Title of the Campus: People's Vision of the City
Organizer(s) Names: ActionAid Association
Date and Location: Monday, 11 September to Wednesday, 13 September 2017 / Kolkata / India

Urban Thinkers Campus in figures:

2 COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
60 PARTICIPANTS
27 ORGANIZATIONS
5 PARTNERS GROUPS REPRESENTED

Executive summary:

As we all know that 2016 was the third World Habitat year organised by United Nation Habitat at Quito; Ecuador. At this UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development – Habitat III – member states signed the New Urban Agenda. This is an action-oriented document which sets global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities. Through drawing together cooperation with committed partners, relevant stakeholders, and urban actors, including at all levels of government as well as the private sector, UN-Habitat is applying its technical expertise, normative work and capacity development to implement the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Mandated by the UN General Assembly in 1978 to address the issues of urban growth, it is a knowledgeable institution on urban development processes, and understands the aspirations of cities and their residents. In the third World Habitat Conference, 2016, ActionAid Association was elected as co-chair of the World Urban Campaign, a part of UN Habitat. In this background ActionAid Association had hosted an Urban Thinkers Campus at Kolkata from 11th to
13th September on the topic “People’s Vision of the City”. It was based on the above idea of creating sustainable cities, along with different constituencies of the city. The whole programme was designed so as to involve different groups of citizens i.e. students, academicians, activists, thematic experts, grass root organizations etc. to design a common minimum vision of the city. The campus was organized with an objective of arriving at an action-oriented plan for implementing the New Urban Agenda, for the Kolkata we need.

Introduction to the Campus:

Cities are seen to be crucibles of creativity, innovations and prosperity. They are, historically, the most dynamic creations of civilisation, offering both challenges and opportunities. Globally, the world has seen an increase in urbanisation vis-a-vis rise in the number of cities – 29% of population living in cities in 1950, to 50% of world population living in cities in 2010. In 1950, there were two mega-cities with 10 million or more inhabitants. By 2005, their number had increased to 20 and it is projected that there will be 22 mega-cities in 2015 out which developing countries will have 17 of these mega-cities (World Urbanization Prospects 2005). Particularly for India, these figures are quite crucial – 18% in 1950 to almost 33% in 2010, and projected to reach 51% by 2050. In 1951, there were only 5 cities, with a population more than 1 million, which increased to 53 cities in 2011, and 3 cities with population of more than 10 million (IIHS 2011 based on Census of India 2011).

With such a huge chunk of population living in urban areas, cities are the primary engines of production, consumption and economic growth. This also entails a rise in urban GDP and investments and global capital flows in the cities. However, urbanization does not only include a rise in population, but also a dramatic change in the way of living, culture, society and political systems. With urban growth, cities also entail a set of risks, social and environmental hazards and vulnerabilities. Cities bear certain similarity to each other in terms of waste generation, urban violence, gender and poverty in various forms. They are also places of opportunities and proliferation and crucial to generation national GDPs.

It is thus undeniable that, cities are the next social, economic, and political centers of the earth, which are going to impact the rest of the globe. In India, the current flagship programme called Smart Cities Mission, has as its declared aims, the responsibility of ensuring socio-economic upliftment by promoting business opportunities, ensuring citizens’ participation and improving e-
governance for better service delivery. The key features of a Smart City is the intersect between competitiveness, capital and sustainability. Given such an ambitious urban development programme in which it becomes essential to engage with people’s groups/constituencies to imagine their own vision and to make sure that it is their ideas and demands that go into the planning of their city. Too often plans for cities been created without caring about the needs and aspirations of the citizens, without respecting their knowledge and their right to the city.

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) gives us an opportunity and avenue to re-create and re-imagine cities for a better and prosperous urban life. The NUA draws a link between urbanization and development, making both crucial for achieving sustainable development. ActionAid India’s idea on People’s Vision of the City has a significant resonance with the kind of city one should advocate for, and can build for the interest of collective future. PVOC is expected to evolve an alternative model of city planning and development. It is conceptualized within the framework of Sustainable Cities and the Right to the City, which demand a transformed and renewed approach to urban life. It advocates collective right to access and enjoy urban resources, and to build up collective efforts to re-structure the city space. Cities need to be viewed from the lens of sustainability, equity, safety, resilience, aesthetics etc. The idea PVOC will consciously build upon economic/ecological/social justice and democratic principles in viewing the urban space from a feminist perspective. The PVOC will engage in building alternative ideas of city building, and advocate for implementation, equitable distribution of resources, transparency and accountability, which will contribute to a sustainable form of development.

The Urban Thinkers Campus to be organized in Kolkata (11th September-13th September 2017), is based on the above idea of creating sustainable cities, along with different constituencies of the city. The programme is designed so as to involve different groups of citizens i.e. students, academicians, activists, thematic experts, grass root organizations etc. to design a common minimum vision of the city. The campus is organized with an objective of arriving at an action-oriented plan for implementing the NUA, for the Kolkata we need.

Summary of all session:

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future,” former US President, Franklin D. Roosevelt.
Day One; 11th September 2017; Urban Lab Session: The first day of the Urban Thinkers Campus, Kolkata edition kicked off with a drawing event for school students at the iconic Victoria Memorial hall. It was organised by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with ActionAid Association. The drawing event was attended by nine schools and approximately 45 students. This was a non-competitive event and the students were asked to envision ‘Kolkata: My Dream City’ on through paper and paint. The event was attended by Chhatrapati Dutta, principal, Govt. College of Art and Craft. The drawings revealed interesting images, images of a city with lakes and trees and playgrounds for children.

Day Two; 12th September 2017; Urban Thinkers Session: With aspiration of hearing vision of the youth for their city “Kolkata” – a City of joy- a debate was organized. Students of four recognized universities of Kolkata –viz; Vidyasagar School of Social Work, Jadavpur University, Rabindra Bharati University and Calcutta Women’s College Bagbazar, participated in the debate on the day and shared their thoughts before social activists, academic experts. The topic of the debate was “Is Kolkata capable to handle water logging and health related problem during Monsoon?” Participants tried to analyse the link between water logging and Kolkata’s geographical position, causes of the problem. As main reason of water logging they have demonstrated physical setups like active clay layer, presence of marshy land, on the other hand the social aspects like growing urbanization and faulty solid waste management system. Focus was given on lacking of proper planning and budgeting for infrastructural development to ensure effective drainage and sewerage system in the metropolitan. Role of Kolkata Municipal Corporation to address the problem and to promote awareness within public about water borne diseases was also critically discussed and analysed. Lack of political will, lack of coordination between departments like PWD, Irrigation, Health and education etc. also becoming a factor to ensure effective systems in Kolkata thus the problems were aggravated. In spite of the challenges they have also pointed out few solutions like use of technology to identify high water logged zones and set up pumping stations to ensure removal of water. Kolkata’s situation was compared with other metros and flood situation was also linked with the problem. In spite of the challenges the group was positive about city’s capability of handling the situation and in reference to that they have summed up by pointing out the need for collective actions and people’s participation with the government stakeholders and individual’s accountability to make the city healthy and sustainable. They have recommended adaptation of green policies to cap emissions produced by the expanding need and greed of increasing populations, which are closely connected with the environmental
degradation as well as use of technology to for dredging and de-siltation of the canals as Kolkata’s drainage system is depended on the canal networks surrounding the city. The overall discussion led towards exploring strategic actions to address waterlogging and related health problems of Kolkata.

Day Three; 13th September 2017; Partner Groups Session: Urban planners, academics, youth and activists from various parts of the city were participated in the Partners Group Session @Urban Thinkers Campus Kolkata. The attempt was to critically analyze how rapid increment of population is affecting city’s water, sewage and waste condition and explore solutions which can contribute in the preparation of a realistic and productive document capturing the theme of the city we need. The consultation includes urban thinkers from all constituencies of Kolkata, academia, women, community, non-government urban planners and youth. The main theme was “Rapid Urbanization is Exerting Pressure on Water, Sewage and Waste in Kolkata City”. On behalf of ActionAid Association Dr. Pritha Chatterjee set the context of the day. She defined “New Urban Agenda” as an outcome document that has emerged from the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (referred as “Habitat III”) held in Quito, Ecuador, in 2016. The UN’s Habitat conferences are held in a bi-decennial cycle, with previous editions being held in Vancouver (1976) and Istanbul (1996). While the document was adopted by representatives of national governments, its preparation lasted two years and involved discussions with various stakeholders, including local governments, civil society groups and urban scholars and practitioners. The “New Urban Agenda”, rather ambitiously, calls for an “urban paradigm shift” to readdress the way we “plan, finance, develop, govern, and manage cities and human settlements.” It commits to a “vision of cities for all” where “all inhabitants” are able to “inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.” She also mentioned one of the negotiation points of Habitat III – that is inclusion of the provision on “Right to the City”, a term used to describe the collective right of “all inhabitants”, irrespective of their legal status, over the city’s resources and spaces. While there was still a reference to this phrase, it has been considerably diluted as a compromise between its supporters—Latin American countries—and its more powerful opponents: the US, European Union, Russia and India. Though India is aggressively pursuing an urban-centric development agenda, its priorities do not seem to fit well with those of the “New Urban Agenda”. India’s current urban policy framework is not centred on an approach that provides “all inhabitants” a “right to the city”. Interestingly she stated that while “smart cities” form the lynchpin of India’s urban agenda, it only makes a fleeting appearance in the “New Urban
Equity, inclusivity and sustainability are instead the recurring themes. The divergence in priorities hence raises questions about the appositeness of India’s current urban development approach. She concluded her deliberation by inviting the experts of different fields and requested them to share their experiences in the line of how urbanization is exerting pressure on water, sewage and waste and what are the possible plans, actions to deal with the growing anomalies thus we all can ensure “Right to City” for all. Expert from Center for Urban Economic Studies, Calcutta University, Dr. Mahalaya Chatterjee gave her deliberation on “Urban Essentialities. To unpack the theme she analyzed the demand and supply theory in terms of growing essential need for water supply in the city. She emphasized the aspect of “holistic development” for ensuring sustainable development. The need for infrastructure development is the great global challenges of the time. There is an essential and growing demand for infrastructure to address critical global issues such as climate change, energy demands, water and food shortages, mass urbanization and economic and social development. To satisfy this need effectively and deliver lasting economic and social development the city needs the collective leadership, experience and creativity of the infrastructure community. She mentioned that there is clear evidence that investment in infrastructure leads to the growth of a countries economy and the improved wellbeing of its people. She also touched upon ecological sustainability and shared that Ecological Sustainable Development should be the overarching objective of any planning and policy framework. The most critical urban environmental needs by people in developing countries include provision of healthful housing and other built environments (e.g. schools, workplaces, etc.), access to environmental infrastructure systems and services such as water supply, sewerage, solid waste management, storm drainage, urban transport etc. availability of open spaces in terms of properly designed community parks and other green areas and environmental surveillance and cleaning services for public buildings and outdoor areas.

Expert from Mumbai Sustainability Center, Mr. Rishi Agarwal, presented his perspective about solid waste management and why Kolkata is failing to set up the standard or to address the waste problem of the city. He critically analyzed Kolkata Municipal Corporation’s role in relation to manage waste. In his statement he mentioned the necessity to implement the rules of Solid Waste Management, 2016. He briefly explained different provisions of Solid Waste Management Rules. In his presentation he spoke about the campaign in Ambala City – “Open Your Eyes”- and stressed upon the role of individual citizen to contribute in waste management. He stated the importance of segregation and recycling the waste and its effect on the ecological sustainability. He narrated situations of major cities in terms of waste
management, where the collection, transportation and disposal of MSW are unscientific and chaotic. Uncontrolled dumping of wastes on outskirts of towns and cities has created overflowing landfills, which are not only impossible to reclaim because of the haphazard manner of dumping, but also have serious environmental implications in terms of ground water pollution and contribution to global warming. Burning of waste leads to air pollution in terms of increased carbon monoxide emissions, which is equivalent to vehicular emissions at times. Composting-aerobic and anaerobic, wet and dry waste- all options are available to the country for scientific disposal of waste in future. However, city requires implementing the Act and rules which can guide the municipal corporations to run the waste services efficiently. In brief he pointed out the importance of education, awareness and capacity building within citizen on management of waste is the prime need of the city.

Mr. Abhar Chowdhury from ARCADIS spoke on sewage system of London. His presentation focused on how technology can be used to improve the sewage system. He showed the positive result of using technology for clearing up the sewage of river Thames. He compared the water pollution of Thames with river “Ganga”. London’s Victorian sewers didn’t have the capacity to meet the demands of the highly populated city. He explained how with the help of technology interception, storage and transfer tunnel -below the river Thames could be built to prevent millions of tons of untreated sewage.

Mr. Sumit Rastogi from ARCADIS –Bangalore, in his statistical representation showed Kolkata’s water supply system and suggested few solutions to deal with the water shortage. He site few examples of water conservation and importance of rainwater harvesting.

The post lunch session was kept for group wise consultation on water, sewage and waste management. Each group presented their arguments and solution points on three segments.

**Group 1:** Group one pointed out the importance of water conservation-through rain water harvesting, and the theory of 3 Rs- Reduce, Reuse and Recycling. They also mentioned the need of promoting awareness on water conservation at the foundation stage and importance of water management planning in urban planning model.

**Group 2:** Group two focused on waste management policies and given examples to manage waste scientifically. They explained the theory of “Reverse Demonstration Effect” for Solid Waste Management and roles of the communities and people’s collectives and institutions like clubs and schools.
Their presentation reflected the need for recognizing the waste pickers those actually segregate the waste and contribute in the recycling processes. The need for generating awareness by using social media and participation of people been highlighted in the presentation.

**Group 3:** The last group consulted on sewage system and placed few suggestions before the house. They spoke about infrastructural development to implement proper and effective drainage system. That group also stressed upon the Importance of preserving water bodies and greenery to maintain the ecological balance.

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**Key outcomes:**

**Session 1 Urban Lab:** Children expressed their view about a city. They drew their dream city where the heritage, culture and new development co-exists. They established themselves as equal political citizens through their drawings.

**Session 2 Urban Thinkers Session:** The participants expressed that the focus should be given on proper planning and budgeting for infrastructural development to ensure effective drainage and sewerage system in the metropolitan. Role of the local urban administration to address the problem and to promote awareness within public about water borne diseases was also critically discussed and analysed. Lack of political will, lack of coordination between departments like Public Works Department, Irrigation, Health and education etc. also becoming a factor to ensure effective systems in Kolkata thus the problems were aggravated. In spite of the challenges they have also pointed out few solutions like use of technology to identify high water logged zones and set up pumping stations to ensure removal of water. Kolkata’s situation was compared with other metros and flood situation was also linked with the problem. In spite of the challenges the group was positive about city’s capability of handling the situation and in reference to that they have summed up by pointing out the need for collective actions and people’s participation with the government stakeholders and individual’s accountability to make the city healthy and sustainable.

**Session 3 Partners Group Session:** Participants pointed out the importance of water conservation- through rain water harvesting, and the theory of 3 Rs- Reduce, Reuse and Recycling. They also mentioned the need of promoting
awareness on water conservation at the foundation stage and importance of water management planning in urban planning model. Also to focus on waste management policies and given examples to manage waste scientifically. They explained the theory of “Reverse Demonstration Effect” for Solid Waste Management and roles of the communities and people’s collectives and institutions like clubs and schools. They reflected upon the need for recognizing the waste pickers those actually segregate the waste and contribute in the recycling processes. The need for generating awareness by using social media and participation of people been highlighted in the presentation. They also expressed concerns on the existing sewage system and placed few suggestions before the house. They spoke about infrastructural development to implement proper and effective drainage system. They also stressed upon the Importance of preserving water bodies and greenery to maintain the ecological balance.

Conclusion & way forward

The Urban Thinkers Campus “People’s Vision of the City” was a national forum to discuss the scope of implementing the New Urban Agenda in a realistic way that enable environments that foster healthy participation from all social groups. This time intentionally the campus was inaugurated through participation of the children where they came up with their ideas of a city. A child is never recognised as a political citizen in most of the countries and for that the campus took informed decision to take up this issue. The youths are the major number in any country as population is concerned. At this era of urbanisation where the infrastructural development is in a boom without looking into the existing culture and system of a city, the youth of the city from different colleges presented their views about the lack of coordination between different departments of the government resulting the problem of health and water condition during a rainy season in a city. The campus ended with the partners’ group session on the last day where every person present expressed their views on the sewerage, water and waste. Two main points came out during this campus. The first one is the sharing the main observations with the national and local authorities and start a social media campaign targeting the middle class citizens.

On the basis of the UTC outcomes, what are your recommendations to National Governments and other Stakeholders, including local and sub
national governments, in order to effectively contribute to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda?

We will share the report with the National and local authorities and work with them to implement the New Urban Agenda.

Monitoring

1. How do you intend to monitor the achievements and progress in the implementation of your action plan approved at your Campus (success indicators and other measures of achievement should be proposed)?

Organising series of meetings with the outcome of this campus with different stakeholders
Random survey to monitor the behavioural changes of the common people about water and waste
Monitoring the different social media campaign with water, waste and sewerage of the city
Documenting case studies and sharing with the local authorities about children’s participation in planning process, usage of water, sewerage system and waste management.

2. Explain how you intend to share the results of your action plan with the WUC community and other partners in order to jointly implement the New Urban Agenda?

The organisers will prepare the outcome report of People’s Vision of the City @Urban Thinkers Campus Kolkata and share widely with the WUC community and others interested and committed to implement the New Urban Agenda.

The organisers will also document all the forthcoming activities related to the outcome of this campus and share widely.

The organisers are also thinking to have a follow up progress forum in coming 5 to 7 years and report back to the WUC.
UTC key speakers

- Dr. Jayanta Sengupta, Secretary and Curator, Victoria Memorial Hall, Ministry of Culture, Government of India;
- Prof. Chhatrapati Dutta, Principal, Government College of Arts and Crafts, Kolkata; India
- Dr. Pritha Chatterjee, ActionAid Association; India
- Mr. Rishi Aggarwal, Mumbai Sustainability Centre; India
- Dr. Mahalaya Chatterjee, Director, Centre for Urban Economic Studies, Calcutta University; India
- Mr. Sumit Rastogi, ARCADIS India
- Mr. Abhar Choudhuri, ARCADIS; UK

List of participants:

Please Download the List of Participants HERE

List of organisations represented:

1. Saradacharan Aryan Vidyapit
2. Aryakanya Mahavidyalaya
3. Calcutta Academy
4. Savitri Pathsala
5. Banipith Girls High School
6. Taki Girls High School
7. Shyambazar AV School
8. Ramjay Seal Sishu Pathsala
9. Ahiritola Banga Vidyalaya
10. Government College of Arts and Crafts Kolkata
11. Calcutta University
12. Jadavpur university
13. Rabindra Bharatai University
14. Calcutta Women's College
15. Vidyasagar School of Social Work
16. Mumbai Sustainability Centre
17. ARCADIS India
18. ARCADIS UK
19. St Xaviers University
20. Child in Need Institute
21. The Calcutta Samaritans
22. Right Track
23. Earth Care
24. Justice & Care
25. We are the Common People
26. Wada Na Todo Aviyan
27. Kolkata Consultant
28. West Bengal State University

List of partner groups represented:
1. Children & Youth
2. Businesses & Industries
3. Foundations & Philanthropies
4. Research & Academia
5. Local & Subnational Authorities

List of countries represented:
1. India
2. United Kingdom

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