12th Tranche Development Account Project

REGIONAL REPORT ON MAINSTREAMING LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND (LNOB) IN NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH ASIA

December 2023
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2 REGIONAL REPORT ON MAINSTREAMING LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND (LNOB) IN NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH ASIA
This report highlights global and regional trends and includes good practices on the development of disability-inclusive and safe cities. The report served as preparatory material for the Concluding Workshop for the project "Mainstreaming Leave No One Behind (LNOB) in National Urban Policies and Programmes (SDGs 11 & 6) in South Asia", which was co-organized by UN-Habitat, ESCAP, and UNOICT on 25 October 2023, at the 8th Asia Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-8) in Suwon, Republic of Korea.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>DPOs</td>
<td>Disabled People's Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESCAP</td>
<td>Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>ESCWA</td>
<td>Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia</td>
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<td>LNOB</td>
<td>Leave No One Behind</td>
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<td>MSJE</td>
<td>Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment</td>
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<td>MoHUA</td>
<td>Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs</td>
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<td>MOUD</td>
<td>Ministry of Urban Development</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>NIUA</td>
<td>National Institute of Urban Affairs</td>
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<td>NUA</td>
<td>New Urban Agenda</td>
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<td>OPDs</td>
<td>Organizations of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>ROAP</td>
<td>Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNCRPD</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>UNCTs</td>
<td>United Nations Country Teams</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UN-Habitat</td>
<td>United Nations Human Settlements Programme</td>
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<td>UNOICT</td>
<td>United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<td>UNRCCO</td>
<td>United Nations Regional Coordination Office</td>
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<td>UNSDCF</td>
<td>United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework</td>
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With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations Member States pledged to reduce inequality in all its forms through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while ensuring that no one will be left behind (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2023). Over the past decades, the Asia-Pacific region has made considerable strides in social development, driven by aggregate economic growth. This growth has facilitated better quality of life through an increasing number of social protection schemes, in addition to generating new jobs, increasing incomes, and improving overall levels of access to basic services and other opportunities. Despite this sustained economic development and substantial reduction in poverty, socioeconomic inequalities, gender discrimination, and lack of access to clean water and urban services continue to exist depending on several factors, including wealth, gender, residence, and education levels, among others. High levels of inequality impede economic progress, negatively affect social cohesion and continue to marginalize vulnerable populations thereby posing a formidable barrier to sustainable development.

Within the marginalized populations, persons with disabilities were some of the most vulnerable and affected, having suffered differentiated and intensified impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of preparedness and resilience towards the public health crisis, in the Asia-Pacific region, exposed persons with disabilities to even greater and more complex vulnerabilities during the pandemic. This brought about prolonged socioeconomic crisis across the South Asian region (United Nations, 2020).

In the Asia-Pacific region, the total number of persons living with disabilities is estimated to be around 750 million (ESCAP, 2021a). Persons with disabilities, particularly youth, women, and rural inhabitants experience higher rates of unemployment and are at a greater risk of vulnerable employment and insufficient social protection (ESCAP, 2021a). This report attempts to identify challenges and learnings from cross-country experiences in South Asia, and examines various initiatives at regional, subregional and local levels. It further investigates the national institutional frameworks in the target countries which are being used for mainstreaming LNOB and draws attention to pilot initiatives that could leverage SDG implementation in South Asian countries. The report also emphasizes the importance of drawing lessons from cross-subregional and cross-country experiences for SDG implementation in the region. In addition, this report attempts to draw insights by undertaking a review of the good practices of various countries and organizations from South Asia and other Asia-Pacific subregions.
The digital divide has given a new face to inequality, as digital access has become one of the critical determinants of livelihoods, well-being, and recovery (ESCAP, 2021a). Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that incorporates the rights and needs of persons with disabilities into closing the digital divide, and for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and disaster response strategies. Indeed, the principle of “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB) has come under serious strain globally, and there is a need to mainstream this principle in national and local urban policies and programmes.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a blueprint for peace and prosperity with the aim to eradicate poverty and reduce socioeconomic inequalities while also tackling climate change, ensuring sustainability and persevering the natural environment. Member States pledged that no one would be left behind in these efforts, that they would endeavour to address the needs of the furthest behind first, and are committed to achieving sustainable development for all nations and segments of society.

For the Asia-Pacific region, it is critical that LNOB should be integrated into all areas of sustainable development, particularly because the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 SDGs, by 2030, and may achieve less than 10 per cent of the SDG targets if it continues to follow on the current trajectory of progress (ESCAP, 2023). Furthermore, SDG 11, which requires making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, is also amongst the SDGs that have registered the least progress since 2000. Only 50 per cent of targets could be measured under SDG 11, and the region is likely to miss all targets, by 2030, if it continues on this current trajectory. This lack of progress has resulted in a number of development challenges, particularly in the rapidly urbanizing cities. It is important to note that access to safe water and sanitation are recognized human rights. For persons with disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right to equal access to services, facilities and information (United Nations Human Rights, 2006).

Over the past few decades, the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed significant social development driven by economic growth, which has generated new jobs, increased labour incomes, strengthened social protection systems, and improved access to basic services and other amenities. Nevertheless, South Asian countries continue to face a wide range of systemic challenges that undermine inclusive and sustainable development. For example, the devastating social and economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to plague the subregion in the near future. In addition, widening inequalities continue to drive social divides and disproportionately impact the most discriminated and marginalized individuals and communities in society. Similarly, governments across the subregion are yet to address worsening environmental crises. Climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss are projected to negatively transform the lives of people across South Asia and require interventions and transitions of an unprecedented scale. In particular, climate change and environmental degradation can have disproportionate and severe impacts on persons with disabilities. The pandemic has also added urgency to close digital gaps.
In this context, the “Mainstreaming Leave No One Behind (LNOB) in National Urban Policies and Programmes in South Asia” project was envisioned in partnership with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology (UNOICT). An important aspect of this collaborative effort was to strengthen capacities of national and local governments, prioritize LNOB and focus on addressing disabilities in urban policy and planning frameworks in the four South Asian member States: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The project primarily focused on strengthening national governments and local urban institutions to incorporate LNOB (inclusion, disability and safety) into national urban policies, facilitating evidence-based localization of national policies and implementation of SDG 6 and SDG 11, and helping to guide the development and adoption of their approaches for:

(i) Engendering LNOB (disability-inclusive and safety for all) in national policy and programmes with a major focus on SDGs 6 and 11;

(ii) Building the capacity of local governments in knowledge management to achieve vertical integration and benefit from the positive impacts of global/regional good practice interventions on the ground; and

(iii) Building institutional capacity and introducing institutional reforms.

The report discusses how the target countries, under the present LNOB project, have taken an inclusive approach towards policy planning to ensure more resilient and disability-inclusive development. It further sets out the context and narrative to outline the need for disability-specific disaggregated data for development and policy formulation, implementation, evaluation, and highlights the significance of evidence-based policy formulation to empower national and local governments to mainstream LNOB as a key principle in implementing the New Urban Agenda. Consequently, a narrative has been set out in the report, through the illustration of good practices, to outline how inclusive policies and disaggregated data are extremely important to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and protect them against discrimination on the grounds of disability.

5.

OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL PROGRESS

One billion people, constituting 15 per cent of the world’s population, live with some form of disability, with the majority living in low- and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2023a). Moreover, approximately 750 million people live with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region (ESCAP, 2021a). This number is expected to increase because the prevalence of disability is affected by a range of factors, including age, war and conflict, natural disasters, and forced displacement. In addition to adverse socioeconomic outcomes, persons with disabilities encounter attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full, equal and effective participation in society.
The rich experiences gained from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in diverse country contexts, and within various regional and subregional dynamics, can enable essential insights to be drawn from cross-country experiences. These insights contribute significantly towards the implementation of the SDGs at the country level. Cross-country experiences can provide useful lessons concerning the prioritization of the SDGs, means of implementation, institutional architecture, and financing modalities to address challenges and assess the progress towards achieving the goals. The diversity of experience in the context of Asia is particularly relevant in this regard. However, cities will play a critical role in the implementation of the entirety of the 2030 Agenda as all of the SDGs contain targets that will require local action. Recent studies report that successfully achieving about 65 per cent of the 169 SDG targets will only be possible through substantive involvement of local actors, especially the local government.

In order to make the 2030 Agenda a reality, broad ownership of the SDGs must translate into a strong commitment by all stakeholders to implement the global goals. The various indicators and targets of the SDGs offer a powerful tool for quantifying the scale of the challenges faced by cities, and identifying areas where significant effort is required to reach targets or improve monitoring. There is, therefore, an added urgency to ensure that policy measures at the local, national and regional levels not only address response and recovery from the pandemic, but also include underlying inequalities. Resilient policy interventions will need to be made to accelerate action towards attaining the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate overall SDG progress, and progress in SDG 6 and SDG 11 in the Asia-Pacific region and in South and South-West Asia, between 2015 and 2022, respectively.


1 The South and South-West Asia subregion includes ten member States namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey.
The South and South-West Asia subregion made most of its progress on No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). The subregion is regressing on Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life below Water (SDG 14), and Peace, Justice and Strong institutions (SDG 16). Although data is limited, all subregions are regressing or showing limited progress for Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11). Progress is slow or stagnant on most of the remaining goals.

Data gaps exist for at least two-thirds of the indicators, particularly those concerning environmental and social areas. The average overall progress towards achieving all 17 SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region has increased slowly from 4.4 per cent in 2017 to 14.4 per cent in 2022. The total number of years required to achieve the SDG targets in the Asia-Pacific region has increased, which means the region will miss the 2030 target year by several decades (ESCAP, 2023).

The following sections provide a detailed overview of the existing disability-inclusive policy frameworks and specific challenges faced in the four South Asian target countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka). It further discusses the existing monitoring, reporting and verification systems in the target countries and selected cities for mainstreaming LNOB and disability inclusion. Through literature review and discussions with various Disabled Person’s Organizations (DPOs) and stakeholders, it was observed that the increasing vulnerability of persons with disabilities has not been sufficiently addressed in development policies in various countries in South Asia.

The South Asian region also faces many challenges as various countries have fallen behind in making provisions for accessible and inclusive policies, and social protection response and recovery initiatives for persons with disabilities. The region is also characterized by a high population that falls under the low and middle-income status, high levels of economic informality, low social protection coverage, intersectional marginalization due to gender, ethnicity and caste, and a high concentration of migrant population. Additionally, the COVID-19 crisis magnified vulnerabilities in the region and furthered the marginalization of persons with disabilities. The UN Secretary General's Policy Brief, A Disability-Inclusive response to COVID-19, recognized the magnified inequalities experienced by people with disabilities during the pandemic and advocated for their inclusion in all recovery and response measures (United Nations, 2020).

The major challenges identified in the region concern facilitating disability-inclusive urban development and mainstreaming Leaving No One Behind (LNOB), with a focus on persons with disabilities. These are outlined below:

- Upholding the rights of persons with disabilities in line with international instruments requires more focus and sensitization initiatives;
- Persons with disabilities continue to face extreme poverty and face barriers to employment;
- Representation and participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making remains low, and there are limited efforts to reach out to persons with disabilities by government agencies showing lack of responsiveness;
- Lack of specific social protection measures for persons with disabilities in the South Asian countries;
- Standards of accessibility vary across the region and are often not comprehensive in responding to the barriers to diverse disabilities. Also, there is a need to build better initiatives by addressing the pre-existing barriers in urban environment and inequalities;
- Inaccessibility of information and communication services and lack of standard procurement policies for accessible ICT;
- Lack of subnational government initiatives, which can pave the way towards more inclusive response and recovery;
- The availability and comparability of disaggregated disability specific data remains a challenge. As a result, persons with disabilities, and the issues that limit their full participation in society, are often underrepresented and unaddressed in policymaking;
- Planning and management for inclusion of disability perspectives in disaster risk reduction remains a challenge in South Asian countries.

In view of the above-mentioned challenges, it is necessary for the governments of South Asian countries to implement disability-inclusive urban policies and planning in order to achieve the SDGs and fulfill the LNOB promise. Policymakers in South Asia require support through technical expertise and innovative policy tools to ensure that their cities become safe, resilient and disability inclusive. There is a gap in coordination across various government agencies and departments at different levels and between the organizations, that address issues related to persons with disabilities. It will be crucial to ensure that disability-inclusive policies are coherent and mainstreamed throughout society at large.
To begin the SDG 6 and SDG 11 implementation process at the country level, central governments in the target countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka) have completed the task of setting up initial governance and coordination mechanisms. Countries have actively involved UN agencies, DPOs, multi-stakeholder groups and various stakeholders in the course of the consultation processes at the national level. Furthermore, these countries have completed mapping exercises, at various levels, by aligning the SDG targets/indicators with national plans. A few countries have completed prioritization of SDG targets/indicators at the national level. However, an in-depth assessment of the interlinkages between the SDGs and the evaluation of policy interventions has yet to be undertaken, through further research and analysis, to ensure the best outcomes.

The audit report recommended a set of concrete interventions to improve accessibility of public services provided by the Municipality, including a strong emphasis on the need for vertical accessibility. An exposure visit to Lalitpur Metropolitan City was also organized, on 10 March 2023, to promote inclusive urban policy discussions between the local governments, and further demonstrate best practices in Lalitpur City in terms of accessible infrastructure (public toilets in municipal buildings, school premises, etc.), that could be replicated in Dhulikhel Municipality.

Further to the audit and visit, Dhulikhel Municipality requested UN-Habitat, in Nepal, for technical collaboration, as proof of concept, by designing an elevator at the Office of the Executive of Dhulikhel Municipality to ensure vertical accessibility. A team of structural engineers and architects, with knowledge of universal design, was employed to provide solutions to retrofit the existing Municipal building to integrate vertical accessibility and include a public toilet so that public services can be accessible to all.
This collaboration between the municipality and the UN-Habitat project team enhanced the overall accessibility to the Dhulikhel Municipality building. Based on the assessed needs, Dhulikhel Municipality allocated, in the current fiscal year budget, a total of Nepalese Rupees 6 million (US$ 45,000) for the construction of an accessible elevator in the Municipality premises, and smart and accessible toilets in the public space. This budgetary allocation is a reflection of the commitment to improving accessibility, and the result of strong advocacy through different policy dialogues and events to engage a wide range of stakeholders.

UN-Habitat collaborated with the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) for the preparation of the design catalogue of accessible public toilets for different cities in three ecological belts in Nepal. The catalogue has been published and disseminated by SONA in both national and international events and to wider stakeholders. In collaboration with the Ministry of Urban Development, UN-Habitat finalized the revision of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Operational Guideline of the Ministry. The MOUD had prepared the GESI Operational Guideline in 2013 to improve access of women, poor, socially disadvantaged and marginalized group to resources, opportunities and benefits from the Ministry’s programs and projects.

The revised Guideline encapsulates the essence of the new federal structure of Nepal, the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, and was validated during the “National Young Planners Congress” on 21 June 2023 (UN-Habitat and others, 2023). Constructive feedback, that was received from the workshop, was incorporated and has been approved by the Ministry. The Guideline was launched by the Honourable Minister Ms. Sita Gurung, on the occasion of World Habitat Day 2023 held on 2 October 2023.

UN-Habitat also provided technical support to the Department of Urban Development Building Construction (MOUD/DUDBC) for publishing the report, Urban Development-World Habitat Day Special Edition-2023, that entirely focused on inclusive cities. This collaboration brought together academia, practitioners, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to consolidate a substantial repository of the knowledge products that highlight various issues and approaches for making the cities accessible, leaving no one and no place behind.

However, its implementation was feeble due to a change in the governance structure of the country. Hence, responding to the request from the Ministry, UN-Habitat supported the review and update of the Guideline and made explicit provisions to integrate the issues of GESI in the entire project cycle implemented by the MOUD, including design guidelines to make the infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities. Its enforcement will enable the MOUD to ensure GESI-responsiveness in its physical infrastructure development projects.

Tools were developed, in collaboration with local OPDs and the National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal (NFD-N), to standardize the accessibility audits and some were tested in the Dhulikhel Municipality for the accessibility audit of the Office of the Municipal Executive and ward buildings. The revised GESI Operational Guidelines highlighted the necessity of tools to conduct accessibility audits and GESI audits to ensure that accessibility and inclusion are embedded in the planning for infrastructure development.

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India

The UN-Habitat team in India is actively involved with the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office (UNRCO) in India, under the UN Partnership on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (PRPD), to pursue the LNOB mandate and fulfil the respective project outcomes and components through collaborative work (UNPRPD, 2021). UN-Habitat is also part of the Disability Working Group and contributes to the ‘One UN’ Work Plan. In 2022, the LNOB India team consulted with urban missions of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the city of New Delhi was strategically identified as the project’s target city wherein collaborative efforts were implemented with the Department of Social Welfare, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, to align with outputs and activities of the project.

Furthermore, UN-Habitat collaborated with NFD-N, the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA), the Regional and Urban Planners Society of Nepal (RUPSON), the Dhulikhel Municipality, Kathmandu University, the Ministry of Urban Development (MOUD), and the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC), for inclusive policy advocacy, policy review, preparation of knowledge projects, accessibility audit and capability-building on inclusive planning and accessible infrastructure development. These collaborations were further supported by the preparation and dissemination of various knowledge products.

The UN-Habitat Nepal team has collaborated jointly with the user community, academia, federal and local governments and the professional bodies to identify gaps in national and local urban policies. Efforts were made to explore a people-centric approach to minimize policy gaps, promote capacity-building, facilitate mass awareness, and ensure improvement in infrastructure and service delivery system. This good practice of having a collaborative and people-participatory approach can be replicated to mainstream LNOB in other countries in South Asia. The extensive engagement of the NFD-N and the city level Disability Council of Dhulikhel Municipality not only insured the ownership of the project, but also played a vital role in improving inclusive policies and infrastructure development. A joint exposure visit with the local bodies in Kathmandu and Dhulikhel also significantly improved their understanding of disability-inclusive urban development.

Additionally, as an aftermath of the Karnali earthquake which occurred on 3 November 2023, the UN-Habitat office in Nepal coordinated with the National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFD-N) Karnali Province office to conduct a rapid impact assessment by mobilizing an expert team and enumerators to prepare an impact assessment report. This collaboration generated data by assessing the impact of the earthquake on persons with disabilities, strengthened evidence-based inputs in inclusive policies for response, winterization, temporary shelter and disaster resilience, including housing reconstruction.

At the city level, the team worked with the Department of Social Welfare and Directorate of Education, Government of Delhi, and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur to conduct training programmes, simulation exercises, and accessibility audits in schools as a pilot intervention for enhancing accessibility and inclusion in the school infrastructure in New Delhi.

At the national level, the team worked with UNRCO India, to enhance the 'Data for Development' portal by developing a framework for collecting disability-disaggregated data, in India, to support the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The team was also in consultation with the officials of the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban (SBM-U) (translated as the Clean India Mission), the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), as well as the Smart Cities mission under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to delve into initiatives to mainstream disability inclusion in the urban missions, with a focus on fulfilling the targets of SDG 6 and SDG 11.
As part of the collaboration between UN-Habitat and UNRCO India, the partners organized a National Conclave on “Gender and Disability Inclusion in Indian Cities” from 28-30 April 2022 along with the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), the policy think tank of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). The 3-day Conclave was attended by UN agencies, Urban Local Body (ULB) officials, and representatives from Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), academia, policy and research institutions, and other urban practitioners and sector experts. At the panel discussions and sessions of the Conclave, the LNOB principle was a primary theme and each session focused on a different aspect of inclusion, including discussions on technology as an enabler, policy interventions, and case studies on localizing inclusion for urbanization. The LNOB project objectives and scope for interventions were also introduced to the participants at the Conclave to encourage stakeholder engagement in achieving the project components.

For several ongoing initiatives, different UN agencies actively working in India have been consulted for support. For instance, the content of the sessions of the Capacity Building Programme, conducted at the Conclave, was developed in consultation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) given their experiences in building ‘socially smart’ cities in India. Moreover, the team was initially supported by the UNRCO Communications division to develop a joint communications and social media strategy for outreach of the Conclave overall, as well as of the Smart Solutions Challenge and Inclusive Cities Awards launched at the event.

UN-Habitat India has also collaborated with research institutions and government agencies to pilot effective capacity-building and training initiatives. In collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare of the New Delhi government and the training partner, IIT Kharagpur, the team conducted pilot training programmes in December 2022 on “Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusion in Schools” in two schools in New Delhi for approximately 400 participants, including students, parents/caregivers, teachers, special educators, and school management authorities (UN-Habitat India, 2023a). For these programmes, training modules on enhancing accessibility in schools, and a Toolkit on “Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusion in Schools” for conducting accessibility audits and supporting training material have been developed, which are being converted into a self-paced online course that will be accessible on a learning platform and can be incorporated into school curricula (UN-Habitat, and IIT Kharagpur, 2023; UN-Habitat India, 2023b).

A two-day “Capacity Building Programme on ‘Gender and Disability Inclusion in Indian Cities’” was organized for urban local bodies officials and urban practitioners during the National Conclave in April 2022. The Programme included pre-training assessment of participants, simulation exercises, field visits, sharing of experiences, and interaction with user experts. To sustain the momentum of the capacity-building and training sessions conducted at the Programme, four city-based workshops were conducted across host cities in four regions (north, south, east and west) of India in July and August 2022. The city-based workshops introduced the following modules to the participants to cover diverse aspects of inclusion:

- Understanding Gender, Disability and Related Inclusions;
- Accessible, Inclusive and Safe Planning for Women and Girls, Elderly, and Persons with Disabilities;
- Tools and Techniques for Inclusive Urban Development;
- Institutionalizing Inclusive Urban Development within Cities;
- MoHUA’s Harmonised Guidelines and Standards For Universal Accessibility;
- Web Accessibility.

The workshops were conducted with key stakeholders from each region to sensitise and create awareness at the local level and delve into practical implementation of inclusion and accessibility aspects of urban development.

The ‘Smart Solutions Challenge and Inclusive Cities Award’ is a collaborative initiative of NIUA, UN in India, and UN-Habitat India, with technological support from UNOICT (NIUA, 2022). It was launched at the National Conclave by the UN Resident Coordinator, to address city-level accessibility and inclusion challenges in Indian cities. The initiative aimed to crowd-source innovative solutions for achieving SDG 11 and the LNOB principle of New Urban Agenda, thereby fostering a citizen-centric and participatory approach to solve the pressing issues of mainstreaming gender and disability inclusion into urban planning.

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2. Training modules can be found at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QgDxhYVc-q_ax0hme56Qjg2DhYFja

Smart Solutions Challenge and Inclusive Cities Award launched by the UN Resident Coordinator, India
The Challenge was designed to identify solutions which can be easily adapted or replicated by cities; generate potential ideas and prototypes; as well as acknowledge and recognize those innovative solutions that are being implemented within cities in India which address accessibility and inclusion needs of persons with disabilities. The solutions were required to address needs and concerns from either of the following five thematic areas: Policy and Governance; Disaster Risk Reduction; Mobility and Transportation; Health and Sanitation; and Disaggregated Data Management. Any individual, start-up, entrepreneur or organization with an innovative solution or idea around ICT, that addresses city-level challenges faced by persons with disabilities, women and children, and the elderly, could apply for the Challenge (ITH, 2023). The evaluation process was concluded in August 2022 and the winners were felicitated by the Honourable Minister of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, and the UN Resident Coordinator of India.

A series of knowledge products were also developed under different collaborations which include:

**Guide and Digital Toolkit on Inclusive, Accessible, Safe, and Resilient Urban Development**

The Guide was designed as an easy blueprint for urban practitioners to embed the principles of Universal Design and Inclusion in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating infrastructure projects. The Guide was digitized with support from UNOICT and a version of the digital toolkit document was also launched at the National Conclave.

The Smart Solutions Challenge and the above-mentioned knowledge products contribute towards achieving multiple LNOB project outputs as they support the engagement, sensitization, and capacity-building of key urban stakeholders, which is necessary for promoting inclusive urban development in India.

**Thematic Modules**

With support from national universities, two thematic modules were developed based on the concepts of inclusion and accessibility at the city level. The interactive e-learning courses will provide contextual understanding on the issues, needs, gaps, and opportunities of inclusion and accessibility, including global standards and specifications to be adopted, with practical applications and recommendations to render easy strategy implementation by practitioners. These will be uploaded for building the capacity of various stakeholders and urban practitioners.

**Policy Brief**

Along with the UNRCO and NIUA teams and a consultant organization, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, a policy brief on Gender and Disability Inclusion in Urban Development was developed to influence the decision-making processes of the central government towards inclusive urban development (Visakha, and others, 2022).
Sri Lanka

The Government of Sri Lanka has different legal Acts and Frameworks for data and built environment, and also for different sectors that include disability considerations. The policies and regulatory frameworks in Sri Lanka are comprehensive, particularly Article 12 of the Constitution, which reinforces the rights of persons with disabilities. Many acts and legislations have also been put forth to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, such as the Rehabilitation of the Visually Handicapped Trust Fund Act No. 9 of 1992, The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996, Rana Viru Seva Act No. 54 of 1999, Special Educator Society (incorporation) Act No. 3 of 1999, and regulations for accessibility included in the gazette.

However, in terms of facing challenges for disability inclusion and despite the legal and regulatory frameworks, the strict COVID-19 lockdowns in Sri Lanka resulted in limited coordination with relevant government stakeholders. Another important issue is the lack of adequate measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) frameworks that lead to outdated data. The lack of sensitization at the ground level, particularly in implementing the design and construction of the built environment impedes the mainstreaming of LNOB at various stages of public policy. The Government of Sri Lanka has been implementing various initiatives to mainstream LNOB which include conducting accessibility audits by the UN-Habitat team in the Nuwara-Eliya Municipality area, and organizing workshops for technical staff personnel and DPOs to facilitate universally-accessible built environments in the urban council area of Nuwara-Eliya. The Government is committed to advancing these initiatives to other cities in Sri Lanka to promote the principles of LNOB.

In the same context, the UN-Habitat Sri Lanka team collaborated with UNDP on effective stakeholder engagement and partnerships. The project team initiated dialogues with the local DPOs and conducted a series of consultations with national stakeholders. The DA-12 LNOB team in Sri Lanka worked on ground level initiatives, gaining technical expertise through the CITRA Lab which is the first social innovation lab that uses human-centred design and foresight tools to test development solutions.

The project team also conducted workshops to sensitize key government officials and held a series of trainings to develop the national road map for disability-inclusive development in the identified sectors. The road map was developed to revise the disability act, and identify policy gaps in mainstreaming LNOB as a key principle. Following the workshop, the Ministry for Social Welfare requested the incorporation of disability components in city planning initiatives. Workshops and accessibility audits were also conducted in Mathugama city. An expert committee was constituted by UN-Habitat Sri Lanka to develop disability advocacy videos, guidelines, audit reports, national disability auditing guides and checklists on disability auditing and universal designs, and national roadmap on disability inclusion. A design-thinking workshop for Nuwara Eliya was also conducted in March 2023 to improve accessibility in various sectors.

Upon discussions with government officials, including the State Ministry of Social Empowerment and National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities (NSPD), UN-Habitat Sri Lanka emerged as a key strategic partner in disability inclusion and in promoting inclusive development. In addition, the Prime Minister’s Office has also shown interest in working with UN-Habitat on LNOB initiatives and has also suggested establishing a Task Force for persons with disabilities. A request was also received from the Government of Sri Lanka to provide technical support to the reviewing committee on the national regulation on accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Since UN agencies and NGOs in Sri Lanka have grassroots level engagements and deep knowledge of local needs and priorities, they are able to include this knowledge in policymaking proposals, and thus have a wider representation of development agencies including donors in the council. However, technical assistance for projects implemented by government agencies is required with the need to involve stakeholders from multiple sectors, at all levels, including subnational and local governments, and should not be limited to only social services and health sectors. Multiple stakeholders must include urban planners, architects, engineers, educators, public administrators, industries and transport sectors. The UN-Habitat team in Sri Lanka is assisting with the validation workshop and training for government officials and stakeholders to strengthen mainstreaming of LNOB in national urban policies and programmes.
**Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, the city of Khulna was identified for the present project after detailed discussions with various stakeholders. Recently, a discussion with the Bangladesh University and the Institute of Planners was initiated to organize a national workshop. With support from the Urban Development Directorate (UDD), Ministry of Housing and Public Works, sensitization workshops, on universal accessibility in buildings and infrastructure for architecture and planning students in Dhaka and Khulna, have been planned. On the request of UDD, the project’s e-modules are being translated into the local Bangla language by UNOICT. UDD will also provide digital space to host the modules on their website.

A focused group discussion on policy assessment framework for the evaluation of infrastructure linked policies, namely The Housing Policy 2016, and Urban Readiness Guideline in Bangladesh 2021, has been planned. Senior sector experts will peer review the assessment framework, review select policies of the Government of Bangladesh, and publish the recommendations as a white paper. The white paper will also be made available on the UDD website.

The Bangladesh Business and Disability Network (BBBDN) has committed to conducting a universal accessibility audit of the National Housing Authority (NHA) building, and share recommendations with the NHA for consideration and execution. A sensitization and training workshop on the audit findings will be conducted for officials of the Urban Development Directorate (UDD) and NHA, who are the joint occupants of the building. A job fair for the disabled is also planned by BBDN. This initiative, where the skills required by the private sector are matched by people with disabilities, is being led by BBDN with support from UN Habitat, ILO and the private sector. A capacity-building workshop on universal accessibility for participating stakeholders shall be conducted on the side lines of the job fair. Subsequently, a CEOs meet to deliberate on the role of private sector, highlighting initiatives that support policies for the disabled will also be conducted. The CEOs meet is expected to conclude with the release of a white paper on initiatives of the private sector, and more specifically players of the ready-made garment industry for the disabled, which will provide a roadmap for the rest of the industry to follow.

In addition to addressing inclusivity within government policies and the private sector, it is considered important to develop tools for real-time implementation. In this regard, collaboration with the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) aims to localize transport linked national policies and tools, develop relevant toolkits and manuals in the context of Khulna city, create e-learning modules, and make policy recommendations and amendments to existing policy frameworks.

A national level seminar, acknowledging the partnership on World Town Planners’ Day, was conducted by BIP in November 2023. Attended by over 100 planners and professionals working on the field of planning, the event was graced by senior members of the government and BIP, including Mr. Md. Anisur Rahman Miah, BPAA, Chairman, Rajdhani Unnayan Kortripokkho (RAJUK); Mr. Kazi Wasi Uddin, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works; Mr. Md. Atiqul Islam, Honourable Mayor, Dhaka North City Corporation and Planner; Mohammad Fazle Reza Sumon, President, BIP; S. M. Meheri Ahsan, General Secretary, BIP; and Dr. Priyanka Kochhar, Technical Adviser, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UN-Habitat Bangladesh. Key presentations on the theme of ‘Learn Globally, Apply Locally’ also focused on the importance of leaving no one behind.
The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development presents a unique opportunity to build multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development to leverage cross-sectoral approaches to enhance their effectiveness and impact.

It is evident that the governments and the stakeholders involved in prioritizing, planning, implementing and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in South Asia require support with technical expertise and innovative tools to ensure that their cities become safe and disability inclusive. Based on this understanding and to provide technical support to government partners in the target countries, regional level interactive e-learning modules were developed by ESCAP to sensitize government partners, various stakeholders, and urban practitioners on mainstreaming LNOB and promoting disability-inclusive urban development in South Asian cities.

The aim of these e-learning modules was to educate and foster conversations around mainstreaming disability and ensuring that no one is left behind in the process of urban development. To ensure that LNOB is embedded in national urban policies and programmes as a key principle, together with a focus on SDG 6 and SDG 11 in the target countries, these modules aim to expand the discussion of disability rights and justice and mainstream LNOB with a lens of disability-inclusive urban development. The e-learning modules targeted a wide range of decision makers, urban practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders with a particular focus on embedding universal design and accessibility in the national urban policies and programmes, and mainstreaming LNOB as a key principle to ensure that cities are disability inclusive and safe for all. The content introduced accessibility and disability inclusion as an important urban issue for policymakers and grassroots advocates. These e-learning modules will be hosted at an online platform for easy access by various stakeholders working toward mainstreaming LNOB and disability-inclusive urban development.
The launch of a multi-level stakeholder network at the subregional level will help in strengthening partnerships at national and local levels, and will serve as a unified voice that will be self-organized, comprising of voluntary groups of persons with disabilities, their representative organizations, and representatives from UN agencies, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant civil society stakeholders who share a commitment toward implementing the principles of LNOB.

It is also important to ensure that the proposed multi-level stakeholder network at the subregional level is sustainable in nature and has effective inter-country engagements. The existing platforms, namely the New Urban Agenda (NUA) Platform, the Urban SDG Knowledge Platform, and the SDG Help Desk could be leveraged for sharing knowledge products, to the extent possible.

Developing such a multi-level stakeholder network will require measures that are tailored to different types of situations so that all urban actors, including service providers, communities, civil society organizations, and the private sector, can work in a coordinated and integrated way to mainstream LNOB in national urban policies and programmes. The disaggregation of data by disability status is significant for monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for informing policy formulation and evaluation.

A tenet of the LNOB project is strengthening partnerships at subregional, national, and local levels to localize the SDGs. Such partnerships can facilitate enriching best practice toolkits, technical documents on ensuring comparability of SDG data collection and analytical methods, and policy approaches. The pilot projects, in different cities across the partner countries, can provide tangible actions for cities that share similar characteristics in other countries. At the subregional level, the present project leveraged project partners, and other regional/subregional institutions, knowledge management partners to build a strong network of decision makers, and urban practitioners.

The institutional structures and the hierarchy of national/provincial and local levels share several common elements, which also contribute toward exchanging methods for effective governance frameworks that are performing well in the partner countries. National and international platforms, such as the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), the Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy, Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, World Urban Forum, the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development, and the South Asian City Summit will be utilized to create common understandings, forge relationships with other cities, make commitments to new approaches, and build partnerships as the foundation for future joint actions and networking among countries and cities. The participation of high-level delegates and decision makers at the regional forums will allow for formalized national government commitments towards the objectives of this project.
Among these global and regional forums for inter-country engagement, the following platforms are particularly significant for the proposed project:

**Urban SDG Knowledge Platform** was jointly established by ESCAP, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and CityNet, in 2017, to promote and support knowledge-sharing and city-to-city cooperation for sustainable urban development. It serves as a repository of case studies from the region which are labelled and linked to relevant SDGs to be replicated and scaled up in cities (United Nations Urban SDG Knowledge Platform, 2017).

**The New Urban Agenda (NUA) Platform** is the knowledge portal for gathering voluntary reports, best practices, and data, both quantitative and qualitative, for reviewing the progress made in implementing the New Urban Agenda to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The NUA Platform facilitates the sharing of experiences, best practices, and establishment of alliances for increased action in the coming decade (UN-Habitat, 2022).

**SDG Help Desk** is a platform that can also be leveraged for this project for knowledge management. The Help Desk is a one-stop online platform that serves as a gateway to a wide range of knowledge and analytical products, including SDG data portals, toolboxes, e-learning courses, multimedia resources, technical advice, and opportunities for peer-learning and South-South cooperation. ESCAP established the SDG Help Desk in response to requests for capacity development support from member States (ESCAP, ESCWA, and UNOICT, 2020).

To facilitate disability inclusion, an academy can be established to ensure that there is a core team to streamline and package learning modules at regional and national levels in South Asia. The present report reveals that there is significant scope for both cross-subregional and cross-country learnings concerning disability-inclusive urban development and SDG implementation. Experiences vary across subregions and countries, and sharing good practices could ensure effective and meaningful participation and knowledge-sharing amongst urban practitioners in South Asian countries.

### GOOD PRACTICES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the commencement of the project and during its implementation, there have been many lessons learned and good practices undertaken which need to be shared. As a result, the present project is able to contribute to future initiatives for cities interested in mainstreaming LNOB and disability-inclusive policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Another important aspect learned during the project was the need for some essential foundational tools needed for raising awareness, building legal frameworks, and mobilizing finance/resources before any recommendations can be applied.
This section provides a set of recommendations (both long term and short term) and proposes policy measures that can be followed by national/local governments and identified stakeholders. These recommendations are based on strategic policy interventions, deliberations with the government officials, urban practitioners, policymakers, DPOs, and from detailed assessments of good practices from target countries. To ensure a more resilient and disability-inclusive urban development, various learnings of the project (such as effective coordination across ministries and administrative levels and with the organizations of persons with disabilities) have been outlined below. This is crucial to ensure that disability inclusion and LNOB-related policies are coherent and are mainstreamed throughout urban management processes in the target countries. The common elements discussed in this section are also based on the study of precedents from other countries that mainstreamed LNOB in various stages of their urban policy cycle, and strengthened their measuring, reporting and verification systems in selected cities.

**Good Practices for Replication**

The section highlights the major outcomes and impacts achieved in the target countries on mainstreaming LNOB.

**BANGLADESH:**

A Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction roadmap was developed, on 23 October 2023, to promote resilient and inclusive buildings. Furthermore, there was collaboration with the Bangladesh Institute of Planners with the aim to develop knowledge products (for the city of Khulna), create e-learning modules, make policy recommendations and amendments to existing policy frameworks. These are a few good practices from Bangladesh which could be applied to other countries in South Asia.

**INDIA:**

Good practices include collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and Directorate of Education, Government of Delhi, and academic research institutions (like Indian Institute of Technology) to conduct training programmes, simulation exercises, and accessibility audits in schools as a pilot intervention for enhancing accessibility and inclusion in the infrastructure in schools across New Delhi. Other good practices include:

- Introducing the ‘Smart Solutions Challenge’ to invite innovative solutions from various urban practitioners and research institutions;
- Developing knowledge products on gender and disability inclusion, and promoting disability-inclusive urban development in Indian cities; and
- Developing the Guide and Digital Toolkit on Inclusive, Accessible, Safe, and Resilient Urban Development.

**NEPAL:**

Good practices include extensive engagement with all relevant stakeholders, such as the National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal (NFD-N), professional organizations (Society of Nepalese Architects), academia (Kathmandu University), DPOs, and members from the city-level Disability Council of Dhulikhel Municipality. Such multi-stakeholder participation could be extended to other cities, across the country to ensure ownership of ground-level initiatives, and effective participation in the formulation and implementation of inclusive policies and infrastructure development. The best practice of designing accessible public toilets, in Dhulikel, through collaboration with the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) has been made available for use by other cities across Nepal. In the Dhulikhel Municipality, best practices include the formation of the city-level Disability Council as an advisory body for the municipal executive, together with capacity-building, mobilizing technical and financial resources, increasing investments in accessible infrastructure, including municipal prioritization for livelihood upliftment of local communities for economic independence. These can be extended at the regional level for inclusive urban development.

**SRI LANKA:**

To ensure disability-inclusive urban development, the main priorities that need to be addressed are the lack of adequate monitoring, and specific measuring, reporting and verification frameworks that lead to outdated data. The following good practices were piloted in Sri Lanka to mainstream LNOB in urban policies:

- Conducting design-thinking workshops and workshops on inclusive tourism, sensitization of education, health, legal and transport officials on mainstreaming accessibility;
- Conducting extensive consultations with DPOs and persons with disabilities and conducting accessibility audits in the Nuwara-Eliya Municipality Council area, in October 2022; and
- Engaging persons with disabilities as resource persons for workshops and development of the roadmap to ensure their meaningful and effective participation.
Foundational Support for Mainstreaming LNOB

To operationalize the recommendations, there are several key areas that will require an enabling environment, foundational support and planning. Creating disability-responsive urban solutions requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses awareness raising/advocacy, legal frameworks, and municipal financing. Following are some strategies and considerations for each aspect:

1. Awareness Raising/Advocacy:
   a. Education and Sensitization Programmes:
      • Implement awareness campaigns to educate the public about the challenges faced by people with disabilities.
      • Conduct training sessions for municipal employees and service providers on disability awareness and inclusion.
   b. Community Engagement:
      • Foster partnerships with disability advocacy groups and organizations to involve the community in all decision-making processes.
      • Organize events, workshops, and forums to facilitate dialogue between people with disabilities, policymakers, and the community.
   c. Media Outreach:
      • Engage with media outlets to promote positive narratives and stories about people with disabilities.
      • Ensure that public information and communication materials are accessible to individuals with various disabilities.

2. Address the disproportionate rate of poverty of persons with disabilities.
   Concerted measures are required to develop and implement comprehensive poverty reduction policies and measures for persons with disabilities, taking into consideration the multiple dimensions of poverty and social protection measures.

3. Provide persons with disabilities, of all ages, with educational and economic opportunities.
   As the region endures changing demographic structures and a contracting working-age population, concerted efforts to increase the economic participation of persons with disabilities could augment gross domestic product.

4. Ensure that a strong national coordination mechanism is in place.
   This will promote good governance, multi-ministerial cooperation and enhanced capacity to facilitate disability-inclusive urban and socioeconomic development.

Key Policy Recommendations

Based on the good practices highlighted in previous sections, policy recommendations have been outlined below for mainstreaming LNOB and promoting disability-inclusive urban development in target countries in South Asia. The experiences and policy analysis shared in this report reiterates the need for regional initiatives, for implementing SDG 6 and SDG 11, to be strengthened further as these could significantly contribute to reinforcing SDG implementation efforts at the national and local level. Governments in South Asia may consider the following recommendations to target barriers that inhibit the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the development process:

- Commit to disability-inclusive urban development and SDG implementation at national and local levels.
  These could include aligning implementation plans for the SDGs and establishing a mechanism for the engagement of representative organizations of persons with disabilities to participate in policymaking, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This may include ensuring universal accessibility in built environments, housing, public buildings, recreational spaces and basic urban services, such as sanitation, water, health, education, transportation, emergency and disaster response, resilience-building and ensuring access to service, information and communications.

- Address the disproportionate rate of poverty of persons with disabilities.
  Concerted measures are required to develop and implement comprehensive poverty reduction policies and measures for persons with disabilities, taking into consideration the multiple dimensions of poverty and social protection measures.

- Provide persons with disabilities, of all ages, with educational and economic opportunities.
  As the region endures changing demographic structures and a contracting working-age population, concerted efforts to increase the economic participation of persons with disabilities could augment gross domestic product.

- Ensure that a strong national coordination mechanism is in place.
  This will promote good governance, multi-ministerial cooperation and enhanced capacity to facilitate disability-inclusive urban and socioeconomic development.

- Enable the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the political process and in decision-making processes.
  Policy measures to increase the meaningful representation of persons with disabilities in parliaments, political parties, national gender equality mechanisms, decision-making processes and governance at all levels are needed. There is a need in the region to generate consensus on the definitions and methods of collecting disability statistics, and thereby enhance the reliability and comparability of such data. This would be crucial data to design, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of disability-related policies and programmes.

- Develop a multi-stakeholder approach to review the progress of SDG 6 and SDG 11.
  Multi-stakeholder engagement, including from the government, DPOs, international organization and development agencies, is required to leverage the expertise and insights of each sector to facilitate barrier free and disability-inclusive urban development in the South Asian region.

Foundational Support for Mainstreaming LNOB

To operationalize the recommendations, there are several key areas that will require an enabling environment, foundational support and planning. Creating disability-responsive urban solutions requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses awareness raising/advocacy, legal frameworks, and municipal financing. Following are some strategies and considerations for each aspect:

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   b. Community Engagement:
      • Foster partnerships with disability advocacy groups and organizations to involve the community in all decision-making processes.
      • Organize events, workshops, and forums to facilitate dialogue between people with disabilities, policymakers, and the community.
   c. Media Outreach:
      • Engage with media outlets to promote positive narratives and stories about people with disabilities.
      • Ensure that public information and communication materials are accessible to individuals with various disabilities.
2. Legal Frameworks:
a. Inclusive Urban Planning Policies:
   • Advocate for the integration of universal design principles in urban planning policies.
   • Ensure that zoning regulations and building codes prioritize accessibility.
b. Anti-Discrimination Laws:
   • Strengthen and enforce anti-discrimination laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities.
   • Provide legal recourse for individuals facing discrimination in housing, employment, and public services.
c. Accessibility Standards:
   • Develop and enforce accessibility standards for public spaces, transportation, and communication.
   • Regularly update these standards to align with advancements in technology and best practices.
d. Inclusive Employment Policies:
   • Encourage the adoption of inclusive employment policies within municipal government and private businesses.
   • Offer incentives for companies that hire individuals with disabilities.

3. Municipal Financing:
a. Inclusive Budgeting:
   • Advocate for inclusive-budgeting practices that allocate specific funds for disability-responsive infrastructure and services.
   • Prioritize projects that enhance accessibility, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible public transportation.
b. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):
   • Encourage partnerships with private businesses to fund and implement disability-inclusive projects.
   • Offer incentives to businesses that invest in accessible facilities and services.
c. Accessible Infrastructure Grants:
   • Establish grant programmes to support businesses and municipal projects that focus on creating accessible infrastructure.
d. Tax Incentives:
   • Provide tax incentives to businesses that implement accessibility measures, fostering a more inclusive urban environment.

The current socioeconomic crisis is the immediate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in the South Asian region as many countries in the region have fallen into recession. Though the pandemic is a global phenomenon, the region has faced an intense impact due to low coverage of social protection. Countries in South Asia are also witnessing challenges in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level, and ensuring disaggregated and inclusive implementation. However, other countries, like India and Bangladesh, have taken initiatives to implement and monitor the SDGs at subnational (state, district, local) levels. In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and in the process of building back better, governments must mainstream disability inclusion into pandemic responses to ensure that the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities are safeguarded. It is critical that at all levels of planning, implementation and impact assessment, programmes must ensure full and effective participation of persons with disabilities. The countries in the region must also invest in data collection methods and administrative and financial data must be disaggregated to ensure accountability.

In conclusion, at the regional, national and local levels, there is a need to develop collaborative initiatives that focus on information generation, exchange of ideas, technology and knowledge transfer, developing partnerships, and transferring good practices. Further, there is an opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas and collaboration across the South Asian subregion. There is also a need to draw synergies and leverage regional and subregional initiatives for more active support towards the implementation of the SDGs. The work of various relevant platforms (such as Urban SDG Knowledge Platform, The NUA Platform and the SDG Helpdesk) must be linked to help South Asian countries attain the SDGs. As target countries in South Asia strive to raise the efficacy of their SDG implementation efforts, it was found that national and local governments have much to learn from each other concerning SDG adoption and implementation, mobilization of funds through innovative tools, effective monitoring of progress and generation of data.
I. BACKGROUND
1. The Asia-Pacific region is home to an estimated 750 million persons with disabilities who face numerous barriers, such as access to inclusive education, employment, social protection, inclusive transportation, and political participation to ensure their full participation in society (Alisjahbana, 2021). These challenges directly affect their well-being, autonomy and dignity. Planning and design solutions become significant when addressing the challenges posed by urbanization to ensure safe and inclusive cities in South Asia. There is a need to consider how to plan the urban environment using universal design principles to develop safe cities for vulnerable and marginalized groups and promote their full and active involvement in social life. From the viewpoint of LNOB, South Asian governments are required to develop, incorporate and implement disability-inclusive urban policy and planning. In this context, ESCAP, UN-Habitat and UNOICT supported the implementation of the 12th tranche development account project “Mainstreaming Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) in National Urban Policies and Programmes (SDGs 11 and 6) in South Asia”. The policymakers in South Asia require support with technical expertise and innovative policy tools to ensure that their cities become safe and disability inclusive. The tenet of the project included strengthening partnerships at the regional, national, and local levels to localize the SDGs through the establishment of a Multi-level Stakeholder Network supporting LNOB. It was noted that a multi-stakeholder approach is required for reviewing disability-inclusive urban development in South Asian countries that includes government, civil society, international organizations and development agencies to leverage the expertise and insights of each sector.
2. The present terms of reference shall commence in November 2023.

II. PURPOSE
3. The main purpose of the Multi-level Stakeholder Network would be to coordinate and synergize local, national and regional efforts to promote collaboration and networking among the South Asian countries to plan, implement, monitor, assess and report on disability-inclusive urban development. In addition, the network would also foster a mutual exchange of best practices, knowledge and innovation by local and national governments.
4. The Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall act as a platform, providing ideas, tools, reliable data and information, analysis, and policy guidance on disability-inclusive urban development, and facilitate capacity-building mechanisms in South Asian countries to mainstream LNOB in national urban policies and programmes. Additionally, the Network will also focus on supporting the progress of South Asian countries towards achieving timely implementation of SDGs 6 and 11.

III. COMPOSITION
5. UN-Habitat will serve as the secretariat of the Multi-level Stakeholder Network and will coordinate with all the members to ensure the smooth functioning of the Network. UN-Habitat will maintain an effective secretariat to support the functioning and reporting of the Network. The secretariat will help the Multi-level Stakeholder Network to appoint its leadership, which may comprises up to two Co-chairs from amongst its membership.
6. This regional Multi-level Stakeholder Network will act as a united voice which will be self-organized, comprising of voluntary groups of persons with disabilities, their representative organizations, and representatives from UN agencies, government agencies (officials in the rank of Secretary or Joint Secretary) in the target South Asian countries, non-governmental organizations, and other relevant civil society stakeholders who share a commitment toward ensuring the implementation of the principles of LNOB. It is proposed that involving government departments and ministries, dealing with issues related to urban development, disability, social protection and social justice in respective countries, must be prioritized.
7. Each member organization of the Network will be represented by one focal point and one alternate. All focal points will actively participate in sharing information on LNOB initiatives, and will be responsible for technical support and coordination on such initiatives within their organization under the leadership of their senior management. The membership shall reflect the target countries from South Asia in a balanced manner.
8. It is also proposed that an Executive Committee be constituted which will approve membership to the network, provide overall guidance for the work of the Network, support in setting strategic priorities to support effective implementation, follow-up and review of the functions of the network. The membership to the Committee may include representatives from various ministries of the central government, local governments and other interested stakeholders in the targeted countries to incorporate their perspectives and facilitate collaboration among national and regional stakeholders for effective project and programme implementation. Executive Committee members will be jointly responsible for the Multi-level Stakeholder Network to attain its objectives and adhere to its working principles. The Committee could provide, as deemed appropriate, technical and/or human resources to the Network’s Secretariat.

9. The membership may also include distinguished experts in the field, representatives from development partners (global, regional, subregional or bilateral) with mandates to support the implementation of principles of LNOB in national urban policies and programmes.

IV. FUNCTIONS

The Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall be on voluntarily basis and will have the following functions:

- Continuously provide strategic direction and technical assistance to countries in South Asia for mainstreaming LNOB initiatives in National Urban Policies and Programmes;
- Develop and facilitate joint capacity-building sessions, events and webinars for different actors across the region to advance the mainstreaming of LNOB and promote disability-inclusive urban development;
- The Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall be flexible to work at local, national and regional levels.
- Help in strengthening partnerships at the regional, national and local levels to localize mainly SDG 6 and SDG 11, and mainstream LNOB in National Urban Policies and Programmes in South Asia;
- To streamline synergies and avoid duplication of efforts, the Network shall explore areas of collaboration with other existing coordination mechanisms within the United Nations which are addressing disability-inclusion related issues;
- Monitor and periodically evaluate the progress of policy interventions and implementation to propose suitable adjustments as required;
- For specific tasks, the Multi-level Stakeholder Network may invite the participation of other experts; and
- The Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall aim to meet once every quarter. The agenda for the meeting will be shared at least two weeks in advance by the secretariat. If required, any additional ad-hoc thematic meetings may be called, or requested by any member, when needed. The notes of each meeting will be distributed among all members and filed in the records of the network.

V. LEADERSHIP AND REPORTING

10. The Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall submit a written report for the information of members at each of its formal quarterly meetings on progress of the objectives of the network.

11. The Co-chairs shall serve for a period of two years after which they will be eligible for reappointment. The Co-chairs will be working on rotation basis to ensure that every participating country within the network shall get equal chance in the leadership roles.

12. The Network, in its own working methods and while engaging others, will operate in an inclusive, systematic and transparent manner ensuring meaningful participation and adequate representation of persons with disabilities in the leadership roles within the network.

13. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Multi-level Stakeholder Network and to ensure that the network remains relevant to emerging needs, the mechanism of the Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall be reviewed by its members every two years and shall determine its relevance and operations.

14. The Multi-level Stakeholder Network shall expire on 31 December 2030.
REFERENCES


