

PROOF and Janaagraha

When Janaagraha was launched last December, it was with the singular focus of bringing the voice of the citizen into the decision-making process of government.

Our first campaign of ward works budgeting has completed its first phase, and is continuing into the second phase of participation in implementation of these works.

We believe that PROOF is a remarkable opportunity to create a platform for citizen engagement. Information that comes out of the PROOF documents will only be the first step. By itself, this information is passive, inert. It needs to come alive with participation, internalisation and ownership by the citizens in their neighbourhoods.

Our vision for how this will work is that the PROOF documents act as a catalyst for the average citizen to engage more, get a firmer comprehension of how –in this case – their local BMP government works, and then take the next step: ask the question, “What does this mean in my ward, my locality?” This will in turn spur more disaggregated analysis and debate.

Another important aspect of PROOF are the Performance Indicators: financial data is a necessary condition to understand an institution. It is not a sufficient condition, however. This financial data needs to be supplemented by performance data. How well is the BMP doing in delivering primary education services to the children in corporation schools? How efficiently are the hospitals and dispensaries running? These are important questions, but require careful deliberation before the right parameters of performance can be evolved.

Our view in Janaagraha is that these performance indicators cannot be developed in a vacuum; they need to evolve through debate and discussion. Let the people participate in determining which areas need to be prioritised in the development of performance indicators – after all there are hundreds of potential metrics. Then let there be discussion on what these performance indicators ought to be. These could take several iterations, but the body of knowledge will only grow, and the spaces for engagement will only become more robust.

In summary therefore, Janaagraha is a partner to the PROOF campaign because we believe that this marks a radical departure to the mindset of the past: with regular, standardised information, public engagement in tangible terms can become a reality. Of course, there will be many obstacles. That is part of change. All we can ask for is to be, in the words of Richard Hofstadter, “a thorn in the side of complacency.”

Ramesh Ramanathan
Campaign Coordinator