

Education for Urban Sustainability

The session discussed the current status and further work required for local policy adoption and alignment of global and national sustainability goals in towns and cities, as well as how to strengthen inclusive public engagement processes, which can serve as powerful venues for sustainability learning and action.



panelists

- Shri Kamlesh Yagnik, Chief Resilience Officer, Surat (Resilient Cities Network)
- Dr Manvita Baradi, Urban Management Centre, Ahmedabad
- Mr Paco Bunnik, Senior Urban Designer, City of Amsterdam
- Dr Jigna Desai, CEPT University, Ahmedabad
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Session Highlights

1. Cities are ideal spaces for experimenting with and implementing sustainability solutions. By fostering informed, engaged, and empowered citizens, urban areas can become living examples of how human ingenuity and cooperation can overcome environmental and social challenges. In this endeavour, education is not just a tool but a transformative force that reshapes the urban landscape into a thriving and sustainable habitat for future generations.
2. ESD approaches for policy alignment, multi-stakeholder engagement, and action learning must be highlighted at global and national urban forums and integrated into implementation schemes, programmes, and projects.

Approaches to bring about policy alignment, working with political and administrative leaders include:

1. Collecting and sharing evidence, especially combined with site visits (e.g. community-generated evidence on lack of basic services in slums)
2. Site visits for senior national or state bureaucrats facilitated by local government officials with community interactions
3. Collectivisation of the community and supporting them to interact with political and administrative officials (e.g. residents' association in slums)

4. Partnership with a UN body or a national institution (e.g. National Institute of Urban Affairs in India) and localisation of global and national policy
5. National or international competitions for cities to apply (e.g. Bloomberg Initiative for Cycling Infrastructure, or Green City Action Plan, Malaysia)
6. Projects can serve as catalysts, e.g. installation of LED streetlights helps to introduce the idea of energy efficiency, promotes visibility of forward-thinking leaders
7. Prepare guidelines, toolkits with multi-stakeholder participation for sectors that are not well developed at the municipal level yet, such as local climate action planning, culture and heritage conservation, supporting street vendors or other informal livelihoods, SV Nidhi, basic services for informal areas, etc
8. Community events for promoting the interaction of leaders with the community, especially non-elected officials who might not have a community connect
9. Exposure visits for leaders to other cities showcasing best practices and supporting them for presentations
10. Awards and global recognition
11. Activism at scale by the public (e.g. bicyclists' protest in Amsterdam in the 1970s)

Public engagement approaches as venues for sustainability learning

1. Citizens' assemblies are structured processes for public engagement and learning on sustainability, characterised by inclusivity, high-quality deliberation, and effectiveness in linking to public governance.
2. Using community theatre and interactions around performances (the decision to rebuild the existing city of Bhuj instead of creating a 'new Bhuj')
3. Converting a derelict or problem spot into an area where educational activities happen can get a discussion going around civic issues and scale the questions (Conservation Site Score in heritage conservation initiatives)
4. Projects are useful to keep conversations specific and real than speaking about sustainability in the abstract
5. School and youth initiatives, and taking their achievements and findings to the community and leaders
6. Solutions-focused approaches where people can be convened, along with implementing officials, leaders
7. Film festivals and discussions around these

Challenges to these approaches

1. Training and capacity building are not a focus at the city level.
2. The mandates for city-level decision-making are also quite restricted.
3. The lack of multi-stakeholder platforms can result in chicken-and-egg situations, e.g. people don't segregate if waste collectors don't have separate collection systems, and vice versa.

Quotes with attribution

"Educating for sustainability action in cities is not merely about imparting knowledge; it is about inspiring a collective movement toward a sustainable future". - Kamlesh Yagnik, Chief Resilience Officer, Surat and President, SRK Foundation

Key Remarks from the Participants

Solution-focused approaches that involve the community, implementing agencies, and political leaders can help build political will, generate interest, and provide sustainability learning opportunities for all stakeholders.

Key Recommendations from the Session

1. Develop case studies and toolkits on ESD for urban issues
2. Educators must participate in Urban forums and highlight approaches for multi-stakeholder learning, capacity building and how these contribute to progress on the 2030 agenda and global sustainability goals
3. Advocate for programmes for capacity building for urban political and administrative leaders, including on ESD approaches
4. Advocate for programmes for multi-stakeholder approaches for urban sustainability
5. Initiate a Green Global Citizen(ship) programme for youth change-makers

Who Acts?

- UN bodies/programmes connected with human settlements and issues such as transport, road safety
- Urban sector ministries, expert bodies and academic institutes
- Civil society and ESD actors

Referred Case Studies

- Citizens' Assemblies (e.g. at <https://democracyrd.org/>)
- Preparation of SV Nidhi
- Rebuilding Bhuj post-earthquake
- Conservation Site Score
- Amsterdam spatial plan/vision
- Green City Action Plan Malacca, Malaysia (and 146 cities)
- Schools, Eco-Campus and Young Reporters for the Environment