

Children in India Are Literally Drawing Themselves Better Neighbourhoods.

By [Nicole Dieker](#)

February 24, 2015

Remember how Thomas and crew literally [mapped](#) their way out of the labyrinth in *Maze Runner*? This story is like that, only real and with less people getting stung by grievous: children who live in India's slum neighborhoods are getting the opportunity to map out areas that need amenities or improvements, and in the process are re-drawing their future-SLASH-making us wonder how much money our own governments are spending on [bizarre public art](#) (ALL HAIL THE MATCHSTICK OVERLORDS) when they could be making streets safer by investing in street lights, bike lanes, road improvements and all that jazz.

Here's how the program works, according to [CityLab](#):

Teams of young mappers and adult facilitators spend roughly 45 days traversing their slums. They learn the shape of their neighborhood, how streets interconnect (or don't), and the the density of homes there. This information becomes the map's skeleton. Then, they fill in the specifics. They stake out what's needed through the eyes of children—where underserved public areas could become play spaces, where trash bins could be added in an area they regularly see littered with filth. Their ideal neighborhood is drawn and detailed onto the map. Then, after it's complete, leaders from the child clubs present their work to local officials.



CityLab notes that 25 percent of urban residents in India live in slums, so about 65 million people. These people need safe streets, and part of that safety requires adding outdoor lighting, creating new trash disposal areas, and building public toilets. [Humara Bachpan](#), the

organization behind this city mapping project, knows that kids often know exactly which parts of their neighborhood are unsafe and where it can be improved, and hope that by involving children in city planning now, they are inspiring a generation of future city leaders. (CHILDREN ARE OUR LEADERS! It is just like [The Lord of the Flies](#), only the opposite.)

"Humara Bachpan" translates as "our childhood"—[Citiscopes](#) went on a bit of a tour with the organization:

Manju Goel, a field worker with Humara Bachpan, says it is still early days but there are promising signs. The child leaders have mapped their neighborhoods. Every utility that is non-functioning or needs to be mended is marked on the map with a cross. The final blueprint will be shared with local municipal councilors, urban planners and policymakers.

Citiscopes says there have already been improvements thanks to the program, including 30 new street lights in one slum area and trash receptacles made out of cardboard boxes to keep litter out of classrooms.

If your only impression of India's slums comes from *Slumdog Millionaire*, take a minute to learn more about Humara Bachpan and the work these children are doing. It's a great story—and a great way to get children involved in improving their own communities.

*IS THIS THE COOLEST THING? DO WE HAVE ANY URBAN PLANNING BUFFS OUT THERE?
(JANE JACOBS 4EVA)*

[via [The Atlantic/CityLab](#)]

<http://community.sparknotes.com/2015/02/24/children-in-india-are-literally-drawing-themselves-better-neighborhoods>