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PREFACE

The Centre for Public Impact (CPI), a global not-for-profit organisation founded by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), supports governments, civil society, and public sector organisations to redesign systems, work, and cultures. By helping them embrace complexity, value relationships, and prioritise learning, we are shaping a new future of government, reimagined so that it works for everyone. CPI's Climate Action Team designs and manages programmes that accelerate climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in cities.

In Bengaluru, CPI collaborated with Integrated Design (Indé) to understand how people from different social groups experience climate stress caused by heat, drought, and flooding. Indé, in turn, partnered with the Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA) to engage urban poor communities living in low-resource areas. This collaboration brought together complementary strengths:

- 1. **CPI**: Experience in inclusive public policy and participatory systems change.
- 2. Indé: Deep expertise in climate-responsive urban planning and design.
- 3. APSA: Decades of trust-based engagement with marginalised communities in Bengaluru.

Together, we explored bottom-up, climate-responsive planning approaches rooted in lived experience.

This addressed a critical gap: while climate impacts, such as heatwaves, erratic rainfall, and water pollution, are increasingly visible, the language used to describe them often feels disconnected from everyday life, especially for those most affected.

Earlier conversations with communities and civil society underscored the need to 'decode' climate science, making it more relatable, locally grounded, and action-oriented. What began as a pilot in select localities expanded to engage a broader range of stakeholders, including civil society groups, community leaders, governments, researchers, and residents from diverse income levels.

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abatement

carbon footprint level rise

carbon sequestration biodiversity net gair

air quality management areas retrofittir

renewable energy Dack LOOP deforestation

coral bleaching

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At its core, the Decoding Climate Science project is guided by a simple belief: climate change is about people, and climate science must reflect the diverse lived realities of those most affected.

This toolkit supports that goal by using everyday language to describe climate stress in ways that resonate locally, helping demystify the science and encourage awareness and action. The vocabularies and reflections gathered here reveal public perceptions of climate change. They reveal fears, knowledge gaps, and insights that can shape more grounded, relatable messaging for policy, planning, and community engagement.

Crucially, these stories highlight the intersectional nature of climate vulnerability. Conversations, particularly with marginalised groups, showed how caste, class, gender, religion, disability, occupation, location, and sexuality affect people's exposure to climate risk and how rapid, unregulated urban growth worsens this inequality.

Tackling climate change requires confronting social structures that exacerbate vulnerability. This toolkit is a small but meaningful step toward building climate literacy as a foundation for more just, inclusive, and sustainable climate action.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all the researchers, participants, and collaborators who made this work possible. We are especially grateful to the Indé team – Dr Anjali Mohan, Sharanya Sreedhar, and Justin Andrews – and to the APSA team – Manjula N, I.S. Patil, Anitha Prakashrao, Suresha Kantha Bokara, and Neeth L D'Souza – for their invaluable role in organising and conducting fieldwork. We thank the participants from colleges, select localities in Bengaluru City, and public parks who generously shared their time and insights, which were vital to the development of this toolkit.

We also acknowledge the CPI team: Akshay Agarwal, Anognya Parthasarathy, Carmella Grace De Guzman, Dhiviya David, Neha Margosa, Dr Shreya Jha, and Yoshita Srivastava, whose expertise and commitment helped shape this work. Finally, we thank Carina Gormley, Gabrielle Beran, and Josh Sorin from CPI's Climate Action Team for their guidance and input throughout this project. We are also grateful to designer Harini Aiana, whose illustrations beautifully reflect the community spirit and human-centred nature of this work.



INTRODUCTION

WHY DOES THIS TOOLKIT MATTER?

Cities are hotspots of climate change. In India, rising temperatures, flooding, and water stress are unfolding alongside long-standing urban challenges, including inadequate services, environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s 2022 report states that climate change doesn't occur in isolation; it amplifies existing vulnerabilities.

Although awareness is growing, many people still lack the language and tools to recognise climate impacts in their daily lives. Climate science can be technical, making it difficult for people to see the connection between their personal experiences (such as water shortages, air pollution, and unsafe heat) and the broader climate system.



Growing urbanisation and climate change create complex risks, especially for those cities that already experience poorly planned urban growth, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and a lack of basic services."



This disconnect makes it more challenging for communities to take action and for governments to design effective, inclusive responses.

Decoding Climate Science (DCS) was developed to bridge this gap. A collaboration between CPI, Indé, and APSA, the project was piloted in Bengaluru to explore how people from different communities understand and respond to climate stress.

This toolkit is a key outcome of that work. It is a step-by-step guide to strengthening climate literacy – not as a technical exercise, but as a practical, people-centred process. It helps translate climate science into everyday language, link local experiences with scientific understanding, and support inclusive action across urban settings.

Tip: Need a clear, easy-to-understand list of definitions for common climate terms? Click here to skip to the 'Key climate terminology' section in the Appendix!



WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit is designed for:



Government agencies developing inclusive, responsive, and equitable policies.



Non-governmental organisations, grassroots groups, civil society organisations, and active citizens engaging communities in climate dialogue and advocacy.



Educators, scientists, and researchers looking to connect technical knowledge with everyday realities.

Whether you are shaping policy, facilitating dialogue, or leading local action, this toolkit offers flexible formats, methods, and insights to support your work.

HOW DOES THIS TOOLKIT ENABLE CHANGE?

The toolkit supports change through four main pathways. These are not isolated stages – they interact and reinforce one another over time.

It is designed to be flexible, but it assumes users are willing to adapt it to their specific context and that there is space, whether formal or informal, for dialogue and reflection.

UNDERSTAND

Breaks down climate science into plain science into plain language, using local metaphors and metaphors and examples, to help users interpret changes in their environments.

CONNECT

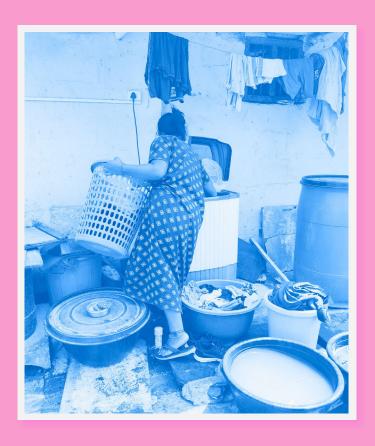
Builds bridges between lived experience and scientific knowledge through participatory tools and shared narratives.

ACT

Provides practical
guidance for
community
engagement
and collective
planning,
equipping
stakeholders
to take
informed,
localised
action.

EQUIP

people's integrate into policies insights planning and fostering more decision-making.









HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Whether you're shaping policy, facilitating dialogue, or leading local action, this toolkit helps you decode climate science in ways that are relevant, accessible, and rooted in lived experiences. It provides practical steps and methods to engage a range of stakeholders in building climate awareness, enabling context-specific and inclusive action.

Climate literacy, as understood here, is not a fixed outcome but a continuing process shaped by context, participation, and learning. The toolkit offers a flexible structure that evolves through five key stages:

STEP 1: PREPARE AND PLAN

Lay the groundwork for meaningful engagement by:

- Understanding climate concepts in simple language
- Contextualising scientific terms to local realities (e.g. reframing "urban deforestation" as the loss of neighbourhood green cover)
- Mapping the area of intervention: Identifying climate stressors specific to that geography
- Profiling stakeholder groups: For example, youth, urban poor residents, or middle-income households
- Developing communication materials: This could include posters,
 presentations, games, or visuals that are culturally and contextually relevant

Intended change: Users gain the ability to understand and decode climate science into locally meaningful terms, setting the stage for deeper engagement.

STAGE 2: DESIGN AND ENGAGE

Use participatory methods to surface and validate local climate knowledge:

- Design engagement tools such as focus group discussions, interviews, mapping exercises, or workshops
- Pilot and adapt these tools to reflect stakeholder needs and realities
- Document insights, including local terms for climate stressors, visual maps, and stories of adaptation

Intended change: Stakeholders begin to connect their lived experiences with broader climate concepts, thereby becoming active contributors to the knowledge-building process.

STAGE 3: SHARE AND REFLECT

Bring insights back to the community to validate, deepen, and expand them:

- Presenting findings in accessible formats such as posters, stories, visuals, or presentations
- Creating feedback loops where stakeholders can validate or expand on what was documented
- Fostering ownership by encouraging participants to reflect on and use the insights in their advocacy or planning

Intended change: Stakeholders become visible narrators in the climate story, shaping narratives that can inform both community responses and policymaking.

STAGE 4: TRACK CHANGE

Assess how understanding and engagement have evolved:

- Revisit stakeholders to explore changes in understanding, behaviour, and confidence
- Track indicators of change such as shifts in vocabulary, increased participation, or new community initiatives
- Document outcomes to inform future adaptation or scaling of the approach
- Learn and refine by capturing what worked, what didn't, and what might need to change for next time

Intended change: Climate literacy becomes embedded in communities, laying a foundation for long-term, locally driven adaptation and resilience planning.

STAGE 5: IMPACT EVALUATION

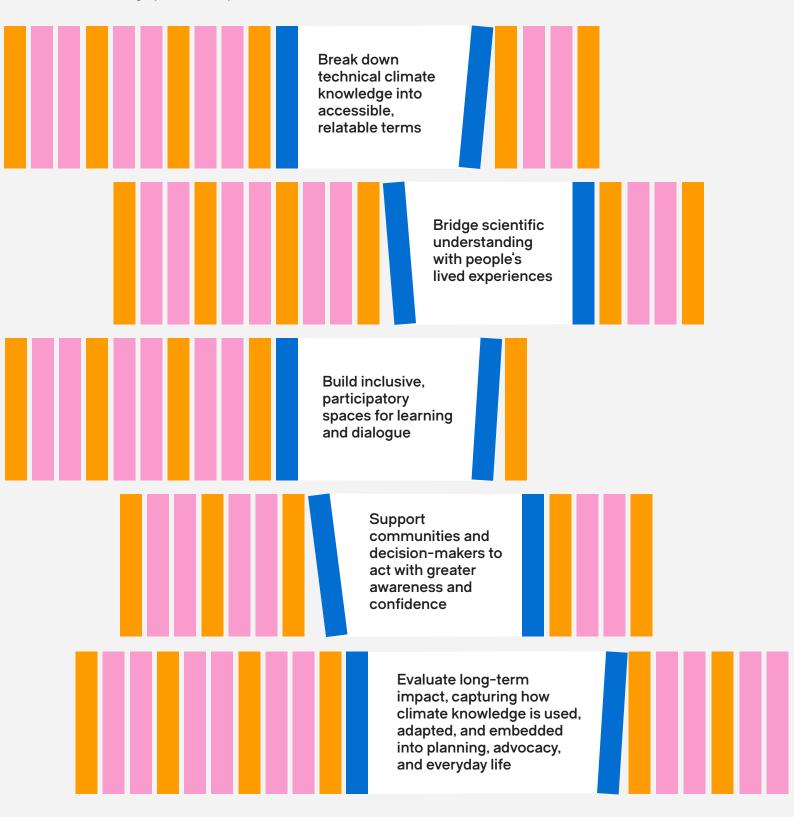
Look beyond immediate outputs to long-term effects on climate adaptation:

- Track toolkit uptake and influence on planning and policy
- Assess whether lived experiences are shaping adaptation decisions
- Identify shifts towards participatory decision-making

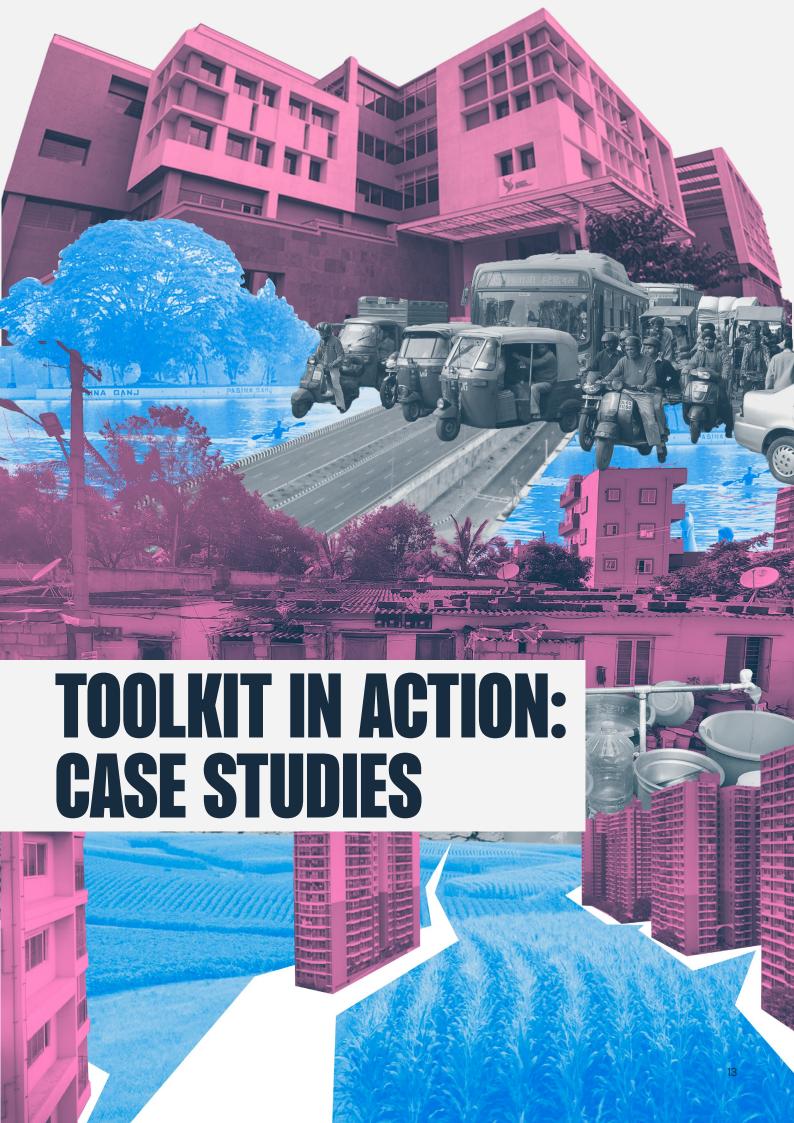
Intended change: Local actors feel confident in leading and advocating for climate action, and policies are grounded in community realities.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

This five-stage process helps users:



The aim is not just awareness, but actionable understanding, where individuals, communities, and institutions co-create climate responses that are just, grounded, and locally informed.





Our approach to climate literacy was grounded in a simple idea: people don't need to be experts in climate science to understand or respond to the changes around them. Instead of starting with data or technical terms, we began with people's lived experiences, such as what they notice, remember, and navigate in their everyday environments.

We treated climate literacy as a conversation, not a one-off event. It was place-based, iterative, and shaped by the realities of different social groups. Scientific ideas were introduced gradually, as tools to help make sense of what people were already seeing and feeling.

A flexible, context-based approach

This approach was deliberately adaptable for different groups and contexts. For example:

- With students, we mapped their commutes and heard stories about midday heat.
- With low-income residents, we explored water stress through neighbourhood walk-throughs.
- In public parks, we observed how infrastructure shaped comfort, safety, and access.



People used their own language – "oven roads," "first-rain floods," and "dark stretches" – to describe real climate stressors. These metaphors helped connect formal science with everyday life.

We tailored our methods to suit the context:

- Using local languages and familiar formats
- Recognising how climate is experienced differently depending on people's locations, livelihoods, and access to services
- Enabling community voices to shape how climate concepts were framed and discussed

What's next?

This section describes how this approach was applied with four different groups: youth, urban poor residents, users of public spaces, and middle- and high-income communities. We share what we did, what emerged, and what this reveals about how climate literacy can be built in Bengaluru and beyond.

1. YOUTH

Urban youth often navigate a fast-paced environment shaped by heavy traffic, evolving infrastructure, and shrinking green spaces.

At one private college, for instance, students highlighted dust, congestion, and inadequate drainage as part of their "normal city life" but recognised these conditions as symptoms of larger climate challenges.



Why is it essential to engage youth in climate literacy?

Young people are emerging as a socially and politically aware group with the potential for long-term engagement in climate issues. They are digitally connected and deeply invested in their city's future.

Despite this, their perspectives are often excluded from formal climate discussions. They may not have the language or platforms to connect their life experiences, such as heat exposure, poor air quality, or unsafe streets, with climate science or policy.

Engaging youth in climate literacy helps them:

- Recognise that their everyday struggles reflect wider climate vulnerabilities
- Connect personal experience to scientific understanding
- Develop the confidence and vocabulary to participate in shaping climate action

These voices are not only essential for future leadership, but they also offer vital insight into the climate realities of today.

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

- Climate memory icebreakers: Students shared their first memories of unusual weather or extreme climate events. In pairs, one spoke while the other captured keywords on sticky notes.
 This created a bridge between personal stories and environmental themes, requiring no prior scientific knowledge.
- Story circles: In small groups, students discussed recurring climate-related stressors, such as flooded underpasses, scorching heat, and "dark stretches" without lighting. They shared how these affected their routines and what coping strategies they used, such as carrying umbrellas or avoiding certain roads.
- Participatory climate mapping:
 - Students sketched their daily routes, labelling problem areas using colour-coded sticky notes (red for heat, blue for water-related issues, and green for local solutions, such as tree planting).
 - 2. Maps were compared to identify common patterns and differences across locations, class backgrounds, and mobility options.



KEY INSIGHTS

Conversion 1

Everyday stressors reframed: Students mapped busy, dusty junctions and poorly maintained roads as 'normal' city life, but soon recognised these as symptoms of poor planning made worse by climate stress.

GREENER

Lack of green cover: Roads without trees were described as "oven-like," highlighting how urban design choices, like prioritising cars over shade, directly affect thermal comfort, especially for walkers and bus users.

Safety in dark, flood-prone spaces: Unlit underpasses and lanes were noted for their safety and flooding risks. These spaces revealed how infrastructure gaps intersect with climate vulnerability.

Pollution and health: Students marked areas "heavy smoke" or "can't breathe here" near traffic lights or factories. Few linked this to fossil fuel emissions, showing an opportunity to connect personal health to policies.

Heat and inundation: Wide roads with minimal shade were described as "almost impossible" to walk through during midday. Both extremes of "too hot" and "too wet" revealed failures in climate-responsive planning.

Intersectional differences: Students observed how experiences vary by class (car/bike owners vs. bus riders), gender (safety in public spaces), or mobility (challenges faced by those with disabilities). These reflections revealed how climate impacts are not equal – they interact with existing inequalities.

HIGH - DENSITY

DDED

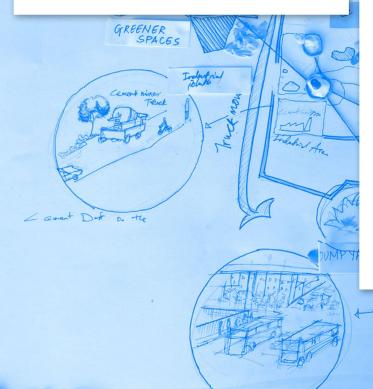
COLLEGIE

VEDIKA

Linking the local to the global: Initially seen as "urban" problems, issues like heat and flooding were later linked to broader systems, such as heat islands and global warming, demonstrating the emergence of systems thinking.

Crop-rainfall mappings: Students from Bengaluru's outskirts discussed rainfall shifts, crop failures, and disappearing lakes. One student shared, "Naasha aagatthe" (destruction happens), referring to the losses of mango and ragi crops. Another added that mango yields had been affected that year due to extreme heat. This revealed a lived understanding of food insecurity linked to climate patterns.

Understanding waterlogging: In one college, students learned that the building sat on a former lake, explaining frequent flooding. This connected historical land use to present-day risk.





HOW CAN YOU ADAPT THIS?

Collaborate with colleges, high schools, and youth networks: Partner with local student clubs or NGOs, enabling a ready audience that feels a sense of ownership over the process.

Use an interactive session flow: Combine an icebreaker (personal climate memories), a brief climate overview, and a colour-coded mapping activity highlighting local hotspots (heat, flooding) in daily routes.

Document and share: Photograph the maps, compile key insights, and present them to local officials or community platforms to spark further dialogue.

2. URBAN POOR RESIDENTS

Low-income communities in Bengaluru face intersecting challenges ranging from poor housing and inadequate services to climate stressors like extreme heat, flooding, and water shortages. These challenges are often intensified by systemic neglect and a lack of formal recognition or support.



Why is it essential to engage urban poor residents in climate literacy?

Urban poor residents are among the most exposed to climate impacts but often have the least access to resources that could help them adapt, such as stable housing, reliable services, or government assistance. Climate stressors impact their health, safety, and livelihoods in ways that differ significantly from those of wealthier groups.

Importantly, many of these residents also hold deep, place-based knowledge of how their neighbourhoods have changed over time. Long-term residents are aware of shifting weather patterns, infrastructure weaknesses, and effective coping strategies. However, their insights are rarely considered in climate planning.

Because not all urban poor communities are the same – some are long-established, while others are home to recent migrants – climate literacy efforts must reflect the diverse experiences and needs of these communities. Listening to this knowledge is key to designing more inclusive, relevant, and effective climate responses.

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

- Focus group discussions: Held with 15–40 residents, mainly women, to share collective concerns, coping strategies, and perspectives on services, infrastructure, and climate stress.
- Transect walks: Walk-throughs with community members to identify local issues related to basic services and the associated vulnerabilities.
- Community mapping: Residents identified hotspots, including areas prone to waterlogging and unreliable water sources.
- Semi-structured interviews: Conducted alongside or outside group activities to hear individual voices, particularly those not present in previous interactions.
- Photo and video documentation: Capturing everyday urban conditions, especially those highlighted by residents.
- Multilingual facilitation: Conversations were conducted in Kannada, Tamil, and Hindi to ensure broad participation and inclusivity.
- Feedback and return: Findings were shared back with communities through visual summaries and meetings, strengthening trust and mutual accountability.
- Institutional collaboration: Insights were shared with municipal bodies, NGOs, and advocacy groups to inform service delivery and policy development.



"During heavy rains, water enters our houses. We have to remove the water and sleep on carolboard sheets because the floor stays wet."

Everyday

Conlier, we could alrink water from the well, now we don't even trust piped water.

We can smell the furnes as soon as we step out.

Vocabularies

Sewage mix, and the whole place stinks.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Lived awareness without technical framing:
 Residents regularly experience heat waves,
 erratic rainfall, and pollution, and children
 often speak of climate in school. But most
 residents do not fully understand the causes.
 Those who do often link the changes to visible
 trends, such as fewer trees, more concrete, or
 urban expansion.
- Green cover matters: Tree-lined roads were noted as cooler and easier to navigate. One domestic worker in her 60s said she didn't feel the summer heat because her walking route was shaded, showing how greenery supports resilience in daily life.
- "Adjustment" as adaptation: People described responses to climate stress as "adjustment".
 This mindset reflects resilience, but also signals the absence of structured support or long-term planning.



"wherever there is an open area, they dump waste."

- · Basic services for climate resilience:
 - Water: An irregular water supply, expensive tanker deliveries, and stagnation due to poor drainage all increase daily stress. In some settlements, daily routines revolve around the availability of water.
 - 2. Transport: Public buses are crucial, especially for women and older residents, but long wait times, overcrowding, and inadequate frequency make travel difficult and, at times, unsafe.
 - 3. Waste management: In areas with regular garbage collection, drains remain clear and flood risks are lower. In others, people resort to burning waste, worsening both air quality and flooding.
- Migration and economic stress: Residents
 expressed concerns about rising prices for
 rent, food, and services associated with inmigration. Some felt pushed out of jobs (e.g.,
 domestic work), while others benefited from
 rental income. This shows how economic and
 climate pressures are tightly intertwined.

HOW CAN YOU ADAPT THIS?

To use this approach in other low-income urban settings:

- Partner with trusted local organisations, such as NGOs or community-based groups, that already work with residents.
 - Use inclusive formats, such as focus groups, transect walks, or community mapping, that cater to different genders, age groups, and mobility levels.
 - Facilitate in local languages and create comfortable spaces for dialogue.
- Start with what people already know and experience, then connect those insights to broader climate concepts.
- Frame climate responses in practical terms that align with everyday routines. For example, rest shelters instead of emergency centres.
- Combine climate engagement with economic support, such as water subsidies, transport passes, or food relief during extreme events.
- Ensure follow-up and feedback, so communities see how their input informs action.

3. USERS OF PUBLIC SPACES

Public lakes and parks in Bengaluru offer crucial benefits in the face of climate change, providing cooling shade, supporting groundwater recharge, and offering accessible spaces for rest and recreation. These green-blue areas can slow flood runoff, reduce urban heat, and foster both environmental and social resilience.

But these spaces are not equally available or welcoming to everyone. Observations across several lake parks revealed persistent issues: poor maintenance, inadequate infrastructure (such as non-functional restrooms or lighting), and subtle forms of exclusion that affect who uses these spaces and how.



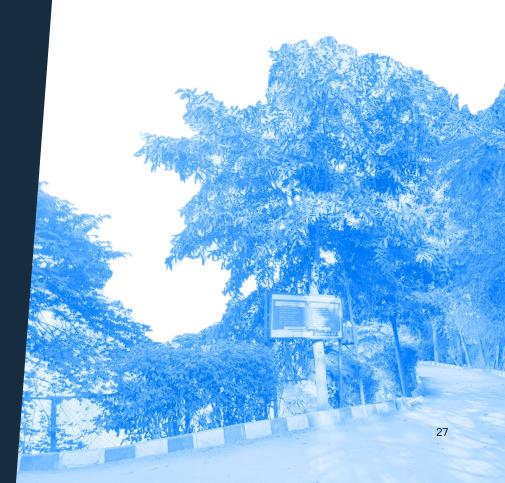
By systematically observing public space use – from apartment residents on morning walks to informal workers and older residents seeking relief from the heat – this engagement captured a broad spectrum of experiences and revealed how climate, infrastructure, and inequality intersect in shared environments.

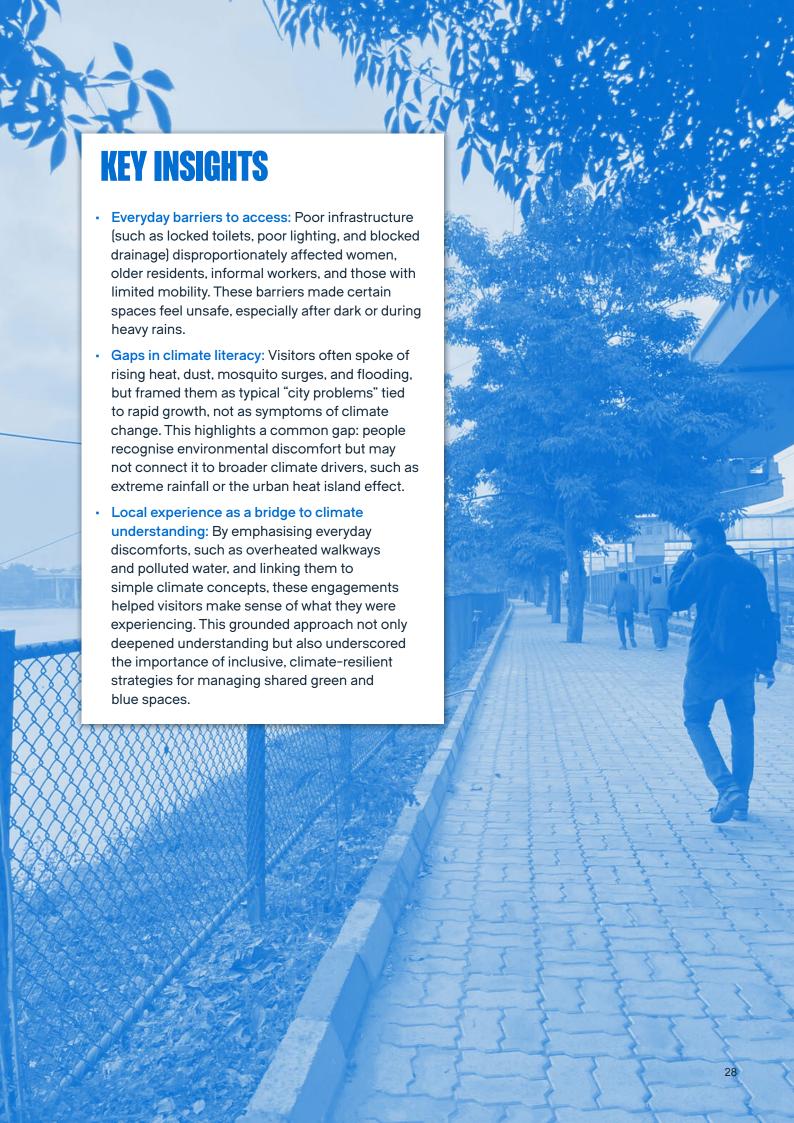
Observing public space use helps city planners, designers, and communities:

- Identify where climate and comfort align (or fail)
- Recognise social dynamics that shape access and safety
- Advocate for investments that make public spaces more inclusive, resilient, and climate-friendly

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

- On-site observations: Teams visited each lake or park at various times – morning, midday, and evening – to understand usage patterns. They observed who visited, where people gathered, and which areas were avoided. Attention was paid to environmental cues such as flooding, exposed sunlit areas, missing lights, or locked restrooms.
- Casual conversations and micro-interviews: Using a short, flexible questionnaire, the team spoke to visitors about their routines, comfort levels, and environmental concerns. Questions covered heat, flooding, wildlife sightings, and whether visitors felt safe, particularly women, older adults, and workers resting during the day.
- Documentation: Field notes captured stories about theft, vandalism, polluted water, locked gates, and mosquito breeding. These materials helped illustrate how environmental degradation and infrastructure neglect affect the daily use of public spaces.





HOW CAN YOU ADAPT THIS?

Identify public spaces for observation. Choose parks, lakes, or open-access areas that reflect the local context. Visit at different times to engage with varied user groups.

2

Keep interactions informal. Use short questionnaires or open prompts. Let people share their own stories about heat, safety, water, and comfort.

3

Document both
physical and social
realities. Note areas
that work well (shady
zones, easy entry) and
those that don't (locked
restrooms, overgrown
areas). Pay attention to
who is using the space,
who isn't, and why.

4

Share findings locally. Compile photos, quotes, and key themes into short summaries. Present them to municipal officials, resident welfare associations, or environment-focused groups to advocate for change.

4. MIDDLE— AND HIGH—INCOME RESIDENTS

Whitefield, once a quiet suburb on the edge of Bengaluru, has rapidly transformed into a hub for technology parks, luxury apartments, and high-end commercial spaces. The shift from farmland and small factories to high-rise living and IT campuses reflects broader urban changes across the city.

Many middle- and high-income residents in Whitefield work in the IT or service sectors and have chosen to live here for better housing, proximity to offices, and modern amenities. But this growth has come at a cost, altering Whitefield's climate conditions, infrastructure capacity, and overall livability.



Why is it essential to engage middle- and high-income groups in climate literacy?

These residents shape the city's climate future in several key ways:

- Through housing preferences and consumption patterns, which influence real estate trends, land use, and infrastructure demand.
- By mobilising financial resources to support sustainability initiatives through Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), the Bangalore Apartments Federation (BAF), and civic groups.
- Via their political visibility and access to decision-makers, giving them influence over urban policies and development priorities.

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

Through informal discussions at the Whitefield Club, we held:

- A small-group forum: Residents shared firsthand accounts of issues like water scarcity and heat stress in a relaxed setting.
- Storytelling approach: Facilitators guided conversation but allowed open-ended sharing to surface genuine concerns and coping strategies.



Were not talking about 'global warming' here, we talk about dust, traffic, heat, and local issues that affect us daily."

ANOTHER ASPECT THAT'S NOT TA LKED ABOUT IS THIS THING OF LIGHT. ITHINK IT'S UNDER THE EASEMENT ACT ... 400 'RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE ACCESS TO YOUR OWN SUNLIGHT. WE NOTICED, SUDDENLY THAT WE STARTED WAKING UP GARLLER LATER IN THE MORNING. THAT WAS BECAUSE THIS BUILDING WENT UP BEHIND US, WITH A COUPLE OF FLOORS AT THE EDGE, AND IT BLOCKS THE SUNLIGHT UNTIL 10 OR 10:30 AM

Everyday

People Say it's hotter, we use more Ac. We never use terms like "greenhouse gases" we just adapt.

Vocabularies

no one around me says "climate change"
-they complain about flooding or how
you can't breathe with all the dust."

you won't believe how many people get hurt because tankers can't break on time in these crowded roads!

KEY INSIGHTS

Residents described climate-related concerns in everyday terms, such as heat, dust, water shortages, and the lack of walkable roads, rather than using scientific language. There was a clear awareness of environmental shifts, but these were seen as isolated inconveniences rather than signs of climate change.

Despite relative financial stability, residents noted disparities in their ability to adapt. Some could afford air conditioning or even relocation, while others felt constrained by rising costs and a limited say in planning decisions. Many also expressed a quiet longing for the shady trees and orchard plots that once kept the area cooler.

Still, community-led efforts such as tree-planting and cycling initiatives were signs of growing adaptation and mitigation. Yet, residents were clear: local action alone cannot resolve systemic urban challenges without stronger policy frameworks and enforcement.

When we came here 40 years ago there was no ITPL...there was a marked drop in temperature once you crossed the railway line... it get completely difflent.

HOW CAN YOU ADAPT THIS?

Host small, informal gatherings – weekends work best for busy residents

Partner with Resident Welfare Associations [RWAs] or apartment committees

Use neighbourhood WhatsApp groups to spread invites and climate-awareness materials

WHAT WE LEARNED

ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Effective engagement begins in familiar settings. Prompts like "When did Bengaluru's heat first feel unbearable to you?" sparked rich stories in Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, and English. Phrases like "oven-road" or "first-rain flood" naturally led to maps, charts, and discussions on climate risks.

Holding sessions in parks, bus stops, or chai stalls reduced social distance, encouraging casual participation. Starting with lived experience, not climate jargon, helped people connect immediately. This made it easier to introduce materials like data cards or slide decks without them feeling imposed. Three outcomes stood out:

- Authentic language: Terms like "dust throat" or "no-shade stretch" translate experience into concepts that scientists and policymakers can use.
- Cross-group empathy: Youth heard older apartment residents describe sleepless hot nights, while IT workers listened to young mothers from informal settlements describe queuing for water during drought.
- Reusable materials: Sticky-note maps and quote posters shared via WhatsApp helped sustain engagement beyond the session.



DESIGNING BETTER CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

"The temperature has increased. Even the winter is less now."

(1 We have no education/ awareness on climate change.")

- Start with the stakeholders' world (students, residents, workers), not the science. Begin with daily routes, routines, and concerns.
- Build comfort before content: Icebreakers, games, and small-group chats make people more open to sharing.
- Narrow the focus gradually: Begin with broad prompts ("What do you see?") and then guide participants toward deeper reflection ("Why do you think this happens?").
- Prioritise thinking over facts: Visuals, word games, or quick five-word summaries encourage engagement and critical thinking.
- Adapt in real time: Tailor the pace and method to the group's energy and needs.
- Address language gaps: Use subtitled videos and pause to translate and explain. Local-language resources improve impact.



WHAT COULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

- Time and trust: Climate literacy should be an ongoing, reciprocal process. While urban poor residents welcomed two visits, a third felt excessive without visible outcomes. A 9-12 month engagement with feedback at each stage would better support trust-building.
- Engagement with local governance:
 Securing time with government officials is challenging. Engaging early with local structures, such as ward committees or area sabhas, can build lasting, two-way relationships.
- Diverse methods, clear purpose: In addition to those used in this pilot, tools such as photo voice, WhatsApp groups, or ward noticeboards facilitate ongoing participation. However, these methods should only be used when their purpose is clearly understood by participants. Ask:
 - Is there community demand?
 - Is the method technically feasible?
 - Will the outputs lead to tangible action?
- Sustaining participation: Communities may not expect immediate results, but they do want to be heard. For example, moderators could curate stories into monthly digests for feedback and, eventually, for local officials, focusing on shared experiences rather than quick solutions.

- Ongoing monitoring and reflection: Rather than just tracking numbers, reflect on what is being done, how it is being done, and with whom. Ask:
 - Are different groups (by gender, age, caste, ability, location) being included?
 - Are some groups better engaged in smaller, separate settings?
 - What level of participation are we aiming for: Informing, consulting, or co-creating?
 - Do participants feel a sense of ownership over the process?
 - Are findings being shared back for correction and validation?
 - Do the methods of engagement equip participants to continue climate conversations and actions on their own?

These insights will support users in achieving the outcomes described in the Theory of Change: understand, connect, act, and equip.

In this pilot, community engagement depended on relationships built by the NGO partner. Some communities within each settlement were not engaged simply because those relationships didn't exist. This is common. One way to overcome this is to work with multiple local partners to ensure broader inclusion, though this was beyond the pilot's scope.

WAY FORWARD

The DCS project demonstrates that rapid urbanisation, intensifying climate stress, and entrenched inequalities require a new approach to communicating, planning, and acting.

Climate literacy is not a luxury – it is essential infrastructure.

FUEL COLLECTIVE POWER AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

From map-making to memory-sharing, small acts build trust and momentum. When local officials respond to student maps or residents' co-design park improvements, new forms of climate governance take root.

ADVANCE JUST AND INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

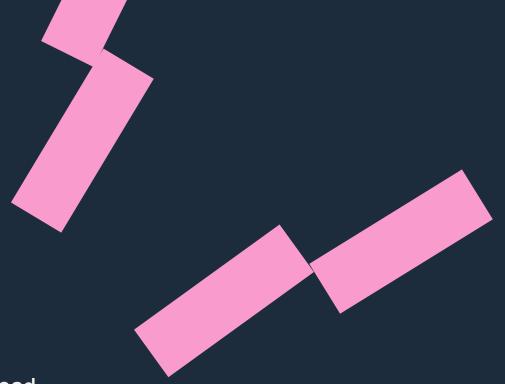
Embedding community voices in policy and planning is not only ethical, it's effective. The toolkit empowers communities to shape decisions that reflect their realities, encompassing everything from infrastructure to green cover, as well as mobility and safety.

BUILD EVERYDAY CLIMATE LITERACY

Ongoing engagement, not one-off training, is key to strengthening local awareness and resilience. This toolkit offers accessible entry points for educators, youth groups, and officials to sustain long-term learning journeys.

ADAPT AND SCALE

The toolkit is designed for replication across geographies. Its methods are adaptable to new languages, cultures, and urban settings. By anchoring climate action in lived realities, the approach remains grounded, responsive, and scalable.



Looking Ahead

"(Were not talking about 'global warming'
rure, we talk about dust, traffic, heat,
and local issues that affect us daily."

These are the stories shaping tomorrow's climate response. We don't need everyone to be scientists. We need everyone to be seen, heard, and informed.

By listening first, connecting knowledge to experience, and working with communities, we can reimagine climate action as a shared, human story – one that is urgent, grounded, and just.



APPENDIX

KEY CLIMATE TERMINOLOGY

This section provides clear, easy-to-understand definitions of commonly used climate terms. These are not technical descriptions, but rather simplified explanations designed to support inclusive dialogue and community engagement. Where possible, local or everyday language should be encouraged to complement these definitions.

Air pollution: Harmful particles and gases in the air from vehicles, factories, burning waste, and other sources. These pollutants affect both climate and health.

Climate: The average pattern of weather over a long period, usually 30 years or more.

Climate action: Any effort to address or respond to climate change, whether through adaptation, mitigation, or awareness-building.

Climate adaptation: Adjusting our behaviours, infrastructure, or systems to cope with the effects of climate change, such as using drought-resistant crops or improving drainage.

Climate change: The broader effects resulting from global warming, including shifting weather patterns, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, and more frequent extreme weather events.

Climate crisis: Climate change is causing serious harm to people and nature. These effects are getting worse and are putting our health, safety, and wellbeing at risk. Some changes, such as melting ice sheets and rising sea levels, may be irreversible. However, many of these problems can still be mitigated if we work quickly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate justice: Recognises that climate change affects people differently and often deepens existing inequalities. A just response addresses these differences and prioritises the needs of those most affected.

Climate literacy: The understanding of how climate works, how human activity affects it, and how climate impacts people and ecosystems. Climate-literate individuals can better participate in and influence climate decisions.

Climate maladaptation: Responses to climate change that unintentionally increase vulnerability or harm certain groups, such as building infrastructure that worsens flooding elsewhere.

Climate mitigation: Actions to reduce or slow down climate change, such as cutting emissions or increasing green cover.

Climate resilience: The ability of people, communities, and systems to cope with, recover from, and adapt to climate impacts while maintaining their core functions.

Deforestation: The clearing of trees and forests, often for development. It reduces carbon storage and contributes to rising temperatures.

Droughts: A prolonged period with little or no rainfall, leading to water scarcity for people, crops, and ecosystems.

Fossil fuels: Energy sources such as coal, oil, and natural gas formed over millions of years. Burning them releases greenhouse gases.

Global warming: The long-term increase in the Earth's average surface temperature, mainly caused by human activities such as burning fossil fuels.

Greenhouse gas (GHG): Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere by absorbing and releasing radiation, including carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, ozone, and water vapour. This causes the greenhouse effect that warms the planet.

Heatwaves: Unusually high temperatures lasting several days, often harmful to health and becoming more common with climate change.

Heavy precipitation: More intense rainfall due to warmer air holding more moisture, often leading to flooding.

Industrial era: The period spanning the onset of large-scale industrial activity around 1750 to the present day. The reference period of 1850-1900 C.E. is generally used to estimate what the global average surface temperature was before the industrial era.

Just transition: Recognises that climate change affects people differently and often deepens existing inequalities. A just response addresses these differences and prioritises the needs of those most affected.

Paris Agreement: A global commitment signed in 2015 to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C, ideally 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels.

Underserved communities: Groups that face greater harm from climate change due to historic and ongoing inequalities, such as limited access to services, infrastructure, or representation in decision-making.

Urban flooding: Flooding in cities caused by heavy rain and poor drainage, worsened when natural surfaces are replaced by roads and buildings.

Urban Heat Island (UHI) Effect: Cities become hotter than surrounding rural areas due to concrete, asphalt, and reduced tree cover, which trap heat.

Urbanisation: The growth of cities as more people move to urban areas. While it can bring economic opportunities, it also puts pressure on infrastructure, services, and the environment.

Weather: The condition of the atmosphere at a particular place and time, such as temperature, rain, wind, or humidity. It changes frequently, sometimes within hours.

Wildfires: Large, uncontrolled fires in forests or grasslands, often worsened by heat, drought, and wind.

MATERIALS THAT SUPPORTED ENGAGEMENT

- Climate change conversations guide for field follow-up for working-class settlements
- Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide for participants from working-class settlements
- Questionnaire for public space engagement on climate change and the lake ecosystem
- Session plan for engagement with middle and high-income residents
- Session plan to capture youth perspectives

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