

Youth Sabha 1

Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), organised the first online Youth Sabha on the theme of “Delhi as a city for learning” on 24th September 2020 from 03:00 pm onwards. This Sabha was anchored by youth representatives from NIUA, DDA, PRIA and IGSSS. PRIA and IGSSS are CSOs working with youth. Over 450 registrations were received for this youth sabha, out of a total number of 1050 registrations.

The Youth Sabha was designed as to get feedback from each and every participant. Based on the theme, the main concerns shared by the participants were regarding lack of facilities and spaces that respond to changing needs and trends; issues of accessibility to existing educational facilities, and hostels and housing for the youth. The participants also gave suggestions and ideas towards utilising technology and social media effectively to enhance access to facilities and also for making this access more equitable across the city especially in informal settlements.

A number of youth stressed on the importance of moving from supply of learning infrastructure to creating a learning ecosystem, which has inter-linkages between education and employment, skills and industry and a holistic approach towards education with learning centres clustered with associated amenities like student housing, small commercial units for their day to day needs, and skill labs for self-learning – and the entire ecosystem supported by a universally available digital infrastructure.

The key suggestions and feedback shared by the participants have been summarised below:

Availability, accessibility and quality of education infrastructure

Inequitable distribution and quality of educational facilities across the city - there are lesser number of schools and colleges in the urban extension areas leading to long journeys for education for some youth and also issues of transport connectivity and reduced attendance. Some of the schools and colleges do not have facilities such as separate toilets for girls and boys, open playgrounds, spaces to practice sports etc. More numbers of accessible Counselling Centers, Motivational Centers, Mental Health Care and Rehabilitation Centres are required that offer a safe space to youth to obtain guidance in all aspects of life such as career, higher studies, dealing with competition and pressure, depression, financial distress, addiction, etc. While such centres are available in schools, participants shared that many colleges and universities do not have such services operational.

Given the pandemic situation, education is being imparted through online mediums. A number of young students pointed out that not everyone has access to smartphones and laptops. Having computer centres and libraries in the neighbourhood was cited as

one of the solutions that can bridge this gap. It was also suggested that the existing community infrastructure like Barat ghars and unused community halls can be repurposed to accommodate such uses for the youth and children in the community temporarily or on a permanent basis.

Delineating and developing knowledge clusters in the city was another big idea posed by the youth where emerging as well as existing areas of education and employment are placed in close proximity. Besides, that affordable student housing, food joints, cultural facilities can be integrated. Such knowledge clusters must be placed close to public transit.

Areas where land for constructing schools is not available, (such as unauthorized colonies) provision of mobile schools and libraries can be thought of as a stop-gap arrangement to avoid break in education. Open Schools functioning in Delhi are running over capacity. Space for such schools is an important element for providing access to education to more and more children.

A unanimous demand was for one stop information centres/ website/ apps to provide updated information about educational institutes, employment opportunities, which courses and skills are in demand, location and availability of student housing and youth hostels etc.

Access and Availability of Student Housing

Delhi has large number of migrant students from other places across the country. However, student housing is an area that the city is lacking in. Existing hostels within campuses are already running over-capacity, leaving many students to look for paying guest accommodation or get into apartment lease etc., and thus hindering learning and ease of study.

A very limited range of housing options are available for students, as many owners are vary of renting out their homes to younger people. Often students settle for lower standards of living space at much higher prices.

Lack of adequate habitable space in slum resettlement colonies affects does not provide a comfortable space or environment for studies. Community centres etc. can also provide for reading rooms, library space, counselling centres and access to internet as well as online training and courses.

Employment

Placements/ jobs/ higher education/ scholarships etc., are not commonly provided by higher education institutes (except for technical colleges), and students end up taking jobs that do not match with their qualifications and skills to start earning a livelihood. This should be a closed loop to avoid wastage of resources spent on training etc. Skill labs should be set up in or near educational institutions to enable students to acquire skills alongside their education.

Public Consultations going ahead

For effective Public Consultation going ahead data (monitoring, baseline, policies) shall be made available in public domain. There may be a quasi-judicial mechanism for receiving suggestions when the draft plan is published, people shall be informed if their suggestion was accepted or rejected and why. Finally, issues pertaining to low income housing, vendors and urban village need to be prioritized in public consultations.