JANAAGRAHA

UPDATES FROM THE WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP IN PUBLIC FINANCE FOR CITIES

JUL-SEPT '24

About the Women's Fellowship in Public Finance for Cities

The Women's Fellowship in Public Finance for Cities is an immersive, two-year programme that provides a platform for young women professionals to carve out a niche for themselves in the domain of public finance. By nurturing women professionals to emerge as leaders in public finance management, the Fellowship aims to drive better gender outcomes in the future and catalyse reforms for better quality of life in India's cities and towns.

The first cohort, comprising 11 Fellows, was launched in January 2024. The Fellows are working on live projects with either the Finance Department or Urban Development Department in 6 states across India.

Programme Milestones: Fellows' Journey in Progress

From Theory to Field: Fellows' Immersive Learning

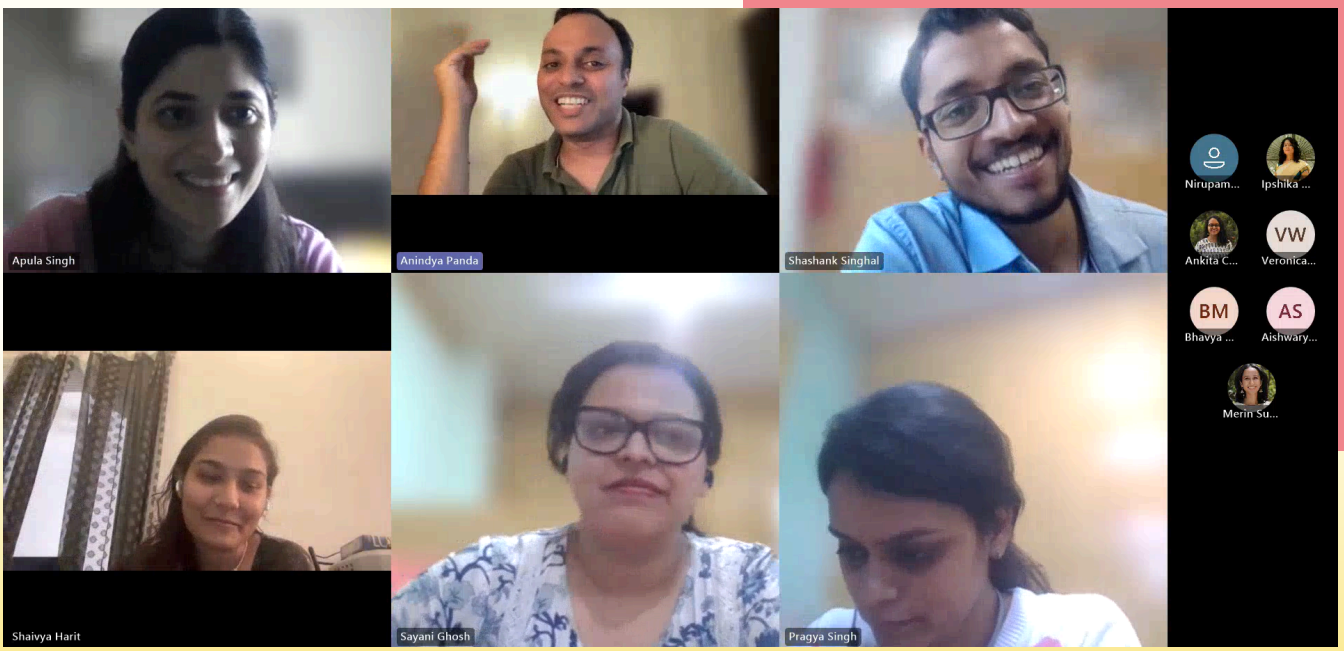
The PFM Fellows embarked on a transformative journey through field immersion in their respective states, aided by a series of thoughtfully-designed foundation sessions and expert webinars. These sessions aimed to equip the Fellows with essential knowledge and skills in various aspects of Public Finance Management (PFM), ensuring they are well-prepared to understand and address challenges in their projects.

So far, the Fellows have attended 11 webinars, each designed to deepen their understanding of their subject and equip them with innovative perspectives to tackle real-world challenges.

These learning sessions, coupled with a specially-curated Women's Leadership Development Programme in partnership with Harappa Education (now upGrad), continue to nurture the Fellows with the knowledge and skills to chart their own transformative experiences and inspire change in their individual projects.

A Practical and Iterative Way to Drive Change

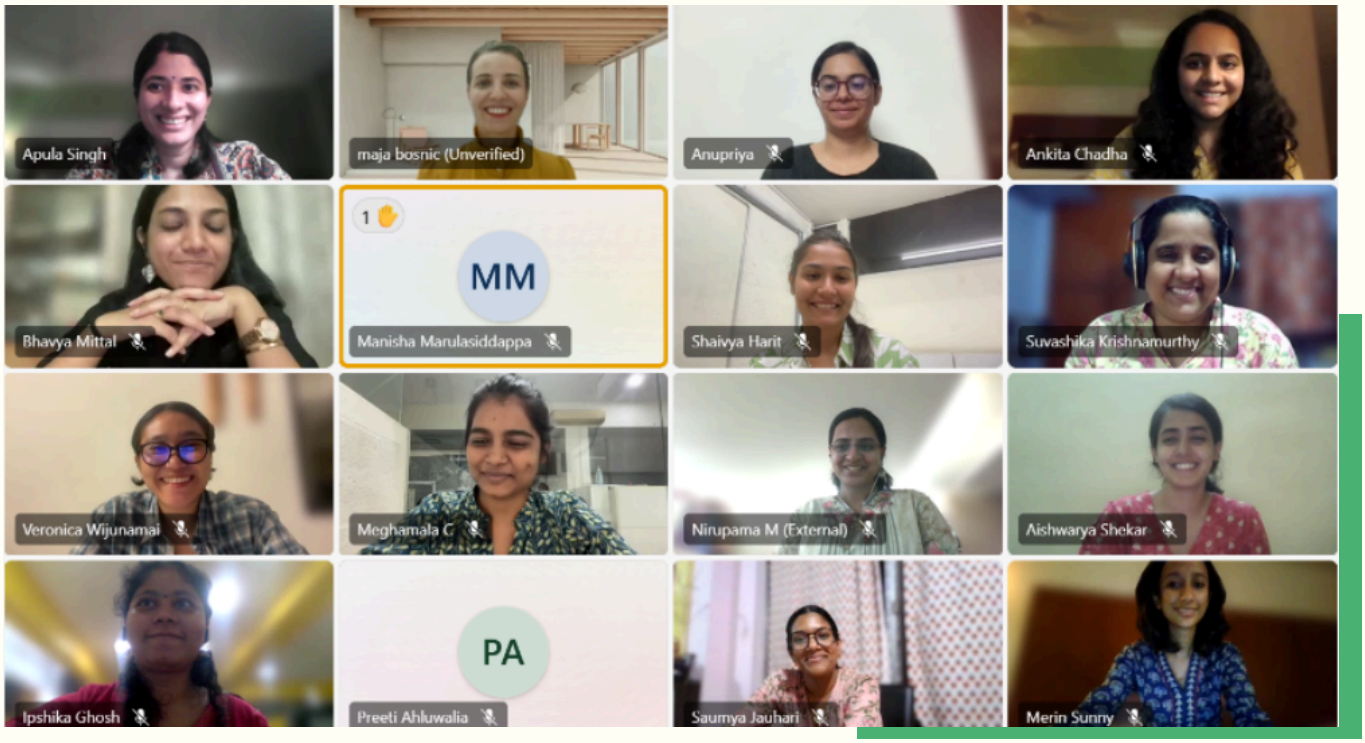
On 22 August 2024, the Fellows participated in an insightful session led by Anindya Panda, Senior Manager – Organisation Development and Policy, Janaagraha. The session focused on practical approaches to driving institutional change in public systems. Panda and his team emphasised the critical role of empathy in problem definition and introduced the three As of institutionalising change: Authority, Ability, and Acceptance. The session also provided valuable insights on effectively communicating the impact of reforms, equipping Fellows with practical tools for their project engagements.



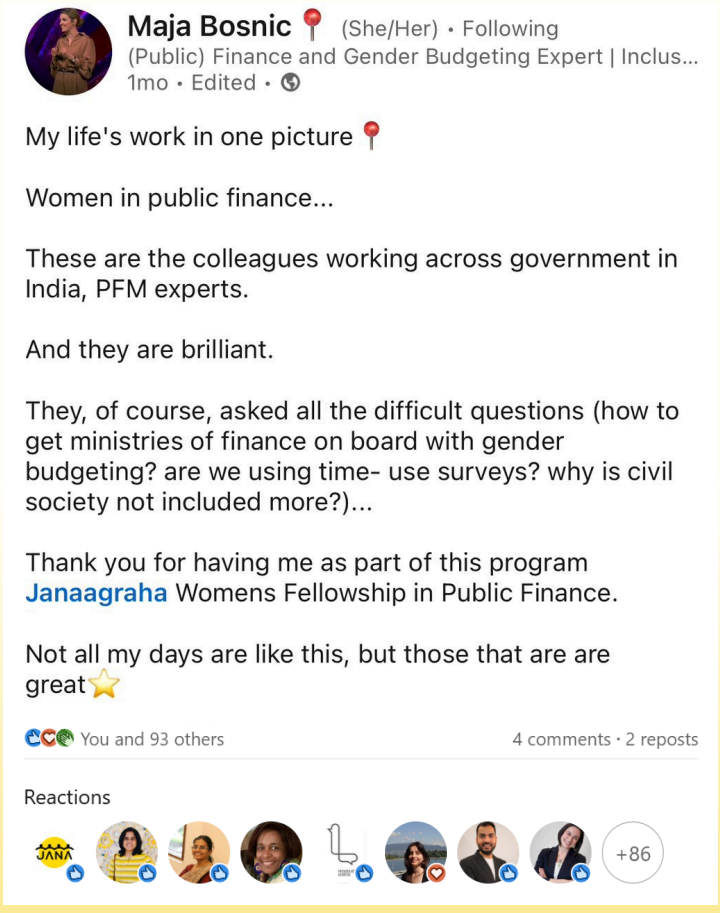
A snapshot of the webinar 'A Practical and Iterative Way for Driving Change'

Gender Responsive Budgeting: From Concept to Implementation

An engaging masterclass on Gender Responsive Budgeting was conducted by Maja Bosnic, a renowned economist and pioneer in gender and green budgeting. The session provided Fellows with comprehensive insights on integrating gender considerations into budgetary processes. Through practical case studies, Bosnic demonstrated how gender analysis generates valuable data for informed decision-making.



Session with Maja Bosnic on Gender Responsive Budgeting



Maja Bosnic (She/Her) • Following
(Public) Finance and Gender Budgeting Expert | Inclus...
1mo • Edited •

My life's work in one picture

Women in public finance...

These are the colleagues working across government in India, PFM experts.

And they are brilliant.

They, of course, asked all the difficult questions (how to get ministries of finance on board with gender budgeting? are we using time- use surveys? why is civil society not included more?)...

Thank you for having me as part of this program Janaagraha Womens Fellowship in Public Finance.

Not all my days are like this, but those that are are great

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Reactions

+86

The Fellows' enthusiasm and engagement was particularly noted by Bosnic, who later shared her experience of interacting with the cohort on LinkedIn.

Mentorship in Action: Guiding Fellows Towards Future Success

The Fellows are now entering another significant phase of their Fellowship — engaging with distinguished mentors in public finance. These mentors, experts across various PFM domains, will provide personalised guidance aligned with the Fellows' individual interests and aspirations. These interactions will create spaces for Fellows to reflect on their experiences, synthesise their learnings, and shape their future paths in public finance.

Our mentor panel comprises of the following experts:

Alok Rajan	**Senior Programme Officer, State Capacity and Public Finance, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**
Avani Kapur	**Director, Foundation for Responsive Governance (ResGov)**
Debarpita Roy	**Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress**
Devesh Sharma	**Senior Programme Officer, Digital Public Finance, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**
Kesavan Srinivasan	**Senior Adviser, Janaagraha, and former Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General, Government of India**
Maja Bosnic	**Public Finance and Gender Budgeting Expert**

Voices from the Field

A Tale of Two States

Shaivya Harit
PFM Fellow
Odisha

Every place offers its own context, learning, and experience. Over the last nine months, the Women's Fellowship in Public Finance for Cities has allowed me to explore urban local governance in Odisha and Karnataka.

Odisha's unique approach is a decentralised model of involving transgender Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in delivering essential services like faecal sludge management and solid waste management. This spurred our team to explore if PFM reforms could result in an even greater positive impact on service delivery.

This hypothesis led us on a journey through various Urban Local Governments in Odisha to examine budgetary practices, expenditure management, and service delivery processes. During these visits, I learned that the preparation of realistic budgets, based on actual needs from the ground, and the creation of an asset maintenance plan, can significantly improve the quality of service delivery in ULBs. The insights gained were my first encounters with PFM at the local level, highlighting the challenges and the potential of reforms. The quest is still on...

On a field visit to the Raichur City Municipal Council (CMC), Karnataka on 25 July, 2024 as part of the Fifth Karnataka State Finance Commission assignment. In the photograph: Project Director, District Urban Development Cell, and Municipal Commissioner, Raichur CMC, along with the Janaagraha team.

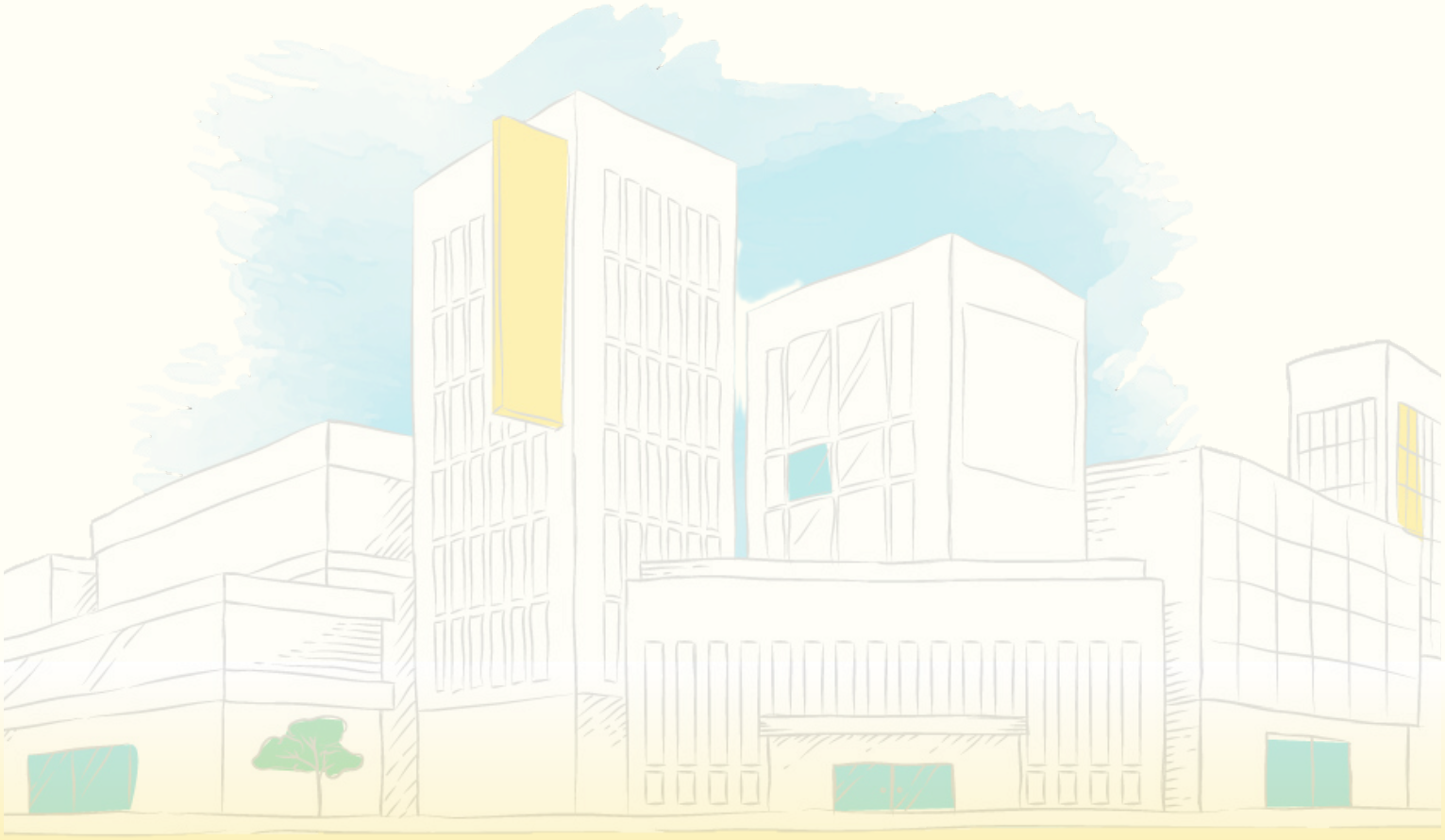
However, this learning would have been incomplete and would have bypassed greater appreciation from me had the team at Janaagraha not given me an opportunity to also contribute to the Fifth Karnataka State Finance Commission's Report. A weeklong field trip to the ULBs in Karnataka revealed what each state can learn from the other. While the learnings are aplenty, I list down here two very specific ones that each one can take from the other:

- A very interesting learning from the ULB-level budgeting practices in Karnataka is the adoption of a functional system of budgeting that enables one to understand the services on which public money is being spent.

- Karnataka, on the other hand, can learn from Odisha regarding the latter's efforts to maintain capital assets, which have been adopted from the Fifth State Finance Commission's recommendation and the extensive standard operating procedures on operations and maintenance of essential assets in the solid waste management sector.

These two important learnings are based on my short stints in Odisha and Karnataka, and from the unique governance styles in both the states.

More learnings will follow as the exploration continues. Till then, wish me luck!



Building Competency of Municipal Finance Cadre for Sustainable PFM transformation

Saumya Jauhari
PFM Fellow
Assam

My recent travels across Assam, as part of the Fellowship, highlighted the complex challenges and opportunities that shape the state's municipal finances landscape.

Assam is committed to a comprehensive transformation of its municipal financial management practices through its Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (DoHUA). The state aims to establish a robust and sustainable digital framework for municipal finances.

As a part of the implementation of the Digital Public Finance Management system for digitising financial processes in ULBs in Assam and revising the Assam Municipal Accounting Manual (AMAM), I visited 8 ULBs to study their financial processes and systems. While ULBs like Silchar and Bongaigaon are transitioning to digital systems for accounting purposes, others still rely on manual accounting methods. This impacts record accuracy and publishing of timely financial reports. All these challenges, along with a lack of standardisation in budgeting, reinforce the need for comprehensive PFM reforms.

Orientation training on municipal finance and accounting for the first batch of Assam Urban Technical Officers.

A significant finding from these visits was the pressing need for capacity building among ULB staff. The lack of standardised training programmes have left personnel eager yet unprepared to embrace more sophisticated financial practices, such as accrual based double-entry accounting systems. To bridge this gap, the state government has inducted officers into the Assam Urban Financial Service cadre to serve as Finance Management Officers in ULBs across the state. For their induction training, I collaborated with state officials to outline the roles and responsibilities of this cadre, categorising these into routine tasks and quarter-specific responsibilities. I also contributed to designing a competency-based training programme for these officers, mapping functional, domain and behavioural competencies. This structured approach to training sessions and learning objectives ensures that the officers are well-prepared for their roles and can effectively address the financial management needs of ULBs.

I strongly feel that enhancing municipal finance reforms requires not only investment in digital tools but also a holistic approach that focusses on upskilling human resources. Building trust among citizens and communities, and focusing on transparency and accountability in efficiently spending public money, paves the way towards impactful and lasting financial reforms.

Along with efforts to build a financially robust and resilient system for the sustainable development of Assam, our team also never misses an opportunity to soak in the culture of Assam by exploring the local cuisine and savouring flavours that resonate deeply with the communities we serve. These moments served as a reminder that public financial management, at its core, is about supporting communities.

As I continue this work, these experiences remain at the heart of my efforts to build a financial system that is resilient, contextually relevant, and capable of supporting the sustainable development of urban areas in Assam.

Unraveling the Complexities of PFM for Sustainable Urban Development

Aishwarya Shekhar
PFM Fellow
Tamil Nadu

Having worked in the urban realm, I have always viewed cities as dynamic entities with layers of complexity, each requiring a multifaceted approach. Over the past seven years, this perspective has helped me understand the nuances of urban development too. My journey as a Public Finance Management Fellow over the past nine months has been transformative, allowing me to see urban challenges from a financial perspective. This Fellowship has provided me with first-hand knowledge of how public finance drives the functioning of cities.

Navigating the Financial Maze of Urban Development

One of the primary projects I have focused on is revenue augmentation for municipal corporations in Tamil Nadu through a change in property tax systems. Under the guidance of Dr Arvind Subramanian, former Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India and current member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, we explored a shift to the capital value method aimed at making taxation more equitable and transparent.

This project has deepened my understanding of the nuances involved in changing policy and has highlighted the importance of data-driven decision-making. It has also given me the opportunity to engage with municipalities from other states, gaining insights into the challenges of implementing new methods, particularly the political complexities that often shape policy execution.

In discussion with Dr Aravind Subramanian and the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC)

In today's world, crafting good economic policy requires not just addressing immediate issues but also thinking about long-term impacts, calculating risks, and ensuring the plan is sustainable. A critical lesson from this project was that political will, coupled with readiness to optimise the window of opportunity, is essential for turning policy ideas into action.

Another aspect of my work involved understanding the mechanisms of intergovernmental transfers to local bodies, which is critical as they are one of the primary sources of funding for local governments. However, challenges such as too many conditionalities and inequitable distribution based on developmental needs hinder effective allocation.

Through this experience, I have gained a clearer picture of the challenges cities face in securing adequate funding and the importance of fair allocation systems.

Beyond the Numbers: Personal Insights

While my journey has been filled with challenges, particularly regarding the tax policy changes that did not materialise, it has also been incredibly enriching. I have learned to navigate new data analysis software and quantitative models, and even explored green finance principles along the way.

On a personal note, in my fourth city in three years, I am enjoying Tamil Nadu's diverse cuisines, beautiful terrains, and rich culture through weekend walks, street art, and museum visits.

This Fellowship has broadened my understanding of urban finance and fuels my excitement to explore finance's role in shaping resilient cities.

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Janaagraha's Women's Fellowship
in Public Finance for Cities

Got feedback?
Write to us:
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