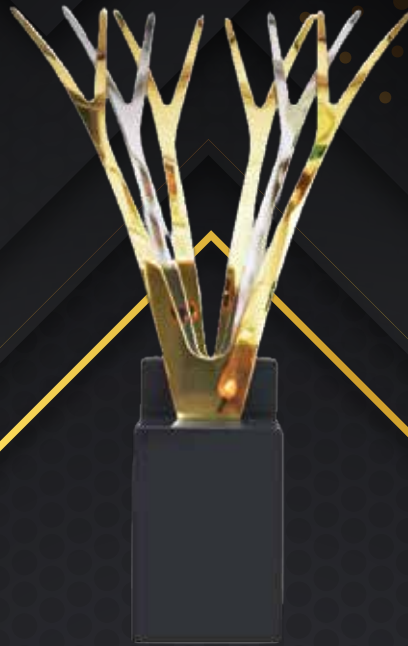




JANAAGRAHA CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP & DEMOCRACY



2nd Edition of Janaagraha City Governance Awards

EVENT REPORT

12th January, 2021





BACKGROUND

Janaagraha City Governance Awards has been instituted in memory of Mr V Ramachandran to recognise ground-breaking work in decentralisation in the urban context by institutions across all levels of government.

Mr V Ramachandran (1931-2015) was a distinguished Indian Administrative Service member and one of India's finest civil servants. He received the Padma Bhushan for meritorious civil service in 2008. After a distinguished career in Delhi and in his home state, Kerala, he retired as the Chief Secretary to Kerala's Government in 1989. Mr Ramachandran was one of India's most eminent advocates of decentralisation to local bodies. He also played a seminal role as a Second Administrative Reforms Commission member in pushing the envelope on administrative reforms in India, especially on decentralisation to local bodies. He was also on the Governing Board of Janaagraha for several years until the time of his passing in December 2015.

In its second edition, we believe Janaagraha City Governance Awards will become the hallmark for excellence in India's urban decentralisation.

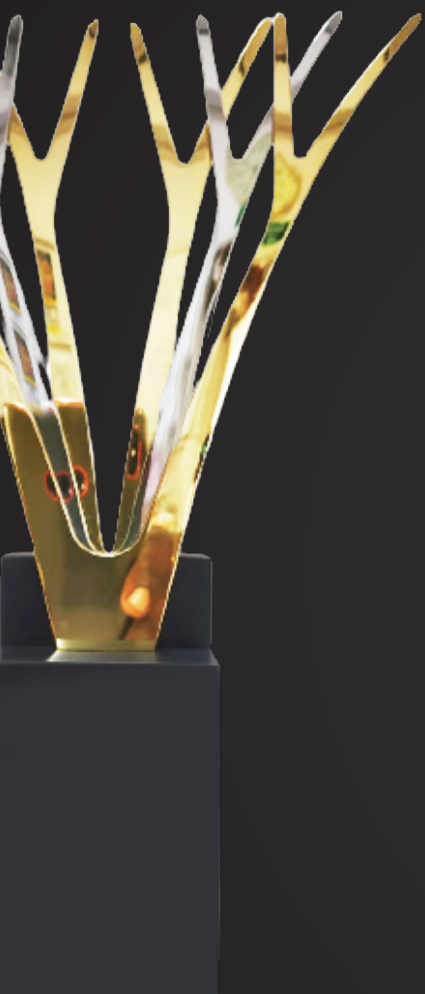
MISSION

More than two decades have passed since the enactment of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act, but decentralisation continues to be a crucial governance reform agenda in India. This is more so in the urban context given how Panchayati Raj has marched far ahead of Nagara Raj, and the rapid urbanisation that India is witnessing, with 50% of India's population expected to be in urban areas by 2050.

In Mr V Ramachandran's honour, a doyen of decentralisation, this award seeks to identify and honour accomplishments that germinate far-reaching impact.

AWARDS

In the second edition of Janaagraha City Governance Awards, there were five award categories, with one winner and two runners-up awarded under each category, and select initiatives receiving honourable mention



1.

Best State

Initiatives by state departments to foster decentralisation in cities vide legislation or policy or implementation

2.

Best Municipality

Efforts by urban local bodies to strengthen city governance and citizen participation

3.

Best Civic Agency

Demonstration of inter-agency coordination, and nuanced conflict resolution mechanisms by civic agencies like water supply boards, urban development authorities etc.

4.

Best State Election Commission

Efforts by State Election Commissions to strengthen the conduct of municipal elections

5.

Best State Finance Commission

Robustness of State Finance Commissions' recommendations to further urban decentralisation

APPLICATIONS OVERVIEW

- » We received a grand total of 54 applications spanning across 18 states – 40 applications from different governments and 14 nominations by Janaagraha based on our landscape research on urban decentralisation initiatives across 5 categories
- » These 54 applications were reviewed internally, arriving at 29 shortlisted applications across the five award categories. Applications were scored on the degree of decentralisation including community participation, leadership, impact, replicability, and sustainability
- » The shortlisted applications were then ranked by the jury based on the parameters stated above. Average of the ranks by participating jury members was used to arrive at the winners

JURY



Mr Amitabh Kant
CEO, NITI Aayog



Prof. Ashutosh Varshney
Professor, Brown University &
Eminent Political Scientist, Author



Mr Arvind Bellad
Hon'ble Member of Legislative Assembly,
Karnataka



Mr SK Das, IAS (Retd.)
(Chair of the Jury)
Former Secretary, Govt. of India



Dr Niranjan Rajadhyaksha,
Research Director and Senior Fellow,
IDFC Institute



Mr Priyank M Kharge
Hon'ble Member of Legislative Assembly,
Karnataka



Mr Sanjeev Chopra, IAS
Director and Chairperson,
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy
of Administration (LBSNAA)



Ms Yamini Aiyar
President and Chief Executive,
Centre for Policy Research (CPR)



Second Edition of Janaagraha City Governance Awards – Awards Ceremony

The second edition of Janaagraha City Governance Awards event, was held virtually on 12th January 2021 from 03.00 to 07.00 PM IST. Mr Hardeep Singh Puri, Honourable Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India presided over the event as the Chief Guest and announced the winners.



JANAAGRAHA CITY GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2020

In memory of V Ramachandran

2nd Edition

SPEAKERS



Hon. Minister Hardeep Singh Puri
Housing and Urban Affairs,
Government of India



Ramesh Ramanathan
Co-founder,
Jana Group



Swati Ramanathan
Co-founder,
Jana Group



Srikanth Viswanathan
Chief Executive Officer,
Janaagraha



V R Vachana
Associate Manager - Advocacy,
Janaagraha

The event started with the opening remarks from Ms Swati Ramanathan and Mr Ramesh Ramanathan, Co-founders, Jana group, highlighting India's cities and urbanisation for its future, making meaningful discussion and commentary inevitable. ***"If anything, COVID has reminded us even further just how fragile we all are and how vulnerable our cities are. The truth is we face enormous challenges today in India's cities, and these challenges are on multiple fronts"***, said Ms Ramanathan. The opening remarks further re-emphasised the pertinence of decentralisation in cities. Mr Ramesh Ramanathan remarked, ***"Do our political parties have it in them to genuinely embrace decentralisation? Frankly, I am not sure if we in India will ever get to what we can call an ideal arrangement, given our experience over the last two decades. Certainly as of today, that answer is no. But until that happens, we have to keep pushing and working with whatever interim arrangement is made available to us till then, dealing with this incredible range of urban challenges."***

VR Vachana, Associate Manager - Advocacy at Janaagraha, gave an overview on Janaagraha City Governance Awards explaining the mission of the Awards, applications received and the selection process.

In the keynote address, Honourable Minister, Mr Hardeep Singh Puri emphasised the importance of collaboration between different stakeholders, both within and outside the government. Mr Puri also commented on one of the most significant issues plaguing India's local governments – ***"The fact is our ULBs need to be self-sufficient. I was delighted to see that Lucknow was able to raise 200 crores in bond, I think it is the ninth city to do that. This is just the beginning, we have to go much further. We also need a trained body of professionals who can help govern urban spaces."*** Mr Puri also highlighted the need to fix the existing resource crunch, as the need of the hour. ***"See, we are short of people with that kind of experience. On the other hand, we are producing many graduate engineers who need experience, so what we have done is, we have married the two, and we are now going to plan for something like that for 25,000 such graduate engineers. We have just posted 13,504 to different ULBs, internships completed by a 100 and ongoing for about 881. But we need to multiply this, and I would like organisations like yourself to partner with this so that products from our universities can come and learn from you."***

He fondly recollected his personal encounters with Mr Ramachandran while serving as a First Secretary in Geneva. He recalled Mr Ramachandran's seminal role as a member in the Sub-Commission group on Right to Development. He remarked, ***"The period when Mr Ramachandran served on the sub commission's group on Right to Development is the period which saw the acceptance of the right to development. Early on, many of us took the position that development is a right, for which you can approximate towards, it is something that you can aspire for. But I think the work he did was seminal in every respect."***

Srikanth Viswanathan, the Chief Executive Officer of Janaagraha then delivered the concluding remarks and thanked the Minister for taking time out of his busy schedule to be a part of the event. He also thanked all the applicants, winners, participants, media, team and others who made the event possible. Mr Srikanth also reiterated that ***"It is all of us collectively who can make change happen. From Janaagraha, it is our commitment to relentlessly pursue the strengthening of democracy, citizenship and governance in our cities and neighbourhoods. We see this event as yet another milestone in this journey, a journey where we hope we can count all of you as fellow travellers."***

JANAAGRAHA CITY GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2020
In memory of V Ramachandran
2nd Edition

BEST MUNICIPALITY

Winner
Indore Municipal Corporation
for PPP Based Integrated Solid Waste Management

1st Runner up
Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation
for My City Beautiful City

2nd Runner up
Raipur Municipal Corporation
for GIS Based Property Tax Administration System

Honourable Mentions
Petlad Municipality for Decentralised Solid Waste Management
Vellore Municipal Corporation for Decentralised Solid Waste Management
Kollam Municipal Corporation for Zero Waste Initiative

JANAAGRAHA CITY GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2020
In memory of V Ramachandran
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BEST STATE

Winner
Department of Housing and Urban Development,
Government of Odisha for JAGA Mission

1st Runner up
Urban Development Department,
Government of Maharashtra
for Decentralisation of Plan Approvals

2nd Runner up
Commissioner and Director
of Municipal Administration,
Government of Telangana
for Geo-Spatial mapping of urban properties

JANAAGRAHA CITY GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2020
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BEST CIVIC AGENCY

Winner
Public Health Engineering Organisation, Government of Odisha
for Piped Water Supply Scheme for all Urban Households

1st Runner up
Punjab Municipal Infrastructure Development Company
for Municipal E-Governance Project

2nd Runner up
Navi Mumbai Municipal Transport
for Integrated Transport Management System

Honourable Mention
Mussoorie Dehradun Development Authority
for E-Platform and ERP System

JANAAGRAHA CITY GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2020
In memory of V Ramachandran
2nd Edition

BEST STATE ELECTION COMMISSION

Winner
Gujarat State Election Commission
for E-Voting

1st Runner up
Maharashtra State Election Commission
for Bifurcation of Assembly Rolls & Digitisation
of Local Body Voter List

2nd Runner up
Uttar Pradesh State Election Commission
for E-Election Software

JANAAGRAHA CITY GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2020
In memory of V Ramachandran
2nd Edition

BEST STATE FINANCE COMMISSION

Winner
Kerala's 4th State Finance Commission
for recommendations on participatory governance
and robust data ecosystem

1st Runner up
Bihar's 5th State Finance Commission
for recommendations to enhance
urban fiscal decentralisation

2nd Runner up
Maharashtra's 4th State Finance Commission
for recommendations to enhance autonomy
of Urban Local Bodies

**Kollam Municipal Corporation
for Zero Waste Initiative**

Mussoorie Dehradun Development Authority
for E-Platform and ERP System

**Maharashtra's 4th State Finance Commission
for recommendations to enhance autonomy
of Urban Local Bodies**

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The Awards ceremony was followed by three insightful panel discussions with eminent politicians from different political parties, senior bureaucrats and women leaders.

First Panel Discussion

Power to the People: Is a truly empowered City Government possible in India ?

While cities and urban infrastructure and services are gradually getting mainstreamed in India's public discourse, there is generally a palpable sense of helplessness in political leaders and bureaucrats on how to fix India's cities at speed and at scale. This panel reflected on political perspectives on furthering urban decentralisation in India and discussed the political realities and impulses in empowering cities.

Panellists



Mr Arvind Bellad

Honourable Member of Legislative Assembly,
Karnataka



Ms Sowmya Reddy

Honourable Member of Legislative Assembly
Karnataka



Ms Vandana Chavan

Honourable Member of Parliament,
Maharashtra



Mr SM Vijayanand IAS (Retd.)

Chairman, Sixth State Finance Commission
& Former Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala



Moderated by -

Mr Srikanth Viswanathan

Chief Executive Officer, Janaagraha

Political economy is the key term that perhaps best summarises India's challenges in implementing the 74th Constitution Amendment Act and decentralised urban governance. In unpacking the political economy issue, we also reflect on the success of decentralisation not just on political and administrative grounds but other community-based innovations.

Kerala's model of decentralisation successfully achieved bi-partisan political consensus, but was it possible largely because of contextual factors to Kerala or are there learnings that can be adapted and scaled up in other cities of India? Responding to this Mr Vijayanand commented, ***"The big bang decentralisation which was a small window of opportunity opened by a political leader, intelligently used by a combination of civil servants, civil society and maybe politicians who combined both. That is key to Kerala's success, and I would say to any success, decentralisation cannot happen in silos. This is a first big lesson and is a long haul." "I would say the biggest stumbling block in decentralisation are the officials who don't want to move over, and they have some genuine fears concerning their career, salary and all that. So, Kerala had a compromise, and Kerala is the most unionised civil service in the country, more than West Bengal."***

So, if one had to replicate Kerala's success in other parts of India, do we begin with the politician or start with the bureaucrat? Mr Vijayanand strongly believed that starting with the bureaucrats will be a small, temporary solution, given their tenure. He mentioned that ***"Decentralisation and decentralised governance is a system that has to come from politicians. As I indirectly mentioned, political will also doesn't last very long, sometimes the window of opportunity is very small, then how the bureaucrat structures it is very important. So, start with the politician and let the bureaucrat structure it."***

While Mr Bellad agreed with the overarching argument put forth by Mr Vijayanand, he also pointed out that ***"Most of the legislators' time goes in doing what an executor should be doing. Then, we will be trying to resolve the dispute among people which is the job of the judiciary. So, in our job we get very less time, we have good intentions, but God is in the details. The fine print is written and documented by the executive, which is the bureaucracy, where we don't get the necessary support."*** He also went on to mention that both the political leadership at the state level and the bureaucracy are hesitant to devolve the power of water supply, transport, planning etc. to the municipality. ***"It is the combination of both. As legislators and parliamentarians, we don't completely trust our councillors. Similarly, the bureaucrats, they don't trust their counterparts in the municipal bodies."***

However, Ms Reddy was of the different opinion that while it has to start with the politicians, bureaucrats are also equally responsible. ***"I agree that it has to start with the politicians, but I think that bureaucrats are also equally responsible, for example, it has been only 2.5 years since I have been an elected representative and I can give you a long list of things that haven't yet happened, because of the bureaucracy."***

Given the consensus that one should start with politicians, what would it take for political parties to take a firm stand and achieve a breakthrough policy innovation in decentralisation in cities? Answering this, Mr Bellad highlighted the need to create multiple institutions and empower them, building system and business processes to help them take the initiative. ***“So, I feel, as legislators and political leaders we need to do the legislation, but we don’t make the rules. Rules are left to the bureaucrats. The bureaucrats sublet them to small clerks or small officers, so they develop complicated government orders, so it is complicated to implement the law’s original intent. So we need to work on process re-engineering to achieve what is the intent and desired intent behind the original law or thought.”***

Adding on, Ms Chavan emphasised the importance of capacity building of elected representatives, administrative officers and the citizens and the need for it to be continuous as things are dynamic, especially in city governance. Ms Chavan also highlighted the lack of steady devolution of finances to local governments, especially with the GST introduction that has unfortunately left the municipal corporations in a very sorry state. ***“They have no independence as to which are the development programs they should be taking up, and they have to go with a begging bowl. There has to be a dramatic change or probably an amendment in the Constitution that says that the GST contribution just as it goes to the centre and state, it has to be mandated that it comes directly to the cities.”*** Talking about devolving power to the local governments and to the people directly, Ms Chavan commented that ***“Unfortunately, the Nagara Raj Bill has not been passed by several states and in the states that it has been passed, it has been immensely diluted. This Nagar Raj Bill is the most important because it gives power to the people. It talks about area sabhas, it talks about the election at ward level, and if this actually happens, we will successfully empower people.”***

Ms Reddy commented on the need to empower the local representatives, be it at the gram panchayat level or corporators and have a bottom-up approach. Mr Bellad further highlighted the need for incremental change. ***“The first thing required is the business process re-engineering at the ULB level, at the state level and at the central level, so that the delivery happens efficiently and quickly.”***

Ms Chavan concluded the panel by commenting on the need for a strengthened voice and strengthened visibility to decentralisation. ***“Here again, the decentralisation policy was brought about by the politicians, the political fraternity has come forward and brought about the 73rd & 74th constitutional amendments. Now it is to the bureaucrats to really follow it up and also elected representatives. So, we need to change the mindset of elected representatives, bureaucrats and just make sure it is not a representative democracy, we convert it to participatory democracy. That is what will strengthen local governance and governance as a whole.”***

Second Panel Discussion

Making Decentralisation Work in India: Learning from Successes

This panel reflected on experiences of states that are beacons in furthering decentralisation in India. It focused on India's decentralisation reforms and critical elements that can enable decentralised governance in Indian cities.

Panellists



Mr G Mathivathanan

Principal Secretary, Department of Housing
& Urban Development, Government of Odisha



Ms Sarada Muraleedharan

Additional Chief Secretary, Department
of Local Self-Government, Government of Kerala



Mr Manjunath Prasad

Commissioner, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike,
Karnataka



Ms D Thara

Joint Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs,
Government of India



Moderated by -

Mr Srinivas Alavilli

Head - Civic Participation, Janaagraha

Different states have different legislations governing their cities. While most cities have civic agencies and parastatals, the Gujarat legislature gives relatively more functional autonomy to the municipalities. How do you assess the landscape of legislations across states? How can we replicate the success stories from the city level to the national level?

Responding to this, Ms Thara emphasised that functional autonomy goes hand in hand with capacity. ***"When we are thinking about law making to functional autonomy, we also should think of pushing them, train them, build trust in them and make them execute one or two projects, get the outcomes and build the confidence. And then, slowly build both engineering and management capacities in such a manner that slowly they start functioning. The issue is how we bring economies of scale, the best way to do it is, decision making can be decentralised, but execution can be pooled."***

With more states passing city-specific legislations, Ms Thara put forth that cities should also be paying attention to the individual components, which is a very healthy practice. ***"Water, transit, solid waste management, health and education policies for the city should be distinct and clear so cities can orient their resources and actions towards that. Tax policies should also be different for every city, the state could suggest a range, and then cities could work accordingly."***

While the Gujarat model devolved more functions to the local government, Odisha focused on formalising citizen participation in its flagship project, JAGA Mission. Mr Mathivathanan commented that Odisha followed the finance commission methodology. ***"In Odisha, what we have done is, followed the finance commission methodology of per capita or proportionate devolution based on population which is the basis of grant distribution by the finance commission. So, at the ULB level whatever funds are received, 25% has been dedicated to being spent on the urban slums and urban poor. The community-based institutions are our partners in implementing municipal functions like water distribution, solid waste management. Our model is to strengthen the fourth tier of governance to ensure that the community is managed by themselves."***

While Kerala has been a role model for decentralisation, the participation of citizens, the people plan movement and many more, Ms Muraleedharan recollected that ***"While kudumbashree was in the ideation phase, one of the major problems faced in Kerala was the absence of women in gram panchayats. So that's when we started looking at creating the network of women who we could push in the local participatory processes. We were successful in getting them in local participation structures but were we successful in giving them voice there? Obviously, the strength lies in collectivity and also in the capacity building to get women to say that they were responsible for their community and understanding the politics of deprivation. Therefore, it meant that it was their political mandate to fight it and bring about solutions. It may sound as activism but when you are working in the local governance it is also about having a balancing act because you want the local government to acknowledge the local community on the one hand, but you also want the community to be able to seek freely and fairly. I can't say we succeeded completely, but the fact that we tried and***

are consistently trying to inculcate in interfacing with the bureaucracy as well in kudambashree, and understanding the respect and dignity of people who can't speak that, is very critical. To get them to appreciate the lack of speech or articulation is not equal to the lack of thought or experience."

In capturing what worked best in Bengaluru's context, Mr Prasad recollected that to have greater involvement of the citizens and have the resident welfare associations at the grassroots level, the BBMP institutionalised ward committees three years back. *"We found that these ward committees are very helpful in resolving issues at the ward level; otherwise, everything keeps coming to zonal level. Even though now the elected corporators are not there, but we ensure that the ward committees should function. In the last four months, we have constituted ward committees where instead of the local corporators, we have senior officers nominated as the ward committee chairman. We have seen remarkable changes in the last few months, every fortnight the decisions taken in the last meetings are reviewed and decisions that are being implemented. With inputs coming from the grassroots level, the governance will be much better than what it was earlier."*

How can we make the process of participation straightforward and meaningful, not just the slum dwellers association or RWAs? How do we simplify this process? In response to this, Ms Muraleedharan laid down a step-by-step procedure to formalise citizen participation. *"Firstly, when we create rules, there needs to be a demystification of language, broken into concepts that can be understood by the person on the street. The next step would be communication, investing in communication for people to understand what we are talking about and its implications. Then we need to enable them through capacity building. And then, there needs to be a space where all of this come together, and different understandings can then get into one melting pot where a common consensus on how to resolve differences can happen. Then, there needs to be monitoring."*

While Ms Muraleedharan laid down the steps, Mr Mathivathanan reiterated what worked in the case of Odisha, *"In my opinion, what has worked in Odisha to get citizen participation through citizen partnership which are SHGs. In some areas it's the slum dweller association, some it's the women SHGs. In Odisha, fortunately, we have the Mission Shakti, which is more than two decades old."*

In many of the areas they have replaced the contractors, so the community manages its own assets and functions. Therefore, we could successfully transfer the funds to lowest levels through the ULBs and transfer responsibilities. Only thing we could not do is functionaries, even state couldn't create them. We created municipal cadre very late, about 23 years back, so it takes time to have an established municipal cadre with technical and managerial capabilities. But now that gap is being filled by roping in the community partnerships, to run activities. However, all this needs massive capacity building with repeated programs using digital modes. We have upgraded the capacities in

all forms, this has helped us get a lot of feedback and deal with grievances. We have Jal Sathis, Swachh Sathi, who touch each household and deal with the problems.” While Mr Mathivathanan spoke about the case of Odisha successfully formalising citizen participation through partnership, Ms Thara brought to light the challenges associated with it. *“The challenge is one, to have a movement, and the other is to make it a routine and be a part of the whole thing. I think there is a sort of non-clarity about how do we engage in the works of the municipal corporation as a professional agency. How do we get public participation as an integral part of implementation? The nuance of involving the citizen is more important, and we should create a matrix for how the citizens are getting involved, at what level and for which work.”*

In his concluding remarks, Mr Prasad highlighted the importance of data and information as simple and easily accessible for engaging the citizens and enabling them to participate. *“We took out the details of the last five years on whatever civil works were done in each of the ward, 15,000 crores worth, all the documents of these works, starting from estimate, work order, third party estimate, bills and photos have been uploaded on the website. We expected the citizens to look into the information and see if the work was actually done or not. We had a press conference to request the citizens to look into this as it was the first time such a thing was done. On the website, we enabled them to give feedback on each and every work. We thought there will be immense response and excitement, but to my utter dismay, after six months of displaying this information not even 4,000-5,000 people looked into the information. Then I realized, from the feedback of fellow officers, that the information has to be simple. Citizens will not spend so much time on issues that don't concern them, their main concerns are if the garbage is removed or the footpaths are proper and many more, so if these decisions are made, they are least bothered about other decisions the BBMP are taking. In this case, the only way to involve them is to bring in all RWAs, have capacity building, tell them how every penny of theirs is spent by municipal corporations, and if they are getting the benefit of that. If all these structures are put in place, no elected body can remove it. We just want more and more citizens to look up this information, that is possible through more capacity building.”*

Third Panel Discussion

Women leaders as change agents in Indian cities

India is perhaps one of the few countries that has constitutionally provided 33% reservation for women in local politics, and this has dramatically increased participation of women in local politics. While women's presence has increased in local bodies, it is often criticised that it is men who run the show. On the other hand, we see more grassroots women leaders across India who are challenging this perception and have been undertaking remarkable work in addressing urban challenges. Through this panel, we tried to understand what can women city politicians do differently in cities and how?

Panellists



Ms Arya Rajendran

Mayor, Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation



Ms Astrid Nienhuis

Mayor, Heemstede Municipality, Netherlands



Ms Hemakshi Meghani

Co-founder, Indian School of Democracy



Ms Madhuri Sahasrabudhe

Councillor, Pune Municipal Corporation



Ms Rokhsana Fiaz

Mayor, London Borough of Newham

Moderated by -



Mr Srinivas Alavilli,

Head - Civic Participation and



Ms V R Vachana,

Associate Manager - Advocacy, Janaagraha

The discussion began with the experience of being a woman city leader. Ms Rajendran remarked that ***"In Kerala, women lead, women are part of politics since olden days. But, now in this last local body election, more than 50% of women contested in this local body election and are elected as councillors. So, from that we know that women coming from the socially relevant activities or politics is more compared to the olden days. From this it is evident that some people accept the change and some people don't accept the change."***

Taking Ms Rajendran's point forward, Ms Fiaz pointed out the impact of racism, discrimination and inequality on people from the marginalised community. It was the driving force for her to join politics. Being the first woman Mayor of colour in Europe, she mentioned that her biggest challenge was her predecessor, a white male, who had been the Mayor of Newham for 23 years. ***"So, in that context, I operate within an institution that was very used to operating through the prism or lens of patriarchy or male world view and the privilege that it brings. It is challenging for all women who step into politics and are activists at various levels. We are also a part of a movement of women globally that are challenging misogyny and issues relating to the perception of what women can do and cannot do."***

On the contrary, Ms Nienhuis is the fourth female Mayor of Heemsteede, Netherlands and the city has had only women mayors for the last 27 years. Ms Nienhuis perfectly captured the argument for more representation of women in politics by stating that ***"The government is mostly run by men. Then we obviously have blind spots in what we are doing in policies. Whether you are a woman, whether for somebody with a disability, whether you are old or young, and all those different groups have different perspectives or different problems. You really need government even at the municipality level where everybody can recognise themselves in the government and the perspectives from the different groups translated into policies. I think women are outstanding in connecting and recognising that and sometimes maybe less concerned with their own popularity or personal profiling. Actually, being in office is about looking at what needs to be done, on behalf of the people."***

Bringing it closer to home, Ms Sahasrabudhe laid out the dynamics of gender and power and how it has shaped the local polity. ***"Politics is the field which is male dominating and decisions are mainly taken by the men. It is in the hands of the men, but still, you can create your own footmarks on this path. Reservation in local self-government has allowed women, but I think women who can think independently, work independently should be given a chance to govern the city."***

However, is it enough that we constitutionally mandated the representation of women in local governments? Does that necessarily translate into the empowerment of women? To which Ms Meghani responded with, ***"Unfortunately, the numbers have increased, but the impact probably has not. Yes, there is the 74th constitutional amendment which gives at least 33% reservation. But what are the conditions around, which kind of decreases their political ambition or effectiveness."***

So, for women to start their political journey, what kind of systems and networks are to be put in place? To this, Ms Meghani proposed a three-prong approach – ***“Almost a hundred countries in the world have some or the other form of reservation for women to get into politics. Luckily India has that sorted at the local level. I do think we need to up our game at national level. The second aspect is social change. Reservation can only do so much. So we need to kind of reframe ourselves as a society at large to what we expect from leaders. Most people think that a man is a leader. They use the pronoun ‘he’. So we need to change that, and that is going to happen through education, through a lot of people calling out issues. Picking up women’s issues as human rights issues and talking about that. The third is creating conditions for women leaders to amplify and thrive in that position.”***

Ms Fiaz also added that while leveraging such platforms is crucial, we also need to challenge culture. ***“The cultural deficit that exists globally in terms of women’s voice, particularly at the local level, absolutely needs to be addressed. As we approach challenges to hegemony and political culture, you will evoke quite an irrational and at the time an aggressive and violent response.”*** Lastly, Ms Nienhuis mentioned the importance of recognising the importance of choice. ***“Democracy belongs to everybody, which means that women can choose the role they want to play in that democracy. They can also be very active within their own community and try to be role models in their street or neighbourhood. As long as they are functional and as long as they are visible.”***



JANAAGRAHA CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP & DEMOCRACY

About Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy

Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (Janaagraha) is a Bengaluru based not-for-profit institution that is a part of the Jana group. Janaagraha's mission is to transform the quality of life in India's cities and towns. It defines the quality of life as comprising quality of infrastructure and services and quality of citizenship. To achieve its mission, Janaagraha works with citizens to catalyse active citizenship in city neighbourhoods and with governments to institute reforms to City-Systems.

You can read more about Janaagraha at
www.janaagraha.org

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