

September 2026



Institutionalised Citizen Participation in Indian Cities

Documenting Best Practices and Models

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Attribution: Please cite this document with the acknowledgment “Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, (2026, September 8)
Institutionalised Citizen Participation in Indian Cities: Documenting Best Practices and Models.”

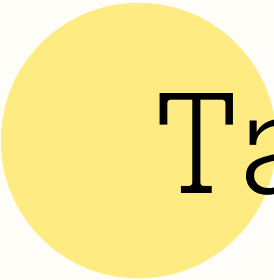


Table of Contents

Introduction	4
What Makes Participation Work?	11
Pathways to Institutionalisation.....	19
Recommendations.....	23
Annexures.....	28



1. Introduction

1.1 Citizen participation is critical for urban governance and accountability

Improves governance and service delivery

- Governments benefit from citizen participation in data collection, beneficiary identification, and monitoring of civic works, providing vital project/programme implementation support and last-mile service delivery.¹
- Participation aligns planning with citizen needs, ensuring efficient allocation of resources and fund utilisation that reflect real priorities.²

Sources: ¹Times of India, Indore ²Times of India, Guwahati

Strengthens accessibility and crisis responsiveness

- Operating at local and hyperlocal levels, citizen participatory platforms improve accessibility of governance by creating direct avenues for government in engaging and sharing information with citizens.³
- During crises, participation structures act as trusted channels for disaster management and preparedness, enabling rapid communication and response.⁴
- With global recognition, there is a growing investment in citizen participation, as seen in FY24 when 100% of World Bank IPF projects embedded citizen engagement mechanisms.⁵

Sources: ³Bajpai & Kothari, 2020 ⁴The Hindu ⁵World Bank

Provides channels for civic concerns and grievances

- Chennai, 2025–26: Residents increasingly turned to social media to raise civic complaints — around 250 of the city's 1,000 daily complaints now come through these platforms, rising to over 700 a day during floods.
- Bengaluru, 2021 & 2026: Residents repeatedly took to the streets over unresolved civic concerns — from stormwater-drain encroachment in Bellandur that flooded homes to proposed tree cutting for tunnel-road construction near Lal Bagh.
- Nationwide, 2025: The NEET paper-leak controversy escalated into student protests across several cities when demands for accountability were not adequately heard through institutional channels.

Sources: Times of India; Deccan Herald; Indian Kanoon 2026

1.2 Institutionalising it makes citizen voice a regular part of decision-making

1 Formalises citizens' role in local governance

When people cannot find a reliable way to raise an issue, they look for another one. Institutionalisation gives them that reliable way: it turns a community group into a citizen group that local government formally recognises. That shift gives residents a channel where what they say is on record, a genuine say in what gets prioritised and funded, and it deliberately reaches vendors, tenants and slum residents — not only those who are already organised. As a result, the local, lowest tier of governance becomes the most direct and easiest way for people to shape their everyday lives.

2 Shifts citizens from beneficiaries to active participants in decision-making

Institutionalised participation also changes what communities are able to do. Rather than simply receiving what has already been planned, they set the agenda before the plan is drawn. Rather than being consulted only after a decision is made, they are present when priorities and budgets are set. Success is no longer measured just in services delivered, but in decisions changed — and the relationship no longer ends at delivery, but continues into monitoring.

This shift happens at the closest tier of governance. water, waste, footpaths, local safety and vending zones are decisions made closest to where people live. Yet without ward elections and functioning committees, citizens have limited access to the tier of governance that shapes their everyday lives.

1.3 Existing laws and policies provide channels for citizen voice in governance

- **74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993** mandates citizen participation through formation of institutionalised participatory platforms of Ward Committees in municipalities having population of three lakh (0.3 million) or more.
- **Model Community Participation Law, 2008 or Model Nagar Raj Bill**, proposed a three-tier model of governance— city government, Ward Committees, and Area Sabhas, intended to institutionalize participatory democracy at the grassroots level.
- Institutionalised participation mandated under **Central and State Development missions** through participatory platforms such as **Self-Help Groups mandated under Kudumbashree (Kerala), Mission Shakti (Odisha), and National Urban Livelihood Mission.**
- Citizen engagement is becoming an essential component in various **Urban Development Projects and programmes like Smart City Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission and Pradhan Matri Awaas Yojana-Urban.**

Citizen participation is also a globally recognised principle of good governance

- SDG 16 (UN, 2015): Explicitly includes targets on participatory and inclusive decision-making, embedding participation as a crucial global development and governance principle.
- World Bank (2018): Meaningful citizen participation leads to improved governance, enhanced public service delivery, and contributes innovative solutions to development challenges.
- OECD, Government at a Glance 2025: Local-level participation yields tangible results — it promotes more democratic and effective policymaking and increases public acceptance of government decisions.

The challenge is implementation, not the absence of a framework.

India already has multiple provisions and programmes that create opportunities for citizens to participate. The question is whether these provisions have the institutional support, resources and accountability needed to work consistently in practice.

1.4 State action is what turns a participation mandate into a functioning institution

The 74th Constitutional Amendment created the basis for Ward Committees in 1993. But the mandate only becomes meaningful when states notify the rules, establish the institutions and give them the capacity to function.

8 / 35 states and union territories have notified Ward Committee rules

EXAMPLES FROM STATES

State	Key milestones			What this shows
Tamil Nadu	1993 State amendment	2010 Enabling Act	2022 Rules notified	It took 29 years from the state amendment to the notification of rules.
West Bengal	1993 State amendment	2003 Ward Committee rules		It took 10 years to notify the rules after the state amendment.
Mizoram		2010 Rules based on existing Village Councils		Used existing local institutions to implement the mandate, without a long gap.

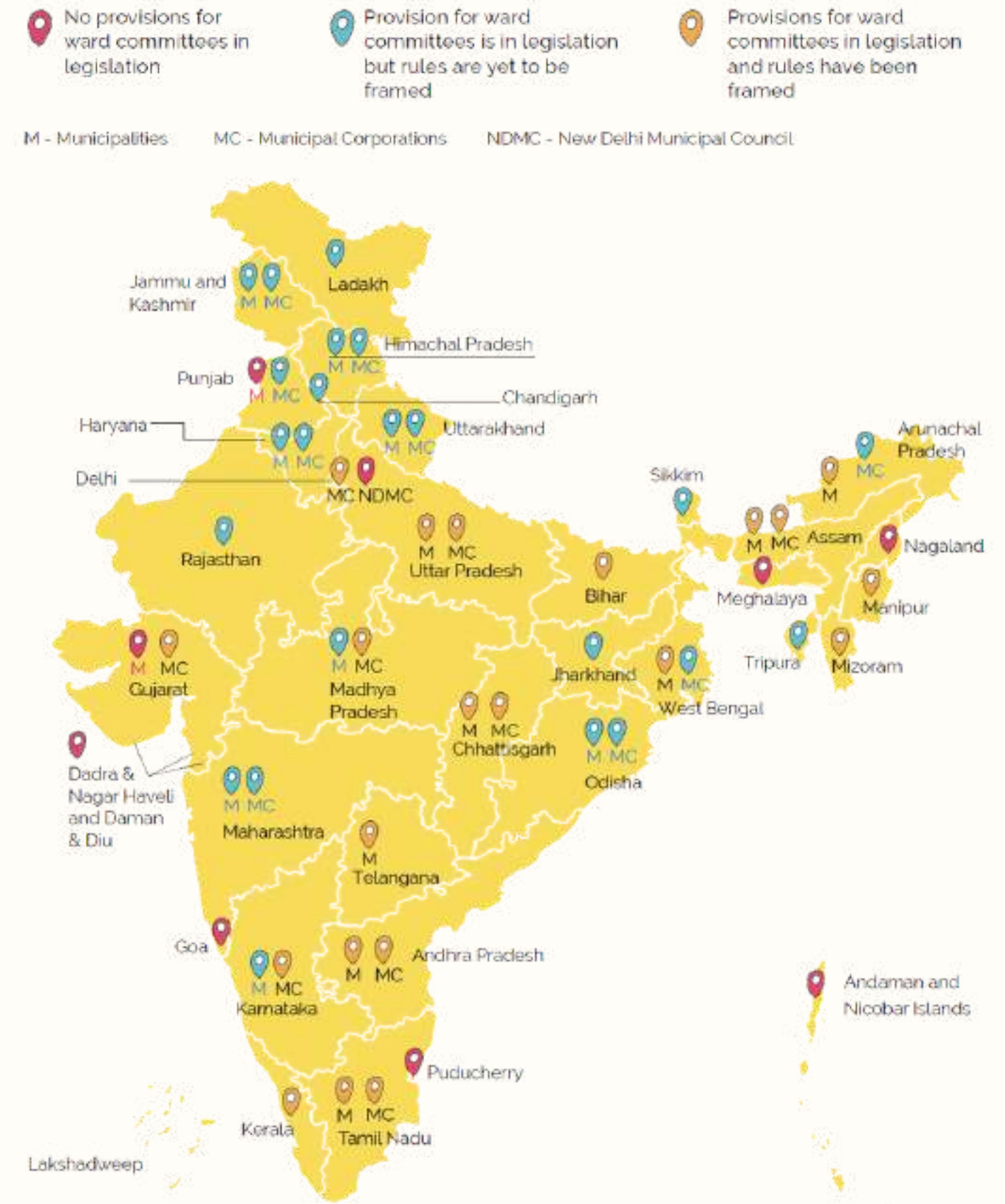
The gap between a constitutional provision and a functioning institution can span decades.

1.5 Implementation of participatory mechanisms remains uneven across states

Only a few states across India have institutionalised active ward committees, while most others have the enabling legislation in place. The next step is operational rules, staffing and calendars that turn provisions into practice, following models already tested across the country.

The Constitution creates the opportunity for participation, while state governments determine whether it becomes an institution citizens can actually use.

Status of ward-committee provisions across states and UTs



1.6 Our research examines the systems and practices needed to make citizen voice meaningful

The research focused on citizen participation through **institutional participatory platforms** of varied typologies operating at the city, ward and sub-ward levels.

Typology of participatory platforms at various city levels

Level	Participatory platforms	Description
City	Citizen Forums, Nagrik Vikas Manch, Community Development Societies	Platforms for city wide discussions, policy making, fund allocation, public grievances redressal
Ward	Ward Committees, Mohalla Committees, Ward Sabhas, Area Sabhas	Local governance bodies for ward-level planning, budgeting and issue resolution
Sub-Ward	Neighborhood Groups, Local Councils, Self Help Groups, Resident Welfare, Associations Slum Development, Associations	Grassroots-level platforms for community-driven problem solving; efficient local service delivery

12 city and state cases were selected to demonstrate best practices and models of systematic, decentralised and place-based citizen participation. Selection was based on the legitimacy and sustainability of the platforms, including how long they have been operational, as well as their impact on quality of life, local governance and physical infrastructure.

States and cities with best practices

City / State	Participatory Platforms
Gurugram, Haryana	Resident Welfare Associations
Delwara, Rajasthan	Mohalla Committees, Nagar Vikas Manch
Bhuj, Gujarat	Ward Committees
Pune, Maharashtra	Mohalla Committees
Karnataka	Ward Committees
Kerala	Ward Committees, Neighbourhood Groups, Ward Sabhas, Development Seminar, Resident Associations
Indore, Madhya Pradesh	Resident Welfare Associations, Self-Help Groups
Giridih, Jharkhand	Ward Committees
West Bengal	Ward Committees
Mizoram	Ward Committees, Local Councils
Odisha	Slum Dwellers Associations
Chennai, Tamil Nadu	Area Sabhas



2. What Makes Participation Work?

2.1 What makes citizen participation effective



2.1.1 Participation is stronger when formal mandates are reinforced by active collaboration

What makes collaboration effective



Government leadership

Active involvement of NGOs/CSOs, SHGs, and other social groups strengthens functioning, outreach and inclusivity of platforms.



Civil society partnership

– Support, cooperation, and ownership from elected representatives and ULBs/departments ensures legitimacy and provided agency to community.



Interdepartmental collaboration

Horizontal convergence across line departments and vertical alignment with State/Central programs make platforms more effective

Collaboration and convergence

- Civil society and citizen groups played a key role in operationalising WCs in Bengaluru and Mangaluru (PILs filed by citizens and CSOs in the High Court of Karnataka played a critical role in operationalising ward committees in Bengaluru and Mangaluru).
- In Bhuj and Delwara, efforts of CSOs led to the formation of WC in absence of legal mandate.
- In Odisha, Bhuj, Karnataka, Delwara, Giridih, Indore, CSOs have strengthened participation by building citizen capacity, raising awareness, mobilising communities.
- SHGs were instrumental in the formation of WCs in Bhuj and SDAs in Odisha.
- In West Bengal, Odisha, Kerala, Pune, Chennai, and Mizoram, citizen participation thrives with support and ownership from political and government leadership.
- In Odisha, SDAs receive 7.5% of the project cost as supervision charges by programme linkage with the Urban Poor Welfare Fund under state's MUKTA scheme.

Strong legal mandate and institutionalisation

- The Acts should clearly lay down the composition, roles, responsibilities, representation, duties, and powers of the platforms.
- For effective implementation, Rules/Bye-laws should be notified with provisions relating to the delimitation of areas, elections, tenure, funding mechanisms, and operational aspects of the platforms.

Voices from the field



"Ward Committees help us identify local development issues directly from citizens. Instead of us searching for problems, the community brings them forward and make solutions more responsive and effective."

Mr Basavaraju, Nodal Officer, Byirithi Ward, Bengaluru



"Through the Ward Committee, we are able to put forth the needs of women from marginalised groups in our ward and ensure they are not left behind in local decision-making"

Ms. Shila Dey, SHG & WC Member, Siliguri Municipal Corporation



Ward Committees help us identify local issues and development needs, it has made access to citizens easier and has empowered us as their representatives "

Mr. Qasim, Ward Councillor, Bhuj Municipality

2.1.2 Inclusive composition ensures that platforms represent the diversity of the community

Who participates?



Composition of platform

- The composition of the platform shall have representatives from the elected council, executive council, CSOs/ NGOs, ward residents, sub-committees like RWAs, SHGs and NHGs, subject matter experts, women, youth, elderly and marginalised groups.
- Mandatory reservation for women, youth, marginalised groups (SC/ST), and senior citizens.



"For long, women's voices remained within households, but Ward Committees have brought them into public decision-making. Today, women in Bhuj are not only raising concerns about water and sanitation but also leading solutions."

Ms. Rashmi Solanki, President, Bhuj Municipality

How inclusion is institutionalised (examples)

- Kerala, Odisha, Bhuj, West Bengal, Giridih have mandatory inclusion of sub-ward level committees like RWAs, SHG and NHG in Ward Committees.
- West Bengal has inclusion of subject matter experts while Bhuj includes retired government officers in its Ward Committees.
- Kerala, Bengaluru, Mangaluru, Bhuj, Delwara, Siliguri, Kolkata, Pune, and Giridih have mandatory reservation of women (40-50%) as members of the platform.
- Bhuj reserves 20% senior citizen participation in its WCs.
- Odisha and Bhuj have reservation for inclusion of youth in Ward Committees.
- Kerala and Delwara have representation from marginalised groups in Mohalla committees and Nagar Vikas Manch.

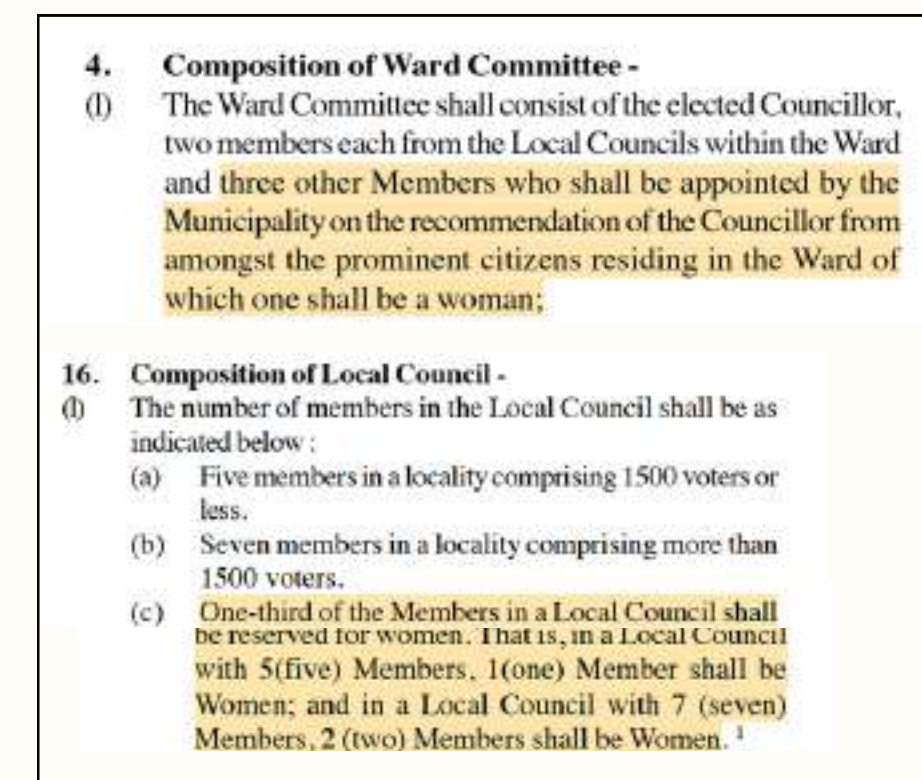
Composition of the ward committee — Bhuj SOP

Composition of Ward Committee as per Standard Operating Procedure for the constitution and effective functioning of a Ward Committee, Bhuj



Women's representation — Mizoram Rules, 2010

"Women's Representation in The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010"



2.1.3 A structured and contextual process enables meaningful participation

Regular and structured process

- Meetings should be conducted regularly—on a quarterly, monthly, or, where required, weekly basis.
- Meetings should have a pre-defined agenda, prior notice, and a dedicated venue and time. Minutes should be recorded and meeting-related records maintained. In some cases, provisions can also be made to ensure the safety and comfort of attendees, with dedicated funds allocated where necessary.

Essential elements of a Meeting



"Regular Meetings are essential for the platforms to sustain. The day when this meeting dialogue amongst the community ends, everything will end."

Ms. Rimjhim, Project Coordinator, Seva Mandir, Delwara

Regularity and venue of meetings

- Greater Chennai Corporation allocates INR 5000 per meeting for holding Area Sabhas in the city. Meetings announcements are done through door-to-door invitations, loudspeakers, and social media.
- In Kerala, Mizoram, Chennai, and Kolkata, meetings are conducted quarterly; while in Karnataka, Bhuj, Odisha, Siliguri, Delwara, Pune, Giridih, monthly or bi-monthly.
- In Bangalore, Bhuj, Kolkata, Siliguri, Pune, and Giridih, meetings are generally held at the ward office. In other cases, they are often held in public spaces like parking lot, chowks, or parks.



Ward Committee meeting in a market place, Bhuj



Ward Committee meeting at Ward office, Hoodi Ward, Bengaluru

Meeting notices and records

- Meeting notices are circulated by established WhatsApp groups, or displayed at the notice boards across ward offices. Pune, Delwara, and Gurugram have a fixed date and time of the month dedicated to the meetings.
- Odisha's SDAs maintain a register of records on all activities carried out by the platform.
- In Pune and Bengaluru, meeting minutes are made public via online channels or WhatsApp for future actions.

2.1.3 Capacity building helps sustain and strengthen this process

Outreach and engagement methods



Door-to-door
mobilisation



WhatsApp /
Social media



Street plays /
Rallies



Budget Bus /
Public events



"Regular capacity building of elected representatives and Ward Committee members on subjects like 74th CAA, municipal budgeting, pressing environmental issues is key to ensure continuous participation".

Mr. Manish Acharya, SETU Abhiyan, Bhuj

- Karnataka's Ward Samithi Balaga has city-level Committees and organises state-level Convention to galvanise formation of ward committees across State. Kolkata and Siliguri have Annual General Ward Meetings and Ward Conventions.
- In Chennai, outreach and awareness for Area Sabha meetings is done via public announcements, door-to-door (D2D) invites, social media, and WhatsApp, while Indore has adopted street plays, rallies, jingles, and FM radio for outreach on waste management. Bengaluru's 'My City My Budget' campaign uses a Budget Bus for outreach, awareness, and collection of submissions.
- Kolkata and Siliguri have separate budget allocations for ward-level cultural activities.
- In Odisha, digital tools have been developed to track and document the activities of SDAs.

Capacity building



Training for elected
representatives



Orientation for
ward members



Citizen awareness
programmes

Engagement drivers

- Systematic and regular capacity building and training of elected representatives, ward members, and citizens has enabled sustained participation.
- Many cases have adopted innovative and context-specific approaches to receive inputs and outreach for broader engagement.
- There has been adoption of digital and technological interventions for wider access, monitoring, record-keeping and grievance redressal.



Capacity Building Workshop, WC, Bhuj



Capacity Building Workshop, SDA, Odisha

Ward Development Plan



Ward-level planning activity being undertaken by community members, Giridih



A Ward Development Plan prepared by respective Ward Committee, Bhuj

2.1.4 Participation has greater influence when platforms operate across levels and issues

- There should be provisions for more than one structured forum for participation at different levels of the city, such as sub-ward committees including Area Sabhas, Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), functioning as subsets of Ward Committees.
- The constitution of sub-committees can further enable focused discussions and problem-solving on sectoral issues, such as subject-specific sub-committees (e.g., water, health, and sanitation) under Ward Committees.

Multi-level and thematic platforms deepen influence



City level forums



Ward level committees



Sub-ward / Area Sabhas



Issue-specific subcommittees



"Being part of the Slum Dwellers Association has transformed our lives. Earlier, women were only listeners in community meetings, now we make decisions about neighbourhoods. This platform has given us voice, visibility, and the confidence to ask for our needs."

Ms. Mamta Adhikari, SDA President, Sandhapur Adarsh Colony, Jatni, Odisha



"We have benefitted a lot due to the formation of the Ward Committee. Now, we have the collective agency to ask the local government for our needs, our problems are addressed and acted upon. We have also actively protested and agitated in the case of unresponsive administration or what we feel are wrong decisions"

Ms. Manjula, Ward Committee Member, Bhuj Municipality

Structured forums in practice



A Ward Sabha in Bhuj, an annual meeting of all wards in the city which is open to all residents



A Development Seminar in Trivandrum as part of the Annual People's Planning Campaign

- Kerala has Ward Committees established under the Kerala Municipality Act, 1994, Working groups, Development Seminars and Ward Sabhas under the People's Planning Campaign (PPC), and Community-based organisations (CDS, ADS, NHGs) under Kudumbashree Mission.
- Mizoram has Ward Committees and Local Councils operating at sub-ward level, constituted under The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010
- Delwara operates through Mohalla Committees, Aam Sabhas, and Karyakarnika at ward and sub-ward level platforms; and Nagar Vikas Manch at city-level. It has sectoral-committees under MCs for waste management and heritage conservation.
- Kolkata's Ward Committees include sector-specific sub-committees on health, education, water, and sanitation for targeted problem-solving.

2.1.5 Once participation becomes routine, technology and collaboration can help scale it

- In Bhuj and Bengaluru, WC WhatsApp groups also act as public grievance platforms for prompt issue resolution.
- In Odisha, digital tools have been developed to track and document the activities of SDAs.

Digital platforms in practice



Facebook page of an RWA, Gurugram



WhatsApp Group of a Ward Committee, Bhuj



WhatsApp Group of a Ward Committee, Bengaluru



Access

WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages and online channels improve two-way communication.



Monitoring

Digital dashboards and tracking tools improve monitoring of projects and services.



Grievance redressal

Residents report issues and track responses through digital platforms.



Outreach

Social media and digital campaigns broaden outreach and awareness.

Digital & technological interventions extend how citizens access platforms, how activities are tracked, and how grievances are resolved — complementing, not replacing, in-person meetings and physical notices.

Adaptability also draws on collaborations/convergence — the same civil society, political leadership and interdepartmental support that strengthens the institutional foundation also helps these tools reach further and adapt as circumstances change.



3. Pathways to Institutionalisation

3.1 Government-anchored institutionalisation

Mandate → Government action → Platform

Chennai

The 2010 law took twelve years to become a working Area Sabha meeting: the mandate sat unused until rules were finally notified in 2022, with the first meetings following in 2023.

Mizoram

The 2010 Rules took effect almost immediately, since they simply absorbed the state's long-standing traditional Village Councils into the new structure rather than starting from nothing.

Pune

Mohalla Committees grew out of the ward-office structure, with meetings held on a fixed date each month and minutes recorded and shared publicly.

West Bengal

Progressed much more quickly, with the Municipal Amendment Act, 1993, and the 2003 Ward Committee Rules establishing a system that has remained operational for the past two to three decades.

Odisha

JAGA Mission took about five years to reach full institutionalisation: launched in 2018, it kept Slum Dwellers' Associations consultative through Phase 1 before handing over real financial and executive powers in Phase 2 from 2020, with a legal capstone arriving only in the 2023 Odisha Municipal Laws Act.

3.2 CSO-anchored institutionalisation

Citizen/CSO mobilisation → Advocacy or litigation → Institutionalisation

Bhuj

Five CSOs began building Ward Committees in 2008 with no legal mandate at all; the first committee took shape only in 2015–16, and it has taken until today for ten of the city's eleven wards to be covered.

Karnataka

Saw quicker progress once litigation became involved. A High Court directive in 2019, followed by consultations and government notifications, resulted in the first Ward Committee meetings in Mangaluru by 2022 — an approximately three-year journey from filing the petition to establishing a functioning platform.

Delwara

Since 2004, community mobilisation in Delwara has evolved into a network of Mohalla Committees, Aam Sabhas, Karyakarnika and the Nagar Vikas Manch, creating regular spaces for deliberation and collective action. Over time, these platforms became embedded in local governance, supporting initiatives in water, waste management, heritage and social inclusion.

3.3 Citizen Group / CBO-anchored institutionalisation

Community network → Local participation → Formal role → Scale

Kerala

Converged three platforms in just four years, moving from the 1994 Municipality Act to the 1996 People's Planning Campaign to the 1998 Kudumbashree Mission.

Gurugram

Resident Welfare Associations grew more organically over years of continuous self-organisation rather than through any single formal milestone.

Giridih

Ward Committees, chaired by the elected councillor, took shape through residents, women and SHG members meeting regularly on ward issues — traction built from sustained local participation rather than a legal fight or state programme.

Indore

The Swachh Bharat Mission model grew more organically over years of continuous self-organisation rather than through any single formal milestone.



4. Recommendations

4.1 Communities are already taking the lead in driving change

BHUJ, GUJARAT

Ward Committees were constituted under the Homes in the City programme, without a legal mandate. WCs are functional in 10 out of 11 wards, with broader representation and inclusion of marginalised communities.

KARNATAKA

Citizens and civil society organisations have played a critical role in compelling the government in urban governance by operationalising ward committees. Inspired by these developments, citizens across other city corporations in Karnataka, including Mysuru, Ballari, Hubballi-Dharwad, Belagavi and Kalaburagi, are pushing for the formation of ward committees and area Sabhas.

ODISHA — SLUM DWELLERS' ASSOCIATIONS

SDAs have evolved from consultative bodies to implementing partners, creating livelihood opportunities by engaging community members in upgradation works.

DELWARA, RAJASTHAN

Community efforts have rejuvenated traditional water structures, implemented effective solid waste management with Aarogya Mitras, and advanced social inclusion with 50% women's representation across forums.

GURUGRAM, HARYANA

Resident Welfare Associations mobilised residents for collective action, negotiated with authorities on infrastructure upgrades, and often co-managed services through public-private partnerships.

INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH

RWAs mobilised households, coordinated campaigns, and linked citizens with the IMC, while SHGs engaged slum communities. Volunteers and youth reinforced compliance, creating sustained civic pride.

In each case, the initial push came from residents, RWAs, SHGs, or civil society groups themselves—often without a formal mandate—after which government responded by supporting, adapting, or institutionalising what communities had already initiated.

4.2 Closing the gap requires changing what happens at key moments

- 1 Stakeholder mapping** — for e.g., every household on the affected stretch in Tambaram, Perungalathur, and Junnasandra, especially the residents already flagging blocked drains on their own
- 2 Sensitisation** — for e.g., residents and corporation engineers made aware that a standing ward forum exists for exactly this complaint, so the next blockage doesn't have to wait for a monsoon to be noticed
- 3 Needs assessment** — for e.g., a joint walking audit of stormwater drains and low-lying stretches with residents and engineers together, to map where desilting and capacity upgrades are actually needed
- 4 Co-design and prioritisation** — for e.g., an annual desilting and drainage-upgrade calendar co-designed by residents and the corporation's engineering department, instead of works that happen only after a flood
- 5 Draft plan and feedback loop** — for e.g., the drainage works plan and its timeline published for objections before it is notified, so residents can flag a missed stretch before the contractor is signed off
- 6 Implementation and monitoring** — for e.g., desilting carried out on schedule, drains marked and tracked, and the plan reviewed with residents after every monsoon rather than left until the next crisis

INFORM

CONSULT

INVOLVE

COLLABORATE

EMPOWER

For e.g. Citizen-led ward drainage plans with budget control over desilting spend

The answer is not new technology or legislation, but a way to turn existing citizen action into sustained engagement.

4.3 What each stakeholder can do

Union Government

- Recommend forums at city, ward and sub-ward level, including for smaller towns
- Issue model bye-laws on meeting frequency, quorum and disclosure
- Build a national civic-tech platform and training modules
- Fund a CSO partnership pool for capacity building

State Government

- Notify rules under the municipal act, not just the act itself
- Mandate a Participation Cell in every urban local government
- Require participatory budgeting, linked to the budget calendar
- Earmark State Finance Commission funds for these platforms

Urban Local Government

- Run forums with dedicated staff, offices and budgets
- Keep public digital records and an online feedback channel
- Update ward plans annually from citizen input, tied to the budget
- Partner with local CSOs on planning and delivery

CSO/CBOs, Academia & Donors

- Support capacity building for both officials and citizen leaders
- Provide independent monitoring of how platforms actually function
- Build simple digital tools for records and grievance tracking
- Make citizen participation a funding condition, not an add-on

4.4 Proposed design for a Participation Cell

A small standing unit inside the municipal government, chaired by the mayor and commissioner together, with a member secretary, department nodal officers, rotating ward councillors, and 2–4 staff for documentation, facilitation and outreach.

The **CHAIRPERSON** is the Mayor who provides political leadership, represents citizen voice in governance decisions, and ensures participatory outcomes are linked with elected council priorities. Municipal Commissioner / CEO – Provides administrative leadership, resource allocation, and inter-departmental coordination for implementation of citizen-led decisions.

The **HEAD OF CPC** is the Additional / Joint Commissioner who leads the CPC, oversees all activities, and ensures integration of citizen feedback into planning, budgeting, and service delivery.

CORE TEAM

Member Secretary — a designated municipal officer (Executive Engineer / City Planner / Assistant Commissioner) who coordinates meetings, maintains documentation, ensures inter-departmental communication, and tracks follow-up actions.

Department Representatives — nodal officials from Planning, Sanitation, Finance, Public Health and IT who align departmental work plans with citizen priorities.

Elected Representatives — two Ward Councillors, on a rotational basis, ensuring representation of elected members and strengthening the accountability loop between citizens and elected representatives.

SUPPORT TEAM (TEAM HIRE)

1 Manager (Consultant) for coordination and partnerships.

2–4 Fellows for documentation, ward-level facilitation, inclusion and digital systems.

Interns / Associates to support outreach, communication and community engagement.

KNOWLEDGE & IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

Local CSOs, NGOs, universities and research organisations that provide facilitation, training, technical assistance and outreach, and co-create capacity-building and awareness programmes.

External Advisory Members (Optional) — domain experts and retired bureaucrats or professors who advise on innovative practices, SOP design, and review the impact of participatory governance mechanisms.



The opportunity now is to move from promising practices to institutionalised participation

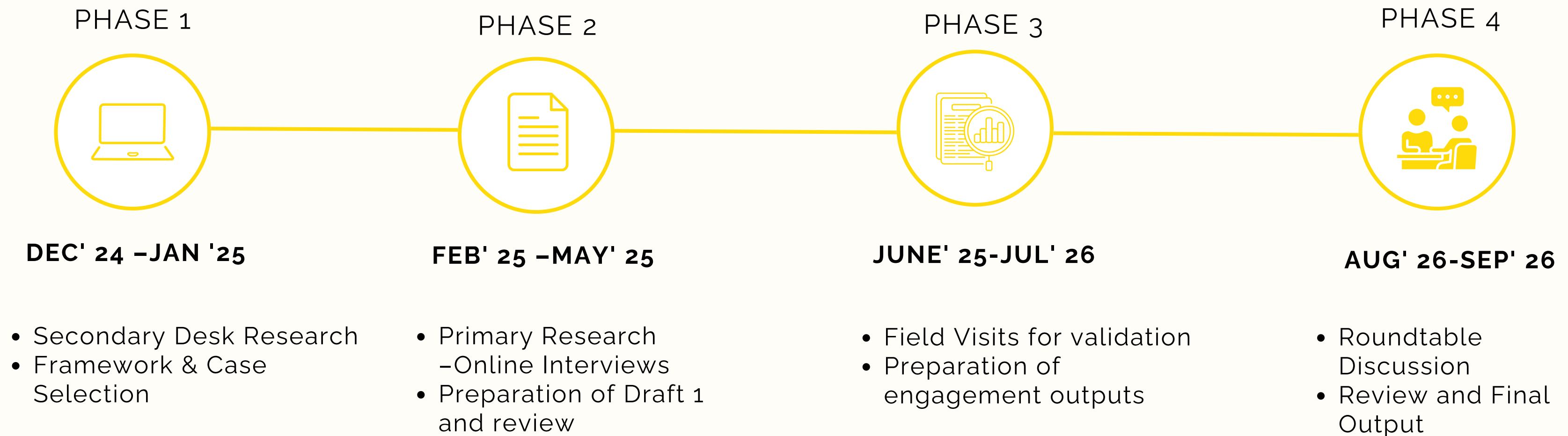
More than 30 years after the 74th Constitutional Amendment, the foundation for citizen participation exists. **Cities and communities have also demonstrated that meaningful participation can work**, through ward committees, participatory budgeting, neighbourhood platforms, and issue-based forums.

The next step is to make these practices part of how cities routinely govern: **with clear rules, dedicated capacity, regular processes, inclusive platforms, and mechanisms that connect citizen inputs to decisions and budgets.**

This cannot be the responsibility of one actor alone. **Governments, elected representatives, civil society, communities and citizens each have a role in building participation into how cities are governed.**

Annexure 1: Research methodology

This qualitative study adopts a multiple case study approach to document models and best practices in participatory urban governance across Indian cities



Annexure 2: Findings in a nutshell

1. Ward Committees of Bhuj, Gujarat

Ward Committees were constituted in Bhuj under the Homes in the City programme, without a legal mandate, and are functional in 10 out of 11 wards, with broader representation and inclusion of marginalised communities. WCs comprise 17–25 members with 50% women's representation, chaired by the elected Corporator, and meet monthly to review issues and progress. They prepare annual Ward Development Plans to guide budget allocations, prioritise civic works, monitor project quality, and identify beneficiaries. Outcomes include civic improvements like water resource restoration and citywide cement concrete roads, empowered women and SHGs through active participation, and 8 functional ward offices with public information access.

2. Ward Committees of Karnataka

Karnataka's efforts with participatory governance started with its provisions of Ward Committees through its state acts and their amendments through the years, with citizens and civil society organisations playing a critical role in compelling the government in urban governance by operationalising ward committees. WCs comprise members including residents, RWAs, SHGs, CSOs, SMEs, and officials, meet monthly or bi-monthly, and often form sub-committees on sectoral issues like water and sanitation. Their roles include reviewing municipal budgets, monitoring civic amenities, participating in neighbourhood planning, and proposing development works based on community needs. Inspired by these developments, citizens across other city corporations in Karnataka, including Mysuru, Ballari, Hubballi-Dharwad, Belagavi and Kalaburagi, are pushing for the formation of ward committees and Area Sabhas.

3. Kerala's Model of Universal Participation

Kerala has institutionalised participation through Ward Committees under the Municipality Act (1994), working groups and Ward Sabhas under the People's Planning Campaign, and Kudumbashree's community organisations, with these platforms operating at different levels of the city and working in convergence, keeping the poor and women at the centre of governance. All platforms have diverse composition and representation from Women, Marginalised groups, Youth, Resident Associations, ASHA and Anganwadi Workers, with elected representatives and ULG officials. WCs play a consultative role by disseminating information, collecting data, identifying beneficiaries, and monitoring ward-level activities, while Kudumbashree implements livelihood programs and maintains administrative records. Outcomes include enhanced citizen involvement, with women's participation in governance surpassing the national average.

4. Slum Dwellers' Associations of Odisha

Odisha's Jaga Mission has empowered nearly 3,000 Slum Dwellers' Associations (SDAs) since 2018 across 115 cities as community-led hyperlocal governance units, with women holding 50% of leadership positions. SDAs are formed with members from each household and function through monthly meetings held at Parichay Grihas with a prior set agenda, maintaining registers for attendance, minutes, and resolutions submitted to the ULB after each meeting for accountability. Their roles include mobilization and data collection, executing development works, and functioning as Implementing Partners that receive 7.5% of the project cost as supervision charges for projects up to ₹2 lakh. Outcomes include slum upgradation with 725 slums converted into Adarsh Colonies and 167 fully transformed, backed by a legislative mandate earmarking 25% of municipal budgets for slum infrastructure.

5. Ward Committees of West Bengal

Kolkata and Siliguri in WB stand out as a rare example of continuity and functionality in Ward Committees, operational for over two decades. Both cities have become deeply embedded in governance, with regular meetings, diverse representation, and sub-committees ensuring effective citizen-municipality coordination. Ward Committees propose ward-specific development needs, consult on works, and monitor municipal services. They address grievances, oversee state and central schemes, maintain sanitation and public spaces, and foster community spirit through events, festivals, and awareness campaigns.

6. Mohalla Committees of Pune, Maharashtra

In Pune, Mohalla Committees comprise local residents, women, youth, and community leaders and they serve as platforms for dialogue and grievance redressal. Their roles include identifying civic infrastructure issues, improving civic coordination, and facilitating awareness on issues like sanitation, safety, and health. Regular meetings and inclusion of diverse voices make them accessible forums for everyday governance. Meetings are held on a fixed date monthly at respective ward offices, minutes are recorded and publicly shared.

7. Ward Committees of Giridih, Jharkhand

Ward Committees were constituted to strengthen participatory governance and citizen engagement at the grassroots. Each committee, chaired by the elected councillor, includes local residents, women, SHG members, and community representatives. They meet regularly to discuss ward-specific issues, monitor civic services, and prioritise development works. Their roles include grievance redressal, ensuring transparency in project execution, and coordinating with the municipal body. Outcomes include improved service delivery, citizen participation in planning, and stronger accountability of councillors.

8. Mohalla Committees and Citizen Forum of Delwara, Rajasthan

Delwara, Rajasthan, offers a strong example of multi-layered participatory governance, operating through Mohalla Committees at the neighbourhood level, the Aam Sabha and Karyakarnika as town-wide deliberation and executive forums, and the Nagar Vikas Manch as a citizen platform. These platforms drive neighbourhood and town-level planning, resolve local problems, manage funds, and oversee development projects. Community efforts have rejuvenated traditional water structures, implemented effective solid waste management with Aarogya Mitras, and advanced social inclusion with 50% women's representation across forums.

9. Ward Committees and Local Councils of Mizoram

In Mizoram, participatory governance operates through Local Councils and Ward Committees. Local Councils, the smallest elected urban bodies under the Mizoram Municipalities Act, include a President, Vice-President, and members with mandatory women's representation. They manage day-to-day services like sanitation, water supply, street maintenance, and welfare beneficiary identification. Ward Committees, chaired by elected councillors, act as consultative forums to deliberate on development needs, monitor civic works, and link citizens with municipalities.

10. Area Sabhas of Chennai, Tamil Nadu

In Chennai, Area Sabhas function as sub-ward forums comprising all registered voters in a polling booth area, typically 1,000–1,500 residents. Convened by an elected Area Sabha Representative, they enable citizens to voice grievances, prioritise local needs, review welfare schemes, and monitor service delivery. Meetings are conducted quarterly with prior notice and set agenda, in public open spaces. Greater Chennai Corporation also allocates INR 5000 for the conduct of Area Sabha Meetings.

11. Resident Welfare Associations of Gurugram, Haryana

In Gurugram, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) play a central role in participatory governance, particularly in planned colonies and gated communities. Formed as registered societies, RWAs represent household interests, manage common services, and liaise with the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) on civic issues such as sanitation, waste management, water supply, and security. They mobilise residents for collective action, negotiate with authorities on infrastructure upgrades, and often co-manage services through public-private partnerships.

12. Participation in Indore, Madhya Pradesh

Indore's success as India's cleanest city since 2017 rests heavily on citizen participation integrated into waste management under Swachh Bharat Mission. Through RWAs, SHGs, NGOs, schools, and market associations, residents adopted source segregation, door-to-door collection, and recycling practices. RWAs mobilised households, coordinated campaigns, and linked citizens with the IMC, while SHGs engaged slum communities. Outreach via rallies, plays, social media, and school programs fostered behavioural change. Volunteers and youth reinforced compliance, creating sustained civic pride.

Annexure 3: Acts and laws referred

- Kerala Municipality Act, 1994
- People's Planning Campaign, 1996
- Kudumbashree Mission, 1998
- Karnataka Municipalities Act, 1964
- Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976
- Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Act, 2020
- JAGA Mission -Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers' Act, 2017
- West Bengal Amendment Act 1993
- West Bengal Municipal (Ward Committee) Rules 2003
- The Tamil Nadu Urban Local Bodies (Ward Committee And Area Sabha) Rules, 2022
- The Mizoram Municipalities (Ward Committee and Local Council) Rules, 2010
- Jharkhand Municipal Act, 2011

About Janaagraha

Janaagraha is a non-profit working to transform quality of life in India's cities and towns. For over two decades, the organisation has strengthened the city-systems that enable urban India to plan, design, govern, fund, and manage itself.

The organisation champions sustainable urban development through systemic reforms, partnering with constitutional bodies, union and state governments, and civil society organisations. Its engagements span the XIII, XIV, XV, and XVI Finance Commissions, State Finance Commissions, Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, NITI Aayog, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and state governments including Assam, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.

Find out more at www.janaagraha.org



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