



Learn to make your city sustainable by being inclusive



No city today can be called sustainable merely on account of its tree cover or pure river water. The fruit wala, the kabari wala, the chaat wala, the press wala, the cobbler-many of these people are increasingly being forgotten in the definition of sustainable cities. We forget that an urban ecosystem has trees and ponds, clean air and birds, but also, people and the infrastructure they need. People in the public space make it safer. They are also key to running our city, with the fewest resources. Many live in sub-standard settlements, without enough water, electricity, mobility. Therefore, equity is also an important aspect of sustainability. Existing inequities and institutional inadequacies make it hard for individual and community actions to make a significant difference to the overall picture. Yet, Chintan optimistically presents this action sheet for the middle classes to act on.

- Walk around the neighbourhood in which you live and where you work. Keep your eyes opened. Look out for the food vendors, the dhobis, the mochis, the tailors in the corners, the kabari shop and maybe the mobile repair person. Expand this list.
- You don't have to go simpering apologetically to them and befriend them. But what you can do is to ask your colony RWA or any association involved in local matters, to find ways of acknowledging them. It could be via I-Cards, via putting them all down in a directory that is shared with everyone or merely ensuring their work spaces are more comfortable and humane.
- Make sure you enable at least some folks in the neighbourhood to share your interest. Ask if local youth will do a project on their stories, their lives. Build up empathy.
- Identify how many need space to leave their things overnight. For example, someone who repairs cycle-tyres and punctures cannot carry all their equipment home every evening. Find a place and create a protocol to store it. Avoid offering only your own home for this otherwise you will be the sole supporter-not a good idea for long lasting sustainability. Try to use the RWA office, or multiple people's homes and offices.
- Ensure such people have clean water and even tea. Even if it means installing something, or even, making it available at a few offices and homes. Better still, allow and help the chai wala to operate. If needed, give him or her reusable cups instead of their using plastic.
- Is there a toilet for these folks?
- Are they sitting in a comfortable place or just under a piece of plastic in the blazing sun? If it rains, what are their options?
- Can they advertise their services? For example, can a mochi put up a sign with his cell and timings?
- What happens when they get ill? Can people pool in for medical insurance? For other health facilities? For medicines?



- How do they save? Does the finance brain in your office have an idea? Do they have basic bank accounts?
- Can people start sharing their used but highly usable things with them? Such as handbags, chairs, water bottles?
- Where do they charge their cell phones?
- What help do their children need? Can you be part of this?

