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Every child likes to cover their hands with ink and draw. But the young children from OUAT Farmgate basti here in the city on Sunday attempted to exemplify the “social maps” of their slum to showcase the requirements of their locality. Around 45 children from the slum made a series of maps to demonstrate the needs and demands of their locality.

These children are part of the Humara Bachpan Child Clubs, which is helping them with these maps. The campaign calls for a civic revolutionary movement of making handmade maps of the slum which will help to portray the essential stipulations asked by the children. This is a part of the child-led planning (CLP) process which is a marked attempt to empower the young children of the slum by voicing their rights to live in a much healthier and safer environment.

With the issues of the slum running high; the children from the child club conducted an event at their basti inviting government representatives and presented them the maps along with their respective demands.

They presented their maps to mayor of Bhubaneswar Ananta Narayan Jena and deputy mayor K. Shanti in the presence of Dharitri Patnaik, Michael Figelson, Steven Kaempfer,

representatives of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, a Dutch philanthropy and other members from the community.

“I will make sure that the children’s matter is taken into cognisance. And I will support Humara Bachpan and the child leaders to give all the necessities that they are seeking to get,” Mr Jena said.

After a week of enervating collection of data and information and their careful analysis of the issues found in their basti; the child leaders were successful to create a roadmap in the form of a “dream map” to denote the demands and rudimentary requirements of the slum.

“We want individual toilets in our houses. As there is a lack of toilet facilities we children have to defecate in the nearby open field. I usually have to control my urge to defecate in the open during the morning hours as there are people around and I feel ashamed to do it. I have to wait till it gets dark. Also, there is a big lock outside the community toilet. So, I can’t use that also.” Said Narayan, a 13 year old child leader from the slum.

“I want our basti to have a playground. As we do not have one; we usually play on the road. Because of this it poses as a hazard to our life. Also, we want our drains to be covered. They are open and give out foul stench which is unhealthy for us to inhale. While children falling into these open drains is rampant in our basti. I want the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation to cover the drains at the earliest.” Recalls Sradhanjali, a 14 year old Humara Bachpan child leader.

Children like Narayan and Srandhanjali who come from very economically marginalised households, cannot expect but wait for a miracle to happen to change their harsh and adverse living conditions.

“It is a miraculous change to see children planning their own neighbourhood and attempt to bring about policy level changes as well. Smart cities should not only be technologically advanced but must imbibe the aspirations of the children in order to make cities more “child friendly” said Preeti Prada, national head of the Humara Bachpan Campaign.

“Most of the time children are never considered as citizens. They’re considered as future citizens only. This will be a surrogate development proposal to help raise the voices of these children who are advocating to bring added changes in their bastis,” Dharitri Patnaik, India Representative of Bernard van Leer Foundation explains.

Link: <http://www.asianage.com/slum-children-present-map-bhubaneswar-mayor-ananta-narayan-jena-development-their-locality-834>

*As appeared on The Asian Age/25.Feb.2015/National/HBC