



# PRAJA FOUNDATION

## ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FELLOWSHIP

### COHORT 1

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## ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

Among Praja Foundation's several efforts towards better governance in the city of Mumbai, the Elected Representatives Fellowship Programme has been one of the most collaborative projects. The Programme was designed to challenge the participating fellows to understand the ground-level realities of governance and the powers and functions of local Elected Representatives while working alongside them.

The Programme aimed to engage students in assisting Mumbai's Municipal Councillors in order to facilitate the work of and provide these councillors with a dedicated team of individuals serving as a link to Praja; and to provide exposure to students by participating in the process of governance. In this programme, 19 students selected as fellows through a structured selection process, were assigned to work with local representatives of specific wards allotted to them, for a period of six months.

In the course of their fellowship, they undertook research and analysed data to interact with councillors and assist them in raising issues in the deliberative bodies of the city. Councillors in Mumbai benefitted immensely from this Fellowship Programme as they would get regular assistance from the fellows who would approach the councillor with Praja's data on various issues related to the councillor's respective ward and the city in general.

The fellows, through this opportunity, have gained invaluable experience which they will carry forward in the projects they take up in the near future. It has not only helped them to grow as professionals but also as individuals.

As this journey comes to end, the fellows share their experiences of this endeavor.

Good governance is a wisdom which is achieved by knowing what people need and that which is best for the people-being ambitious towards it and achieving it with integrity

ADITYA PITADIA 18

BCOM, S.K. SOMAIYA COLLEGE



The words 'making democracy work' on the poster at my college notice board was my initiation into taking up Praja's Elected Representatives Fellowship. I was really inspired and felt like participating in this initiative. I was eager to see how successful one could be in making our democracy work. My research got me pretty satisfying answers and so I registered myself at the website and fortunately got through to be one of the selected few.

My initial perception towards the councillors was very wrong as I thought they were self-serving and unmotivated. I felt so due to their portrayal in the media. It made me skeptical as to how would things work out with them.

The three-day orientation program taught me a large number of things about the mechanism of our Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) the acts, departments, members, obligatory and discretionary duties, budget, the powers of the councillors, confidence to work with councillors and all such other learning which made me understand the functioning of the MCGM. After being so informed, I realised that there is still a vast scope for learning.

On taking appointments and meeting the councillors I was delighted and happy to be wrong about them, as they were very polite, calm, conversant and most importantly very keen to have good governance in the city. My co-fellows and I met a variety of councillors, engaging in discussions on a range of issues concerning Mumbai and the Corporation. We attended the General Body Meeting (GBM) where I was delighted to see the councillors whom we met earlier for meetings waving at us and introducing us to their fellow councillors- it was a very happy and pleasant experience for me.

Earlier as a citizen, I used to complain that my corporator and administration running my city are inefficient and they are certainly not willing to work. The Fellowship changed this perception and taught me by practical experience that corporators are very ambitious with their plans for the city, but the newly elected ones are finding it hard to cope with how the MCGM works and how they shall address the issues to the Corporation to get them solved. It was inspiring to see Praja taking huge steps like publishing White Papers, training councillors, releasing Report Cards, conducting an Elected Representatives Fellowship project and such other initiatives to work on improving governance.

The fellowship benefited me as a student by the seminars, the monthly meetings which were very interesting and educative, it made me more disciplined by maintaining reports and gave me ample exposure, it even got me engaged and involved in the process of being an alert citizen towards the development of my city and for the benefit of the people living in the city.

Governance is the power which is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for its development.

**AFREEN MAZGAONKAR 19**

SYBCOM, HINDUJA COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

There are various reasons as to why I joined the fellowship programme. Firstly, it has been a privilege to work with the representatives that we as citizens have elected and since Praja gave me this opportunity, it fired up my interest. Secondly, to know more about democracy and the functioning and administration of the corporation. Thirdly, the data collection procedure of Praja is so accurate and reliable, that I knew I'll be working with a trusted source.

Before meeting the councillors I had an image of them in my head that they are negligent about the problems faced by us as common citizens. But after meeting them and working closely with them I realised that they actually were interested in listening to what I had to say and that made me feel responsible for my work and further increased by interest. I realised that apart from solving everyone's problem they have various meetings to attend and several other issues and responsibilities to deal with. To solve a single problem they have to go through a long procedure which gets the work delayed. I also realised that Praja does research only on major issues, however, there are other problems on which the councillors have to look into and so I feel that they are trying their best to do whatever they can and citizens who are unaware of the work done by the councillors will definitely criticise them; I was one of them. I am happy now, that I am more aware of the ground reality.

Talking about my experience at Praja, I would like to thank Praja for considering me worthy and responsible enough to give me this opportunity. It was a great experience since meeting councillors on a regular basis made me understand how all the issues are actually dealt with at ground level.

Attending workshops that Praja conducted for us turned out to be very informative and helped me deal with various issues including on how to frame questions for councillors. Doing work related research on various topics has not only helped the elected representatives but also helped me enhance my knowledge.

Teamwork was the most important thing I learnt from this fellowship, since all of us worked together, including our coordinators on various issues where I got answers to my problems.

I also got a chance to attend General Body Meetings and actually see on a practical level the discussions of all the councillors with each other and it was a truly interesting experience. It helped me know what problems the elected representatives themselves face while asking questions to the administration.

Apart from all this, I have had a chance to build relationships with people and memories which I'll cherish for the rest of my life. I am definitely taking back a lot of knowledge from Praja and I know it will definitely be useful.



Governance is a thin line between exploitation and just use of power, on which most fail to balance without moral stability

**ALIFIA K KHAN 19**

BLS LLB, PRAVIN GANDHI COLLEGE OF LAW

I came to know of Praja Foundation when some of the organisations' representatives came to talk about the fellowship programme that was being initiated. The passion with which they were talking about Praja, its achievements and projects, especially about the Fellowship Programme was what caught my attention. I thought that this could give a direction to my inner fire as a youth and increase my capacity of making changes in the system. I am studying law and so I've always been interested in governance, its institutions and the politics related to it, so as soon as this opportunity came my way, I knew it was perfect and I had to take it.

I joined the programme almost a month late and even though I missed the three-day long orientation because of my selection in the second round; my seniors, coordinators as well as my fellow colleagues, along with my self-motivation made sure that I wasn't left behind by any means.

The first few meetings were intimidating as I did not get a chance to do mock meetings like my colleagues and was also very skeptical of the image the elected councillors had, but I jumped into it anyway and all for good. Each meeting with the elected representative has been different from the other, because they are all such dynamic and varied personalities. These meetings brought me insights into such varied minds, running and working in the administration, each having a specific way of looking at issues.

Some were very warm and welcoming while others absolutely uninterested and some would just never take our calls. Even the interested councillors would have excuses for their inefficiency and somehow their amazing aura would make me question my own ground. As I started realising this, with the help of my seniors I started getting my way through it, using a good amount of diplomacy. Now, by the end of six months of conducting discussions with these councillors I'm confident enough to put my points and protect my ground even in front of the Prime Minister.

Apart from this, the fellowship is my first exposure to a job-like structure and so it made me learn a lot of technical work like maintaining reports, filing claims, completing hours, etc. Along with that, the weekly and monthly meetings that took place have definitely increased my fluency of working with people in harmony and made me realise the importance of teamwork to successfully run a project as big as this. Workshops and field visits or even leisure activities conducted by Praja were an important aspect for me to evolve as a person, as it helped me increase my proficiency, my focus on work and made me comfortable and at ease with the people I work.

Overall as an experience this Elected Representatives Fellowship has definitely made me much more responsible and mature as a person. It has evolved my thinking about governance, politics, human behaviour and much more. Young individuals who have a passion in them should definitely come and work for such projects because it gives a feeling of immense joy and pride to even play a small role in the functioning of a project that affects masses on such a great level.

I believe Governance brings together multiple forces at play in any structure to ensure a resultant effect that is socially, economically, politically and morally good for all those involved.

**ASAWARI SAKSENA 23**

BCOM GRADUATE, NARSEE MONJEE COLLEGE OF COMMERCE AND ECONOMICS



Praja Foundation's Elected Representatives Fellowship caught my eye because of how perfectly it matched my beliefs and interests. Having always been drawn to social issues, I found myself thinking of the numerous ideas of improving the functioning of the society.

The Fellowship not only increased my knowledge about ground realities and governmental processes, but also removed many misconceptions. The initial months were difficult, as we struggled to prove ourselves to the stakeholders of the Local Government. But with continuous encouragement and guidance at Praja, we managed to gradually start breaking the ice with corporators. Not only did I find them more than willing to listen to a youthful perspective, but I was amazed at their patience in dealing with us when they are swamped by thousands of citizens daily.

I realised that it was my duty to respond and help them to the best of my ability. I backed up each meeting with research on Central & State schemes and guidelines, read up on strategies of other nations to combat similar problems, and contacted various Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the field to gain expert opinion and research. Praja Foundation not only managed to equip us with necessary knowledge about MCGM, but also aimed at expanding our horizons through workshops, like those on Urban Design and Police Reforms.

What I will be taking back with me is the realisation that as an ordinary citizen, there is so much that I was able to do and so much that I still can. The gap between the government and me now seems smaller. The memories of witnessing change being brought about based on my ideas were empowering. The thought, that maybe through these encounters, we managed to shift perspectives of a handful of people, pushes me to keep the social aspect in mind in the endeavors I take up next. I don't feel like a part of India and its system, they feel like a part of me now.



Governance is the process of interaction, decision-making and monitoring of implementation by a Supreme authority for the betterment of the people.

**ASHUTOSH AGARWAL 19**

BLS LLB, PRAVIN GANDHI COLLEGE OF LAW



This Fellowship for me was more than just a great experience, it was my growth as an individual in so many aspects. It was my first step towards contributing something for the people around me and not just complaining about the irregularities. When I came across this fellowship which gave us an opportunity to work for the society, I couldn't miss it. The only requirement from our side was to learn every day and make the most out of the opportunity.

Most of us knew very little or nothing about these councilors and what exactly they do; the only interaction I had with a councillor prior to this was to get papers attested.

The first few weeks were tough and hectic as I was a little nervous to call them and ask for a meeting, but I just got better with time. Initially I was skeptical about showing them their own data and on whether it does really have any impact on them, because some of them simply didn't care enough to look at the data. I was answered soon as I could see my efforts take shape and hear them in the House and see how an issue once taken into the General Body Meeting by a councillor turns out to be a common issue for most other councillors of the city and so all of them try to come to a solution for it.

For me personally, my greatest achievement would be that I can now travel independently, I have the confidence to speak publicly and with people of authority and make them realise that so many lives depend on them doing their duty correctly.

One of the most inspiring lines I've heard would be "You will come to know the city is working fine when NGOs like Praja are no longer needed to monitor." From Attending the General Body Meetings to Meeting the Mayor, every aspect of this fellowship has just been a memorable moment for me and very few people get an opportunity so great.

People's participation for making a change in the society is the essence of good governance.

**FARHAT KHAN 19**

STUDENT OF ECONOMICS, R.D. NATIONAL COLLEGE

Learning about governance was never on my mind. Through Praja Foundation I was able to learn various aspects of governance and its functioning. At first I thought it would be very difficult for me to learn so much about governance but later on when I worked on field and read the white papers, I had a very clear understanding of what I was doing.

Initially it was difficult to remember volumes of detail about the councillors but later on it was easy to explain as I got more comfortable. Every councillor has a different perspective and works according to that, some take immediate action and others might not. Being a part of this organisation made me realise that running the government is not a cakewalk. Meeting councillors, understanding their opinions, their way of working, is not necessarily easy.

Working on field helped me learn many things which I wouldn't have learnt in theory. Studying about politics in theory and learning on field changed my perspective completely. Knowing about our rights is very important and through this fellowship I was able to comprehend them and articulate the same to others.

The weekly and monthly meetings gave me a great experience of working jointly with so many people involved as a team. Praja has always cared and been so considerate towards its fellows. We were taught to learn from, and work on our mistakes. We learnt many new skills that will be useful in the future. The workshops and seminars conducted by them have turned out to be useful in so many aspects of not only my experience as a fellow, but also for life.

I'm definitely walking out of here wiser and more knowledgeable than what I was when I joined six months ago. I am glad to have got the opportunity to work with an organisation that has been successfully influencing good governance over so many years. Thank you very much for considering me worthy of taking up this responsibility and making me a part of your family. I would sincerely urge every young citizen to get involved in a project like this through Praja, it is an experience I will cherish for life.



Governance is essentially an art of deliverance. It is a catalyst for the strife towards a better tomorrow

**GAYATRI BORKAR 19**

SYBA, KJ SOMAIYA COLLEGE OF ARTS



Local governance is a sector of political science which is usually left abandoned and not really focused upon much other than its vague mentions in our textbooks. Grassroot level democracy, hence turns out to become a very distant concept to our minds. I discovered a lot about myself when I started working in this sector and that was actually the reason why I joined this fellowship.

The last six months have been quite strenuous yet very giving, for me. It has been an experience like no other and I wouldn't be able to thank Praja enough for having chosen me worthy to be part of this program. It has been nothing less than a roller coaster ride.

The first few months were part of a period involving a lot of new discoveries pertaining mainly to the MCGM functions and its role towards governance, also about the data collected by Praja and last but not the least, the test of our capabilities. With a strong push I went forward striving for the same goals as Praja, in terms of good governance and making democracy work, but with time, I also found base for my own individual goals involving capacity and confidence building, speaking skills, overcoming my fears related to meetings and also team spirit. I was pushed out of my comfort zone and I was made to challenge my own performance with each successive meeting. It was a struggle but one which was worth the citizen I have become today.

My meetings with the Elected Representatives involved a lot of assertions as well as desertions from topics but with time I formed a rapport with them that it was more like a discussion than a debate. The fears pertaining to the entire idea of conducting discussions with a political leader and explaining to them our points gradually vanished, without me realising it.

I met the councillors of wards N, L, S and T. With around 30 councillors to meet, it was a hectic job to stay in touch with all of them and figure out their individual issues. There were a lot of ups and downs where sometimes they were very happy to see students like me having such keen interest in local governance, and sometimes they were unwelcoming because they thought I didn't own the necessary skill set that could help them tackle their issues in a field which they were already accustomed to. But with time, they came to terms with the fact that I, as a Praja representative wasn't trying to compete with them, but rather work with them to better the current state of our governance institutions through better and more effective governance. Our interactions with the elected representatives helped us understand the system better and deepen our knowledge of the system. It was very encouraging when a few of the councillors always told us that we must continue to hold the government accountable even after the fellowship ends because the society needs better leaders for tomorrow.



Governance is a tool so strong that if effectively used, can enable a country to become powerful

**HIMANSHI TAILOR 19**

BLS LLB, PRAVIN GANDHI COLLEGE OF LAW

I have always been curious about how the Indian Polity functions. Much is said and heard, but to experience it is a completely different avenue. When I learnt about this fellowship, I knew I had to apply.

As a law student, this has great relevance to my field. Understanding how the government works at the grassroots level is crucial not only as a law student but also as a citizen.

There was no nervousness when I began as Praja had conducted a three-day long orientation for us which trained us in just about everything we needed to know. I had several meetings with councillors of my ward and I remember each distinctly as they were all so unique and impactful. The Fellowship taught me on how to deal with different kinds of personalities. It also allowed me to gain insights into the nuances of the governance institutions and its procedures.

My initial perception of politics was completely demolished when I actually started working with and meeting the councillors. Their job is a challenging one and not many realise this. They struggle and work really hard to better the conditions of their ward. Each councillor has a completely different approach for improving their ward but that does not mean that they are not working, as opposed to the common conception around. We as fellows, were successful in getting the councillors to increase the participation in the ward committee meetings by raising questions and being more involved in deliberations.

In these six months, I have learned a great deal about report making as well, as we were required to make timely reports of our field work. It taught me to keep a systematic record and inculcated this quality in me. It is a habit I have developed and will use in all my future projects as well. It helped me build by persuasion skills and confidence even more. In the past I was rather passive when it came to knowledge of governance. This experience was so enriching that I now know the names of most councillors in the western zone!

Apart from that, Praja conducted several workshops in the course of the fellowship. These were highly informative and we learnt new concepts every single time. I have learnt about the Right to Information Act, The Municipal Corporation of Mumbai and The Maharashtra Police Act among many others. Several luminaries conducted these workshops. It was truly an honour to be able to learn from such experienced speakers.

There are very few times in life when you actually feel like you have made a difference, and this was one. Running a city is a magnanimous task and I take pride in being able to assist the elected representatives. I am grateful to Praja for giving me this opportunity and the experience of a lifetime.

सरकार सीढ़ी है  
तरक्की की,  
ये बात है समझने की,  
स्याही उतरे पत्रों में,  
सरकार बने जनों में।

KAVITA SAROJ 22

MA (HINDI LITERATURE), GN KHALSA COLLEGE

I hate Politics - this was my view regarding politics when I was not aware about Praja Foundation. But today I am very glad to have had a chance to work with Praja Foundation and that has completely changed my view regarding politics.

I was searching for a job after completing my graduation. I even got selected by a company with a modest pay, more than what Praja was offering. My joining date for that job and interview with Praja happened to be on the same day. I decided that I would prioritise the Praja interview over my job. I did this because I want to be a writer and getting field experience is necessary to be a good writer. My financial position was weak yet, I chose Praja because I wanted to learn and gain experience. I left the job I was selected for.

My journey was not an easy one as the environment was very new and different. It was very challenging for me as everything was conducted in English; a language I am not fluent with. My initial days were hard and made me question my choice.

As the journey was difficult and there were times when I felt like giving up, demotivated, and yet I persevered and I am glad I did. This was possible because I was advised to take a few days to think properly and reminded of the fact that I had been selected for Praja from among 150 odd candidates. I deeply thought about this to myself, and realised that life does not give you these opportunities twice. I changed my decision and I continued with Praja.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with councillors. I will remember my first appointment forever. We faced problems getting appointments but gradually we built a strong rapport with all the councillors.

Overall, it was an enriching experience to work with Praja Foundation and I learnt many new things. One thing that will stay with me forever is - "I made democracy work".



The presence of a powerful political party along with indomitable leaders with fair administration skills, when operate in harmony, true governance prevails.

**KINJAL TRIVEDI 19**

BLS LLB, PRAVIN GANDHI COLLEGE OF LAW



It's been an amazing journey in Praja. First of all, such fellowship opportunities come once in a while, and when after getting shortlisted from around 100 candidates, there was a noticeable boost in my self-esteem. My inspiration to join the Fellowship Program was to genuinely understand in depth about the workings of the governance system and how everything works on the ground level.

Since the inception of the Fellowship Program, I have been given incredible training by my seniors and coordinators. The three-day Orientation Program gave us the mock trial of how things will be executed in the course of the upcoming six months. The daily reporting about my experiences through weekly meetings, monthly meetings gave us the chance to improve our techniques and solve most of the queries by discussing our issues with our peers.

The workshops on various topics during monthly meetings gave us an insight into governance from the grassroots level. It gave me the platform to have a firsthand experience of field work, data collection and working with the elected representatives.

Praja Foundation, being a non-partisan organisation, gave me the opportunity to be more aware of our civic issues along with many others and insights on how to deal with them effectively. The amount of time and energy put across by every member of Praja Foundation is quite laudable.

Being a part of Praja, even for a limited time as a fellow has given me a new perspective about governance and how it actually functions. New opinions have formed regarding the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and its officials.

Before joining Praja, I had some prejudices regarding the MCGM and its way of administration which were altered as and when I got to know the ground realities. Initially, when the fellowship started, fellows were being underrated but when we were backed by the strong data, Elected Representatives couldn't help but raise the issues in the MCGM deliberations and ward level meetings.

As wisely said by Nelson Mandela, "It always seems impossible until it's done". I have learnt a lot from my fellowship experience; patience, humbleness, gratitude and kindness are a few to name. I would recommend it to everyone in order to gain knowledge, and some interesting facts about the government system.

To conclude, my journey in Praja has been a rollercoaster ride, but a very exciting one.

Governance is about disseminating and executing of public policies that help in the development of a nation.

**NAILA KHAN 19**

STUDENT, R.D. NATIONAL COLLEGE



As a 19-year-old, I was curious to understand local governance, its functions and how the administrative system in the city works, that Praja gave me a chance to begin with. It was a great opportunity to realise my aim. These six months taught me much more than I initially planned to learn and I am really thankful for the same.

Throughout the fellowship I worked closely with the Elected Representatives. My primary responsibility was to provide them with data and assist them to raise questions in the House. My meetings with them were very interesting because considering the past records of Praja, they recognised me as a fellow and were welcoming and knew that I was there to assist them.

According to a few newly elected representatives the various workshops and seminars that Praja conducts helps them to understand their roles and responsibilities. The workshops not only helped them but also ended up expanding my understanding of the issues related to governance.

As a part of the fellowship program, I also got an opportunity to attend the General Body Meeting that takes place in the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. Through these meetings I got a firsthand experience about the different views of the councillors on certain issues and how they find the best possible solutions for the problem after discussing with each other and putting their point forward.

As months passed by I was able to read and analyse data efficiently and it also helped me understand white papers and compare it with the actual situation in our city. These skills helped me grow personally.

I had various experiences throughout the fellowship, because of which I felt satisfied about the work that we were doing. One such incident was when one day I was traveling in a local train and I decided to read Praja's Health White paper. A middle-aged woman sitting beside me wanted to know what I was reading so I started telling her about the work we do and our fellowship program. We discussed various things among which she told me how she had lost a dear one due to tuberculosis and that she was happy to see someone work on this issue. Before leaving she patted me on the back with a huge smile on her face and that I think is going to stay with me forever.

I'm very fortunate to be a part of this fellowship programme and I sincerely wish that Praja Foundation continues with their efforts. I'd like to conclude with a big thank you to everyone I've worked with during this fellowship be it my co-fellows, my coordinators, other staff at Praja and all the councillors I have had a chance to work with.



Good governance is to promote and sustain holistic and integrated human development.

**NISHANT KALE 19**

SY BA, R. D. NATIONAL COLLEGE

Being a political science student I always wanted to get a practical knowledge of the subject and this fellowship gave me the perfect platform to get to know better about administration and governance. I also thought it as challenge because to talk to and convince elected representatives is a big deal, so there was also an excitement about the fellowship. I believed this opportunity would also help me explore myself better.

Initially we thought it would be very difficult to get appointments and to show the data to the councilors and amicably work with them if they counter us. But gradually we got to know the councillors better and they were very friendly and also they were in fact interested in meeting us.

The journey was incredible- it taught me nuances of studying a data driven report to explaining it to Elected Representatives. I learnt to formulate questions and help councillors raise them in their meetings. It gave me a lot of confidence to have completed these tasks successfully.

Praja foundation also organised various workshops, one such workshop was about Right to Information (RTI). Earlier I didn't have any idea about the RTI, and its procedure but after the workshop we got to know about it and so one day me and some of my classmates decided to file an RTI about the expenditure of roads near our college. I can now file an RTI without any hesitation as I know how strong a tool it is.

I am glad I got an opportunity to be a part of this fellowship and to be able to do some good work for our city.



समाज माध्यमं, विविध संस्था आणि दबाव गट इत्यादी निरीक्षक म्हणुन कार्य करित असलेल्या राज्यसंस्थेत लोकप्रतिनिधी, नोकरशाही आणि न्यायव्यवस्था यांनी समाजातील जाती, धर्म, भाषा, बेरोजगारी, जीवनावश्यक वस्तूंचे वितरण, इत्यादी कारणातुन निर्माण होणाऱ्या समस्या दफ्तरदिरंगाई न करता सक्रियतेने सोडविणे, दर्जा आणि संधींची समानता निर्माण करणे म्हणजे सुप्रशासन होय

**NITIN BARHATE 26**

STUDENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI

**A**s a vivid reader and observer I have always been curious about my surroundings and have had negative and positive thoughts about the governance system, but when I got selected for this fellowship, I felt excited.

To work with elected representatives and the experts at Praja would give me a chance to closely work with urban local governance bodies and understand the immediate reality of the system. I wanted to see change and I knew for a fact that one must be patient and calm for the same, so I gradually started working for it.

I had a skeptical opinion about the councillors as a common citizen. Some of them wanted to work for their own constituency and for their own image, which is not wrong but can divert their minds from 'Lokniti'-Governance to 'Rajniti'-political work for their personal interests. Fresh councillors struggle through the scenario of party politics and work out of pressure in order to leave a mark. Some of them are trapped in gender superiority related scenarios whose sensitivity was noticed by us throughout the course of our various meetings.

I was allotted the two most neglected wards of Mumbai -the biggest examples of skewed development which included M/E ward. Personally, I would like to thank Praja for allotting me these wards.

While conducting meetings, I followed a trial and error pattern. Initially, the councillors would hold me in a trance with their coaxing and strong personality but eventually I developed expertise at dodging it, and presenting myself strongly which has been the wisest achievement of this fellowship. I also want to appreciate my co-fellow Setu for his co-operation throughout. This was an opportunity for both of us to learn each other's strengths and also to overcome our weaknesses. Weekly meetings too became a platform for exchange of knowledge and ideas between the coordinators and the other fellows allotted to the eastern suburb group which taught me the importance and impact of teamwork.

We studied data on each issue and provided the same to each councillor. They also presented probable issues in their Ward Committees and in the House which were the best moments for us. As the fellowship is now ending, I have this feeling that we've got the opportunity to do a lot in terms of the development for these wards, but then again this is just the beginning.

Praja monthly and weekly meetings helped me in understanding the lacunae of Government proceedings and also the behaviour of councillors. Many a times, the environment in the Praja office was like one whole team striving for a mission to improve governance and making each person's life easier.

I would like to quote the Bhagwad Gita to express to what I earned and learnt from this fellowship, 'I serve calmly and quietly through this ocean of contribution where I discovered qualities for personal growth, in terms of career and values in life.'

On a closing note, Praja gives me an insight into the near future that has efficient governance that works for the betterment of its citizens.



Governance is a mechanism to maintain order. It is essentially an antidote to chaos.

PIYUSH BARTAKKE 22

FYBA, ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE

From childhood, I have been listening to anecdotes explaining how selfish and self-serving politicians are. For the most part, I always believed those stories without thinking much about the context and mechanisms of government. But I always knew that I need to learn and understand more and more things in order to have an unbiased and objective view of reality. So, when I came to know about the Fellowship, I thought that this was a perfect opportunity to work directly with the councillors and try to understand the intricacies associated with working as an elected representative. That was the chief reason for joining the fellowship.

In the initial part of the fellowship, I faced difficulty with some of the councillors. They were very critical of Praja's approach towards improving governance. Some councillors were welcoming, some weren't interested in engaging with us while some never responded to us.

At that point I had assumed that working with councillors was going to be challenging but then gradually it became better. Some councillors were very cooperative and were just skeptical initially about the whole endeavor, but once mutual trust was established and rapport was built, it was relatively easy to collaborate to work on the different issues of Mumbai.

I remember one incident in particular, it was a workshop for elected representatives conducted by Praja and the main objective was to explain the parameters of its Councillor Report Card and have a discussion about it. At one point in that workshop, someone mentioned the fact that MCGM had recently omitted the 'malnourishment' column in student's medical examination and the data about malnourished children is not available anymore. Instead they have incorporated 'underweight' category. One councillor defended MCGM's decision to do so and claimed that the media reports of 33% children from MCGM schools being malnourished was hurting the image of Mumbai and in turn India on an international level. I was really disheartened to hear what he had said. He was more concerned about hurting the so-called image of Mumbai than about the health of children.

I also noticed that the educational background of councillors has very little relation with their zeal when it comes to their job. Some councillors genuinely care about the serious issues and want to do something constructive to solve them.

One of the things I like about Praja is its data driven approach. Another unique characteristic of this fellowship program was that, directly or indirectly, it involves all the stakeholders like councillors, administration and citizens in the process of achieving our goal of better governance.

At the end, I am very grateful to Praja for providing us this excellent opportunity. I wish the duration of the fellowship was longer than just six months!

Governance depends on the ability to take responsibility by both administration as well as people.

SAMIRA CHANDANSHIVE 21

MCOM, R.A. PODAR COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

The Fellowship Programme has been a great learning experience for me. The reason which made me join the fellowship was the concept of 'making democracy work', working with powerful leaders, connecting with citizens and the administration at the same time, having new learnings and experiences.

This six month journey was amazing in which I faced a lot of ups and downs but at last did manage to build a strong and trustworthy bond with some of the councillors. The memorable moment in this fellowship was the Dharavi ward visit, visiting MCGM schools and dispensaries, talking to people and getting to know their problems and so much more.

I was allotted to work in G/N & G/S wards, where I actually got to experience the actual scenario of a part of Mumbai. G/N ward consists of Dharavi area, which is extremely underdeveloped and G/S ward consists of Worli and Mahalaxmi areas which is comparatively well developed. This, gave me a holistic picture of Mumbai and also acquainted me to its disparities. Conducting meetings and discussing deeply with the councillors, I also learned various plans and policies undertaken by the Corporation for Redevelopment in Dharavi. This was a high point that I experienced during the fellowship while working in these wards.

The workshops conducted by Praja along with my work on the field gave me practical knowledge about the corporation and helped me learn more about various issues like health, education, etc.

It also helped me improve as a person, as well as improve my leadership and research skills. Working with leaders, I got to know how wisely and broadly they think on a particular topic. They consider all the points and possibilities before arriving at a conclusion.

Praja Foundation is doing a great job in improving local governance. Many councillors are willing to work with us and get assistance from Praja to improve the system for faster and long lasting effects in the corporation and its governance. My only suggestion is that it should keep doing what it is doing and that will definitely bring transparency and accountability in the system, and the change that will ultimately lead to an efficient working of democracy.



Efficient decision making to achieve a common ground for citizens is good governance to me.

SETU BANDH UPADHYAY 22

BLS LLB, VIVEKANAND EDUCATION SOCIETY'S LAW COLLEGE



When I read George Orwell's Animal Farm during my first year in law school, thoughts and ideas about the people holding power were revolving around my head. I wondered how people at a powerful position think, what is their thought process and how does it affect them and their surroundings?

As I got more involved with citizen engagement and policy issues, I realised that even the smallest of problems can lead to a dramatic impact on a mass scale, the magnitude of which can often be underestimated during the decision-making process.

Following these questions along with my interest in policy, I joined the Elected Representatives fellowship programme. This fellowship gave me an opportunity to make a real impact on lives of a large number of people, a real dent if I may say. Understanding and being a tiny part in the functioning of a megacity such as Mumbai presented an opportunity to me which couldn't have been missed.

I was placed in the M/E and M/W wards of the city. Areas included in these wards are few of the most neglected and underdeveloped, not just in Mumbai but in India. Basic human necessities are hard to find in some of these places where the population density is exploding. Lack of infrastructure, health facilities, transportation, education, sanitation and drinking water are challenges faced in these areas.

The councillors in these areas were the ones who faced a variety of different challenges. Some of the councillors were uneducated. Some were first-time councillors and were unaware of the work; these people were often suppressed by senior councillors. A lot of female councillors were proxies of their male relative viz. Husband/Father/Brother.

The 'Silver Lining' of the fellowship is that many of these councillors are getting over the hurdles to work for their people. I met individuals who left their hesitation behind and raised questions in General Body Meetings as well as Ward Committee meetings. Another surprising moment was when a couple of the councillors were admitting that they are unaware and welcomed our help. My suggestions and questions were actually taken seriously which gave me a certain sense of responsibility.

I got to see, understand and make a small contribution as a small cog in this vast machine of Urban Local Governance. I wish the fellowship was a little longer so that I could deep dive into individual issues while working towards solving them. The inclusion of other verticals like Housing Issues, crime and law and order relating to the city can further improve the experience and make the fellowship more immersive.

Overall, it was truly once in a lifetime opportunity and I learned plenty of things because of this fellowship. I wish to conclude the fellowship keeping in mind the statement which I saw in motion - 'The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.'



Governance is a complex process where political leaders exercise their authority for the well-being of their citizens.

**VANI SHIGGAVI 21**

TYBSC IN CHEMISTRY, BHAVANS COLLEGE



I was always interested in the functioning of the government and wished to gain more practical knowledge on the local governance of my city.

As a school student, I wasn't ever satisfied with the information about politics and governance that was provided in our ultra-thin civic textbooks. Even in college, having an education background in science, I had very little exposure to the system and institutions of the government. I wanted to know more about it practically as I wished to work for it.

One day when I came across an advertisement on my college noticeboard saying, "Are you interested in governing your city?", it immediately caught my attention. It was a flyer of Praja's Elected Representatives Fellowship Programme. I felt like this programme was made for me, and so immediately applied for it and fortunately I got selected.

Through a detailed orientation and training programme, I got to know what exactly my role as a fellow will be in this programme and in turn how I will be working to assist the councillors in shaping, framing and modifying local governance.

Before joining, I had a perception that politicians and the people working in the government are responsible for the poor situation of our system, its functioning and the people it governs. But only after month or two I realised how wrong I was.

When we started working closely with councillors and regularly conducting meetings and discussions with them, I realised that citizens are equally responsible for the poor state of our city. Of course there were councillors who weren't interested to work with us, in fact, some didn't even pick up the phone. But, fortunately I came across many councillors who were extremely dedicated and actually wanted to do something for their people.

Through this fellowship I got a chance to attend General Body Meetings (GBM) as well, which was an eye opener for me as I saw councillors fight for their people with the administration. I remember once there was a councillor who tried to seek answers from the MCGM officials by making a funny yet impactfully frustrated comment saying, "Respected Mayor, should the citizens walk looking up or looking down?", further explaining, "from above we have trees falling and below we have numerous potholes."

This one GBM was pretty interesting and left a huge impact on me, as I realised that these councillors are seriously concerned about their people and are so frustrated that they are actually using sarcasm to give a stronger push to the MCGM. There were many such interesting incidents that happened during this fellowship programme with the councillors and it changed my perception drastically, because they were all different personalities with different perspectives which kept challenging me to come up with better ways to put forth my points.

Now as the fellowship has come to an end, I am proud to say that I am an active citizen, who believes in working for the society rather than sitting & blaming others. I would like to thank Praja Foundation especially our coordinators who considered me a worthy learner and gave me this opportunity.



Governance is the engine of local democracy fuelled by citizens' aspirations and delivered by responsible and accountable decision-making institutions.

VIVEK D'SOUZA 23

MA IN POLITICS, UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI

During the five years of my student activism, I visited different cities, immersed myself in different cultures, met people from different walks of life, and established real connections with people who ardently work towards fostering leadership and change. While my experiences gave me the opportunity and privilege to engage with young diplomats and leaders at the global level, primarily the United Nations, my involvement with local grassroots level initiatives slowly started decreasing. It was in my master's class where I learnt that global politics and policies have local impacts and it was the city that exhibited the most contested space. It was at this stage, where I was introduced to the concept of urban governance.

My involvement during the fellowship programme has been the most challenging, yet impactful to date. It was an honour to be selected for the first cohort. It put me in a position of responsibility and gave me an opportunity to understand civic problems.

The first few weeks were indeed insightful as we learnt different aspects of the Indian polity through the orientation, workshops and capacity building activities. The aspect of role-playing in order to give us an insight into the daily lives of councillors was the highlight of the workshop.

The meetings with the councillors gave me an insight into the working of these people. Since many of them were newly elected into the system, the most challenging task was to orient them about the MCGM, its functioning, and most importantly the powers and functions that councillors have in the context of urban governance. Discussions about issues pertaining to civic, health, education, and governing the city opened up an array of agreements and disagreements, but I understood that this is truly what civic engagement meant! While my late uncle engaged himself in local politics, as a youngster, I was always far from it. However, in retrospect, I now believe that engaging with municipal authorities is most critical to governing the city.

The Elected Representatives fellowship was not limited to engaging with councillors. It helped me understand the city from a diverse and interdisciplinary perspective. The weekly and monthly meetings helped me reflect on my work with my team and with the councillors, included workshops on Cities for People, Right to Information (RTI), the relevance of Constitutional Debates, and frequent visits to the municipal wards S, T, N, and L where Praja organised workshops for the councillors. During this six-month fellowship, I not only improved on my Marathi, but I confidently built a strong rapport with the councillors and my coordinators at Praja.

Praja Foundation's fellowship gave me the platform and opportunity to further the goal of instilling local democracy. This fellowship helped me apply the theoretical basis of urban governance and urban reform into praxis. It has allowed me to broaden my outreach and advocacy at the local level. I urge all young people to participate and collaborate with Praja to help make democracy truly work!



A process or manner where power is exercised and policy is made for the development of the public realm.

ZAINAB CUTLERYWALA 22

MSC IN CLINICAL NUTRITION AND DIETETICS, DR. BN COLLEGE OF HOME SCIENCE



There are few decisions in your life that truly make you proud, Praja's Elected Representatives Fellowship is one of those opportunities that I am glad I decided to take.

I am extremely glad to have followed my instinct to join Praja. Few doubts clouded my mind. I can neither speak Marathi nor was I from any political background. It seemed really challenging at that time. Now that I look back those were just tiny obstacles in my mind that I overcame with the strong support of my co-fellows and coordinators.

Initially I was really bold and expressive about my thoughts on governance and criticised it openly on social media, but when I stepped into the field I came to know about the ground reality. Everything should be well thought and well-studied. One can't talk based on flimsy observations. Working with Praja as a fellow allowed me to understand the importance of thorough research, published white papers and evidence based-data collected through Right to Information.

Of many things I learnt, one was that I should think of multiple possibilities of solving a single problem. The second most important skill I learnt is to never get distracted from what you want, there are people who may not agree with my opinion but I should be firm yet polite enough to put my facts and see where it goes.

Everybody lacks in something or another, but I learnt to find out people's strong points or where their interest lies to work with them for maximum efficiency. This taught me teamwork.

I have experienced that if I prepare thoroughly and present it before the councillor they also become equally involved and give their outputs. It is all about not doing things half-heartedly.

While working with municipal councillors, I get that proud feeling of doing something for the city. Be it working on tuberculosis or helping to raise a Notice of Motion, every time I learn something new, I realise there is a lot more to do.

Now when I see a post on social media ranting about what the government should do, I will make sure to ask him/her what he/she has done for the same. I will be more aware of my surroundings and try to inculcate the spirit of good citizenship among others. This is all due to Praja's influence. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity!







## Praja Foundation

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