



URBAN GOVERNANCE DIALOGUE

Transforming Urban Governance

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STRENGTHENING URBAN LEADERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Over the past two decades, **Praja Foundation** has been working towards **strengthening accountable governance**. It undertakes **data-driven research** on **civic issues** to **inform** citizens, the media, and government administrations. Praja also works closely with **Elected Representatives** (ERs) to equip them to address **inefficiencies** in work processes, bridge information gaps, and **mobilise corrective advocacy for change**.

Praja Foundation launched the **Leadership Programme** on 29th January 2026, a **first-of-its-kind initiative** designed to bring together Urban Leaders through **structured, experiential learning, advisory support, and long-term engagement**. The programme will build the capacity of Urban Leaders to make **informed decisions**, implement **innovative solutions**, and co-create **resilient, inclusive cities** that address the needs of their citizens. The programme brought together **24 urban leaders from 11 cities across 5 states and Delhi NCT**, creating a diverse cohort representing varied institutional, political, and regional contexts.



Leadership Programme | Cohort 1

Participants interacting with each other



Aditya Somani facilitating the Introduction to the Leadership Programme session



Aditya Somani, Advisor, Praja Foundation and Chairman, Somani Family Office, inaugurated the cohort with an introduction to the Leadership Programme, and explained the **need for leadership among urban leaders**. He shared **Praja Foundation's vision** of building a **repository of tools and resources** to help urban leaders keep up with **fast-paced technological evolution**. The sessions for Day 1 were moderated by **Milind Mhaske**, the **CEO of Praja Foundation**, who has spearheaded Praja to become a **key national player in transforming urban governance** across India.

Understanding Urban Governance in India: History, Constitution & 74th CAA



The first session of the programme was facilitated by **Jayaprakash Narayan**, former **IAS officer** and founder of the **Lok Satta Party** and **Foundation for Democratic Reforms (FDR)**. He is a key **political and reformist figure in Telangana** and served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly from the **Kukatpally constituency** in 2009-2014, **focusing on reforms like anti-corruption measures, effective local governance, and economic development**.

This session traced the **roots of local governance** in India, explaining the **constitutional framework** of urban governance and highlighting **increasing centralisation of urban cities** through the **disparities between city and state governments**. It looked at the **evolution of urban governance in India** from civic systems in the **Indus Valley Civilisation** to present-day reforms.



Urbanisation & Its Challenges - Setting up urban agenda and Urban Regulations and Legislative Frameworks in India

The next sessions were facilitated by retired IAS officer **Gautam Chatterjee**, who is also Former Chairperson of the Maharashtra Real Estate Regulatory Authority. The 2nd session examined **rapid urbanisation** and its impact on cities, including **unauthorised encroachments** and **unplanned construction**, emphasising the need for urban leaders to actively exercise their powers. The 3rd session focused on discussions on **urban regulations and legislative frameworks**.

A discussion was held at the end of the session to understand how urban leaders felt about the **municipal rules and procedures** of their cities; alongside the **services provided** by respective **municipal corporations**. The responses were collected to understand the **priorities of urban leaders** and measure their **baseline understanding** of municipal rules.



Gautam Chatterjee presenting the sessions on 'Urbanisation and Its Challenges' and on 'Urban Regulations and Legislative Frameworks'

Status of Urban Governance in India and How to Finance Cities

Day 2 began with a session on the **Status of Urban Governance in India**, facilitated by the **Praja Team**. Through engaging activities, the participants examined the **empowerment of elected representatives, legislative structures, fiscal autonomy, and functional responsibilities** of various city governments. The next session on **How to Finance Cities** was facilitated by **Ravikant Joshi** - an Urban Finance and Management specialist and former Chief Accounts Officer of Vadodara Municipal Corporation. This discussion explored ways to **strengthen municipal finances** by improving **revenue generation**.



Ravikant Joshi



Interaction with the participants



Urban Leaders actively participating in the knowledge sessions



Strategic Communication on Knowledge Forums



Swastik Karish

The last session of the day was facilitated by **Swastik Harish**, an **urban development and capacity building** expert. This discussion focused on **strengthening leadership communication** and introduced urban leaders to the **use of AI tools for effective public engagement**.

The day concluded with a **fireside chat** and a **networking dinner** which featured distinguished administrators and urban practitioners such as **Jayesh Ranjan** (Spl. Chief Secretary to Government, Metropolitan Area & Urban Development, Telangana), **Sameer Sharma** (IAS (Retd.); Former Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh), and **Jayaprakash Narayan**.



Fireside chat with the participants

Spatial Planning for Sustainable Cities

The session on **Spatial Planning for Sustainable Cities** was conducted on Day 3 by Anuradha Parmar, Executive Director and Ninad Sansare, Associate Director, from the Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI). This discussion examined India's **spatial planning framework** and emphasised the need to **strengthen city-level planning** by applying the **principle of subsidiarity**.



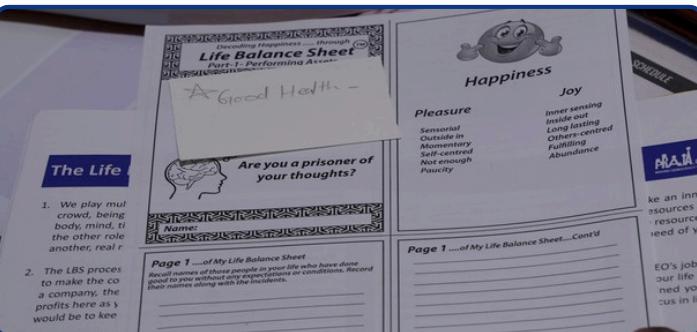
Anuradha and Ninad presenting the session on Spatial City Planning



Urban leaders understanding sustainable spatial planning with maps of their respective cities

Decision Making for Public Good

The last session of this 3-day programme was on **Decision Making for Public Good**, facilitated by **Dilip Patel**, an electrical engineer with a PGD in Aircraft Design from IIT Madras, creator of the **Life Balance Sheet concept**, and a seasoned facilitator in attitude and behavioural change. This was a reflective session which highlighted the importance of **ethical leadership, personal accountability, and decision-making in the public interest** for the welfare of urban areas.



[Above] Dilip Patel explaining the concepts of good decision making for public well-being

[Left] Urban leaders actively participating in the Life Balance Sheet activity

IMPACT

Through facilitated discussions and collective reflection, participants identified four priority governance areas where they agreed to take forward learnings and pursue action within their cities:



Environment Status Report (ESR): Praja Foundation introduced participants to key environmental tools and legislations that urban elected representatives should be aware of, with a specific focus on the Environment Status Report (ESR). The ESR was discussed for **environmental monitoring and accountability**. Participants acknowledged the value of the ESR framework and **expressed intent to explore its adoption in their own cities**.



Complaint Redressal Systems: An interactive peer-audit exercise enabled participants to review grievance redressal systems across cities, **highlighting gaps in accessibility, responsiveness, and coordination**. Issues in Gorakhpur's complaint registration process prompted the Mayor to immediately coordinate with the Municipal Commissioner to fix them. Elected representatives from Dibrugarh shared that they have devised a grievance redressal system and plan to further strengthen it.



Municipal Finance: The municipal finance session became a critical platform for real-time policy consultation. A councillor from Patna, where discussions were underway on issuing municipal bonds, **used the session to assess the city's fiscal readiness**. The facilitator enabled informed deliberation and strengthened the capacity of elected representatives to engage meaningfully with complex financial instruments.



Ward Committees: A focused discussion on ward committees was triggered by a session led by Sameer Sharma, who shared practical insights from implementing ward committees in Hyderabad. This experience sparked **detailed discussions on institutional design, citizen participation, and administrative coordination**. Participants also reflected on the notification of ward committees in Gurugram, leading to a broader exchange on how ward committees can be operationalised effectively rather than remaining only on paper.

TESTIMONIALS

“It was very good to meet people from different cities, learn about their culture and their work. I can use these learnings to steer my own area towards further development.”

— **Shahina Firdaus, Councillor, Varanasi Municipal Corporation**



“For me, one of the key learnings is the significance of working in a team. It is very important for all of us to come together on a single platform, try to understand each others' issues and arrive at solutions collectively.”

— **Monuj Dutta, Assistant Professor, Centre for Social Work Studies, Dibrugarh University**



“I feel that this program is all about learning from each other. We have a lot of work to do in our cities and this experience will help us there.”

— **Lanutoshi Steven Yaden, Councillor, Dimapur Municipal Council**



“The speakers were top class bureaucrats, political leaders and social workers. They shared such great insights.”

— **Arup Deka, Councillor, Guwahati Municipal Corporation**

We would appreciate your views and feedback based on the information shared above. Please feel free to reach out to us at info@praja.org.



Nitai Mehta

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