

Five urban design choices that make a world of difference for parents

Nurturing Neighbourhoods in India care for the whole family

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Designing cities for young children has huge benefits, from healthier environments to more inclusive spaces. Parents and other caregivers also gain from this kind of urban development. We know how stressful cities can be to navigate when you're carrying a baby, pushing a stroller, or holding the hand of a little human who is tired and irritable – or who just wants to play and explore. That's why we're spotlighting simple things urban designers can do to change that experience for caregivers and their little ones.

Launched in 2020, the [Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge](#)¹ has helped cities across India transform over 180 urban spaces for this population. As part of the [World Resources Institute \(WRI\) India team](#) providing technical support to many of these projects, we present five design choices that we have seen make a real difference.



¹ The [Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge](#) is an initiative by the Smart Cities Mission of India's Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs with support from the Van Leer Foundation and technical assistance from WRI India.



Photo: Visakhya KA, WRI India

↑ Children and families enjoy play and leisure at Poovath Street, Kochi

1 Play opportunities on the doorstep

📍 Kochi, Kerala

It is a great relief for parents when their children can play close to home. Taking children to play in a park can be a challenge, as it often requires time and effort to travel to such spaces. However, when a mini park is located close by it becomes much more practical.

In Kochi, a city in south-west India, city agencies – Cochin Smart Mission Limited and Kochi Municipal Corporation – helped make this a reality. Following discussions with residents of a densely populated neighbourhood, authorities reclaimed a stretch of Poovath Street that had previously been used for parking vehicles and transformed it into a linear “pocket park”. The design featured murals painted by community members, play options – such as sandpits – suitable for various ages, exercise equipment for adults, and rest areas.

Follow-up surveys show that 60% of local caregivers and children now use the area for more than 30 minutes a day. In the mornings and evenings, female caregivers – from young girls to elderly women – can be seen using this outdoor space while keeping an eye on children; some watch over them from home while they manage household tasks or socialise with

friends. Members of the community have stepped up to maintain the space, ensuring that it feels secure.

As one father said:

“Other parks in the city are distant and gated. This park offers unmatched doorstep play opportunities, unlike any facilities in the area. Schoolkids stop and play on their way home. I find this park to be safe and clean for our young children’s use.”



Photo: Visakhya KA, WRI India

↑ Caregiver engaging a young child in play in a street-side park

② Play spaces outside children's health centres

📍 Kohima, Nagaland

When parents and caregivers take their young children for health check-ups, they often have to wait to be seen. When there is no place for them to keep their children entertained, waiting can become a stressful experience.

“The courtyard was transformed with the needs of these visitors in mind.”

The Naga Hospital in Kohima, in north-east India, had a courtyard next to the paediatric ward, but it was

not suitable for young children to play, and could not be easily accessed by caregivers with wheelchairs or strollers due to the uneven surface of the walkways. The courtyard was transformed with the needs of these visitors in mind: walkways were levelled, places to sit in the shade were provided, and play elements were incorporated to engage children of various ages.

Dr Prathana Das, a paediatrician at the Naga Hospital, says:

“I can see young children coming out to enjoy the space, and their parents express a sense of relief and security.”

This simple intervention has transformed a stressful waiting experience into a place of smiles and giggles.

↓ Mother and daughter playing while they wait for their appointment



Photo: Sudipto Barua, WRI India

3 Caregiver-friendly amenities at maternity hospitals

📍 Wilson Garden, Bangalore

The comfort and specific needs of parents and other caregivers are often overlooked in the design of maternity hospitals.

For pregnant women, mothers and young children visiting BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) maternity hospital at Wilson Garden in Bangalore, there was no adequate seating; families, including the woman in labour herself, had to stand or sit on the kerbs while waiting for hours. An extensive study was conducted to understand the needs of these women who came to the hospital. In response, wide and multi-height seating modules with backrests were provided to ensure comfort, particularly for pregnant women.

A play area with elements designed for children of various ages was developed adjacent to the waiting area to occupy children and keep them calm while waiting. Additionally, a peaceful herb garden with a walking trail was introduced, offering a calming environment with its medicinal and aromatic plants, and providing a space for relaxation. This encouraged light physical activity, offering pregnant women and other visitors a quiet outdoor space for short walks or gentle exercise. To ensure convenience and hygiene, e-toilets with self-cleaning, touchless systems were installed near the waiting area. These thoughtful improvements collectively created a more supportive, patient-centred environment, significantly enhancing the overall hospital experience for families.

A medical officer at BBMP Maternity Hospital said:

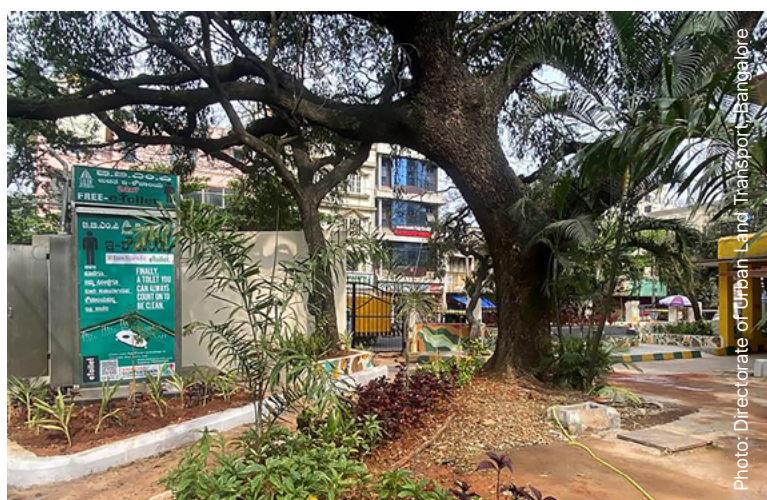
“This hospital has set a benchmark for the development of other primary healthcare centres across the city, benefiting not only children but also their caregivers. By enhancing these facilities with comfortable waiting areas, play zones for children, and the addition of plants and herbal gardens, the overall experience has been greatly improved, making it more pleasant and enjoyable for all visitors.”



↑ Caregivers and their little ones resting on the shaded seating



↑ Walking trail for caregivers to enjoy the herb garden



↑ Herb garden for relaxation retrofitted with a free-to-use e-toilet

“It has fostered a vibrant community space where caregivers can connect with each other and with community members.”



Mobile library for children by Rourkela Municipal Corporation (RMC)

Young child-friendly seating and play space by Rourkela Smart City Limited (RSCL)

Community space by RSCL

Micro-community centre under JAGA Mission

Photo: Rourkela Smart City Limited

4 Clustering services to create a care hub

📍 Rourkela, Odisha

Caregivers can spend a lot of time travelling around a city, just getting from one place to another. It might take a whole day to attend a routine health appointment, go to a play group and visit the temple if they are spread across the city. The stress of travel can be reduced if all the places a caregiver wants to visit with their child are located in the same local area.

In the Ruputola neighbourhood of Rourkela, city agencies – the municipal corporation and Smart City SPV – leveraged funding from various state-level programmes to develop a cohesive care hub that includes an *anganwadi* (an early childhood

development centre that provides education, healthcare, nutrition and support for caregivers and children under 6), community centre, library, temple, women’s activity centre and play area. Not only has this simplified the logistics of daily travel for caregivers, it has fostered a vibrant community space where caregivers can connect with each other and with community members, supporting their overall wellbeing as well as the development of their children. On average, 30 caregivers with their young children are now seen interacting with each other and utilising the facility every day.

A member of the Slum Dwellers Association says:

“Children come here to play, while women can gather in a safe and pleasant environment.”

New Anganwadi Centre
by District Mineral
Foundation Fund

Young child-friendly play
space by RSCL



In the Sanskriti Nagar neighbourhood of Indore, focus group discussions revealed that caregivers would have liked to use the park next to the local *anganwadi* outside the centre's operating hours, but they were unable to do so because various antisocial behaviours made it unsafe. In response, city leaders organised community activities to reclaim the space, while making improvements such as creating shaded areas and interactive play features using natural materials. The area has now become a vibrant community hub, where women feel safe and children and caregivers enjoy spending time together. Of the female caregivers interviewed, 82% reported feeling safer when using the space and taking part in activities.

“City leaders organised community activities to reclaim the space.”

As the grandfather of one toddler in the neighbourhood says:

“It’s a great improvement, and we’re very pleased with it. Numerous engagements with the people of the neighbourhood were key to the transformation, with community input shaping the design. Children never played here before, but now they’re in the park all the time.”

5 Engaging caregivers in a co-creation process

📍 Indore, Madhya Pradesh

By involving caregivers in urban design processes, we have witnessed a significant increase in the use and maintenance of spaces. While the needs and concerns of caregivers are often similar from one city to another, specific neighbourhoods can have unique circumstances. The involvement of caregivers in the co-creation process is essential to creating environments that truly meet their challenges, and fosters a sense of ownership.



↑ Caregivers and their children spending leisure time at Sankriti Nagar *Anganwadi* in Indore

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