



Youth-led civic media for urban governance

Case studies from India and Nepal



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This publication was prepared by Gynna Millan (external consultant for IIED), based on the collective reflection process conducted with the facilitation teams in Bhuj and Dharan.

Acknowledgements

This booklet is grounded in the knowledge and experience of the facilitation teams who participated in three reflection sessions from June 2025 to January 2026.

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The young people who participated in the civic media workshops are the main contributors to this collective learning.

In Bhuj: Kutch Yuwa Nava Nirma (youth collective). **In Dharan:** Yuwa Aawaj (youth volunteers).

Editorial guidance was provided by Camila Cociña, Alexandre Apsan Frediani and Jodie Frosdick (IIED) and Stephanie Butcher and Rajanya Bose (University of Sheffield). Their careful reading and critical engagement strengthened the work considerably.

The booklet was designed and illustrated by Naiara Yumiko (external consultant for IIED), whose visual language shaped how the framework and the cities' journeys are brought to life throughout these pages.

Copy editing by Juliet Heller.



Front cover: participants of civic media workshops in Bhuj, India. Credit: Hunnarshala Foundation

Back cover: community participation during a community action plan workshop in Dharan, Nepal. Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter

'Neighbourhoods Fit for Diverse Young People' is a participatory action-research project exploring how young people in Bhuj, India and Dharan, Nepal use civic media tools to engage with urban governance. Supported by Fondation Botnar, the project brings together the University of Sheffield, Kathmandu University, IIT Bombay, IIED, ACHR, Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, and Hunnarshala Foundation.

Published by IIED, May 2026

Millan, G (2026) Youth-led civic media for urban governance: case studies from India and Nepal. IIED, London.

ISBN: 978-1-83759-215-9
www.iied.org/22733iied

Contents

Mapping youth-led civic media trajectories	4
The civic media approach: utilising the ‘moments of possibility’ framework	7
Bhuj, India: building civic identity through collective processes	12
Dharan, Nepal: reaching beyond media to engage with communities	20
Lessons: two journeys to civic agency through one framework	29
Moving forward: practising and refining possibilities	31

Mapping youth-led civic media trajectories

These case studies emerged from the action-research project, ‘Neighbourhoods Fit for Diverse Young People: Civic Media Practices and Urban Claims-Making in Nepal and India’, conducted between June 2025 and January 2026. The project examined how diverse young people in two cities used civic media technologies — participatory video, community mapping, digital storytelling, photography and street drama — to explore urban citizenship and influence the governance of their neighbourhoods. Working in Dharan, Nepal and Bhuj, India — two rapidly urbanising cities marked by deep social inequality and where governance processes offer limited space for community participation — the initiative combines research and practice through sustained ‘civic media workshops’ (CMWs). These workshops created spaces where young people, many of them navigating caste hierarchies, facing gender bias and experiencing uneven access to digital tools, experimented with these technologies. As part of the process, facilitators of these spaces collectively reflected on how such tools can be harnessed for advocacy in their communities. This publication documents how the process unfolded: through youth engagement, digital media platforms and engagement with urban governance, which transformed over time. The young people’s experience shows how civic media can activate change in contexts shaped by inequality, political complexity and unequal access to technology.

The project brings together three academic institutions — the UK’s University of Sheffield, Kathmandu University and the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay — alongside global, regional and local partners: the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Lumanti Support Group for Shelter (Nepal) and Hunnarshala Foundation (India). It is supported by Fondation Botnar. The project asks: how can diverse young people use civic media technologies to advance urban citizenship and shape neighbourhoods fit for young people? It addresses shared structural challenges across both cities: informal land tenure, inadequate infrastructure, ward-level planning processes with limited resources and restricted community output, governance environments shaped by partisan politics and inequalities driven by class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender.

Participatory methodology

The project methodology was participatory action research, through which CMWs functioned simultaneously as research sites and as spaces for collective mobilisation. Rather than extracting data from communities, the process was built with young people — in each city between 15 and 30 young people participated at different stages, recruited through peer outreach, community networks and partner organisations — who set the questions, gathered the evidence and decided what was made public. Participants explored a series of issues affecting young urban citizens, including housing, waste management, youth safety, migration and employment. They developed media outputs that documented their lived experiences, opened dialogues and made visible what formal planning processes rarely see, as well as opened conversations with ward officials and community organisations about neighbourhood priorities. The young people used digital technologies as tools for building collective identity, advocacy capacity and shifting narratives.

This approach draws on three collective reflection sessions held across eight months with the facilitation teams in both cities. Together, they mapped trajectories, named turning points, examined what hadn’t worked and why and traced the conditions that allowed certain activities to gain traction while others did not. The following sections describe those processes as tangible examples of how civic media initiatives can support youth participation in urban governance when they respond directly to local contexts.



This is my home: community participants locating their home on the map during a community action plan workshop
Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter



Tracing the journey of waste
Credit: Bhuj Team

The civic media approach: utilising the ‘moments of possibility’ framework

Three online sessions brought together teams from Bhuj and Dharan to collectively map what had unfolded, shifted and what was still being learned during the CMWs. Through shared reflections, iterative conversations and creating timelines, a framework gradually took shape, which emerged out of the participatory process itself. The idea of ‘moments of possibility’ crystallised as a way of understanding how young people move through civic media practice and how facilitation can support their participation in urban governance.

The ‘**moments of possibility**’ framework traces how young people move through civic media practice, from first encounters with their city, building skills and confidence and producing their own media outputs right through to engaging with civic governance structures and mobilising together around shared concerns. It maps the recurring forms of action and the conditions that allow participation to deepen, expand or shift direction. As a tool for reflection, it helps facilitation teams and youth groups describe what is happening, understand why certain activities matter more at certain moments and adapt their approach as the process unfolds.

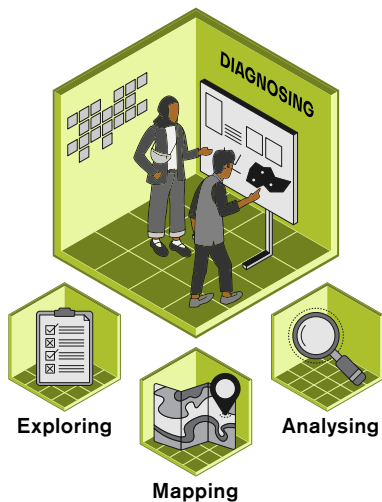
The framework emerged from practical experience. As the CMWs in Bhuj and Dharan generated a wide range of activities (city walks, waste mapping, thematic discussions, storyboarding, film editing, ward meetings, story mapping, community campaigns), facilitation teams began noticing that some activities preceded others. For example, mapping tended to open up discussions; producing media shifted how participants saw themselves and their role; and engaging with civic institutions followed once young people’s confidence had been built. Some forms of participation intensified over time while others remained limited or highly context-dependent. The teams found themselves needing a shared language to name what was actually happening beneath the surface of day-to-day activity, as a way of understanding not just what they were doing, but why certain things worked when they did.

Importance of language

Through repeated reflection sessions, **six recurring moments** took shape: **diagnosing, learning, imagining, producing, engaging and mobilising** (see Figure 1). Each moment groups together a set of activities that reveal how youth participation deepens or shifts and how transitions between moments happen. The shift in language mattered, as one facilitator from the Bhuj team reflected during a session. When the team moved from talking about ‘filming’ to talking about ‘producing’, the connection between what they were doing and why it mattered suddenly became clearer. They recognised that producing was more than filming: it was about collectivising ideas, scripting, testing and making these ideas visible. Similarly, learning was more than training. Engaging captured the relational and often unpredictable work of building trust with communities and institutions. Mobilising was about sustaining collective energy beyond a single gathering or event. These distinctions in language also made the connections between activities visible: editing as reflection, scriptwriting as imagining, ward participation as influencing and negotiating.

The six moments do not follow a fixed sequence. They shift and come into focus depending on the context. Some become dominant, others remain passive and some only emerge later in a process. The framework’s value lies precisely in this flexibility: it reflects how practice can take unexpected turns and supports facilitation teams in responding to those turns. The ‘moments of possibility’ became the lens through which both cities’ trajectories were analysed to understand what each context allowed and what it demanded.

Figure 1. The ‘moments of possibility’ framework



DIAGNOSING refers to the processes through which young people examine their urban environment, uncover hidden systems and identify structural conditions shaping daily life. It often marks the beginning of civic awareness, as participants move from individual experience to collective analysis. Diagnosing builds the foundation for informed action by identifying problems, urban actors and spatial dynamics. It connects lived experience to broader governance structures and invites youth to interpret their surroundings critically.

Activities include:

Exploring: observing neighbourhoods, conducting informal conversations, documenting spaces and engaging directly with lived realities beyond assumptions.

Mapping: visually representing spatial relations, power dynamics or resource flows to clarify how urban systems function and who is affected.

Analysing: interpreting evidence, identifying patterns and connecting local issues to structural systems such as governance, inequality and institutional decision making processes.



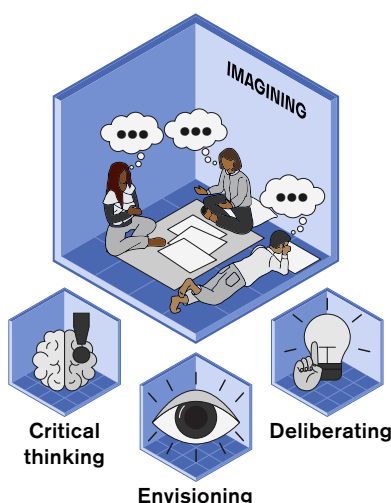
LEARNING captures the development of knowledge, skills and civic awareness through practice. It includes technical experimentation with (digital) media tools and reflective dialogue about social issues. Learning deepens understanding and strengthens confidence. It is collective, influenced by feedback, repetition and shared problem-solving and prepares youth to move from observation toward articulation and engagement.

Activities include:

Reflecting: discussing experiences, reviewing outputs and examining what worked or failed to strengthen awareness and collective understanding.

Experimenting: testing digital tools, trying new formats, exploring creative approaches and learning through trial and adjustment.

Questioning: challenging assumptions, interrogating inequalities and asking critical questions about how urban systems work and personal perspectives.



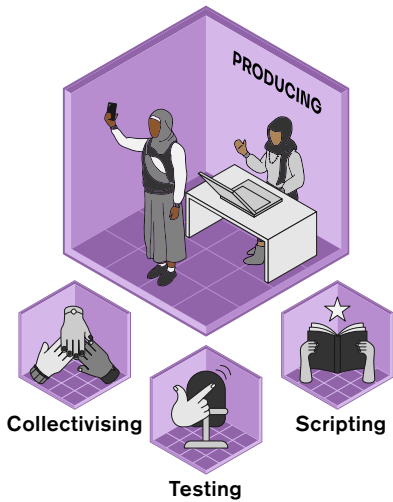
IMAGINING involves constructing alternative narratives, identities and futures. It enables youth to envision new possibilities for themselves and their neighbourhoods, connecting critical analysis with aspiration and collective identity formation. Imagining often strengthens motivation and shapes the direction of subsequent production or engagement activities.

Activities include:

Critical thinking: interpreting information with depth, examining power relations and considering implications of different courses of action.

Envisioning: articulating aspirations, imagining improved conditions for neighbourhoods and defining forms of participation.

Deliberating: collectively discussing alternatives, negotiating ways of thinking and seeing and reaching shared decisions about representation and action.



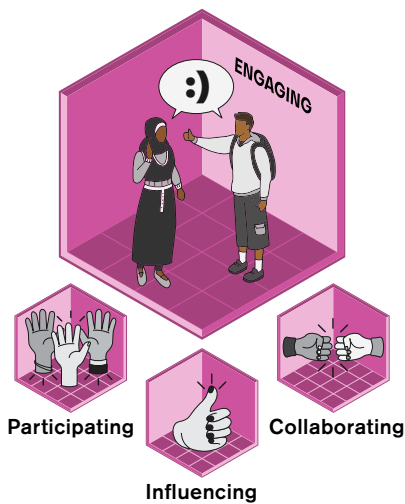
PRODUCING refers to the creation of civic media outputs such as films, audio pieces, digital stories or campaigns. It turns analysis and imagination into tangible outputs, consolidates skills, strengthens collaboration and makes perspectives accessible to wider and new audiences. It serves as a bridge between internal reflection and external engagement.

Activities include:

Collectivising: working collaboratively, sharing roles, distributing responsibilities and building group cohesion around media creation.

Testing: screening drafts, gathering feedback, revising content and refining tone before public release.

Scripting: articulating new narratives, defining key messages organising scenes and conveying stories clearly.



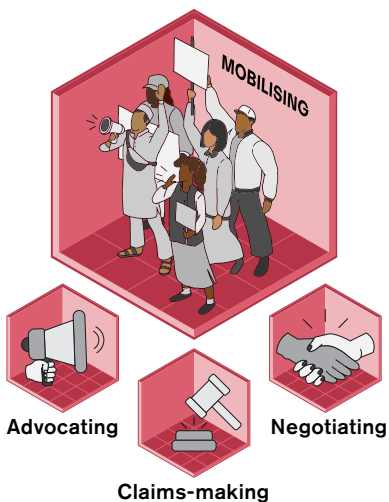
ENGAGING captures the interaction with communities, institutions and audiences. It moves media outputs into relational spaces where dialogue takes place such as forums, meetings and public discussions. Engaging strengthens visibility and positions youth within urban conversations.

Activities include:

Participating: attending meetings, contributing to discussions and occupying civic spaces as urban actors.

Influencing: shaping conversations, presenting evidence and contributing perspectives that affect local decisions.

Collaborating: working alongside community members organisations or local government representatives to advance shared goals.



MOBILISING consolidates collective energy toward sustained action. It involves organising campaigns, building platforms and sustaining momentum, transforming episodic engagement into structured civic presence. It often requires negotiation within complex political environments.

Activities include:

Advocating: publicly supporting specific causes or changes through organised communication and outreach.

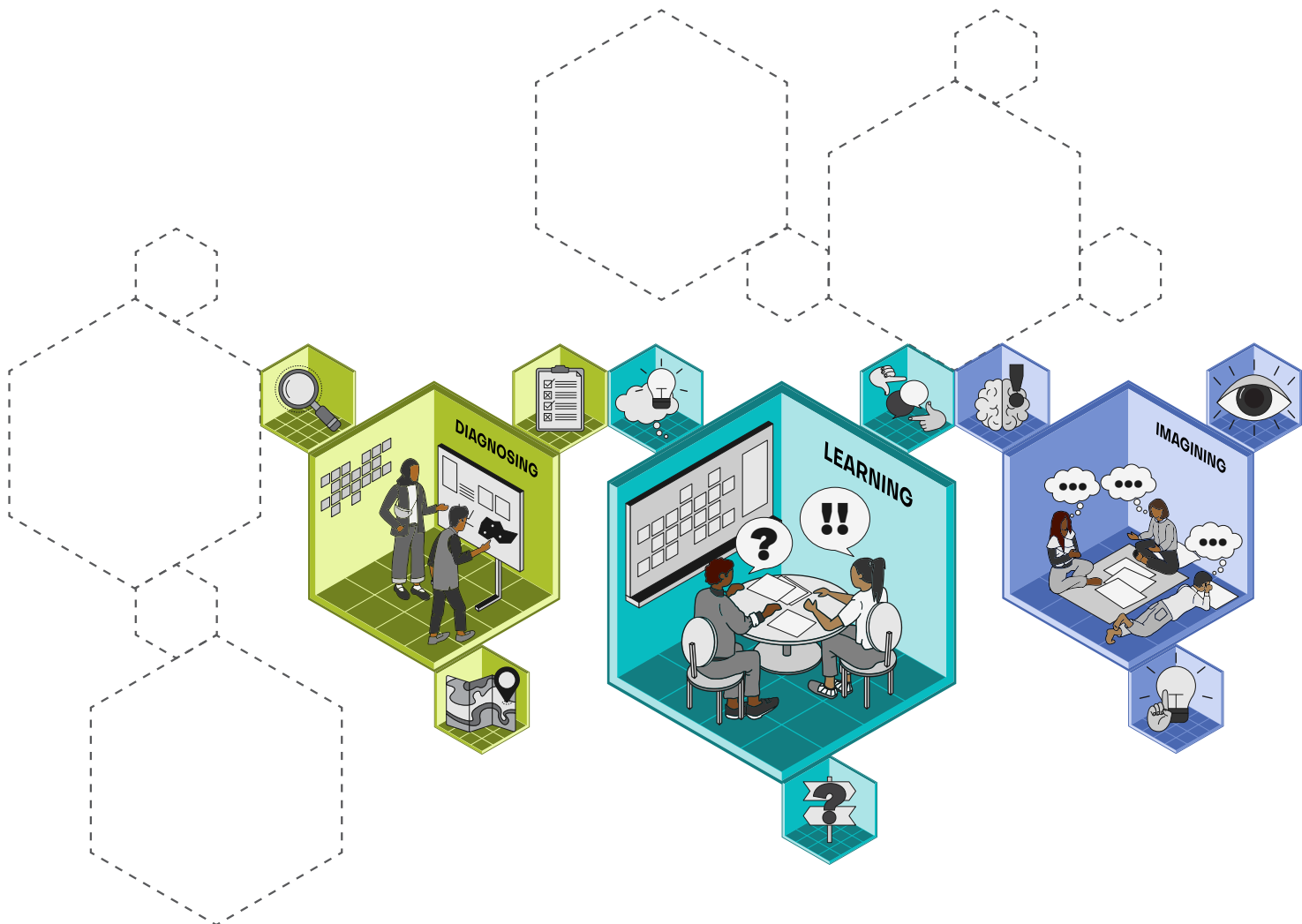
Claims-making: articulating demands, asserting rights and framing expectations toward governance actors.

Negotiating: engaging in dialogue, adjusting strategies and navigating power relations to sustain participation and influence.

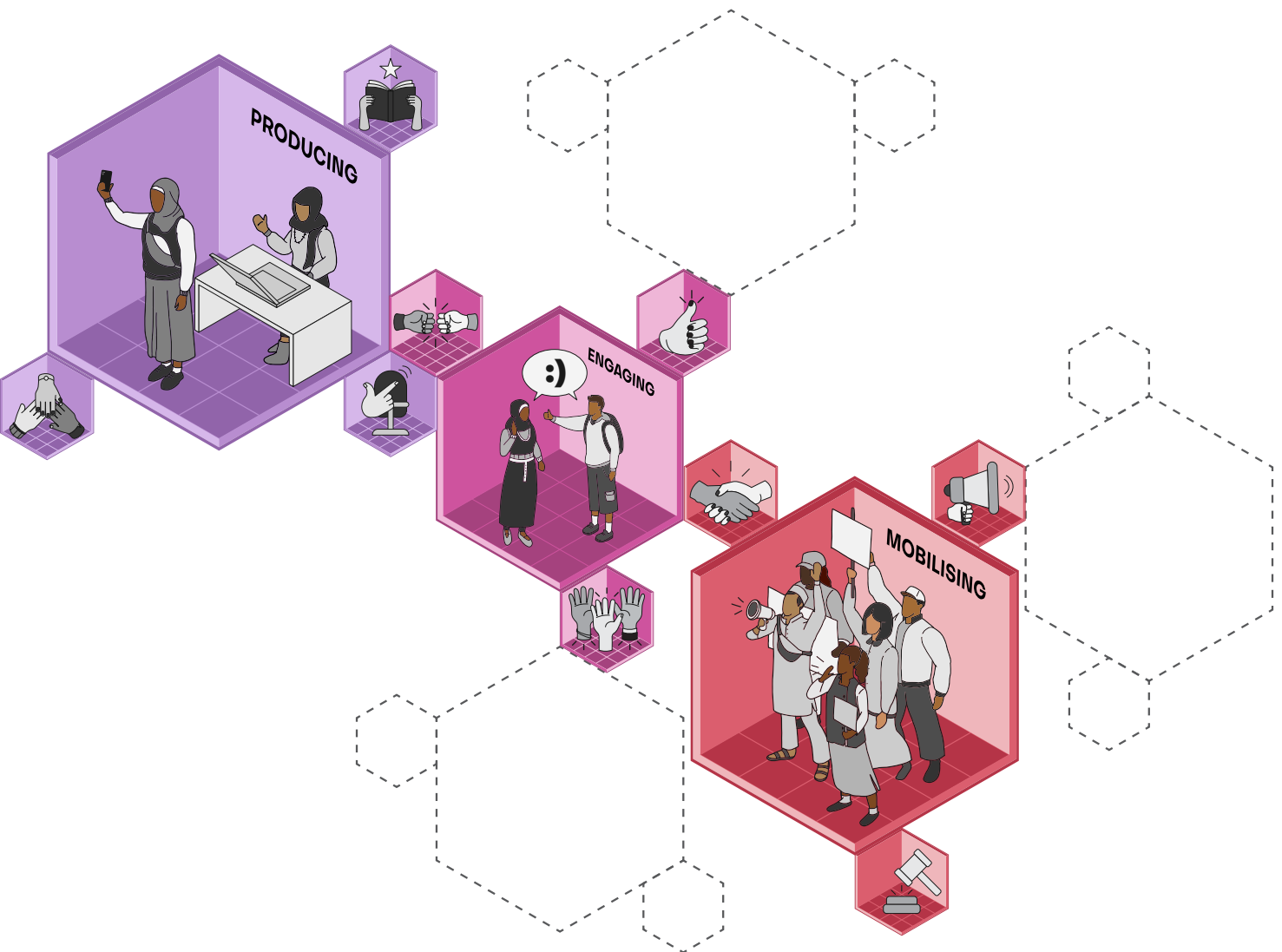
Once the framework began to take shape, the reflection sessions tested and refined it while the CMWs were still running. The sessions mapped trajectories through four guiding questions:

- **What was happening on the ground?**
- **What media tools were being used?**
- **Were shifts in how youth engaged with city issues becoming visible?**
- **Which ‘moments of possibility’ seemed to be driving the process forward?**

Figure 2. Six ‘moments of possibility’: visual representation using beehive structure



Visually, the framework is represented through a hexagonal beehive structure (see Figure 2). Each large hexagon represents one of the six moments. Smaller surrounding hexagons represent the activities that sustain and enable transitions between moments, such as mapping, scripting, experimenting, influencing or negotiating. The hexagonal form reflects interconnection instead of a linear progression. Moments sit next to each other, overlap, expand and contract. Through this approach, the size of each hexagon was adjusted to show intensity: moments that dominated a particular period in a city's trajectory appear larger, while less prominent ones appear smaller. As time moves forward, hexagons cluster and overlap, forming a patchwork where some moments intensify simultaneously while others fade and re-emerge. The beehive becomes a temporal, non-linear map of these movements taking place through open-ended and collective dynamics. Through this iterative process, the 'moments of possibility' moved from intuitive observation to a structured analytical tool. The next two sections show it in motion across Bhuj and Dharan.



Bhuj, India: building civic identity through collective processes



In Bhuj, India, the civic media produced through the project was developed within an environment shaped by gender-based restrictions, religion, caste hierarchies and unequal access to technology. Most young women participating had never used a laptop on their own nor imagined telling their stories publicly. The CMWs started with confidence-building, questioning and learning how to see the city in a new way. Over time, photography, mapping, thematic discussions and filmmaking developed into collective processes that connected the participants' personal narratives to their urban realities. The Bhuj trajectory shows how producing media became a way of diagnosing, learning and incrementally mobilising within a socially complex and sensitive setting.

First stage: explorations

The process began with city walks and storymapping workshops, where small groups explored neighbourhoods, documented spaces through photographs and sketches and started naming what they saw. These early activities were easy entry points, as they required no technical skill, but they asked participants to pay attention in a different way. Youth leaders — six young people who took responsibility for coordination and support within the group, emerged through peer outreach and orientation sessions (clarifying roles and expectations) and weekly face-to-face meetings created a rhythm of regular contact. Photographing the neighbourhood gave participants ownership of how their area was represented, what was perceived as 'good' or 'bad,' what deserved to be shared with audiences beyond the local communities. From there, a participatory video workshop introduced storytelling and camera skills over three days. Heritage walks through Bhuj's walled city used role-playing to explore how urban identity and belonging are shaped by place. A 'Right to the City' workshop asked participants to

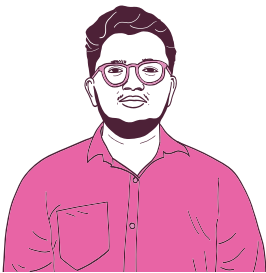
investigate who has claims on public space and whose livelihoods depend on the street. They took these questions directly into filmed interviews with stallholders, vendors and passers-by. Four short videos were produced and edited into a collective film, screened for families and friends in a closed session where participants could experience what it meant to share personal work within trusted circles.

Second stage: personal identity and storytelling

A second phase of thematic workshops, co-designed by the facilitation team, was implemented, each structured around a lens connecting urban issues to personal experience: water and gender, waste and governance, food and the city, home and belonging. These sessions required careful facilitation because they moved into sensitive territory. During the water and gender session, participants explored how household water use was divided along gendered lines — who cleaned, who carried, whose labour was visible. In the ‘Food and City’ session, facilitators introduced a ‘food privilege walk’, in which participants physically stepped forward or backwards based on their lived experiences, whether they had faced discrimination at a food stall, felt safe walking home at night or been turned away from a place because of who they were. Food is heavily politicised in Bhuj and participants were initially hesitant but slowly became comfortable sharing personal experiences of discrimination. In the ‘Home and Belonging’ session, a ‘River of Life’ exercise invited reflection on personal identity and spatial storytelling, though some participants could not video their own homes. Across these sessions, inequality was made visible through the body and personal narratives rather than abstract discussions or debate. Supporting young women’s participation required specific strategies beyond the workshop space, through family visits, stipends and at times separate groups to create conditions where attendance was possible at all.

“When participants physically stepped forward or backwards based on their lived experiences, the abstract idea of discrimination became visible. They could see inequality in the room.”

—Shounak, facilitator, Bhuj



Water and gender workshop
Credit: Bhuj Team



Story exploration workshop
Credit: Bhuj Team

Expanded facilitation team

The process was supported by a facilitation team that grew as the work demanded. Beyond the core facilitators, the CMWs drew in filmmakers, urban practitioners, technical editors, social workers and community mobilisers, each joining at the stage where their expertise was needed. This team expanded in response to what the process required. New layers of complexity emerged when filmmaking began. Unlike earlier workshops, which allowed flexible attendance, filmmaking required sustained commitment; missing one session meant falling behind. This demand exposed differences in who could commit time and energy. Facilitators observed that many young women, largely from Muslim neighbourhoods, had limited mobility and restricted access to technology. Some were hesitant to go outside their communities to conduct interviews; holding a camera in public was itself an act of negotiation. Some found creative alternatives using voiceovers, collaborative storytelling and anonymous filming as ways to remain involved when more visible or mobile roles were unavailable to them. As a facilitator reflected: “Some responded by making a film on wider community issues instead of the person and when they chose an issue tied to the person, they decided to make the face and identity hidden, such as in one case where a young woman made a film on the lack of privacy in her neighbourhood.” The stories chosen by the young people reflected these tensions and made explicit that personal narratives were difficult to separate from urban social and political systems.

Storyboarding became a key device. Facilitators introduced six guiding questions: what is your film about? Why are you making it? Who appears in it? Which places are shown? What sounds will be included? What emotions will it capture? These questions structured reflection and helped participants translate themes into narrative form. Storytelling involved emotional risk; some participants initially wanted to address divorce and early marriage but later withdrew, feeling unprepared to make such experiences public. Facilitators recognised this uncertainty as part of the process since agency requires time. Technical learning happened alongside emotional and social negotiation. A young filmmaker joined to support on-the-ground shooting coordination and weekly sessions turned into a combination of thematic exploration, media analysis and practical production.

Confidence gradually increased. Youth who initially doubted themselves began approaching strangers in markets to conduct interviews. Participants who were quiet in earlier sessions took on defined roles within the team. As one participant explained: “earlier, I didn’t know how to put my voice across in front of people, but after making a film I understood how to tell my story. Before understanding my city, I first understood my neighbourhood.” The filmmaking process became a rehearsal space for public presence. By the time the films had been curated collectively, the group was more confident in producing outputs and deliberating on representation and other issues.

Travel inspires participants

A significant turning point came in May 2025, when a group of youth leaders travelled to Mumbai on an exposure visit. This was not skills training. The goal was to experience a different urban context, visit organisations working with young people, see how others navigated similar tensions between creative practice and civic engagement and simply be somewhere new together. For many, it was their first time leaving Bhuj. Facilitators noted that something shifted during and after that trip: seeing others from similar socio-economic backgrounds confidently leading their own initiatives helped transform/change participants' sense of what was possible. After the visit, their activity on Instagram increased and conversations about what kind of collective space they wanted to create became more ambitious. The visit transitioned participants from learning about urban issues to feeling like they belonged in conversations about them — a decisive change.

Asanjo Film Festival

That sense of belonging found its most visible expression at the Asanjo Film Festival organised by the youth group in the second half of 2025 as a space they fully owned — for screening, for conversation and for sharing their work publicly on their own terms. Asanjo means 'ours' in the local Kutchi language and the name was itself the product of nearly three weeks of collective deliberation about who the new platform belonged to and what it stood for. The festival brought together the films made during the workshops and opened them to a wider audience: elders, street vendors, neighbours and both family and community members who had not been part of the process. The young people took full ownership of organising the festival — deciding on the programme, doing outreach and managing the space. As a facilitator described it: "The surprising part wasn't that they participated, it was that they began thinking like organisers. They weren't just executing instructions, they were deciding direction." The festival marked a transition from participation to ownership and from producing media to claiming public space. For many, it was the first time they introduced themselves as filmmakers, not just workshop participants.

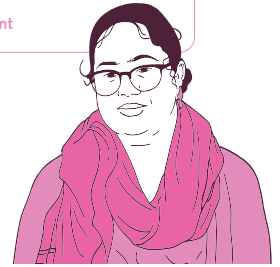


Audience during Asanjo film festival in Bhuj, India
Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter

In Bhuj, the ‘moments of possibility’ framework reveals a trajectory shaped by uneven technological access, gendered constraints and gradual confidence-building. While all six moments appeared at different points, three became structurally central: diagnosing, producing and mobilising. Learning and imagining were embedded throughout. Engaging in its institutional sense remained limited.

I had no experience of how to work in a group or a collective. When I joined, I had many questions about my community and society. This gave my thinking a new direction.

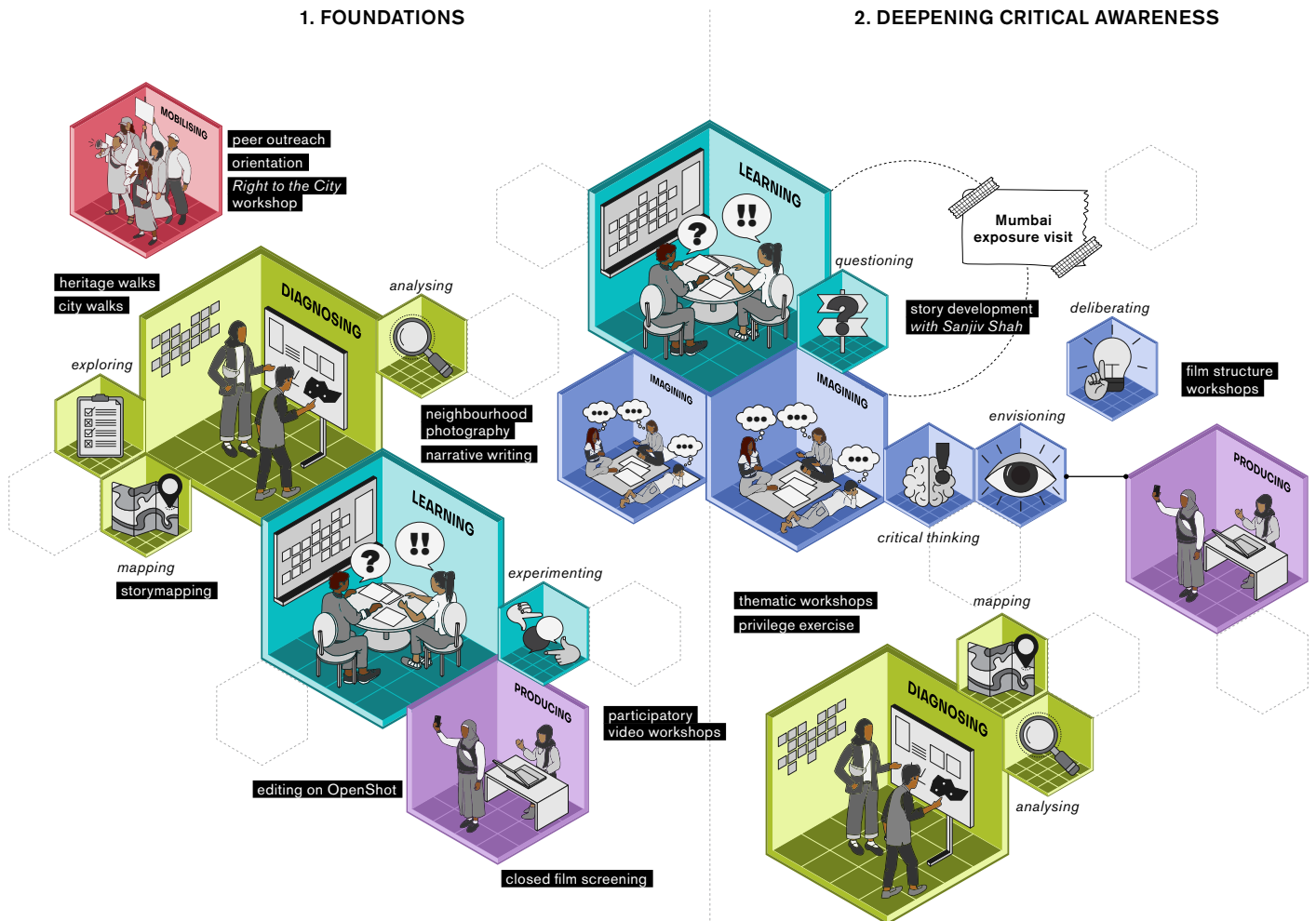
–Yasmin, youth participant



DIAGNOSING emerged early and proved foundational; it was less about formal policy critique and more about uncovering structures embedded in daily life. Waste mapping exercises triggered a critical realisation: participants did not know where their waste went after leaving their homes. **Mapping** exposed how collection depended on informal labour, who lived near the dump site, and which neighbourhoods were served and which were not. **Photography walks** deepened observation. The food privilege walk and other thematic sessions on water, identity and home expanded the conversation into social inequality, making visible the caste, religion and gender-based hierarchies that determined who could speak, move and be seen. **Analysing** and **mapping** therefore operated both spatially and socially.

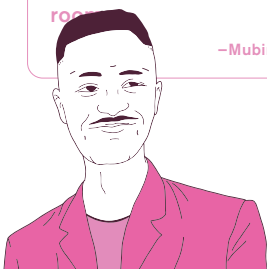
1. FOUNDATIONS

2. DEEPENING CRITICAL AWARENESS



At Nazariya, we saw youth like us showcasing their perspectives through film. At Govandi, they transformed their place through art. In a slum like ours, they have a place to study and a mental health room.

–Mubin, youth participant



LEARNING was inseparable from doing. For many participants, especially young women, operating a laptop, **experimenting** with cameras and editing software was a **first encounter with digital tools**, a practice of expanding possibility in itself. Before producing their own work, participants watched and analysed short films together, breaking down how stories were structured, what choices filmmakers made and why, building narrative literacy before participants scripted their own stories. **Reflecting** occurred collectively. As a facilitator noted, youth engage most through hands-on action: “mapping together, conducting interviews, filming, then sharing and reflecting on these experiences.” **Questioning** deepened over time: why is domestic labour invisible? Who names informal settlements? Why is privacy scarce in dense neighbourhoods?

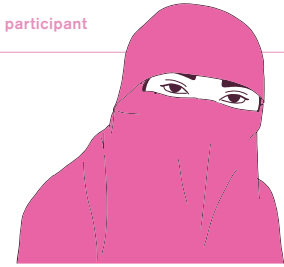
IMAGINING appeared most clearly in the editing space, where participants realised their films represented something bigger than their original topic; for example, a film about waste became a reflection on dignity and identity. This carried into the **collective deliberation** around the Asanjo Film Festival, when the naming process took nearly three weeks, as youth negotiated what kind of platform they were building and who it belonged to. Imagining in Bhuj was about **crafting a shared identity** before going into thinking about urban futures.

PRODUCING was where identity became visible. **Scripting** relied on guiding questions about purpose, place, characters, sound and emotion. **Collectivising** was essential, **editing** exposed imbalanced skill levels and shared timelines and peer support redistributed responsibility. **Producing became a structured rehearsal for collaboration.** Some participants withdrew from sensitive topics like divorce when they felt unprepared for public exposure. Producing was **creative and relational**, a process in which making something together was also how the group learned to trust one another.

ENGAGING was present but restricted. **Participation** occurred through screenings, interviews in markets and community conversations. **Influencing** municipal processes directly was limited and collaboration remained primarily internal or community-based. Rather than formal governance interaction, the group strengthened its narrative presence.

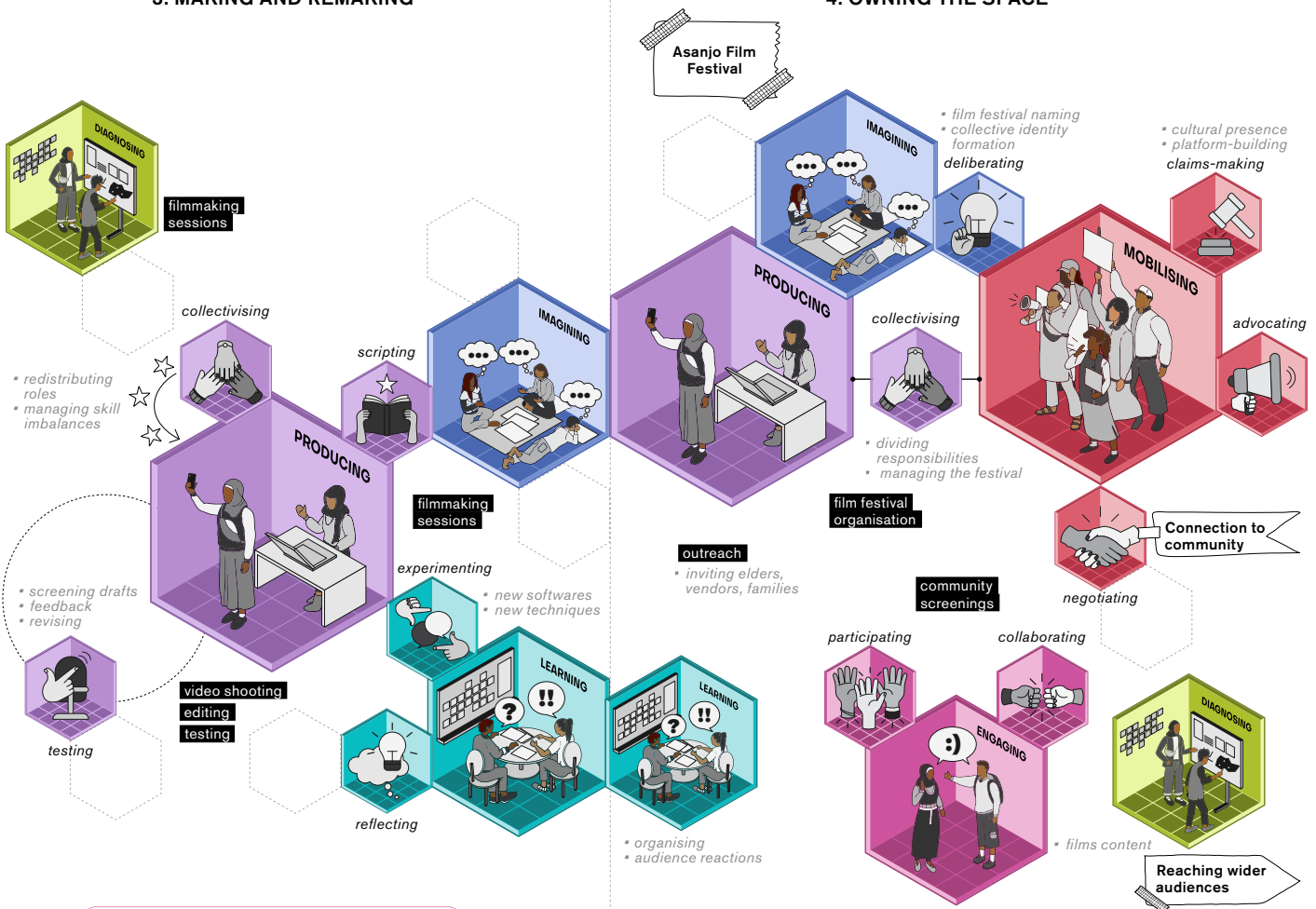
After being with this youth group, I gained knowledge about many things. I didn't know how to address the problems in our area. I also didn't know who to talk to — I would just feel angry.

—Sherbanu, youth participant



3. MAKING AND REMAKING

4. OWNING THE SPACE



Through these two years I worked together with diverse people, made friends and understood each other. My thinking has changed entirely. Now I see them as people first.

—Ashwin, youth participant



MOBILISING followed this internal consolidation and took the form of **platform-building** before direct advocacy. Early outreach invited peers to join workshops. Later, youth introduced themselves as filmmakers, inviting elders and vendors to watch their work. The shift from 'join us' to 'we made this' captures how **mobilisation grew through ownership.** A facilitator observed: "When they felt the festival depended on them, not us, they stepped up."

Advocating and **claims-making** were more implicit than explicit. The Asanjo Film Festival consolidated this mobilisation as cultural presence, not confrontation and the community screenings that followed showed that presence was already becoming its own form of influence.

In Bhuj, the interplay between **DIAGNOSING**, **PRODUCING** and **MOBILISING** created a trajectory grounded in confidence-building within structural constraints. Some activities, particularly institutional influencing and explicit claim-making remained limited. Other practices emerged: **emotional negotiation**, **digital initiation** and **identity crafting**, enriching the process in ways that mattered as much as the formal moments.

REFLECTIONS ON BHUJ EXPERIENCE

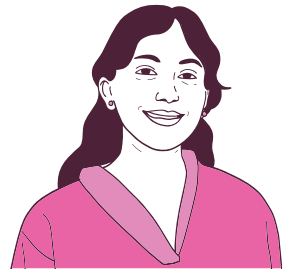
The Bhuj trajectory demonstrates that the six moments of possibility do not carry equal weight in every setting. Diagnosing, producing and mobilising were structurally dominant. Learning and imagining were woven through everything. Engaging, was in the background: present, but not the driving force. This unevenness reflects a context where the first transformation had to be internal — a shift in how participants understood themselves and their surroundings — before it could become external.

For practitioners and facilitators, this raises an important consideration: frameworks should not be applied as checklists. Not all moments need to be equally activated in every setting. In Bhuj, emotional and social negotiation, digital initiation and identity crafting mattered as much as formal advocacy. Some of the most significant work, particularly negotiating within families for young women's attendance, building basic technological familiarity, creating conditions where holding a camera in public became possible, is not explicitly named in the framework but was central to how possibility unfolded. The facilitation team itself grew in response to these demands, bringing in filmmakers, urban practitioners and community mobilisers at the stages where their expertise was needed.

The Bhuj experience also suggests that mobilisation does not always begin with advocacy directed at institutions. Here, it grew through ownership — naming a festival organising screenings, introducing oneself as a community filmmaker rather than a workshop participant. This identity-based mobilisation preceded any policy-oriented engagement and it may be what makes future engagement possible. As a facilitator put it: "Facilitation is not imposing courage; it's helping people confront the quiet resistance inside themselves. That's slower, more uncomfortable, but more real."

"When I'm with young people, I always put fun, joy and lightness at the heart of it. That's what sparks real friendships and group learning — going way beyond what I, as a facilitator, could ever plan"

—Aishwarya, workshop facilitator



Bhuj demonstrates that engaging young people through civic media can function as a slow infrastructure for agency. Its most visible outcome may be a film festival, but its deeper impact lies in nurturing confidence, perception and collective coordination. When young women who have never used a computer begin editing their own narratives and inviting others to watch, their identity and personal agency has already developed and taken root.



Dharan, Nepal: reaching beyond media to engage with communities

Participants during a community action plan workshop

Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter



In Dharan, the CMWs grew from a deliberate choice: to begin with the urban realities that young people were already navigating rather than starting out with media production. Facilitators identified early on that while some participants were digitally confident, others had limited exposure to both technology and civic processes. The cohort reflected significant variability across class and educational backgrounds and one of the ongoing tensions for facilitators was how to work productively across these differences. From that starting point, the workshops became a slow practice of immersion. Youth moved from observing urban processes to facilitating conversations within them, acting as intermediaries between communities and municipal actors. That movement was rarely smooth. Economic vulnerability, political instability and uneven participation shaped the process as well as the context the workshops worked within.

The workshops prioritised learning by doing — engaging the youth directly with communities, navigating institutional processes and using media to explore these interactions. A central practice was the integration of civic media tools into Community Action Plan (CAP) workshops conducted across different neighbourhoods. CAPs were designed to support formalised structures for neighbourhood and ward-level planning through Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs), the local bodies responsible for coordinating community priorities. The youth acted as co-facilitators, responsible for guiding discussions, supporting prioritisation exercises and documenting the process. As one participant reflected, 'I was particularly impressed by how community members came together to discuss and prioritise their problems. This process helped reveal issues that often go unnoticed and showed me how collective discussion can lead to effective solutions'. Media outputs — video, photography, short written reflections — documented community concerns and helped youth and communities reflect on what was being discussed, rather than serving as finished advocacy products.

Engaging with communities

Field visits were a key site of learning. Youth travelled to waste dump sites, drainage points near schools, heritage sites like the Vishnu Paduka Temple and neighbourhoods affected by infrastructure failures or development decisions. They used media tools to record their observations, interviews and environmental conditions, grounding their understanding of urban issues in direct experience. Alongside digital outputs, territorial approaches proved essential, such as street dramas scripted carefully to reach wider audiences and house-to-house visits providing information on vital registration and citizenship documents. These face-to-face, place-based practices complemented the digital work and often built trust and dialogue more quickly. As a facilitator observed, 'Many of them had first joined simply to learn media skills. But as they spent more time on the ground, interacting with communities, their understanding of the city began to grow.'

Interacting with civic authorities

The workshops helped youth move beyond documentation and into institutional engagement. The young people prepared written requests to ward officials and municipal representatives, memoranda of understanding with local authorities, formally setting out concerns — from unmanaged waste dumping and open drainage near schools to tangled electric cables on street poles — and requesting meetings as well as presenting their findings to those authorities. For many participants, this was their first experience speaking directly with government actors. A participant reflected: "Earlier, I believed that solving community problems was mainly the responsibility of local authorities, but through this project, I realised that citizens also have an important role in initiating change." Facilitators noted initial hesitation and anxiety, particularly around being taken seriously. "Participants who were initially hesitant to ask questions gradually became more confident, actively seeking guidance and emerging as empowered youth champions of Dharan," one facilitator observed. Repeated exposure to these situations gradually strengthened youth confidence and their ability to articulate concerns clearly and respectfully.

Facilitation skills emerged as one of the most significant areas of growth. The young people had to learn how to manage group dynamics, encourage quieter voices to speak out and navigate disagreement during community meetings. Media practices supported this work by providing reference points such as images, videos and maps, which helped anchor discussions. Over time, youth demonstrated increased independence, conducting their own meetings and activities without the facilitators.



Deputy Mayor of Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City with representatives from ward 5 and 15 and other delegates during the opening session of the community action plan exhibition

Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter



People of Khoriya community in Dharan sharing their issues and challenges
Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter

Challenges lead to adaptation, flexibility maintains momentum

The workshops also revealed ongoing tensions. Sustained participation proved challenging due to economic pressures, educational commitments and migration aspirations. A significant number of participants came from low-income households where daily financial pressures naturally took priority over voluntary engagement. Some left for work in Gulf countries; others drifted as early enthusiasm faded. Facilitators responded by deepening the work with those who stayed, focusing on shared responsibility and supporting the development of leadership roles among a core group of five committed youth leaders, who received modest stipends to sustain their engagement. Cross-city exchange also opened new possibilities during this period. When the Dharan team saw the films produced by the Bhuj youth group and travelled to take part in the Asanjo Film Festival, it prompted reflection on what their own process could become, a moment of comparative learning that expanded their sense of direction and ambition.

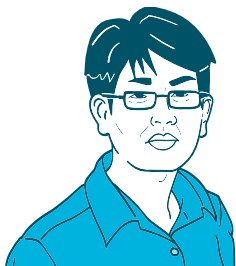
Political instability in Dharan further shaped the process. Changes in municipal leadership and periods of institutional paralysis limited opportunities for formal engagement with planning and budgeting processes. This exposed the broader limitations of the formalised 'participatory' process itself, even when consultations took place, political gatekeeping and weak follow-through meant community priorities rarely translated into budget decisions. The youth group and facilitators responded by adjusting their focus, placing greater emphasis on awareness-building campaigns, understanding land tenure and land use regulations through community discussion programmes and citizenship-related information, including access to national identity documents and understanding municipal roles. These adaptations reinforced the idea that civic media practice must remain responsive to context, capable of shifting emphasis without losing momentum.

Manage social media risks

Digital platforms played an important but carefully managed role. Youth used Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Messenger to share updates, videos and invitations. Workshops encouraged discussions about ethical media use, political neutrality and the risks associated with visibility. These became critical early on. When the youth group posted about the waste dumping site on their Facebook page, followers of opposing political factions interpreted it as partisan commentary. Dharan is a deeply polarised city — and the group faced sustained online harassment. That experience directly shaped how they framed subsequent content by raising issues clearly, always pairing them with constructive suggestions and avoiding language that could be seen as politically aligned.

The most significant test came in September 2025, when protests associated with the Gen Z movement swept across Nepal. In Dharan, the situation was particularly sensitive. While the city's mayor had publicly supported the movement, many of the ward representatives with whom the youth group had built relationships were affiliated with parties on the opposing side. The young people found themselves holding conflicting commitments

“When young people are given real opportunities, useful skills and the right support, they can play an important role in improving their communities and participating in city decision making”



—Ananta, workshop facilitator

— their identity as a non-partisan civic youth group, their individual participation in the early street protests and the institutional relationships they had carefully cultivated over months. The navigation was not straightforward. Facilitators advised caution about social media posting, but the youth themselves were also weighing competing desires, the impulse to speak out and the awareness that visibility carried risks that they had already experienced. One facilitator described the difficulty of those days as an overwhelming volume of news, much of it unverifiable, circulating through the same social media channels the group used for their own outreach. A decision to go quiet on social media was collective but contested. They also suspended a planned activity analysing municipal budget allocations, tracing whether CAP outcomes were reflected in ward spending, deciding it was too politically sensitive. These were acts of strategic judgement that reflected a form of civic learning that no workshop session could have taught — understanding when to speak out, when to wait and how to protect the work without abandoning it.

Powerful moments like these emerged from throughout the process from accumulated practice, repeated facilitation, ongoing documentation and sustained engagement with both communities and institutions. Civic media functioned as an enabling practice supporting youth to learn how to listen, translate, negotiate and persist within the everyday realities of urban governance.

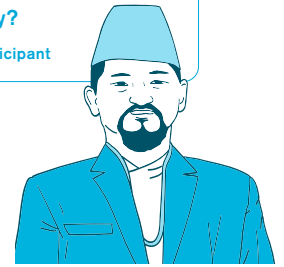


Focus group discussion with the youth of Nishandanda community in Dharan
Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter

In Dharan, all six moments of possibility were activated across the trajectory. However, their distribution was particular to its context. **ENGAGING**, **LEARNING** and **MOBILISING** became structurally more dominant. Producing operated as a strategic instrument for transformation. Diagnosing and imagining were present and often directed toward governance processes.

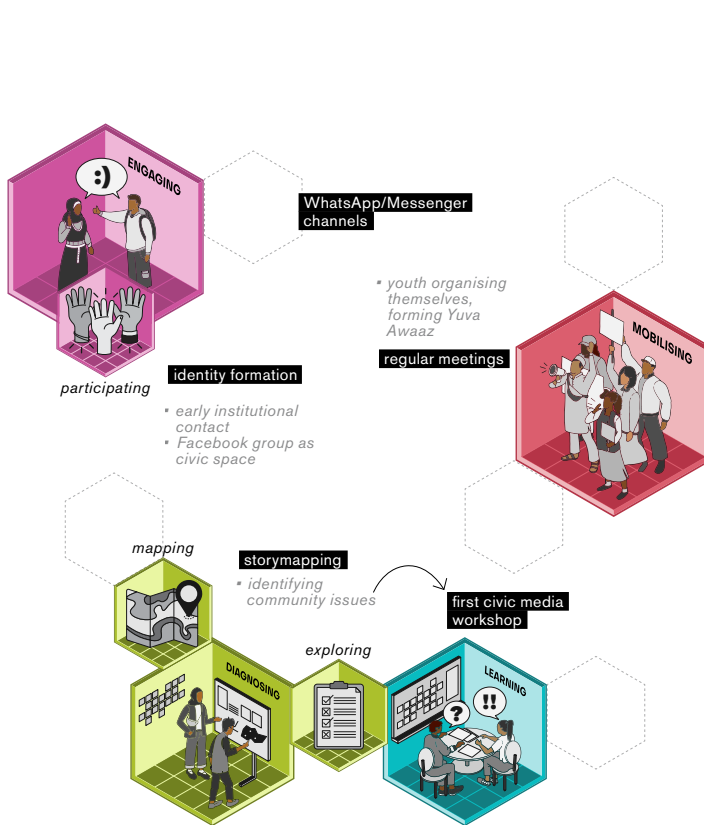
Initially, I expected the project to provide technical trainings and opportunities to advocate for social issues. One question often came to my mind: am I really capable of working for society?

—Shanti Ram, youth participant

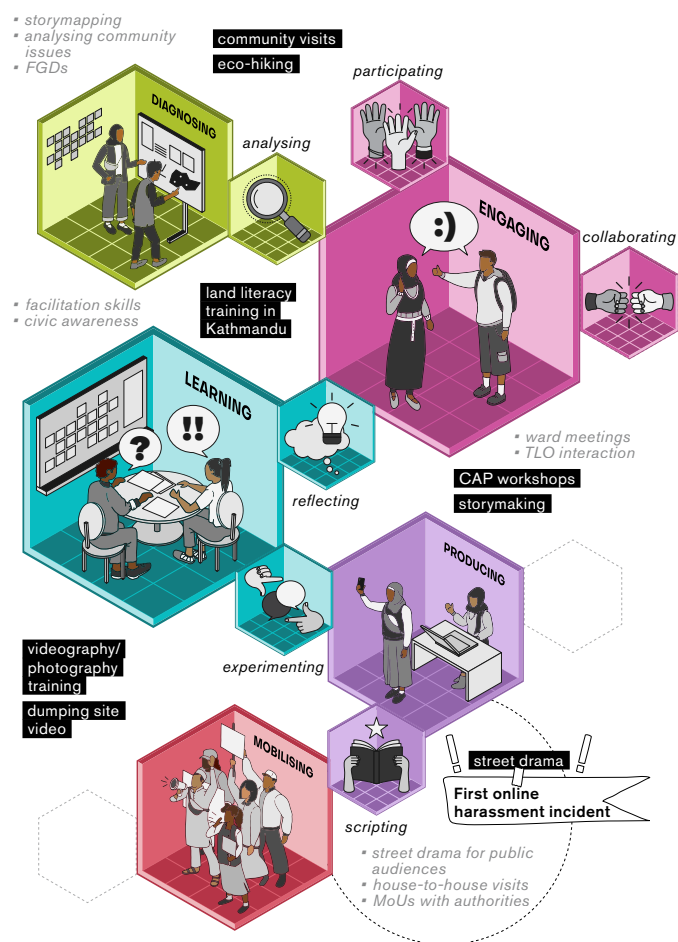


DIAGNOSING developed through storymapping exercises, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and conversations around land tenure, waste management and budget allocation. It was often tied directly to governance mechanisms. **Exploring** municipal processes, such as CAP and ward-level decision making, allowed youth to **analyse** how urban decisions were made. **Mapping** became both spatial and institutional. **Diagnosing** was about understanding formal structures.

1. FORMING AND CONNECTING

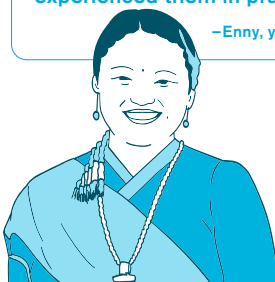


2. LEARNING THROUGH GOVERNANCE



The community action planning process was particularly meaningful for me. Although I had studied some of these concepts academically, I had never experienced them in practice.

—Enny, youth participant



LEARNING was deeply civic. Youth **reflected** on rights, documentation, citizenship processes and budget allocation. **Experimenting** occurred through media production and engagement formats, experimenting with public forums, then shifting to one-to-one visits when political unrest disrupted gatherings. **Questioning** intensified during the Gen Z protests. When the young people were advised not to post politically charged content, the group debated tone and strategy. Learning involved **understanding when to speak and how to speak**, responding to the situation by being both explicitly strategic and contextual.

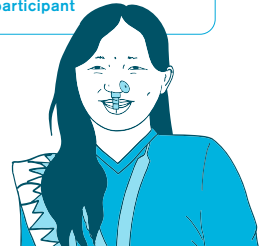
IMAGINING was oriented toward governance change. The young people **deliberated** on how to frame issues constructively and avoid confrontation, a shift shaped directly by the online harassment they had experienced early in the process. **Critical thinking** became visible in the move from direct criticism of municipal actors to suggestive narrative framing. **Envisioning** occurred in discussions about what youth participation in governance could look like, how to influence ward chairs, how to present findings without escalating tension. Imagining was **future-facing but institutionally aware**.

PRODUCING happened throughout the process, resulting in videos documenting: the unmanaged dumping site (part of a campaign combining photography, video, street exhibition and direct **advocacy** to address open drainage endangering schoolchildren), eco-hikes recording the history and condition of heritage documentation, sites like the Vishnupaduka Temple and short pieces on unemployment and civic processes. It was instrumental to engaging institutions and communities. However, producing was rarely the primary moment; it functioned as leverage. **Scripting** street dramas was strategic and done with caution. The tone was adjusted to avoid political backlash. **Testing** occurred through social media reactions and public feedback. **Collectivising** centred on coordinated campaigns.

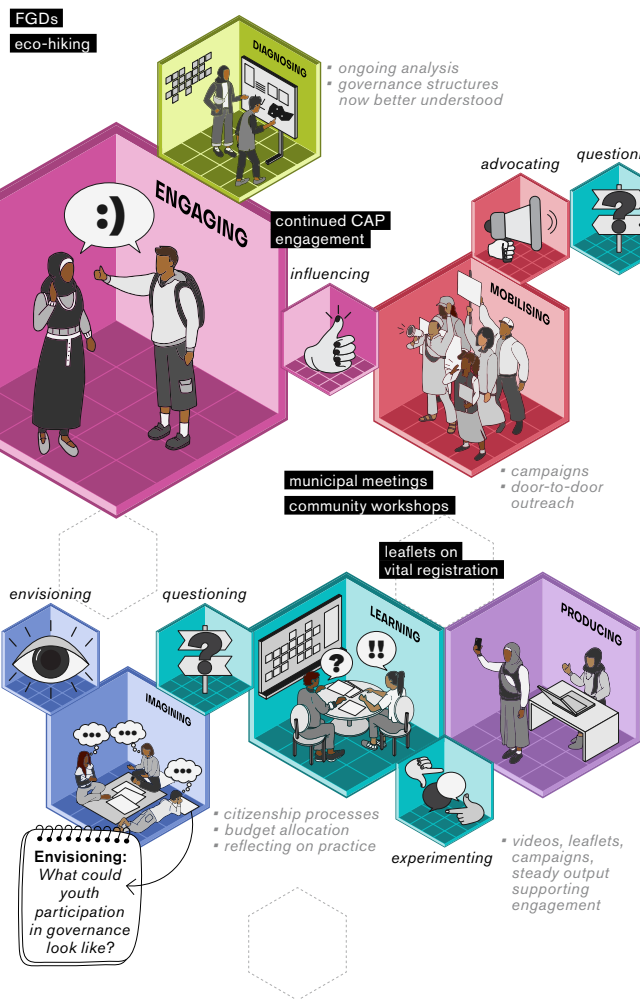
ENGAGING was the most prominent moment — it was **relational and institutional**. Youth **participated** in ward meetings, CAP discussions and municipal processes. **Influencing** appeared in efforts to draw attention to dumping site issues and budget allocations. **Collaborating** occurred within the youth group and with TLOs, ward officials and community members. Even when political instability restricted public posting, engagement did not cease but was adapted. Forums were replaced with one-to-one visits.

During awareness activities on vital registration in the community, I felt a strong sense of responsibility as we engaged directly with people and helped address their concerns.

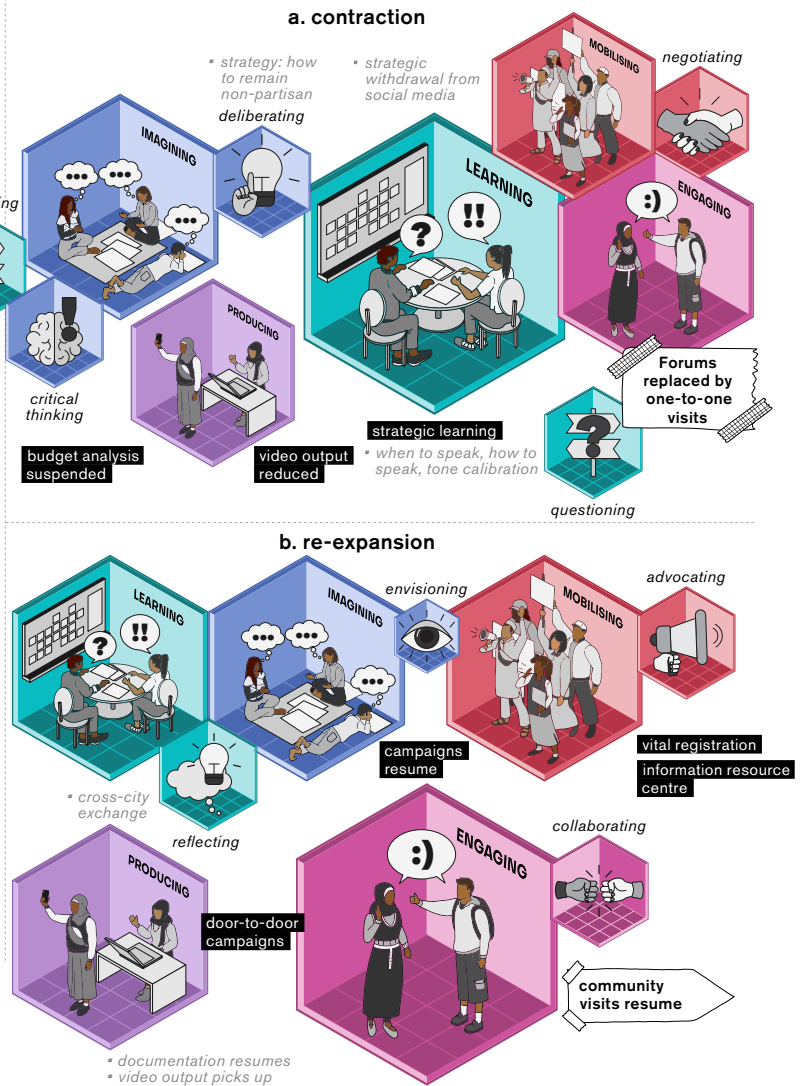
—Dristi Culum, youth participant



3. DEEPENING AND EXPANDING



4. NAVIGATING CRISIS AND RECALIBRATION



MOBILISING emerged through **campaigns** and **advocacy** around waste management and youth safety. **Claims-making** was carefully planned, not directed at authorities alone but navigated within a turbulent digital environment where every public statement risked being read as partisan. The **early harassment experience shaped all subsequent mobilisation**. The group learned to raise issues clearly, pair them with constructive suggestions and avoid language that could be claimed by any political camp.

Dharan's mobilisation centred on **issue-based engagement** within rapidly changing political conditions. The hierarchy of moments reflects a context where governance structures were already accessible but unstable. Youth began engaging in ward meetings and facilitating community workshops early in the process, before the group had fully developed a shared identity or collective voice — **the civic engagement** itself became **the space where that identity gradually took shape**. **Producing** supported **ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING** sharpened strategy and **MOBILISING** entailed **negotiation**.

REFLECTIONS ON DHARAN EXPERIENCE

Working with young people in Dharan meant starting from their lived reality. While some participants moved easily through digital interfaces and platforms, urban governance remained distant, unfamiliar and sometimes intimidating. The cohort brought wide variability in class and educational backgrounds and the facilitation team invested in engaging them across these differences, making space for those less confident while drawing on the energy of those more experienced. The workshops became a slow practice of immersion. Learning did not happen in linear modules but through repeated encounters, with community residents voicing their concerns, officials explaining procedures and the reality of urban problems that defied simple solutions.

One of the most significant shifts was how youth confidence grew through facilitation rather than media production. Young people did not position themselves as documentary filmmakers capturing their communities from the outside, they were the people who brought others together, held space for difficult conversations, guided neighbours through prioritising their needs and stayed present when things got complicated. Listening without rushing to solutions, managing disagreements, amplifying quieter voices in spaces dominated by louder ones — none of it was easy especially given the effort to bring together youth from across different social and economic realities. But gradually, it became their practice, they were not just learning to use media, they were learning what it meant to create a space where people could talk about the future of their city.

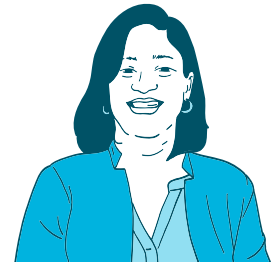
Field visits anchored the process. Walking through neighbourhoods flooded by inadequate drainage, standing at dumping sites where waste accumulated without collection and seeing the gap between municipal promises and lived reality in marginalised communities, these experiences sparked new conversations. Media tools helped the young people document what they witnessed and then explore their storytelling more deeply during reflection and planning. When participants met with community members or officials afterwards, their words carried more weight.

The workshops faced challenges. Sustaining participation proved difficult against the pressures young people navigated every day — family expectations, school deadlines and the pull of migration opportunities. Attendance fluctuated, some left, others drifted as early enthusiasm waned. Rather than trying to keep the group together, facilitators deepened the work with those who stayed. That smaller, committed core became something more durable. They took on greater responsibility, became leaders and points of continuity and learned to sustain the process even without facilitators.

Political instability significantly affected the project. Municipal leadership changed hands and planning processes stopped. Opportunities for formal influence shifted. Even when institutional doors were nominally open, the formalised participatory process itself had significant constraints like political gatekeeping and weak mechanisms for translating community priorities into actual budget decisions. When these blockages happened, facilitators shifted focus toward awareness-building campaigns and other activities that kept the participants engaged.

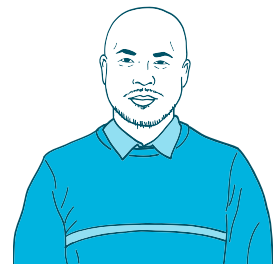
“Many of them had first joined simply to learn media skills. But as they spent more time on the ground, interacting with communities, their understanding of the city began to grow.”

—Lumanti, workshop facilitator



“I feel happy to share, interact during the training and also learn how to be effective in planning, importance of communication, curiosity and critical thinking.”

—Newton, workshop facilitator







Water and gender workshop in Bhuj
Credit: Bhuj Team

Lessons: two journeys to civic agency through one framework

Read separately, Bhuj and Dharan each tell a coherent story. Read together, they reveal that the same framework, used by skilled facilitators in different urban contexts, leads to genuinely distinct pathways to civic agency. The differences are where the real learning sits. Two cities, one framework and two entirely different sequences of possibility. What shaped those trajectories was not methodology but context, who the young people were, what constraints surrounded them and what their reality actually required.

Both cities activated all six 'moments of possibility' for the young people. But the sequence, which moment came first, which had to wait, which was only possible once another had already completed, was determined by context. In Bhuj, young women who had never held a camera could not jump straight in to institutional engagement. Before that, something more foundational had to shift — their confidence to speak out, as well as a belief that their neighbourhood was worth examining and their story worth telling. Diagnosing came first not because facilitators planned it that way, but because the context required it. Mapping invisible waste systems, stepping forward and back in a privilege exercise, analysing films about spaces they actually lived in, all this had to happen before producing became possible. And producing had to happen before mobilising could start.

In Dharan the sequence was different. The cohort brought a wider range of starting points: some participants were digitally fluent and already curious about the city, while for others both technology and civic processes felt distant. What most shared, across those differences, was limited familiarity with how power actually worked at the ward level, who made decisions and how, what it felt like to sit across a table from a municipal official with something to say. Engaging came early precisely because the context permitted it. Ward meetings, CAP workshops, field visits to dumping sites, these were where learning happened. Producing supported that engagement. The videos were not the main event, they were tools for opening doors, grounding conversations with officials in documented evidence and giving the group credibility when they walked into a ward meeting.

This divergence points to something practitioners can learn from — the moments of possibility are not a sequence to follow but a set of conditions to read. The framework's value is in making visible which conditions are already present and which still need to be built. In Bhuj, institutional influencing came later because narrative confidence had to come first. In Dharan, identity consolidation came later because civic engagement came first. Neither path was more complete, each was a response to what the environment offered.

What both experiences share, though, is subtler and perhaps more significant. In each case, there came a point when young people stopped waiting for permission. In Bhuj it manifested in the group deciding to name their own film festival and arguing for three weeks about what that name should mean and young women who had previously held back from public deliberation finding, in that process, a space where their voices carried equal weight. In Dharan it happened when the youth group went quiet on social media during a political crisis, not because they were told to but because they had developed enough collective judgement to know the difference between the right moment and the wrong one. These are different expressions of the same underlying shift, from being participants in someone else's process to being agents who can read a situation and decide what it calls for.

That capacity to read context, calibrate tone and judge timing does not appear in any manual. It accumulated through repeated exposure: one ward meeting, then another; one film screened in public, then more; one moment of online harassment that forced a rethink of how issues were framed. What the field teams in both cities built, slowly and without always knowing it, was not just civic media literacy but situational literacy, how to produce media, when to use it, how to frame it, whether to amplify or hold back. That is a different and more demanding kind of learning and it is what made the work enduring.



A young person from Dharan explaining community challenges, their causes and impacts during a community action plan workshop
 Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter

Facilitation was the mechanism through which all of this became possible. The framework names moments and activities, it does not name the specific decisions that made them work. In Bhuj, it was a facilitator’s insistence on keeping joy at the centre of every session, quietly dissolving social barriers that no formal exercise could have touched. And another facilitator recognising, during festival outreach, that something had changed — the youth moved from executing instructions to deciding direction. In Dharan, it was the decision to go door to door when public gatherings became too exposed. It was facilitators absorbing the anxiety of political risk so youth could stay focused on the work. The framework holds the shape of what happened. Facilitation is what made it happen.

For other practitioners working in a new context, this matters more than the framework itself. The moments of possibility do not tell you what to do, they help you see what is already shifting and what still needs support. Which moments are emerging on their own? Which can be skipped because the conditions are not there yet? Is facilitation limiting genuine capacity building? These are the diagnostic questions the framework invites. The answers will always be local.

In both Bhuj and Dharan, young people arrived at a similar place through very different routes. They came to understand themselves as people with something to say about the cities they live in and, however partially, with some capacity to say it in ways others would listen. The Asanjo Film Festival was one example; a written request handed to a ward representative was another. Neither was the end of anything, but both were evidence that something had begun.

Moving forward: practising and refining possibilities

The experiences in Bhuj and Dharan show that the 'moments of possibility' framework is a valuable tool offering a vocabulary for action and reflection that emerges directly from practice. Diagnosing, learning, imagining, producing, engaging and mobilising are not abstractions. They describe concrete processes that facilitators and young people act out. And the activities beneath them such as mapping, experimenting, deliberating, scripting, influencing and negotiating, make visible the granular, often invisible work through which civic processes happen. What comes next is refining that vocabulary through wider use.

The framework does not prescribe a single path. In some contexts, building digital confidence and navigating gendered constraints will absorb most of the initial energy. In others, institutional engagement can begin almost immediately and the challenge is learning how to sustain it without losing political ground. Facilitators who work with the framework should resist the urge to activate all six moments evenly. The more useful question is: which moments are already in play and which need support right now? Conditions shift, political climates change, participation fluctuates and groups evolve. Returning to the framework periodically, with participants involved, keeps that question alive.

The activities themselves need to be designed carefully. Mapping reveals systems, experimenting builds confidence, deliberating strengthens collective decision making. Scripting sharpens how a story is told and to whom. Each does something specific and each requires time, structure and genuine collective commitment to work well. The framework is also not finished. Practices that emerged in Bhuj and Dharan, such as digital initiation, emotional and social negotiation, and tone calibration in polarised environments were not anticipated, they surfaced through the work. Practitioners in new contexts will encounter others. Documenting and sharing them is how the framework will evolve.

None of this process is easy or quick. Working alongside young people in marginalised urban communities, on issues that matter to them, within governance systems that were not designed with them in mind, takes patience and time. It takes a willingness to sit with uncertainty and not rush toward resolution. The framework offered here was built through long-term collective sense-making across two cities, with facilitation teams who were willing to engage with the unknown and keep going anyway. What evolves through this in any new context will depend on the same willingness to listen carefully, adapt and trust that momentum, once generated, belongs to the people who created it.



Youth participants during a digital storytelling workshop in Dharan
Credit: Lumanti Support Group for Shelter



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This publication documents the civic media journeys of young people in Bhuj, India and Dharan, Nepal — two rapidly urbanising cities where governance processes offer limited space for community participation. It explores how youth-led civic media practice unfolded across 18 months of workshops and how a shared analytical framework — the 'moments of possibility' — emerged from that practice to help make sense of what was happening and why. The publication presents each city's journey, identifies the conditions that allowed participation to deepen or shift and draws comparative lessons across both contexts. It offers practitioners, facilitators and supporters of youth civic engagement grounded insights into how civic media can help young people make their voices heard within urban governance.



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Case study collection

May 2026

Urban; Communication

Keywords:
Housing, media, grassroots movement

fondation
BOTNAR

This work was supported by
the Fondation Botnar