwan, with typhoons driving increasingly severe flooding. From our experience, we have seen that the core challenge is not necessarily a lack of government funding for climate resilience, but rather how to effectively and efficiently utilize those funds to protect our communities.



Neha Kumar
Head – South Asia, Climate Bonds Initiative

"Green taxonomies and standardised definitions are vital because they tell investors, municipalities, and developers precisely what counts as green and resilient. By establishing this clarity and credibility, we can scale up municipal investments and unlock the climate finance needed to meet our long-term targets.



Peter Hilliges
Country Director-India, KFW Development Bank

Long-term project success relies on looking beyond individual assets to strengthen the governance, financial, and implementation capacity of urban local bodies. Empowering these agencies is essential to mitigating impact risk and ensuring they become sustainable carriers of urban development.



Sanjay Divakar Joshi
Principal Urban Development Specialist, Water and Urban Development Sector Cluster, Asian Development Bank

Cities must evolve into investable institutions by building a pipeline of bankable projects and strengthening own-source revenues, particularly property tax. The shift from grant-based funding to models like UCF, where 50% of project costs are mobilised from private participants, marks a strategic move towards sustainable urban finance.



Monali Zeya Hazra
Director, Climate, India, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)

Philanthropic capital plays a critical role in supporting innovative, early-stage projects that have high impact potential but are not yet bankable. At CIFF, lessons from India are also being shared across the Global South, enabling successful approaches to be adapted and scaled for wider impact.



Hari Bhaskar,
Manager – Energy (South Asia, South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Public finance alone cannot meet the growing needs of climate-resilient infrastructure. Mobilising private investment through strong financial institutions, bankable projects and innovative financing mechanisms are essential to scale solutions and build resilience across cities.











From left: Soumya Chaturvedula, Hansa Patel, Monali Zeya Hazra, Peter Hilliges, H.E. Dr. Mumin Chen, Dr. Ramesh Subramaniam, Sanjay Divakar Joshi, Neha Kumar, Hari Bhaskar, and Emani Kumar.

Parallel Session 9:

Reimagining Urban Mobility: Building Sustainable, Inclusive and Clean Mobility Systems

SESSION DETAILS

Moderators:

Divyaprakash Vyas
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Sonal Shah
Founder, The Urban Catalysts

Varsha Singh
Project Coordinator, UrbanShift Country Project, National Institute of Urban Affairs, India

Panellists:

Veda Bharadwaja
Country Programme Manager, UN Women India

Deepa Ahluwalia
Gender and Social Development Specialist, India Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank

Cornelia Stolzenberg
Project Director - EASE, GIZ

R. Srinivas
Honorary Secretary, Institute of Urban Transport

Sonali Vyas
Director- Programs, Safetipin

Kanika Kalra
Vice President, Urban Mass Transport Company Ltd.

Dr. Monica Kashkari
Special Officer, Directorate of Urban Land Transport, Government of Karnataka

Nikhil Mijar
Transport Planner, Road Department, Pune Municipal Corporation

Mudassar Shirgar
Deputy Engineer, Surat Municipal Corporation, India

Dr. Surya Kiran
Former Executive Director, Association of State Road Transport Undertakings, India

Sangaradasse P
Member Secretary, Town And Country Planning Department, Mahe Planning Authority, Puducherry

Sanjay Dharav
Executive Engineer, Road Department, Pune Municipal Corporation

Indian cities are growing rapidly. But mobility systems are not growing at the same pace. By 2036, around 600 million people are expected to live in urban areas, creating much greater demand for safe, affordable and reliable mobility. At the same time, increasing vehicle use is leading to congestion, road safety issues, air pollution and greater dependence on fossil fuels. Mobility does not work in the same way for everyone. Women, children, older persons and persons with different abilities face different challenges related to safety, accessibility, affordability and last-mile connectivity. Climate change is making this more difficult. Heat, flooding and extreme weather can make walking, cycling, waiting for public transport and using streets more difficult.

The transition towards electric vehicles (EVs) and clean mobility brings an opportunity to reimagine the way cities move. It is not only about replacing petrol and diesel vehicles. It is about looking at public transport, walking, cycling, shared mobility, EVs, streets and land use as one connected system.

The session discussed how Indian cities can move towards more sustainable and integrated urban mobility, with public transport as the backbone and clean mobility as an important part of the transition. It explored strengthening of public transport alongside walking, cycling, shared mobility, and last-mile connectivity; using the EV transition to rethink mobility beyond vehicle replacement; better integration of transport, land use, streets, charging infrastructure and energy planning; and making mobility more gender-responsive, safe, accessible, and affordable. The panel discussion also considered the policy, financing, planning, and institutional changes needed to move from individual projects to integrated mobility implementation at scale.

Organised with:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Promoting integrated, people-centric mobility, complete streets, improved first- and last-mile connectivity, multimodal integration and context-specific Transit-Oriented Development to create compact, accessible neighbourhoods and reduce dependence on private vehicles.
2. Mainstreaming gender across mobility planning and service delivery through gender-disaggregated data, safer public transport, inclusive infrastructure, dedicated budgets and mechanisms.
3. Strengthening institutional coordination, statutory and regulatory frameworks, dedicated financial allocations and stakeholder participation to support effective mobility planning and implementation.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Divyaprakash Vyas
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

"Walking and cycling should not be acts of survival. They must be the preferred, natural choice for short local trips."



Sonal Shah
Founder, The Urban Catalysts

"Buses are the backbone of public transport in India. Fare-free travel for women will only last if it is backed by responsive infrastructure and services."



Varsha Singh
Project Coordinator, UrbanShift Country Project, NIUA, India

"A road is not merely a carriageway for vehicles. It is the spine of the city, shaping inclusion, public health, economic opportunity and climate resilience."



Veda Bharadwaja
Country Programme Manager, UN Women India

"Women report harassment when they trust the system. Safe mobility needs a clear reporting pathway where every complaint leads to visible action."



Deepa Ahluwalia
Gender and Social Development Specialist, India Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank (ADB)

"Transport systems are often called gender-neutral, but they are frequently gender blind. Gender-responsive transport must become a policy, not just a project."



Sanjay Dharav
Executive Engineer, Road Department, Pune Municipal Corporation

"Urban road development must prioritise people over vehicles, with success measured by improved accessibility, safety and mobility outcomes rather than kilometres of infrastructure delivered."



Cornelia Stolzenberg
Project Director – EASE, GIZ

People will not shift to public transport just for the climate. Trust is built through communication planned from day one, not added on later.



R. Srinivas
Honorary Secretary, Institute of Urban Transport

omprehensive mobility plans need statutory backing. A model act should require every city to prepare one, and UMTAs [Unified Metropolitan Transport Authorities] must be run by professionals.



Kanika Kalra, Vice President
Urban Mass Transport Company Ltd.

Our old cities were 15-minute cities long before the term existed. TOD [transit-oriented development] in India must build on that heritage, not import a Western template.



Sonali Vyas
Director – Programs, Safetipin

Women are consumers of public transport, not beneficiaries of a freebie. Design services around them as you would for any valued customer.



Dr. Monica Kashkari
Special Officer, Directorate of Urban Land Transport, Government of Karnataka, India

Unless we understand the problems people face, we cannot solve them. Walking the route with a person with a disability changes how you plan.



Nikhil Mijar
Transport Planner, Road Department, Pune Municipal Corporation, India

Metro systems and buses alone won't move everyone. Cities need bold choices like parking restrictions and congestion pricing to make public transport the first choice.



Mudassar Shirgar
Deputy Engineer, Surat Municipal Corporation, India

A policy must not stay on paper. Surat's NMT [non-motorised transport] policy comes with an implementation framework for the people who build our streets.



P Sangaradasse
Member Secretary, Town And Country Planning Department, Mahe Planning Authority, Puducherry, India

Planning must come before growth. Small towns like Mahe need a 20-year vision before rising traffic and development lock in the problems.



From left: Mudassar Shirgar, Sanjay Dharav, P Sangaradasse, Nikhil Mijar, R. Srinivas, Cornelia Stolzenberg, Varsha Singh, Divya Prakash Vyas, Sonal Shah, Kanika Kalra, Sonali Vyas, and Dr. Monica Kashkari releasing a Compendium of Case Studies for Mobilising Funds to Enable Integrated Planning and Infrastructure Development.

Parallel Session 10:

Decoding Climate Action in Urban Ecosystems

India's rapid urban transformation has significant implications for its climate action trajectory. India's first Biennial Transparency Report identified 133 cities with some form of urban climate action plan, reflecting the growing scale of urban climate action planning across Indian cities. However, the focus increasingly needs to shift from plans to sustained action. Translating city-level plans into implementation requires stronger institutional, governance, data, climate finance and monitoring systems in order to systematically integrate climate considerations into day-to-day municipal planning and budgeting processes.

The recently concluded decade-long CapaCITIES programme, implemented by ICLEI South Asia and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, successfully supported the establishment and operationalisation of city-level Net-Zero and Climate Action Cells in six cities as well as state-level Net-Zero and Urban Climate Action Cells in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. The programme serves as a pioneering example of strengthening institutional systems for subnational climate governance and budgeting. The City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain 2.0 (CITIIS 2.0) programme is further accelerating countrywide scale-up of integrated climate action.

The session explored how cities and states can move beyond climate action planning towards sustained implementation and institutionalisation. Drawing on experiences from initiatives such as CapaCITIES and CITIIS 2.0, it brought together diverse local, national and global perspectives to examine the key systems and capacities for institutionalising and scaling up urban climate action.

SESSION DETAILS

Introduction:

Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI, and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

Moderator:

Dr Debolina Kundu
Director, NIUA

Keynote Address:

Isha Kalia, IAS
Joint Secretary and Mission Director, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India

Address:

Ajay Raghava
Additional Director, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India

Address:

Maurits Bosman
Delegated Representative-Water, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in India

Video message:

Andy Deacon
Managing Director, Multi-level Partnerships, and Co-Managing Director, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM)

Presentation:
Decoding Climate Action in Cities: Insights from South Asia and Southeast Asia

Presenter:

Nikhil Kolsepatil
Senior Programme Coordinator (Energy and Climate), ICLEI South Asia

Panel Discussion:

Beyond Planning: Building Climate-Ready Cities and States

Moderator:

Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

Panellists:

Neeraj Kumar, IAS
Director of Transport, Government of Himachal Pradesh

Sandhya B.
Joint Director, Municipal Administration Department, Government of Telangana

Dr. Pranita Umredkar
General Manager (I), Environment Division, Nagpur Smart and Sustainable City Development Corporation Limited

Rajendra Joshi
Founder and Managing Trustee, Saath Charitable Trust

Organised with:

ASIA LEDS PARTNERSHIP | UNOPS | GLOBAL COVENANT of MAYORS for CLIMATE & ENERGY



Andy Deacon, Managing Director, Multi-level Partnerships and Co-Managing Director, GCoM, delivering a virtual address

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Many cities have climate, heat and resilience action plans, but plans often stay on paper. The focus should be on turning plans into bankable, implementable projects and scaling up pilots.
2. Climate resilience must be built into every plan, project and service, for example, through blue-green infrastructure in master plans, risk-informed master plans, climate-resilient road codes, and resource recovery at sewage treatment plants, rather than treated as a separate add-on with its own budget.
3. Climate cells at the state and city levels, long-term climate investment plans, city climate budgets, and state project pipelines, as well as the civil society and communities are important for planning and owning climate action.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

“We have concluded that money is available. However, financiers question whether we have the best ideas to implement on the ground. That is the question we should seek to answer.”



Dr. Debolina Kundu
Director, NIUA, India

“Talking alone doesn’t help much. We need to showcase good practices, let cities learn from each other, and see real on-the-ground interventions where sustainability is promoted.”



Isha Kalia IAS
Joint Secretary and Mission Director, MoHUA, Government of India

“There is no dearth of funds. If good ideas are there, funds will always be found. The real challenge is converting ideas into bankable projects so our climate and heat action plans don’t remain on paper.”



Ajay Raghava
Additional Director, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India

“In the same city, within the same year, you may have floods and also water scarcity. Cities are impacted by climate change, but cities also impact climate change.”



Maurits Bosman
Delegated Representative Water, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in India

“We always had too much water; now we sometimes have too little. It’s not a one-way street but a two-way street. We can learn from the Indian experience as well.”



Andy Deacon
Managing Director of Multi-level Partnerships and Co-Managing Director, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

Cities, especially across the Global South, already have the vision and the local solutions. What they need now is the financing to execute.



Nikhil Kolsepatil
Senior Programme Coordinator (Energy and Climate), ICLEI South Asia

Cities need not just annual plans but mid- to long-term climate investment plans, so funds like the Urban Challenge Fund can act as a catalyst to tap market finance beyond the municipal budget.



Neeraj Kumar, IAS
Director of Transport, Government of Himachal Pradesh, India

In a state like Himachal Pradesh, where green cover is abundant, people may not immediately perceive climate change as a pressing concern. We need to fundamentally rethink our communication approach to build public awareness and secure people's buy-in for green mobility.



Sandhya B.
Joint Director, Municipal Administration Department, Government of Telangana, India

Our goal is to move climate resilience from the margins to the mainstream, embedding it into every urban plan, every investment project and every municipal service.



Dr. Pranita Umredkar
General Manager (I), Environment Division, Nagpur Smart and Sustainable City Development Corporation Limited, India

With IoT-based rainwater harvesting and sensors, we now have real-time data on the cloud for decision-makers. We prepared proactively, so when water runs short the city already knows where to act. A very small initiative, but a very required one.



Rajendra Joshi
Founder and Managing Trustee, Saath Charitable Trust

When you leave out certain sections of a city's residents, you won't have a good plan. When communities are actively involved, a sense of ownership comes in.



From left: Isha Kalia, Debolina Kundu, Maurits Bosman, and Ajay Raghava.



From left: Neeraj Kumar, Sandhya B., Dr. Pranita Umredkar, Rajendra Joshi, Emani Kumar, and Maurits Bosman.

Parallel Session 11:

Circular Cities: Rethinking Urban Systems

SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Soumya Chaturvedula
Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Address:

K. P. Vivekanand Goud
Member, Telangana Legislative Assembly

Special Address:

Kiran Dighavkar
Deputy Municipal Commissioner (Solid Waste Management), Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, India

Presentation:

Ahmed Raza
Senior Policy Officer, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

PANEL 1:

Panellists:

Dr. Madan Kumar
Commissioner, Mandi Municipal Corporation, Government of Himachal Pradesh

Dr. Anil C Ranveer
Director and Scientist F, Central Pollution Control Board, Government of India

C Jayakumar
Swachh Bharat Mission Nodal Officer, Alappuzha Municipality, India

Paramita Datta Dey
Team Lead, Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban Knowledge Management Unit and Senior Research Officer, NIUA, India

PANEL 2:

Panellists:

Dhrumin Patel
Co-Founder, NEPRA, India

Dr. Sarath Mataraarachchi
Executive Director, The Colombo Forum, Sri Lanka

Shashvat Shukla
Strategy Manager, Purpose India

At the World Economic Forum 2026, the UN's International Resource Panel highlighted that, under a linear economy, global material resource extraction could increase by almost 60% from 2020 levels by 2060, rising from approximately 100 billion tonnes to 160 billion tonnes. This increase would be driven largely by lifestyles characterised by overconsumption. Similarly, the Circularity Gap Report 2026, published by the Circle Economy Foundation in collaboration with Deloitte, estimated that only 6.9% of the materials flowing through the global economy come from secondary or reused sources, while approximately 93% are derived from virgin extraction. The linear economy has an estimated €25.4 trillion loss annually to the global economy.

UNEP's Food Waste Index Report estimated that 1.05 billion tonnes of food were wasted globally in 2022. UNEP also estimated that the untapped potential for wastewater reuse is around 320 billion cubic metres per year. Circularity issues are more important for the Global South, as the region is experiencing rapid urbanization, with millions of people moving from rural areas to cities for better economic opportunities.

The session explored pathways to a circular economy across water, food, waste and materials in the Global South. It brought together policymakers, local governments and key stakeholders to highlight practical solutions and the policies, governance structures, and innovations needed to scale them up.

Organised with:

PURPOSE





KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Circularity in urban management extends far beyond basic recycling or solid waste management. It requires an integrated approach covering water loops (groundwater recharge, wastewater management), reduced material use at the source, shorter supply chains, and localised food production.
2. Cities must shift from traditional linear consumption to prevention, source segregation, reuse, repair, and material recovery, while establishing strict environmental safeguards rather than relying on unmonitored waste disposal or incineration.
3. Installing waste-to-energy plants or processing facilities does not automatically make a city sustainable; success must be evaluated through transparent monitoring, air and water quality protection, and pollution prevention.
4. Waste processing cannot operate purely as a non-profit social responsibility initiative. Policies must integrate capital expenditure (CapEx) support, processing/tipping fees, and realistic revenue models rather than relying on unviable mechanisms like low Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) certificate rates.
5. Smaller cities and local communities can achieve effective waste processing by forming regional clusters (combining waste across municipalities within a ~50-km radius) or adopting localised, household- and neighbourhood-level decentralised technologies.
6. Sustainable waste management depends fundamentally on citizen habits, local school and youth engagement, and structured incentives, recognising that public awareness alone does not automatically translate into long-term behavioural compliance.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Soumya Chaturvedula
Director, ICLEI South Asia

"For a city to become circular, it is not about one industry or one process. It requires rethinking the way we live, our development models, economic models and industrial systems."



K. P. Vivekanand Goud
Member, Telangana Legislative Assembly, India

"Our objective must be clear: less waste, less pollution, low emissions, healthier communities and more resilient cities. Let us move from a culture of disposal to a culture of resource recovery, from fragmented urban management to integrated systems, and from commitments on paper to accountability on the ground. That is how we can build a circular city for future generations."



Kiran Dighavkar
Deputy Municipal Commissioner (Solid Waste Management), Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, India

"Why should waste management be treated only as a social responsibility? We need to look at it from an economic perspective and bring profitability into the waste management system. Waste management itself should become a profitable business, where more players can participate and create livelihoods."



Ahmed Raza
Senior Policy Officer, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

"We should work with complexity, not against it. Just because something is difficult does not mean we should not attempt it. We need to think beyond short-term gains, identify strategic entry points and use them to drive broader, long-term transformation of food systems."



Dr. Madan Kumar
Commissioner, Mandi Municipal Corporation, Government of Himachal Pradesh, India

Sustainable management requires more than collection and transportation. It depends on active participation, behavioural change, effective coordination across levels, appropriate processing systems, and source recovery.



Dr. Anil C Ranveer
Director and Scientist F, Central Pollution Control Board, Government of India

If anyone is polluting, they have to pay for the pollution. So if it is a government body also, or it is a specific one also, then they have to pay for the pollution.



C Jayakumar
Swachh Bharat Mission Nodal Officer, Alappuzha Municipality, India

Household-level composting is a key pillar of the waste management model. By promoting decentralised organic waste treatment systems and providing subsidies of up to 90%, the [Alappuzha] municipality has made sustainable waste management more accessible and affordable for residents.



Paramita Datta Dey
Team Lead, Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban Knowledge Management Unit and Senior Research Officer, NIUA, India

If two cities learn from each other and share how they have built capacities and improved waste segregation, they will be far more convinced than if someone simply tells them what to do. Peer-to-peer learning can be a much more effective way of driving change.



Dhrumin Patel
Co-Founder, NEPRA, India

We need to focus not just on refuse-derived fuel, but also on recovering valuable materials through material recovery facilities. A cluster-based approach to waste-to-energy, combined with better resource recovery, can help cities move towards the goal of zero waste to landfill.



Dr. Sarath Mataraarachchi
Executive Director, The Colombo Forum, Sri Lanka

Community is not just one section of society. We are all part of one community, and we should work together, sharing our resources and our power. It is only when we bring these together that we can create meaningful change.



Shashvat Shukla
Strategy Manager, Purpose India

There is a very weak link between awareness building and behaviour change. We often assume that if people know better, they will do better. But that rarely happens. To create sustainable behavioural change at scale, we need to understand the incentives that shape people's actions and rethink how those incentives can be changed.



From left: Soumya Chaturvedula, K. P. Vivekanand Goud, Kiran Dighavkar, and Ahmed Raza.



From left: Soumya Chaturvedula, Dr Madan Kumar, Dr Anil C. Ranveer, C Jayakumar, and Paramita Datta Dey.



From left: Soumya Chaturvedula, Dhrumin Patel, Shashvat Shukla, Dr. Sarath Mataraarachchi.

Parallel Session 12:

Journey of the First 1000 Days: Paalan 1000 integration for ECD Ecosystem Strengthening

Organised with:

Van Leer FOUNDATION

MECDM



SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Divyaprakash Vyas
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Presentation: Meghalaya ECD Mission

Ronald Kynta
Chief Operating Officer, Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS) and Meghalaya Early Childhood Development Mission (MECDM)

Presenter:

Dr. Monimalika Day
Director, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, BR Ambedkar University, Delhi

Presentation:
Paalan 2.0 in Meghalaya

Presenter:
Dr. K. M. Jahirul Islam
Technical Support Unit (TSU), Meghalaya, ICLEI South Asia

Panellists:

Dr. Monimalika Day
Director, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, Dr B. R. Ambedkar University, Delhi

Dr. Lopamudra Tripathy
Social and Behaviour Change Specialist, UNICEF India

Ronald Kynta
Chief Operating Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society and Meghalaya Early Childhood Development Mission

Dr. Sainath Banerjee
Founder and Director, Urban Plus Solutions

Prerna Vijaykumar Mehta
Associate Director – Urban Development, World Resources Institute India

Keshav Kanoria
Partner, Delhi Satellite, Bridgespan India

Closing Remarks:

Prakash Paul
Principal Consultant India, Van Leer Foundation

Launches:

- Nurturing Families: Parental Wellbeing Calendar 2027
- Parental Wellbeing: A Friendly Pocket Guide for Frontline Workers and Supervisors

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Early childhood development (ECD) requires coordinated action across sectors and levels, involving government systems and frontline workers, as well as families, communities and the physical environments in which children grow.
2. Supporting parents and caregivers is an essential part of supporting children. Parental wellbeing, shared caregiving responsibilities and meaningful father engagement should be built into ECD programming.
3. Solutions should be evidence-informed and context-specific. Group-based parenting interventions, targeted home visits for families at higher risk, adaptive public-space interventions and community-led approaches offer complementary ways to strengthen ECD.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Ronald Kynta
Chief Operating Officer, Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society and Meghalaya Early Childhood Development Mission

Engaging fathers in childcare is an important part of parental wellbeing and positive parenting in Meghalaya. By working with traditional community leaders, we are exploring ways to encourage fathers to take a more active role in nurturing their children.



Dr. Monimalika Day
Director, Centre for Early Childhood Education and Development, Dr B. R. Ambedkar University, Delhi

Parenting interventions must go beyond child development to strengthen parental wellbeing and social support. Group-based approaches can help mothers build meaningful connections, while targeted home visits remain essential for families needing additional care.



Dr. K. M. Jahirul Islam
Technical Support Unit (TSU), Meghalaya, ICLEI South Asia

Meghalaya is making significant strides in strengthening its Early Childhood Development (ECD) ecosystem. Recognising parental wellbeing as a key pillar of ECD, the Mission will integrate it to strengthen efforts to improve outcomes during the first 1,000 days and beyond. Through this initiative, we aim to contextualise Paalan's key messages, strengthen local institutions and leverage existing resources to institutionalise parental wellbeing within the state's ECD framework, ensuring sustained support for parents and caregivers.



Divyaprakash Vyas
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

As they say, it takes a village to raise a child. The physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of parents and caregivers directly influences their ability to provide nurturing care. Supporting parents and caregivers is therefore essential to strengthening children's health, nutrition, early stimulation and responsive caregiving.



Dr. Lopamudra Tripathy
Social and Behaviour Change Specialist, UNICEF India

Social and behaviour change is not an add-on to a programme for ECD; it is a strategic action that must begin at the policy and systems level to create lasting change in how families care for their children.



Dr. Sainath Banerjee
Founder and Director, Urban Plus Solutions

Early childhood care cannot be left unregulated. We are dealing with the most vulnerable years of a child's life, and ensuring quality care requires clear standards, trained professionals and accountability.



Prerna Vijaykumar Mehta
Associate Director – Urban Development, World Resources Institute India

Children and caregivers experience cities through everyday moments: the walk to an Anganwadi, a shaded place to rest, a corner where neighbours can meet, or a small space where a child can play safely. These everyday spaces determine whether families can access services, feel safe and experience a sense of belonging.



Keshav Kanoria
Partner, Delhi Satellite, Bridgespan India

How can someone pour from an empty cup? Parental mental health and emotional wellbeing are fundamental to a child's development. From breastfeeding and physical health to emotional security and cognitive development, a parent's wellbeing shapes a child's growth in multiple ways. Supporting children must begin with supporting the people who care for them.



Prakash Paul
Principal Consultant-India, Van Leer Foundation

Early childhood development begins with the caregiver. By prioritising parental wellbeing and strengthening responsive caregiving through Paalan, we invest not only in parents but also in the healthy development of every child.



From left: Divyaprakash Vyas, Dr. Monimalika Day, Gino Van Begin, Prerna Vijaykumar Mehta, Dr. Lopamudra Tripathy, Ronald Kynta, Keshav Kanoria, Dr. Sainath Banerjee, Prakash Paul, and Emani Kumar releasing Nurturing Families: Parental Wellbeing Calendar 2027 and Parental Wellbeing: A Friendly Pocket Guide for Frontline Workers and Supervisors.

Parallel Session 13:

Beating the Heat: Designing Cooler, Healthier Cities

SESSION DETAILS

Moderator:

Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

Presentation: Guiding Localised Heat Action Plans-ICLEI South Asia's Heat Action Planning Approach

Presenter:

Nikhil Kolsepatil
Senior Programme Coordinator (Energy & Climate), ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Address:

Mrinalini Shrivastava
IPS, Director (PR & AG), NDMA, India

Presentation:

Benjamin Hickman
Programme Manager, UNEP India

Panel Discussion: Designing Healthier and Heat-Resilient Cities: A Systems Perspective

Panellists:

Bijal Brahmbhatt
Executive Director, Mahila Housing Trust

Harshal Gaikwad
Additional Commissioner, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation

Dr. Raj Shankar Ghosh
Senior Advisor-One Health and Environmental Health, Public Health Foundation of India

Jasprit Kaur
Senior Programme Manager, The Nand & Jeet Khemka Foundation

Dr. Sabin Thazhe Purayil
Scientist F, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology

Launches:

- Heat Action Planning Methodology
- Heat Resilience in Buildings- A Practitioners' Guidebook

Extreme heat is emerging as a critical urban challenge, posing a major threat to health, worker productivity, urban systems, livelihoods and overall quality of life. Cities in the Global South remain highly vulnerable, with extreme heat costing around 31 million full-time jobs each year and having the potential to reduce South Asia's GDP by nearly 7 percent by 2050.

Cities across the Global South are increasingly responding to rising heat risks through targeted Heat Action Plans. However, a review of eight heat action plans across India identified several institutional gaps, including limited interventions targeting vulnerable populations, inadequate health system preparedness, gaps in long-term urban planning, and limited surveillance of heat-related health impacts, especially data disaggregated by vulnerable populations.

The session explored how cities can move beyond reactive responses and proactively design cooler, healthier and more climate-resilient urban environments through inclusive, people-centred solutions, heat-resilient urban planning, strengthened health systems, and robust governance arrangements, institutional capacity and financial systems.



Emani Kumar, Mrinalini Shrivastava, IPS, and Gino Van Begin releasing ICLEI South Asia's Heat Action Planning Methodology

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Heat resilience must be mainstreamed into urban governance. Heat Action Plans need to be implemented through dedicated institutional structures, building regulations, city-level planning and monitoring mechanisms.
2. Heat interventions must prioritise vulnerable populations. Localised risk assessments, disaggregated health data, accessible early warnings, affordable cooling and financial protection mechanisms such as parametric insurance are essential to ensure that those most exposed to heat are not left behind.
3. Cities need to integrate evidence, coordination and finance. They need reliable local data at higher spatial resolutions, stronger institutional capacity and coordinated partnerships to develop bankable projects.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Mrinalini Shrivastava, IPS
Director (PR & AG), NDMA, India

"The impact should belong to each one of us. Only the privileged should not be equipped to escape heat; the most vulnerable must be protected."



Benjamin Hickman
Programme Manager, UNEP India

"We cannot respond with business-as-usual cooling. We need low-carbon cooling measures that are equitable, accessible and affordable."



Bijal Brahmbhatt
Executive Director, Mahila Housing Trust

"Disrupt the thought that research must come before action. It can also work the other way around."



Harshal Gaikwad
Additional Commissioner, Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation, India

"Heat resilience is not part of our existing development control rules. We need to integrate it into building regulations and neighbourhood planning."



Dr. Raj Shankar Ghosh
Senior Advisor-One Health and Environmental Health, Public Health Foundation of India

"The complete pathway must move from alert to action to assessment."



Jasprit Kaur
Senior Programme Manager, The Nand & Jeet Khemka Foundation

Philanthropic support is catalytic in nature, helping grassroots innovations build evidence, reduce risks and mobilise further finance.



Dr. Sabin Thazhe Purayil
Scientist F, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology

When regional variables come into the picture, conventional models face limitations. AI models can help deliver more localised information.



Nikhil Kolsepatil
Senior Programme Coordinator (Energy & Climate), ICLEI South Asia

ICLEI South Asia's approach to building heat-resilient cities is about enabling cities to move beyond reactive measures and embed heat resilience within urban planning, governance, institutions and finance – translating evidence into sustained, long-term action towards healthier, cooler and more liveable cities.



Emani Kumar
Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI and Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia

The inclusion of existing city climate action or Net-Zero cells within the proposed Urban Disaster Management Authorities under the Disaster Management (Amendment) Act, 2025, presents an important opportunity to strengthen coordinated heat and climate risk governance.



From left: Harshal Gaikwad, Bijal Brahmbhatt, Jasprit Kaur, Dr. Raj Shankar Ghosh, Dr. Sabin Thazhe Purayil, and Emani Kumar.

Parallel Session 14:

From Knowledge to Action: How Asian Cities are Championing Inclusive Resilience

Climate change poses increasing risks to sustainable urban development in Asia, with impacts falling disproportionately on women, the urban poor, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups. Local governments are the frontline implementers of climate adaptation and resilience actions, yet limited technical capacity, gaps in inclusive governance processes and constrained access to climate finance continue to hinder effective and equitable local climate action.

The Enhancing Local Capacity in Socially Inclusive Resilience in Asia (SIRA) project responds to these challenges by strengthening the capacity of local governments and climate practitioners to plan, design and implement socially inclusive, climate-resilient development in four countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines. Through a phased, South-South capacity-strengthening model, SIRA places cities at the centre of the Climate Adaptation and Resilience (CLARE) Programme's effort to connect climate knowledge with local action.

The session demonstrated how capacity building, when designed well, produces measurable changes in how cities plan for climate risk. The session also spotlighted CLARE's learning products, namely the self-paced e-learning course and the modular PPT-based training packages as ready-to-adapt resources that other cities and regions can pick up directly, well beyond the four original project countries.

SESSION DETAILS

Welcome and Introduction:

Bedoshruti Sadhukhan
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

Keynote Address:

Arjan de Haan
Senior Programme Specialist, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

PANEL 1:

Moderator:

Chris Noel Hidalgo
Communications Head, ICLEI South East Asia Secretariat

Panel:

Santosh Kafle
Environment Engineer, Namobuddha Municipality, Nepal

Azur Miladee Nacario
City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer, Legazpi City, Philippines

Dipak Bhowmick
Technical Lead, ICLEI South Asia, Bangladesh

PANEL 2:

Moderator:

Arjan de Haan
Senior Programme Specialist, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Panellists:

Amaresh Belagal
Senior Programme Manager – Urban Water, WELL Labs

Dr. Amina Maharjan
Senior Intervention Manager – Foresight, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

Shilpa Shirish
External Consultant, Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)

Dr. Anshuman Karol
Director, PRIA, India

Organised with:

CLARE CLIMATE ADAPTATION & RESILIENCE

SIRA

Global Research and Technology Development
Funded by UK Government



Arjan de Haan delivering the Keynote Address at the session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Capacity building works both ways. Researchers need to learn from local officials and communities, and training should change how a city plans, budgets and makes decisions, not just add knowledge.
2. Cities do not have to start from scratch. They can "copy and customise" what works elsewhere and learn from other cities' failures as well as successes.
3. Climate risks hit people differently depending on where they live and their circumstances, including whether they are women, migrants, members of lower-income households, or people with disabilities. Resilience needs local, ward-level, participatory planning that brings these groups in.
4. Migrants are contributors, not a burden. Cities should plan for migrants and include them in local planning, rather than trying to stop migration.

SPEAKER QUOTES



Bedoshruti Sadhukhan
Associate Director, ICLEI South Asia

"Truly translating knowledge into action demands continuous, multi-year engagement and formal or informal networking among municipalities, rather than relying on short, sporadic training events"



Arjan de Haan
Senior Programme Specialist, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

"Resilience is strongest when it's inclusive, and inclusive is strongest when knowledge is created together."



Chris Noel Hidalgo
Communications Head, ICLEI South East Asia Secretariat

"When communicating research to local governments, the shorter and more direct your ask is, the better. What do you want cities to do with your research? How should they use your research? What possible effects should they expect if they use your research... Those are more useful and practical for cities as opposed to a well written, detailed, comprehensive report."



Santosh Kafle
Environment Engineer, Namobuddha Municipality, Nepal

"Capacity building is not simply about knowledge. It is about studying the local government system so that climate influences planning, budgeting, decision-making and implementation."



Azur Miladee Nacario
City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer, Legazpi City, Philippines

We copy from other local government units, but then again, along the way, we customise and innovate on our own because we adapt to our unit's unique settings.



Dipak Bhowmick
Technical Lead, ICLEI South Asia

Sometimes learning comes from knowing what not to do, how not to do something, and that gives other cities in the same situation the chance to do it even better.



Amaresh Belagal,
Senior Programme Manager – Urban Water, WELL Labs

Imagine 10 people getting about 70% of the water, and the rest sharing what is left. That is the inequitable distribution that is happening.



Dr. Amina Maharjan
Senior Intervention Manager – Foresight, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

"Migration is often seen as a problem, but migrants contribute to the local economy. Rather than trying to stop migration, cities should learn to adapt to it. Foresight exercises held in informal settings, such as restaurants, can help city leaders see the positive side of migration.



Shilpa Shirish
External Consultant, Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)

For co-produced recommendations to be truly effective, they must be taken back directly to marginalised communities, such as internal climate migrants, to validate whether the proposed actions match their lived experiences and priorities.



Dr. Anshuman Karol,
Director, PRIA, India

Our entry point is not the hydrological survey. Our entry point is to understand the spiritual, cultural and social connection of communities with these water bodies.



From left: Dipak Bhowmick, Chris Noel Hidalgo, Azur Miladee Nacario, Bedoshruti Sadhukhan, Arjan de Haan, Dr. Amina Maharjan, Dr. Anshuman Karol, Amaresh Belagal, and Shilpa Shirish.

Closing Ceremony:

Delhi Declaration 2026: Local Action for Global Climate Goals

SESSION DETAILS

Remarks:

Gino Van Begin
Secretary General, ICLEI

Address:

Dr. Debolina Kundu
Director, NIUA, India

Special Address:

H.E. Ali Murat Ersoy
Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to India

Special Address:

Mikiko Tanaka
Head of Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, UNESCAP

Special Address:

Samed Ağırbaş
COP31 Climate Champion, President of the Zero Waste Foundation

Formal handover of the ARISE Delhi Declaration 2026 to ICLEI Secretary General Gino Van Begin by the Hon'ble Mayor of Delhi, Shri Pravesh Wahi

Special Guest Address:

Dr. Vinay P. Sahasrabuddhe
State In-Charge for the Bharatiya Janata Party in Delhi; President, Asiatic Society of Mumbai

Chief Guest Address:

Pravesh Wahi
Hon'ble Mayor of Delhi

Vote of Thanks:

Soumya Chaturvedula
Director, ICLEI South Asia

Launches:

Delhi Biodiversity Map

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Cities and local governments must be placed at the centre of climate action by strengthening urban governance, coordination between national and local governments, and community participation.
2. Urban climate action requires improved access to climate finance, support for developing investment-ready projects, and integrated planning to address interconnected challenges across sectors such as heat, water, mobility, waste, energy, buildings and infrastructure.
3. Inclusive climate action requires stronger international partnerships, regional cooperation, knowledge exchange, digital technologies, and the involvement of young people in climate policy and decision-making.
4. Cities must play a greater role in climate decision-making and implementation. National climate commitments need to be translated into local action, with local governments involved in shaping climate strategies and equipped with the authority, capacity and resources to implement them.



Samed Ağırbaş, COP31 Climate Champion virtually delivering the special address in the closing ceremony at ARISE Cities Forum 2026

SPEAKER QUOTES



Gino Van Begin
Secretary General, ICLEI

The ARISE Cities Forum 2026 explored the role of multi-level governance and the cooperation required among all levels of government in countries that are parties to the Paris Agreement to achieve the Agreement's targets, at both the national and local levels. We also reinforced our shared urban climate resolve by adopting the Delhi Declaration of the ARISE Cities Forum 2026.



Dr. Debolina Kundu,
Director, NIUA, India

The Delhi Declaration 2026 sets a collective direction for taking the outcomes of the ARISE Cities Forum forward to COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye. Its emphasis on integrated local action, a just clean energy transition, accessible finance and meaningful community participation reflects the priorities that have brought us together.



H.E. Ali Murat Ersoy
Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to India

The journey from 'Bharat to Antalya' should be a continuum of action. Türkiye's host priorities align seamlessly with the Indian approach to climate action, an approach anchored in the timeless philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, 'the world is one family'.



Mikiko Tanaka
Head of Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, UNESCAP

Cities must move to the centre of national climate action and close the gap between national commitments and implementation. Mayors need to sit at the table where national climate commitments are made. Climate finance must reach cities, and cities must be ready to use it. South-South cooperation can help cities accelerate climate action.



Samed Ağırbaş,
COP31 Climate Champion, President of the Zero Waste Foundation

Local leaders know what their communities need. They must have the finance resources and partnership to act. That is why the Delhi Declaration is so relevant. I particularly welcome the Delhi Declaration's commitment to zero waste, because the future of our planet begins in our home. Let us turn the Declaration into lasting partnership and practical action.



Dr. Vinay P. Sahasrabuddhe,
State In-Charge for the Bharatiya Janata Party in Delhi; President, Asiatic Society of Mumbai

A sense of belonging is important for sustainable urban administration. Cities are not just clusters of buildings, gated communities, and skyscrapers. Cities, after all, are living organisms. For cities to become vibrant centres of sharing and caring, some kind of emotional connection is essential.



Pravesh Wahi,
Hon'ble Mayor of Delhi

The solution to climate change lies not only in global agreements, but also in cities and local action. A city should be measured by its cleanliness, pollution and the quality of public health. A change in habits and behaviour is also required for this. We also need the youth to step up and collaborate with us.



Handover of the Delhi Declaration
From left: H.E. Ali Murat Ersoy, Emani Kumar, Pravesh Wahi, Gino Van Begin, Dr Debolina Kundu, and Mikiko Tanaka



Pravesh Wahi, Hon'ble Mayor, Delhi addressing the session



Release of the Illustrated Delhi Biodiversity Map



Dr. Vinay P. Sahasrabuddhe, State In-Charge for BJP in Delhi; President, Asiatic Society of Mumbai virtually delivering special guest address



The Delhi Declaration being adopted at ARISE Cities Forum 2026 with a show of hands

THE DELHI DECLARATION



ARISE Cities Forum 2026: From Bharat to Antalya

Delhi Declaration on Local Action for Global Climate Goals

We, the Mayors, city leaders, and representatives of national, state, and subnational governments, together with partners from civil society, academia, youth, the private sector, and multilateral development organisations, as custodians of our collective future in the Global South, have convened in New Delhi, India, from 27 to 28 October 2026;

RECALL the Paris Agreement's commitment to limiting global warming and protecting people and the environment from the impacts of climate change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the call of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) Constituency for an integrated approach to the three Rio Conventions—on climate change (UNFCCC), biological diversity (CBD), and combating desertification (UNCCD).

AFFIRM our collective resolve to contribute beyond the success of COP31 in Antalya by amplifying urban voices and presenting concrete commitments from cities of the Global South (the Indian Subcontinent and the Asia Pacific, including the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs);

ENDORSE the LGMA Constituency as the voice of subnationals in the UNFCCC process and its COP31 vision to enhance multilevel collaboration and urbanisation in climate action before, during, and beyond COP31 in Antalya, including mobilisation through Town Hall COPs, and pre-COP meetings in Fiji and Tuvalu;

VALUE the forthcoming IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities (part of the seventh assessment cycle in March 2027) as a scientific foundation for placing cities at the forefront of climate action. ARISE will continue to build a committed cohort to advance this opportunity of global importance.

ACKNOWLEDGE to preparing for ongoing impacts of global warming by strengthening resilience to irreversible impacts, tipping points and the limits of adaptation, and by equipping all levels of government to make informed decisions under uncertainty on what to protect, what to rebuild differently, and how to support communities in places that may become uninhabitable;

RECOGNISE that the key is delivery of the next phase of the global climate process through implementation by empowering subnational governments as indispensable partners of national governments and international institutions.

PLEDGE to strengthen cooperation across cities, borders, sectors, and levels of government in the Global South to ensure that the priorities of urban resilience, equity, and sustainability are integrated into global climate outcomes;

We Hereby Declare Our Shared Commitments:

1. Advancing the Global Climate Agenda from Pre-COP31 to COP31
Build on the Taku Pakasoa Declaration: Strength in Unity, adopted on 6 October 2026, by reinforcing the call for accelerated emissions reductions to keep the 1.5°C goal within reach, a just and equitable clean energy transition, enhanced access to climate finance, and stronger resilience for vulnerable communities, particularly Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

2. Accelerate Adaptation and Synergies Across Conventions
Accelerate the implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) by strengthening integrated local action connecting climate, biodiversity, water, land-use, and public health considerations, while leveraging synergies across the Rio Conventions (including UNCCD COP17 and CBD COP17) to align NDCs, NAPs, and NBSAPs.

3. Advance Circularity Through Cooperation and Collective Action
Advance concrete 2035 goals aligned with COP31's priority of Driving Implementation Through Cooperation and Collective Action, integrating circularity into existing local and subnational climate commitments through Zero Waste and Methane Reduction, reducing the increase in waste generation by 50% by 2035, and Green Industrialisation, increasing the use of circular materials in manufacturing and production to at least 15% by 2035, translating global ambitions into measurable local action.

4. Achieve an Energy Transition Outcome that recognises and accelerates subnational delivery to return to the 1.5°C pathway
Support clean energy electrification, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and resilient urban and regional planning across local and subnational levels through the Belém Mission to 1.5, Global Implementation Accelerator (GIA), and NDC 3.0 implementation. Advance the COP31 Presidency's '35 by 2035' Global Electrification Pledge to achieve 35% electricity in global final energy consumption by 2035, and the Resilient Cities & Buildings priority to reduce building-sector energy intensity by at least 25% by 2035, while empowering local and subnational governments with the authority, finance, and regulatory powers to transition away from fossil fuels.

5. Prioritise Ambitious Just Transitions:
Support inclusive just transition outcomes and meaningfully include subnational representation in mechanisms such as the Belém-Antalya Mechanism for Global Just Transitions (BAM) to ensure national outcomes are rooted in local needs and realities and deliver tangible benefits that reach workers and communities at the local level.

6. Institutionalise Multilevel Climate Finance
Call for enhanced local government financing for integrated climate action through country-owned architectures that empower subnational governments to mobilise additional resources, expand fiscal space, and access predictable, affordable finance, supported by inclusive country platforms, dedicated financial intermediation (such as public development banks), and funded expert project preparation across key finance processes like the Climate Finance Work Programme, Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), and Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).

7. Uphold Independent Science and Data Systems
Continue to uphold the key role of independent science in the COP process, drawing on baseline evidence from the upcoming Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Cities and ensuring that local, regional, and subnational contributions are fully reflected in the Second Global Stocktake.

8. Create a Systematic Joint Space for Multilevel Action
Establish, within an appropriate timeframe in response to the upcoming IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities and as part of the Second Global Stocktake, a systematic, joint space for Parties and local, regional, and subnational governments to discuss barriers to multilevel action and means of overcoming them, recognising that the Paris Agreement requires all levels of government.

9. Champion Global South Climate Urban Leadership
Assert the leadership of Global South cities in shaping global climate policy, foster South-South and triangular cooperation, and present scalable, inclusive, and just urban solutions that bridge local realities with global ambition.

10. Strengthen Youth and Community Leadership in Climate Action
Celebrate the leadership and advocacy of global youth and local communities as essential to decision-making and recognise the importance of their contributions – innovations, indigenous knowledge systems, culture and contextualised local practices to climate action for future generations.

Conclusion

From Bharat to Antalya, we bring forward the collective voice of cities: a call for ambition, a demand for equity, and a pledge for local climate action. **The ARISE Delhi Declaration 2026** embodies the spirit of solidarity, partnership, and a whole-of-economy and society approach that must define climate action post-COP31, offering cities' commitment to co-create a climate-safe, just, and sustainable future for all.

We present this declaration as our collective contribution to COP31 at Antalya, affirming that we, the people of the world, will build a future that is resilient, equitable, and low-carbon. ADOPTED this Twenty-Eight Day of October in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-Six, in New Delhi, India.



ICLEI South Asia - ARISE Cities Forum 2026 organising team in New Delhi, India

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