

Safe Road for a Safe Childhood: A Case Study in Surat

Saatwadi, a local community in Surat, where poverty is prevalent, sanitary practices and status fails to meet a 'livable' standard, the people have another problem to worry about – accidents. The community is built on the sides of a major, busy street which means community members are forced to cross the street for their daily needs and interactions.

This puts them at risk of coming before on-going traffic with no proper indication of fast moving vehicles. Since the older members are facing the problem, imagine the plight of the kids! Being fun-loving and carefree and also growing up in an area that lacks place to accommodate games of cricket and 'tapori', the children are forced to use the only big enough place they know that can fit them all – the streets.

Because the road gets speeding vehicles and bustling traffic, there have been numerous accidents in the past, some not so serious but others life threatening; which have in turn caused the children to stop using the street as a playground. But the fact still remains that the kids and the rest of the community are in danger the minute they have to cross to the other side of the street.

Fed up of living in constant fear, the children from the HBC child club decided to take a step forward in making their neighborhood a little safer. They wrote a letter, addressing it to the Zonal Officer, on 10th August. In that letter they requested for a construction of a speed breaker on the part of the road that passes through the community, so that fast moving vehicles would be forced to slow down and in turn, pedestrians can be more aware of oncoming vehicles which crossing the street. The letter was signed and sealed by 50 members of the community, who all ranged from children, parents to other elders. The efforts of the children to mobilize the community and get their attention was much appreciated by the community leaders. Since then, they have also been more welcoming than ever towards our HBC staff and are more willing to co-operate.

A call on 15th September, from one of the community member's told us that some officials from the SMC had come to take measurements of the road in the area for the building of the speed breaker. Even though this was just a sign of what is yet to come, it has conjured up the hope and courage to seek change.