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**World
Habitat
Day**

Engaging youth
to create a better
urban future

World Habitat Day

7th October, 2024

Engaging youth to create
a better urban future



bmtpc

निर्माण सामग्री एवं प्रौद्योगिकी संवर्द्धन परिषद्
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BUILDING MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGY PROMOTION COUNCIL

Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, Government of India



“Creating Enabling Environment for Affordable Housing for All”

Engaging Youth to Create a Better Urban Future: The Power of Volunteering for a Sustainable Tomorrow



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**“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”
- Franklin D Roosevelt.**

In an era defined by rapid urbanisation, cities are facing unprecedented challenges. Housing shortages, environmental degradation, and socio-economic disparities are growing concerns, particularly in urban areas. In India, urbanisation has been accelerating, with 35% of the population now living in cities¹. This growth comes with significant challenges: as of 2020, 49% of India’s urban population was living in slums², highlighting the severity of inadequate housing. Cities like Mumbai and Kolkata have over 30% slum dwelling households³. However, this also presents us with opportunities. Youth, as the future leaders, hold immense potential to address these issues and create more sustainable, equitable, and vibrant

urban environments.

While governments and various institutions are working towards tackling these challenges, the role of young people in shaping the future of cities is becoming increasingly important. Youth, with their energy, creativity, and passion for change, are stepping forward to lead the charge. This is particularly evident in the areas of volunteering and raising awareness through digital platforms. At Habitat for Humanity India, youth engagement is critical in our vision of building a world where everyone has a decent place to live. We actively work along with youngsters to help create a more sustainable and equitable future for families living in poor and vulnerable housing conditions and enable them to achieve strength, stability, and self-reliance.

The Importance of Youth Engagement

Youth engagement is essential for building resilient communities. Cities thrive when residents are

actively involved in solving local issues, and young people bring fresh perspectives and eagerness to address old challenges. Urban areas are home to some of the most vulnerable populations, where access to affordable housing remains a persistent challenge. Migration is one of the key drivers of rapid urbanization. Many youths from rural areas are pulled towards urban areas for better livelihood, employment, education and a dream to improve their living conditions. When individuals and families migrate, they may end up settling in urban slums due to lack of resources. These slums, which are already under-resourced and frequently located in vulnerable areas, face further strain due to extreme weather events, such as flooding and heatwaves, exacerbated by climate change. Young people, often witnessing these hardships first-hand, are in a unique position to advocate for change and contribute through various programmes. Whether it’s through hands-on volunteering

- 1 Rapid Urbanization: Slum Settlements in India’s Mega-cities (arctgis.com) and Press Release: Press information Bureau (pib.gov.in)
- 2 World Bank and United Nations Human Settlements Programme: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS?locations=IN>
- 3 The Times of India: Urban India: 17% of urban India lives in slums: Census | India News - Times of India (indiatimes.com)

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in construction projects, raising awareness through social and digital platforms, youth involvement can drive meaningful change and transformation.

The Government of India has introduced a new internship scheme as part of the Prime Minister's package, aimed at providing meaningful work experience to youth across the country. Announced in the Union Budget 2024-25 by the honourable Union Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, this initiative seeks to offer internships in 500 of India's top companies to one crore young people over the next five years. Youth will gain exposure to real-world business environments and various professions for a duration of 12 months. This initiative aligns with the government's broader focus on skill development and youth engagement, and it offers an ideal platform for young people to contribute to building a sustainable urban future.

Youth Volunteering: Building Homes, Communities and Hope

Volunteering is a powerful way for young people to make a direct impact. Habitat for Humanity India's programmes, which focus on providing affordable housing to low-income families, have seen significant involvement from youth volunteers around the world. Young people participate in a unique programme known as a 'Volunteer Build', which includes active engagement of volunteers in physical construction of homes. Time and again, we have observed that the experience of a volunteer build is transformational and gives people a first-hand experience of how their involvement is having a

real impact on the life of a family.

One such 'Volunteer Build' was a build organised by Habitat for Humanity India in Igatpuri, located in Nashik district of Maharashtra in March 2024, where more than 20 volunteers, including 14 young people from Japan worked alongside future homeowners. Utana Arai, a young volunteer from Japan, recounted building a home for a family of five who were living in a mud house without access to clean water and sanitation, and how it changed her perspective on the global housing crisis. She shared her realisation of the challenges the families faced during the monsoon, enduring flooded floors and extreme humidity during the summer. She said, "Our group built a home for a mom, a dad, and their three young kids. Before seeing it in person, I couldn't have imagined what the mud house where they lived was like. The family had to walk a long way to get clean water, and they charged their phone with a small solar panel. The inside of the home was hot and humid, and I could tell that in the rainy season the house would flood. I realised how hard it must be to study, work, and raise those three young children in these conditions. It made me think about just how many people around the world need a decent place to live, with Japan as no exception."

This powerful example demonstrates the ability of youth to "Build Beyond Boundaries"—both in a literal sense by constructing homes and in a figurative sense by connecting with people from different countries, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. By volunteering, young people not only contribute to the physical in-

frastructure of urban communities but also build bridges of understanding and compassion.

Leveraging Technology and Digital Platforms To Advocate For Change

In addition to hands-on volunteering, young people are increasingly using technology and social media platforms to raise awareness about issues important for community development and nation building. These digital tools allow them to connect with wider audiences, share their experiences, and advocate for change. Social media, in particular, plays a vital role in mobilising support and educating the public about pressing urban issues such as affordable housing, climate-resilient infrastructure, and inclusive city planning.

Youth-led initiatives can amplify the work being done by the Government of India, corporate foundations, and non-governmental organisations, bringing greater visibility to social initiatives and urban development programmes. By sharing stories of impact, hosting virtual awareness raising events, and participating in digital advocacy campaigns, young people influence public discourse and contribute to a broader movement for sustainable living. This engagement not only supports the government's mission of creating livable cities for all but also inspires more people to take action in their own communities.

The Long-Term Benefits of Youth Involvement

Youth engagement has both immediate effects and long-term benefits for individuals and communities. For young volunteers, the experience of working on projects

like Volunteer Builds fosters a deep sense of social responsibility and civic duty. It encourages empathy and inspires them to continue contributing to community-based initiatives as they grow older.

For communities, the benefits of youth involvement extend beyond the physical structures built. Young people bring energy, optimism, and fresh ideas to the table. They often find innovative ways to mobilise resources and draw attention to issues that may otherwise go unnoticed. By engaging young people in creating sustainable urban futures, we are cultivating a generation of leaders who are deeply invested in the well-being of their cities, environment and people.

A Call to Act on

The challenges facing our urban environments are significant, but they are not insurmountable. By engaging young people in volunteering and awareness-raising initiatives, we can harness their passion, creativity, and determination to build a better future for all. Youth can act as agents of change and influencers to take an active role in shaping their communities. We need to create an enabling environment for them to succeed in this role.

As India continues to grow, it is essential that we empower the next generation to be custodians of urban transformation. The youth of today will be the leaders of tomorrow, and by involving them in the work of building homes and raising awareness, we are not only creating a better urban future but also investing in the future leaders of society and contributing towards building a better India.
