

ORGANISED BY _____



Capacity Building Workshop On Experiential Learning: Barrier-free Built Environments



_____ TECHNICAL PARTNERS _____



Introduction

Accessibility has been a topic of serious discussion since the beginning of the 21st century. Many schemes, policies, programs, etc. have been brought in to ensure this at national as well as state levels. Yet, the question of accessibility remains, and that poses a serious question on the efficacy of thus formed policies and programs. It is thus evident that there is a gap in the policies and their realization at the grassroots level. Example of these is the improper laying of braille tiles on the walkway (Photo 1 and Photo 2), improper construction of accessibility slopes in the buildings (Photo 3), etc. Often these are done merely to fulfill building mandates rather than meeting its real purpose. There is a gap in the trickling down of information from one level to another, especially to the grassroots level. Capacity building of all the associated stakeholders is one solution that could be brought in to bridge this gap and that should begin with the policymakers associated.



Improperly laid tactile tiles (Indoor)



Improperly laid tactile tiles (Outdoor)

Organization Overview

ESAF Foundation is a not-for-profit organization formed as a response to the various development gaps in society. Driven by the vision to build a just and fair society, our interventions are based on an integrated development model focusing on creating livelihood opportunities for the underprivileged. Since its inception in 1992, ESAF has birthed 18 entities that are transforming the lives of the poor and the marginalised across the country. Our interventions are aimed at creating livelihood opportunities for the target group. ESAF has impacted more than 3.5 million lives through its different social entities. We also partner with government agencies, community bodies, national and international NGOs and leading corporate houses to deliver lasting change to the poor and marginalised, especially women and children.

The Livable Cities Project implemented with the technical support of the HealthBridge Foundation of Canada, acts as a platform to address the accessibility issues of public spaces and beaches in India. Over these years, we were able to successfully liaise with the government to include specific features that would make it easier for people living with disabilities, women, senior citizens, and families to use and access open public spaces.

A capacity-building program for policymakers was determined to be urgently needed to raise awareness of the significance of establishing accessible open public spaces and beaches. Consequently, the ESAF Foundation conducted a capacity-building workshop for policymakers titled "Experiential Learning: Barrier-Free Built Environments" in collaboration with the Barrier Free Consultancy Cell (BFCC), NeoMotion, De-Care, and Pallium India.

Workshop Brief

The ESAF Foundation jointly with the Barrier Free Consultancy Cell (BFCC) of Social Justice Department Kerala, the De-Care, the HealthBridge Foundation of Canada, the NeoMotion and the Pallium India, hosted a capacity building workshop for the policymakers on December 14th, 2023 at the J. C. Alexander Hall of Architecture and Planning Department of College of Engineering Trivandrum (CET). The workshop was attended by various dignitaries including; Medayil Vikraman (Public Works Standing Committee Chairman, Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation), representatives from the National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH), Vocational Rehabilitation Center (VRC), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Social Justice Department Kerala, architects, urban planners, architecture students and social workers etc.



Medayil Vikraman (Public Works Standing Committee Chairman, Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation) felicitating the gathering

While framing any policy it is important to hear from an experienced person, people who have lived or lived through the said circumstances are capable of shedding light through their lived experiences. The session started with the experience sharing of dignitaries which included; Mr. Pushapakumar R. Pai, Ms. Nincy Modly and Mr. Nishan Nizar, three vibrant personalities who advocate for barrier-free environment for themselves as well as for people who are on wheelchairs or depend on other mobility aids. Pushapakumar R. Pai, a wheelchair-bound activist who shared his struggles to make it to school as a child. The public infrastructures where the footfall is high (including municipal corporations, banks, bus stands, parks and beaches, bus waiting sheds, railway stations, shopping malls, schools, colleges, etc.) must be fully accessible than public infrastructures with less footfall (such as Parliament, State Legislature, etc.).



Pushapakumar R. Pai, an activist, talks about his experiences navigating through inaccessible public facilities

Nincy Modly, a psychologist working as a visiting art therapist for children in Pallium India, shared her experiences as a person living in a barrier-free house that is built to meet her needs, which helps her to move anywhere around her house, but living in a barrier-filled environment outside her compound. Out of love and compassion for our loved ones, we try to make our houses as accessible as possible. But when it comes to making our public facilities accessible, we do not show that concern for people living with disabilities. People with disabilities should be able to access all public facilities without any difficulty, the same is applicable in matters relating to reaching from one point (source) to the other (destination). They should be able to travel between spaces irrespective of their physical abilities through roads and through other modes of travel.



Nincy Modly, Psychologist and Visiting art therapist for children at Pallium India sharing her experiences at the workshop

Nishan Nizar, a model (Mr. Wheelchair India finalist) and a travel enthusiast, added that the Indian Railways has provided compartments and coaches in trains specially designed for people living with disabilities. However, the question remains: given the disparities in elevation between the platform and the cabin, how can an individual with a disability board the train? They travel with the hope that someone will help them out while boarding and deboarding the train. That hope, however, won't materialise unless and until long-term fixes are put in place at train stations and to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, can access them.



Nishan Nizar, traveller, model, and sales executive at NeoMotion, shares his experiences and how he dealt with the barriers in his environment.

It is not that the society is devoid of empathy or compassion, it is just that they are unaware of the array of possibilities that could be brought in. A capacity-building workshop with policymakers would help in bringing infrastructure changes to all public facilities, with an emphasis on accessibility. With this in mind, the ESAF Foundation hosted this workshop in Trivandrum, providing a forum for individuals with disabilities (PwDs) to present their ideas to legislators and government representatives to enhance the accessibility of public spaces, beaches, streets, and other facilities. The workshop on Experiential Learning: Barrier-free Built Environments covered these sessions;

Sensitising the participants & Policymakers

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Dr. Shailaja Nair, Consultant for Barrier Free Consultancy Cell (BFCC) heading the session

Experiential Learning

Using assistive devices, participants take part in useful tasks. This hands-on learning opportunity provided an awareness of the various ways in which assistive devices improve accessibility as well as the challenges associated with utilising them in public spaces, pedestrian facilities, and in beaches. Government representatives and legislators gained important understanding from the practical tasks regarding the necessity of putting universal design principles into practice when developing public space projects.



Participants using mobility aids on a slope during the experiential learning session

Technical Session

The technical aspects of designing barrier-free settings were covered in this session. Legal requirements for accessibility, infrastructure design, and architectural issues were among the subjects covered. Participants have gained thorough understanding of how to support the execution of projects aimed at developing inclusive public spaces and pedestrian facilities in streets.



Lakshmi S R, Associate Professor
(Department of Architecture and Planning,
CET) heading the technical session

Best Practices

Participants engage in a discourse regarding current accessibility provisions through interactive discussions. Case studies from international best practices were analysed to find prevalent errors and highlight best practices. This session encouraged a collaborative approach to address challenges and implement best practices in Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation areas.



Dr. Priyanjali (Head of Architecture and Planning Department and Principal Investigator for BFCC, College of Engineering Trivandrum) heading the session on Best Practices.

Recommendations & Suggestions

- Implement accessible infrastructure in parks, open spaces, and beaches in Trivandrum to make it accessible for People living with Disabilities (PwDs). Also, provide facilities such as; beach wheelchairs, amphibious wheelchairs, open gyms, inclusive children's park, beach walkers, accessible beach walkways, unisex accessible toilets, tactile walkways etc. in the beaches.



- Organise zonal-level consultations with the community members, NGO's, empanelled architect firms, urban planners, and the landscaping architects to ensure proper identification of gaps in the project design before implementing any public space development projects.
- Organise capacity-building training for policymakers, elected representatives, and other stakeholders involved in the development of accessible street and public space infrastructure.
- Ensure accessibility vetting of project design before implementation rather than going for retrofitting.
- Include individuals with disabilities (PwD's) in the design consultations for developing accessible project designs.





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