



WEBINAR REPORT

Role of ULBs in Promoting Social Protection for Urban Informals Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic

27 April, 2020



Background

Informality in urban India is both occupational and habitational. Close to 81 million people in urban India live below the poverty line, and a large number of them live in informal settlements. Using the census data of 2011 and NSSO migration data of 2011, it is estimated that there are around 68 million inter-state migrant households of whom 33 percent are workers. A majority of them are daily, weekly, or monthly wage earners, and fall in the category of poor or vulnerable.

It is now evident that the global pandemic COVID-19 has already impacted millions of urban poor and informal workers. An International Labour Organization (ILO) report published earlier this month had estimates for India's employment scenario. With 90 per cent of India's 500-million workforce engaged in the informal sector, the ILO report estimated that almost 400 million workers could slide deeper into poverty. Needless to say, it would include the informal workers in urban areas.

The Government of India and various state governments have announced some interim measures for the urban poor and informals to mitigate these sudden social and economic shocks. These measures include cash transfers, provisioning of food grains, a supply of gas cylinders, etc. However, as the pandemic situation demanded extended period of lockdown, the urban informals would require a revitalised social protection programme to help them not to slip back into poverty. Such a programme must take into account the diverse needs of women and men as well as especially vulnerable population like single women, elderly people, children, and people with disabilities, among others.

As envisaged in 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (Part IX-A) of the Indian Constitution, the role

of elected Mayors and Councillors are paramount in soliciting citizen engagement, compliance, and contribution to address pandemic induced lockdown and its social and economic consequences on the urban informals. Of the 18 items listed in the XII Schedule as the primary responsibilities of Urban Local Bodies, three items particularly, viz. (i) Planning for economic and social development; (ii) Urban poverty alleviation; and (iii) Safeguarding the interests of the weaker sections of society, including the physically handicapped and mentally unsound; assume even greater importance at the time of pandemic and afterwards.

PRIA International Academy (PIA) and All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG) jointly organised a Webinar on "Role of ULBs in Promoting Social Protection for Urban Informals Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic" on 27 April 2020. Professor Darshini Mahadevia (School of Arts and Sciences, Ahmedabad University, Ahmedabad); Ms Shikha Srivastava (Head, Urban Habitat and Migration, Tata Trusts, New Delhi); Mr Abhishek Pandey (Editor, Urban Update Magazine, All India Institute of Local Self Government – AIILSG, New Delhi); Mr Chandra Mohan Gupta (Mayor, Jammu Municipal Corporation); Mr Amarjyot Singh (President, Una Municipal Committee) participated as panellists. Mr. Tikendar Singh Panwar (Former Deputy Mayor, Shimla Municipal Corporation) and Dr. Rajesh Tandon (Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia – PRIA, New Delhi and UNESCO Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibilities in Higher Education) were the commenters for the webinar. Moderated by Dr Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay (Director, Society for Participatory Research in Asia – PRIA, New Delhi), the webinar was attended by more than 100 participants and focussed on the following questions:

- *What kind of social protection programme could be helpful for urban informals to mitigate the aftershock of pandemic?*
- *What role should be played by the ULBs and more particularly by the elected Mayors and Councillors in designing and implementing such social security programme?*
- *Can the existing national flagship programmes and state government schemes be re-designed to address this crisis?*
- *What kind of support (capacity, advocacy, etc.) the ULBs will require to play the leadership role in protecting the interest of urban informals?*

Key Takeaways

Create integrated social security mechanism for urban informals applicable across states

Involve mayors and ward councillors in planning relief measures and city development plans



Include migrant workers in NUPF and design urban employment guarantee act

Expand the implementation of 74th CAA in spirit and make ULBs financially resilient

Highlights

- *All urban informal workers must be given social protection through employment guarantee, access to food security, eligibility to avail health facilities and access to housing/shelter with proper water and sanitation facilities. These entitlements should be available to them at the destination and not only at their places of origin.*
- *Mayors and elected representatives are the link between the citizen and administration and must be involved in city-level planning as well as the implementation of schemes including the relief measures during a pandemic such as COVID-19*
- *National urban policy framework and policies on migrant workers should aim to make cities liveable by putting the focus on people and not only on creation of infrastructures.*
- *Implementation of 74th CAA should be pursued actively to strengthen ULBs, empower them with decision making for cities, generating and using their revenues and making cities resilient.*

Panel Discussions

What kind of social protection programmes could be helpful for urban informals to mitigate the aftershock of pandemic?

In his opening remarks, Mr. Abhishek Pandey reflected upon the visual of migrant workers

across the country as being stranded on the streets waiting at the bus stops in anticipation of getting back to their homes. He explained that this situation has arisen because these workers are facing extreme difficulties in terms of having access to daily wage opportunities, sufficient food for sustenance and access to safe shelters to put up at. The urban informal workers mostly reside in the informal settlements of the city in cramped spaces where practising social distancing is nearly impossible. He went on to question the government's announcement of INR 1.7 crore as relief for these workers. This amount would be insufficient due to lack of specific information on the number of people that are affected, uncertainty of the lockdown period and lack of a concrete idea about the scale of the pandemic COVID-19.

Mr. Chandra Mohan Gupta shared how Jammu Municipal Corporation is addressing the current situation. He shared that all the migrant labours in the city are being provided with ration, all families with APL and BPL cards along with widows, auto drivers etc. are being given two months of ration in collaboration with CSOs at the PDS. The ration supply includes 1 kg of black gram in addition to stipulated 5 kg of food grains. He expressed his deep concern for students stuck in Kota who want

to come home and workers stuck in the cities who want to go back home and hoped that their mobility would be arranged soon. He also shared that most of the areas in Jammu are green zones and therefore brick kilns are being opened for operation which will contain some of the risks being faced by migrant worker population as they get back to their jobs.

Ms. Shikha Srivastava highlighted the many complexities being confronted by the urban informal workers including migrant workers. She flagged the lack of data or records on the total number of such workers in any city. Additionally, these workers lack secure work because of which their earnings are erratic, and there is no protection against the loss of income for them as they, most often, work outside of any government regulations. She said that the biggest worry at the moment is that about 40 million informal workers are being pushed into poverty and starvation. She enumerated several existing social protection schemes for the poor such as mid-day meal scheme for children, pension scheme, PDS etc. However, the migrant population cannot access these services in the destination city as the documents are issued in their places of origin.

She further suggested that social protection schemes should be designed to contain epidemic or disasters that may come up in the future. One needs to take stock of what has worked and what hasn't and develop remedial schemes to cope up with such situations. For example, although the combination of handing out food and dry rations is well-intended, despite that a substantial section of people are not getting the relief that they need. This is because the planning is not optimal. One possible solution could be to do cash transfers to mitigate the risk, but many people do not have bank accounts which again presents a challenge to this relief measure as well. An assessment by the academia and CSOs shows that a large section of people are unaware of government schemes, cards issued by Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board, PDS card etc. There has to be more outreach on the issues of health, counselling, and livelihood schemes for the informal workers and migrant labourers. The existing social protection schemes need to be strengthened irrespective of the place of residence of the workers to make it

more inclusive in the long term. She pointed out that the states should create mechanisms to build portability of these schemes across and within the states. Additionally, urban poor must be protected from such crises by the government by enforcing the employers to provide their wages and rightful compensation.

Mr Amarjyot Singh shared that Himachal Pradesh has the advantage of being a secluded state as well as controlled population. Una was one of the few places in the state to report the highest number of Covid cases and was in a red zone. However, because of the pro-activeness of the administration, no new cases are being reported, and people have followed the rules of social distancing and quarantining themselves. The city is also making a list of informal workers which does not include migrant workers.

Prof Darshini Mahadevia reflected on the dichotomy between the facts that while we want more urbanisation we do not want to deal with the migrant worker populations. She reiterated that one of the biggest challenges for Indian cities is the lack of information on who the urban informal workers are, how many of them are part of the migrant or floating population, what kind of work they are engaged in, how much they earn, etc. Absence of such critical data is despairing, and if systems are not put in place in the cities during the times of normalcy, then we cannot expect the things to work during times of disasters such as Covid-19. She further emphasised that all the schemes related to social security remain a concept as they are never realised, particularly because migrant workers do not have access to housing and shelter. All other entitlements remain inaccessible in the face of no address proof. All workers, formal or informal, regular or irregular, resident or migrant, need to be registered. For example, in the case of construction workers, only 15 percent are registered. Once the registration is done, one could reach them through schemes. She urged that more considerable attention needs to be paid to develop social security schemes in urban areas.

What roles ULBs, more particularly the elected Mayors and Councillors, should be playing in

designing and implementing such social security programme?

Mr. Pandey expressed a deep concern on ULBs being ignored in the current planning for relief measures. He cited the example of the mayor of Agra who expressed his inability and helplessness because he was not involved in designing the response to this pandemic in his city. The administration never cared to include him in the process, and he pointed out that mayors and elected councillors at the ULB level are the first people to be contacted by citizens in the times of emergency. Hence, it is critical to involve mayors and ward councillors in city-level planning at all times, but particularly while planning for relief. He further shared that recently FCI announced a package for relief and sought collaborations from the government functionaries and CSOs to reach to the last people. However, ULBs and their roles are never defined. The state governments need to make plans in tandem with the ULBs and in consultation with the mayors and elected representatives. Giving examples from nations across the world, he said that we need to learn from the responses of ULBs in different countries where their role in containing this pandemic has been commendable. Mayors in those cities are personally involved in conducting inspection drives, allocating resources and many times utilising their finances to deal with the current situation.

Mr. Gupta shared how Jammu Municipal Corporation is actively working to strengthen the public health system by equipping the hospitals and medical facilities, conducting fogging drives in each lane of the city in coordination with 75 elected councillors. The city administration has been supportive of purchasing machines and equipment to enable the sanitisation processes in the city. He applauded the hard work and commitment exhibited by medical staff, housekeeping staff in the hospitals and the sanitation workers who are working tirelessly despite the threat of the pandemic and accorded good results in the city to them. The JMC is providing safety gears such as masks, hand gloves, and sanitisers to these workers, in addition to giving food packets to the most marginalised such as beggars. Recognising the loss of income of small

traders and entrepreneurs he hoped that very soon small shops would be opened in the areas outside the city.

Ms Srivastava suggested that ULBs should build a strong case for designing entitlements for migrant workers. Additionally, states should have a consensus on portability. For example, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha have an interstate MOU for the workers travelling from Odisha to work in Andhra Pradesh on portability. Similarly, the ULBs should map the spaces in the city to provide rental housing for migrants and informal workers. City planning should include temporary shelters and must feature this in the city plan. She urged that ULBs need to take up a central role in a situation of a pandemic such as Covid-19. Citing the example of cities which have showcased successful handling of the current pandemic, she said that it has been possible to cater to a large number of urban poor in areas where active ULBs and efficient decentralised governance are working in close collaboration with state and national governments. Innovations at city-level such as GIS mapping by Bengaluru Nagar Palika, collaboration with private sector health facilities by Nagpur Municipal Corporation, and developing the Covid tracker app by Surat Municipal Corporations are few examples where proactive city administration has displayed success in catering to disasters such as Covid-19. Hence, ULBs must be strengthened in terms of funds, functions and functionaries.

Mr Singh expressed surprise that currently, all municipalities in the country are working through administration without involving elected councillors. The reasons for this cannot be entirely understood. He went on to explain that Una administration right before the lockdown started online learning from the experience of China and sanitised each lane, market, and shops by spraying sodium hypochlorite, and this continues to be done every day. He suggested that it is most important to spread education about this disease. Currently, many people are comparing Covid-19 with TB, malaria, dengue, etc. However, the former is different from other diseases because it spreads by as simple a thing as sneezing and is unprecedented. There is a need to create awareness and education about the disease through announcements in every *mohalla* in a way

that the message reaches every citizen that it is not an ordinary disease. Each elected councillor should bear the responsibility of sharing this information such that every home is made aware of precautionary measures and behaviour such as hand washing, wearing masks, practising social distancing etc. He agreed that the mayor must play a more engaging role in the process and try to stop misinformation and spread of fake messages.

Prof Mahadevia pointed out that ULBs in India have been constrained by a highly centralised financial system. This has baulked the city governments to pursue their mandates and needs effectively. It is presumed that urban areas are cash-rich. However, the data shows that ULBs can generate only 20-30 percent through Own Source of Revenue and depend on state and central government for the remaining proportion of funds. This leads to pressurising ULBs to implement what has been told to them by the top. They are unable to make their own decisions. Due to lack of funds coupled with anti-migrant sentiments, the schemes also do not get implemented. She urged that Covid-19 is a wake-up call for all ULBs to be strengthened to deal with the pandemic in the future by creating social protection schemes, refurbishing schemes for construction workers, street vendors, textile workers etc. States hesitate to serve workers because of a paucity of funds. In 2008 it was discussed that central funds should be distributed amongst the states based on the number of workers reported in each state as entitlements, not as a rule. In the financial system, The Central Finance Commission or the State Finance Commissions are not actively monitoring distribution of funds to ULBs. While at the centre the PM's Office takes this decision, at state level CM's office takes the decision. Political interests are another set of hindrances to this distribution. However, certain acts must be compliant to all states irrespective of parties and politics.

Can the existing national flagship programmes and state government schemes be re-designed to address this crisis?

Comparing the relief packages announced by different countries, Mr Pandey quoted that Japan has allocated 20 percent of its GDP for Covid-19 relief. In comparison, Malaysia has allocated 16

percent, the USA 11 percent, Canada 8 percent, Brazil 6 percent, France 5 percent, Indonesia 3 percent and China 2.5 percent. However, India has been able to allocate only 0.8 percent of its GDP for the relief, which is reflective of the government's lack of interest and seriousness towards the vulnerable populations. He further suggested that urban informal sector workers also need job protection on the lines of MGNREGA. However, in the absence of registration of these workers, any welfare scheme will face challenges of implementation.

Mr Gupta lauded the central government for their comprehensive response to the pandemic. He urged the prime minister to declare a relief package for middle and lower-middle-class populations who are facing a lot of difficulties owing to job loss, shutting down of businesses and enterprises etc. and their ineligibility for food relief packages of the government.

Ms Srivastava suggested that a national policy that is applicable across state borders must be enacted guided by the portability of all centrally sponsored schemes. Since the constitution of India guarantees mobility across states, the schemes should not be restricted by border or by person's last place of residence. A national information network for each individual and each family should be created wherein they could be issued a social security card with details about all the schemes that the person is entitled to. Every state and city should recognise eligibility to access PDS and health facilities by individuals irrespective of the place of their origin. All the urban informal workers must be given temporary registration at present, as is being done in Delhi so that they can access government relief measures. The policy such as 'One Nation One Ration Card' applicable currently in 20 states must be scaled up for universal access. Additionally, about 1000 crores of cess under Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board is lying unutilised. This is because the process of registration for construction workers is long and tiring, and there is no portability. Hence, even when the governments are announcing cash transfers, the problems is that many workers have not registered and many do not have bank accounts.

Mr Singh suggested that gaps in the implementation of national policies such as Jan Dhan Yojana need to be plugged by making the implementation more regional and addressing issues of geographical remoteness or access to nearest towns for people living in villages etc. He said that national policies need to be aligned according to the needs and challenges of each zone to make it relevant.

Prof Mahadevia highlighted that Social Security Act 2008 was formed through a well thought out process, but it is dead now. It is time that this act is considered more seriously. The urban areas should create social protection schemes such as MGNREGA. She further reiterated that certain laws must be compliant to all states irrespective of parties and politics.

What kind of support (capacity, advocacy, etc.) the ULBs will require to play the leadership role in protecting the interest of urban informals?

Mr Pandey highlighted that mayors of cities in India should be empowered within the scope of 74th CAA and must be involved in city health planning, sanitation planning etc. for lower-income settlements.

Ms Srivastav suggested that to strengthen ULBs, they must be provided with adequate devolution of funds and human resources. She pointed out that total revenue by ULBs amounts to 1.60 crores which is 1 percent of the GDP. While big cities have funds and continuously argue that their share must be more significant because their tax contributions are higher, this argument does not stand in the right place. Several smaller towns and cities still need to have sufficient funds as well as empowered municipal cadre who understand city needs and can plan for the city. A suitable institutional framework needs to be created which deputed or employs persons with specific skill sets at the ULBs. The control rooms in the ULBs should have SOPs in place to deal with situations like this. ULBs should be empowered to make inclusive policies and plans such that the benefits are delivered to the vulnerable groups in the city.

Mr Singh reiterated that ULBs should be able to give feedback on what is working on the ground

and what is not and their suggestions must be recognised and incorporated for building future preparedness. Gaps in ration distribution can be tackled by collaborating with the ward councillors. The ULBs also have the responsibility to coordinate between local demand and supply of locally produced materials such as vegetables and create local sustenance. He also implored that we must prepare for the second wave of Covid-19 expected in June-July by learning from the present and preparing for the future.

Prof Mahadevia echoed that ULBs must be strengthened to deal with pandemics in the future by refurbishing schemes for construction workers, street vendors, textile workers etc. The 18 functions under the twelfth schedule must be clearly stated on which ULBs must take action and be involved by the state and central governments.

Open Discussion

Please reflect on gendered implications of the lockdown and impacts of the current situations especially amongst informal workers.

It was acknowledged that the issues related to women migrants are often neglected. Very few stories specific to women have surfaced in the current situation. However, issues such as shelter facilities are not available for single women migrants are persistent. Women who are left behind at the source whose relatives have migrated are dealing with the crisis on their own. It is worthy of attention as their vulnerabilities heighten in a situation like this.

We have been talking about the efficacy of 74th CAA; however, it is high time to think about making ULBs self-reliant. Most of states have finance commissions but there seems to be no effect on financial condition of ULBs. GST revenues such as Octroi have been lost too. Should we think about enhancing financial capacity of ULBs?

Finance is a very critical aspect for the ULBs, and state and central government need to consider empowering ULBs financially. We need to highlight the issues at the highest level. For example, the finance commission was not aware that procurement of auto tipper vehicles for garbage

dumping has 28 percent GST on it. However, once flagged, the same was cut down for the entire country. Another example is that the ULBs can provide housing for all, but no ULB is financially capable and is mostly at the mercy of the state and central government. The greatest achievement of the current government is housing for all through GPS. However, until there is enough for everybody, there is not going to be a social reform. Mayors do not have any powers as they cannot even sign a check. All powers are concentrated with the administrators. There is a need to spruce up the ULBs as they are the first line of defence and responsible for making available water, issuing of birth-death certificates and involved in the everyday lives of the citizens. However, during the current emergency, no meeting has been conducted with the mayors.

Finances have to be decentralised. When municipalities had to depend on selling lands for generating revenue, the land prices went up, and marginalised people were pushed further to the periphery, and their housing was further pushed to the margins of the city. The second source of funds is user charges such as the price for water, but it may cause disaster again for people who cannot afford the services.

The national urban policy framework talks about mayoral form of governance system. However, it doesn't really talk about the problems of urban informals. Please reflect on that.

NUPF is in the draft phase, and there is indeed no mention of migrants in the policy. It is expected that the national migration policy will take care of urban and rural migrants. The mayoral system works on party lines, and we tend to be entangled in the same dire situation arising out of party politics. However, at some point, we have to rise above party politics to talk at the city level.

We are dealing with a paradox here; the current urbanisation is migrant driven, yet no one wants migrants, and that is what gets reflected in all policies like the master plan. NUPF is drafted in the context of the neo-liberal approach to cities where the centre and state governments are passing down their responsibilities by asking cities to raise its funds with no support from states.

74th CAA certainly needs to be strengthened. However, citizens will need to take up responsibilities. Biodiversity Act is applicable in the cities also under which, in every ward, biodiversity management committee can be formed in lanes or mohallas. These committees have the provision of participating in the political processes even without being an elected representative. In situations of a pandemic such as Covid-19 these committees can be created to make plans for addressing the situation. These should be encouraged by state government and central government.

The 74th CAA in Jammu has not been implemented properly. In the last 72 years, only four elections have been held. Since now it is a Union Territory, we are expecting some improvements in its implementation. Lane committees and mohalla committees are good suggestions, and we will try to form these in Jammu. Primarily it will enable ration distribution as we have seen that while some people have got more than twice, others have not got any. Councillors, along with people from the community, can enable in this process.

If we were to look at the definition of construction workers as defined in the Act, it recognises workers who have worked for 90 days in a year. They need to renew the card every year and get it attested by the contractors. However, there are many petty contractors who hide them from the labour department. Most of the registration is also done by the panchayats, at the source of migrant labourers. These workers are then not given the entitlements at destination. What are your thoughts on this?

The issue of work certification is important, and we have been raising this with the state governments. Some states have taken measures to change the 90 days rule where some conditions have been waived. No registrations are happening because of this rule under BOCW. In most states, it has been an annual renewal of registration, but now it is extended to 3-5 years. Governments have complained that ineligible people have registered. We understand that BOCW has lacunae and problems in implementation, but it needs to be more inclusive and accessible along with portability.

Remarks by Commenters

Mr Tikender Singh Panwar restated that all of us need to realise that designing or planning the cities will not continue as usual. Focussing on the current situation of migrant workers he questioned the failure of states to hold the migrant population for as little as seven days and explained the fault lies in how city planning has been done in India. Mostly driven by development authorities and consultants, the planning has been done with an elitist approach concentrating all the resources on infrastructure development such as highways, malls, shopping complexes and massive residential units. The absence of direct political involvement has ignored the issues such as housing for migrant workers, creation of employment and job protection, development of health facilities, ensuring food security etc. He highlighted the alarming situation in which 80 percent of the stranded migrant population have not been paid their wages. Quoting the CMI data, he revealed that the rate of unemployment stands at 26 percent. Still, the unwillingness of migrant workers to come back to the cities for employment has been reported at 36 percent and predicted that the moment the lockdown is lifted, all these workers would go back to their home towns.

There is a huge inequity in urban India. A research study done two years ago highlighted that difference between 10 percent of asset holders at top and bottom in Urban India is 50,000 times. The national-level data reports 94 percent informality in the cities. We need to understand that 82 percent of those working in the cities have no written contract. 77.3 percent have complained about wages, 70 percent have no social security and 85 percent get less than Rs.7500 a month. With such inequities in place, making urbanisation sustainable is questionable.

Housing is yet another critical issue for urban informal workers. It has been globally estimated that for cities to sustain, 25 percent of housing has to be provided by the state. We have examples of this in India, such as Chandigarh. At present, the rate at which the government provides housing in India has fallen from 6 percent to 3 percent. When the private players provide 97 percent of houses in a city, we can't expect a migrant worker to afford

such a house. In a research study, it was found that 95 percent of people living in shelters in Delhi are working-class people. This shows a lack of availability and affordability of housing facility for labourers who earn as low as Rs.7500 per month. Citing an example from Shimla, he informed that the city had constructed labour hostels 100 years ago. Kerala and Delhi are trying to make labour hostels too, which is a step in a positive direction.

Since migration across states in India is bound to happen and at present total internal migration is 450 million, it is understandable that we cannot afford houses for all of them even if we pool in all our resources. Hence, the housing schemes have to be revisited, and rented housing in addition to labour hostels must be created. However, these kinds of facilities need to be inbuilt in the city plans. Critiquing the neo-liberal approach of urban development, he said that with growing capitalism, lands in the cities have been monetised. However, currently, the jobs are gone, and social infrastructures of the cities are in such poor state that they have become unsustainable for living. He suggested the need to go back to the basics and involve the people of the city on the planning processes.

He agreed with panellists that in the current times of the pandemic, the chain of command begins from the prime minister and goes on to the chief ministers and then to the district administrators. However, it is the mayors and the elected councillors who are at the frontline of the issue; and despite that, they are not involved in disaster response planning.

In addition to this, if we look at the disaster action plans, we have one at the national, state and the district levels. However, there is no planning done at the zone or ward level. In Shimla, CDMA was created by measuring the vulnerability at the ward level; yet, it is not ratified because the ratification ends at the district-level disaster management action plans. This calls for a revision. There is a need to expand the application of 74th CAA by linking planning of the city government with the right to city approach. We need to create ward *sabhas* and *mohalla sabhas* such that citizens are engaged in the process. The ULBs must vie to become financially resilient, and 10 percent of the

tax generated by them should be transferred back to them.

He concluded by saying that the answer to our failure of limited democratisation is not over-centralisation. The response to our failure of limited democratisation is more democratic decentralisation.

Listening to all the panellists Dr Rajesh Tandon commented that it is evident that we are all aware of the problem, and we also seem to know the remedies. The question that remains for us to think is how will this change? Who is going to push for this change? He reflected that the first call to effect this change is on the elected representatives including thousands of councillors, mayors, former mayors and former councillors and implored them to speak on the issue and demand their involvement in the administrative processes within ULBs. He urged that mayors and councillors along with citizens must be at the forefront of planning and solutions. He further reflected that CSOs have not engaged in urban governance, unlike PRIs. We do have some examples such as in Odisha where the Sarpanch has been given the power of District Collector, but there are no elected ULBs in the state. He asked why a chairperson of the municipal committee cannot be given the powers of a District Collector.

He further informed that all our labour laws meant for informal or construction workers are an extension of what has been done in the formal sectors by trade unions and labour ministry. However, the labour movement has failed in India and labour departments are defunct. Whether one is a migrant, home-based labour, or delivery boy, there is no system in place. Hence, it is time to think about how elected representatives could act differently in urban areas. How the CSOs would work differently and in what manner labour unions and educators will respond differently.

Dr. Bandyopadhyay concluded the discussion by summarising that we all need to think and act to strengthen ULBs collectively. CSOs have the responsibility to vouch for their voices with elected representatives such that a concerted demand is placed at the levels of state and central governments for full implementation of the 74th CAA interpreted in today's context. All social protection mechanisms such as food, shelter, health, employment, etc. need to be thought about as an integrated solution. We need to concentrate our efforts such that all our urban institutions, line ministries and departments work for urban informals by addressing the false dichotomy of development versus welfare.