Making the City Ours

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Suggested Citation:

Making the City Ours (2020), Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS), New Delhi, 2020

Published:

Indo-Global Social Service Society
Celebrating the Spirit of Humanity

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Website: www.igsss.org

Making the City Ours

Prepared by:

Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS)

Indo-Global
Social Service Society
Celebrating the Spirit of Humanity

Fields of View

February 2020

Acknowledgement

Kathyayini Chamaraj, Executive Trutee, CIVIC, for sharing training materials on the 74th Amendment used by CIVIC.

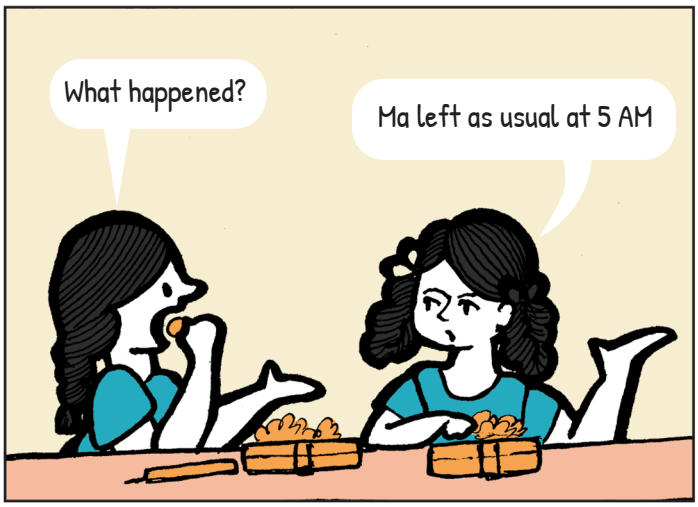
Sonika Tandon, FLAME University, Pune, for assisting on the research for the comic content.

Introduction

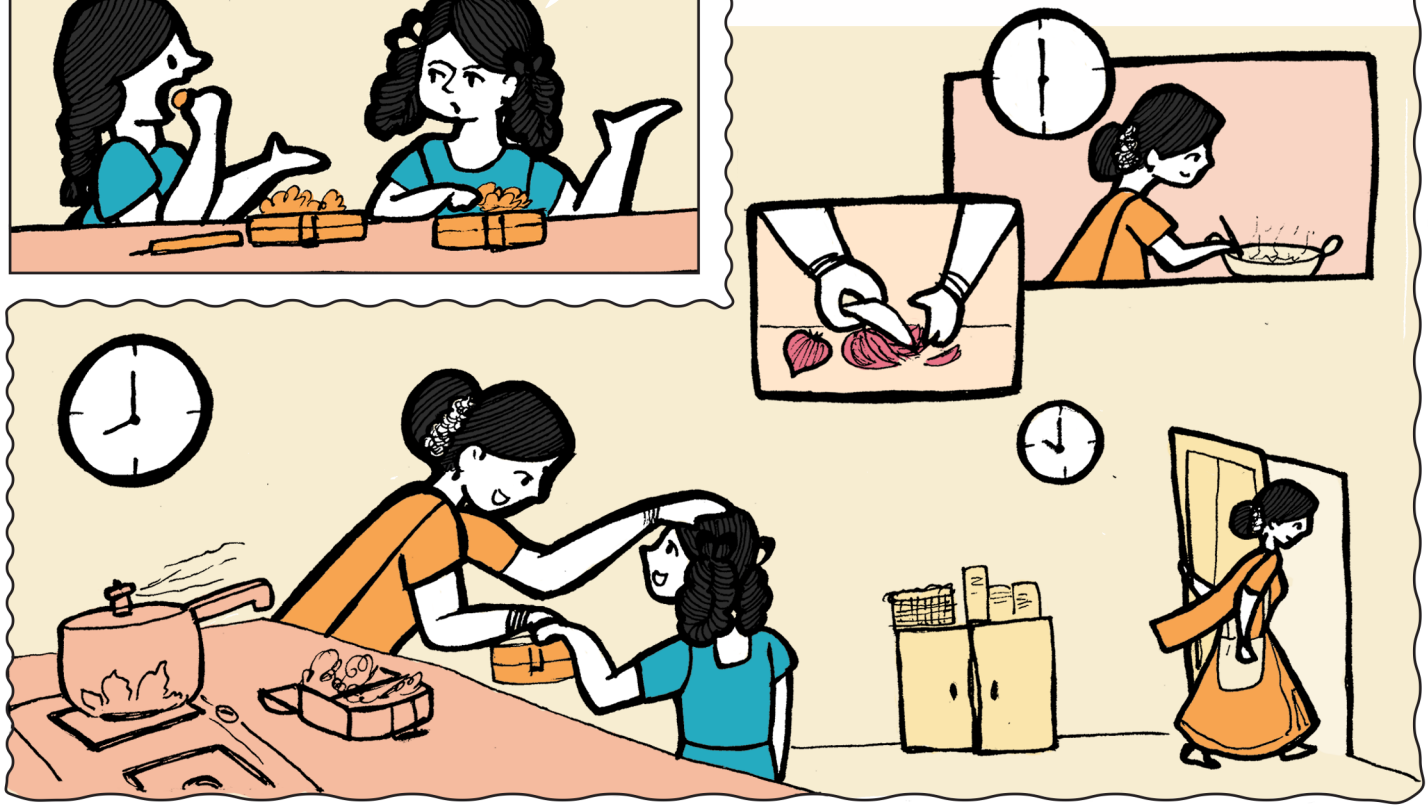
Democracy is understood as power to the people. And so, for a vast and complex country such as India, decentralization of power is critical for both social justice and economic development. It is with this goal of devolving power that a pathbreaking amendment was made to the Constitution of India in 1992 – the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment recognized a new tier of government at the urban local level, in addition to the Central and State governments. As people closest to a problem understand it best, urban local governments are crucial for people's needs to be heard, and to pave the way for meaningful participation of people in governance.

It has been almost three decades since the 74th Constitutional Amendment was passed, and yet the implementation continues to be uneven across cities. Many States continue to be reluctant to devolve power by devolving both funds and functions to the city governments. Many civil society organizations continue to remain unaware of what possibilities the 74th Constitutional Amendment and its implementation offer in their struggle for different rights. It is in this context, we have created a curriculum on the 74th Constitutional Amendment for civil society groups and citizens that aims to make the law accessible, and the following comic is part of the curriculum. It is our hope that the curriculum on the 74th Constitutional Amendment contributes to efforts in reclaiming people's right to the city.



You know that Ma has to go to those houses by 6 AM to make breakfast & lunch. Usually, she comes home by 7.30 AM and cooks and packs our dabbas, so that I can leave by 8 AM. She then leaves for her other job in that tailoring unit at 10 AM.



Yesterday, after ma went to those houses, suddenly our neighbours told us that the water will come only between 7 AM and 8.30 AM. I had to go and get water so that Ma could cook.

Even though there's no water coming in our homes, why are they still sending us water bills?

No idea. Relatives are coming home, - I don't know what I'll do.

Just near home, I tripped and fell. All the water gone. I had to stand again in the queue, again. Got late.

A few weeks later.

CIVICS

When I say city, what do you think?

BUILDINGS

MALLS

MALL

TRAFFIC

ROADS

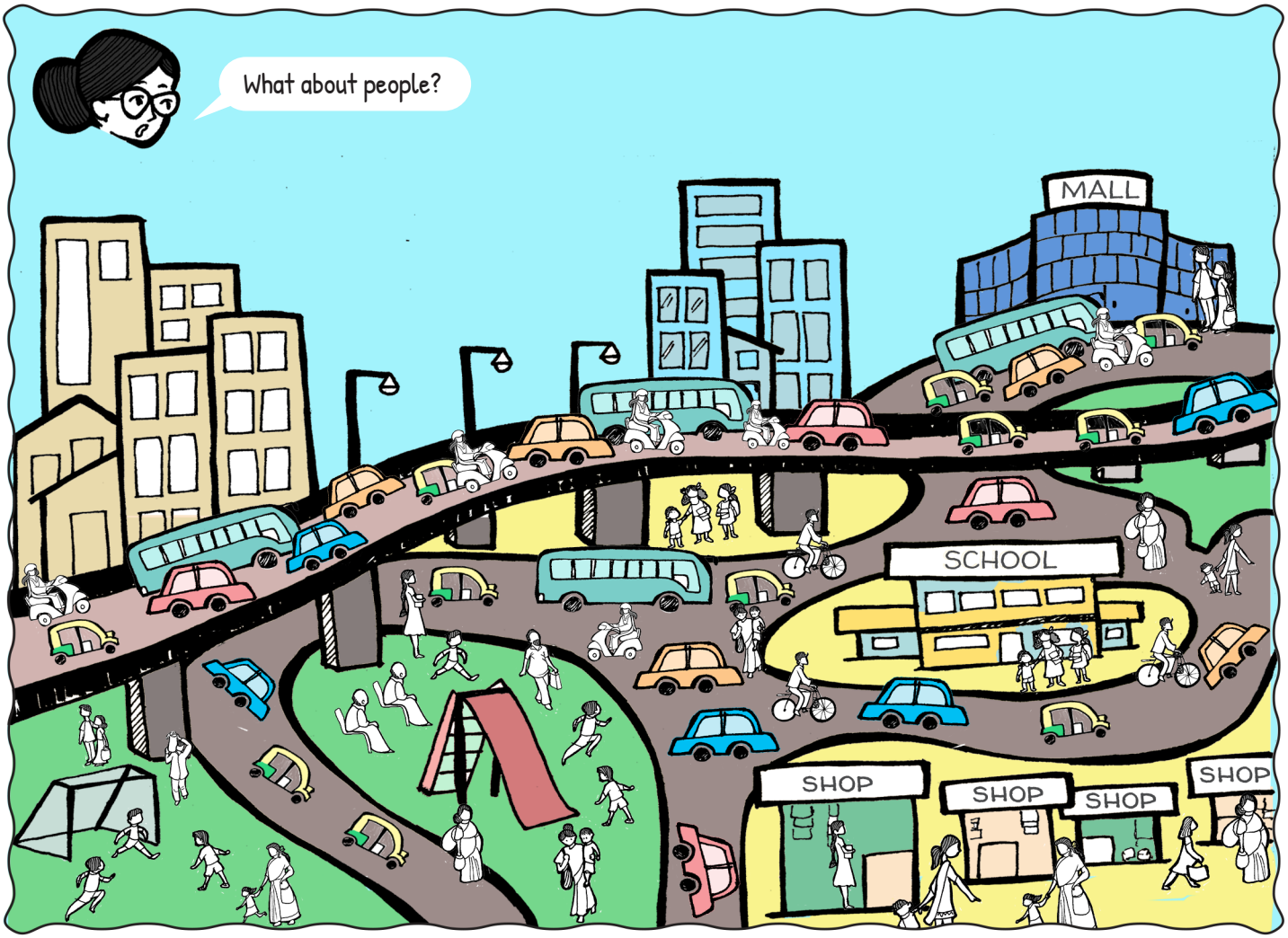
SCHOOL

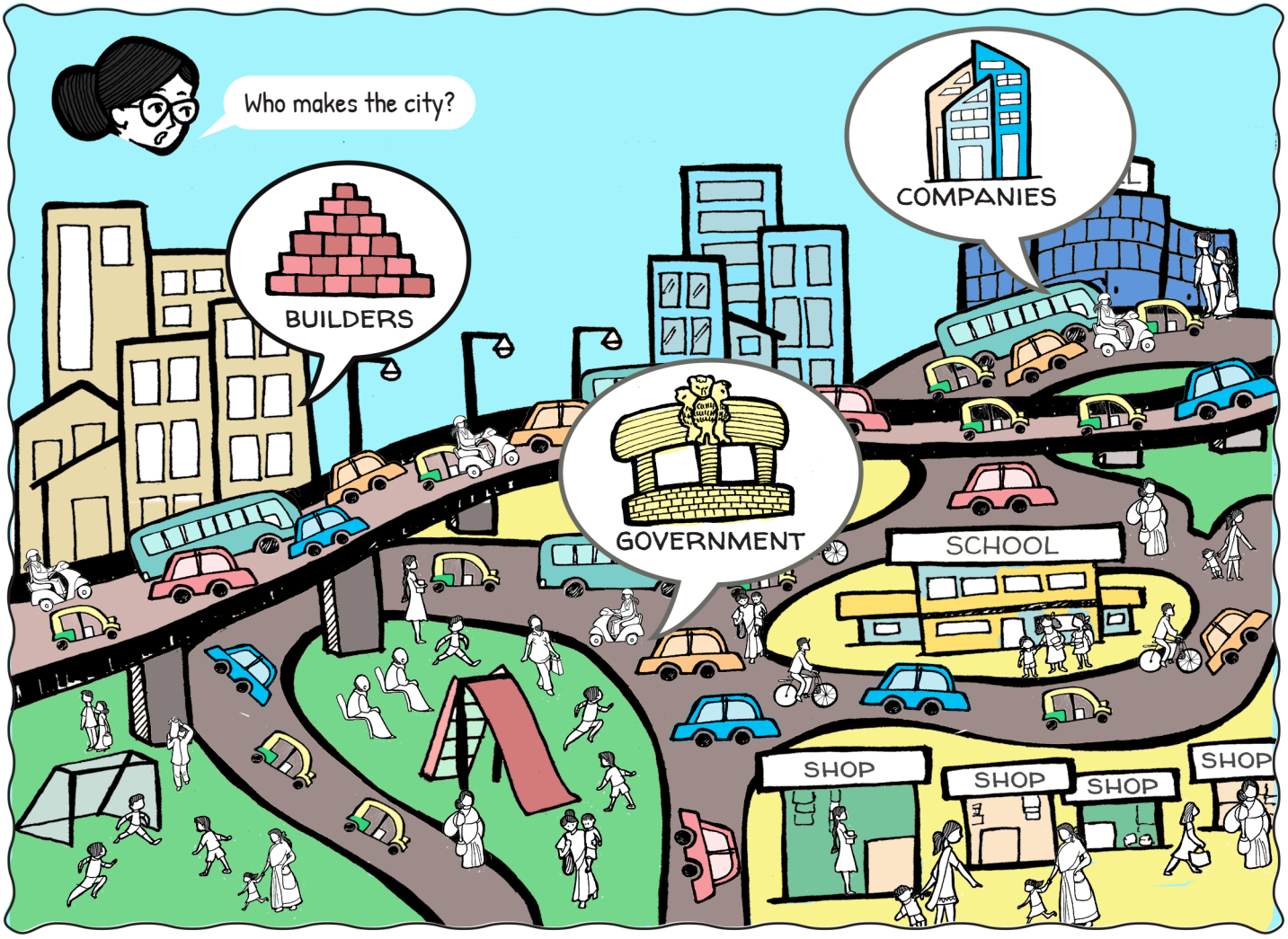
SHOP

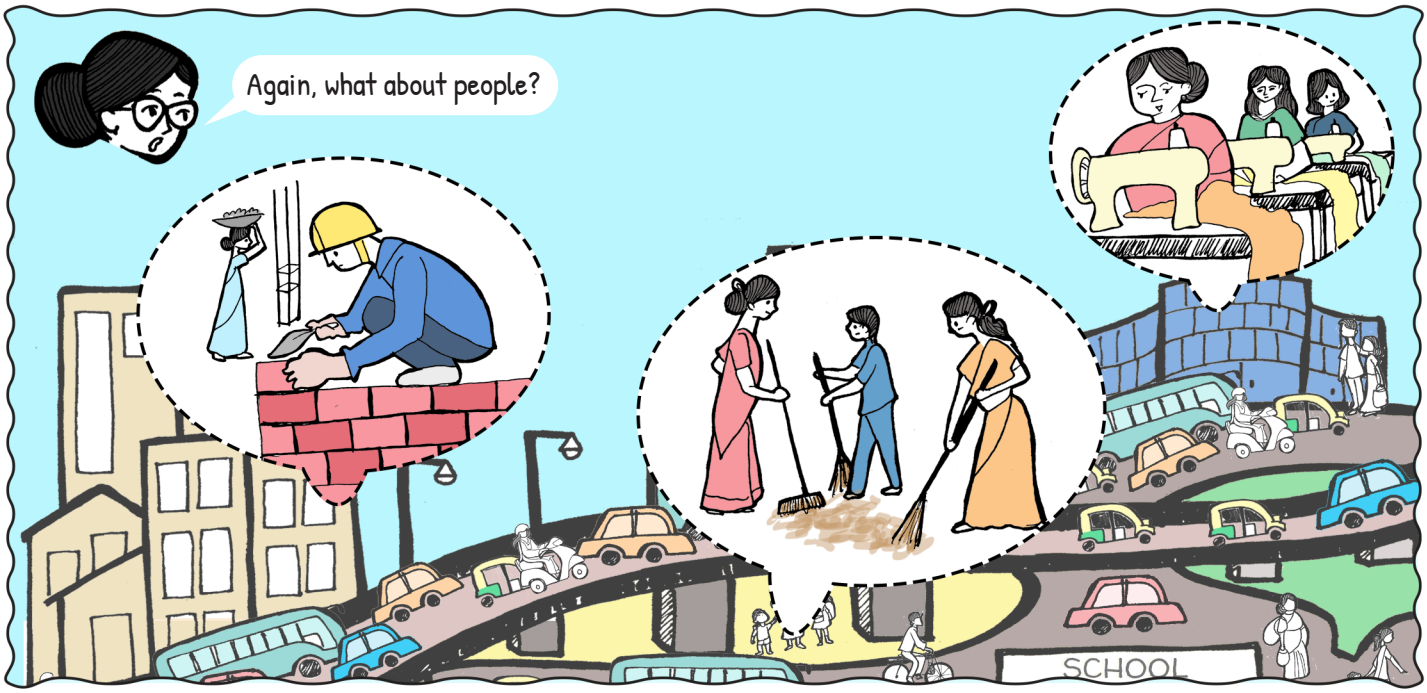
SHOP

SHOP

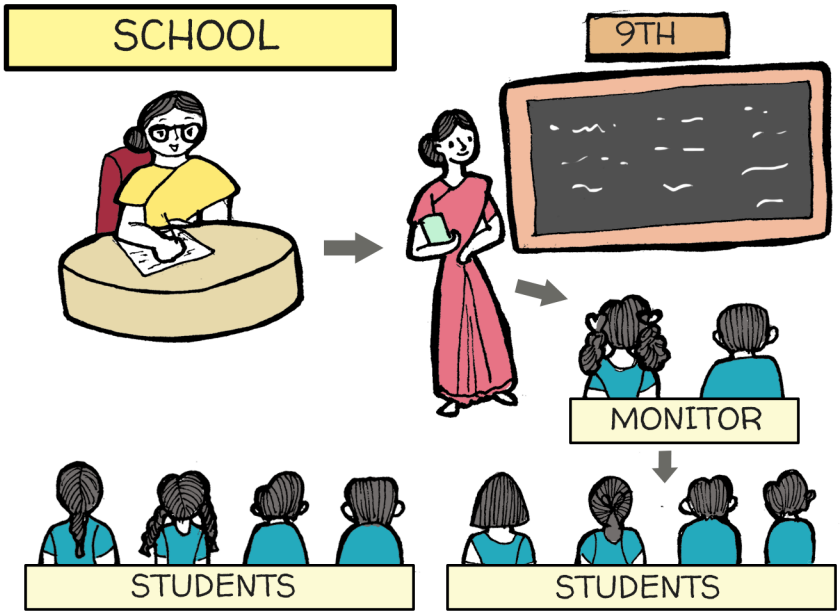
SHOP


What about people?
MALL
SCHOOL
SHOP
SHOP
SHOP
SHOP

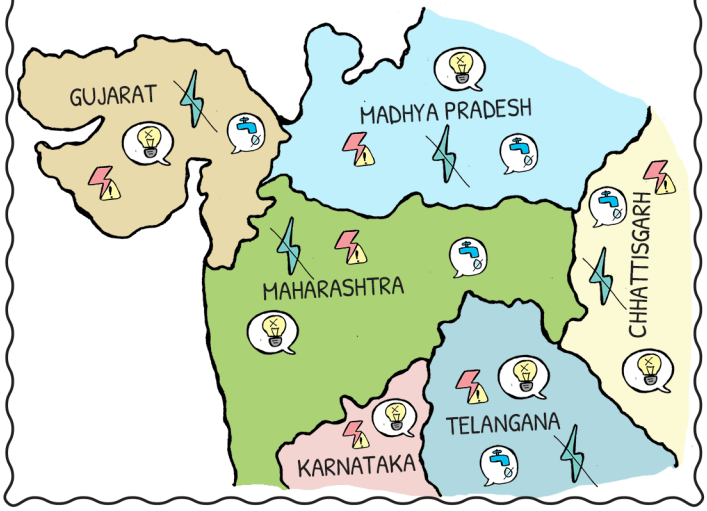

Who makes the city?
BUILDERS
COMPANIES
GOVERNMENT
SCHOOL
SHOP
SHOP
SHOP
SHOP



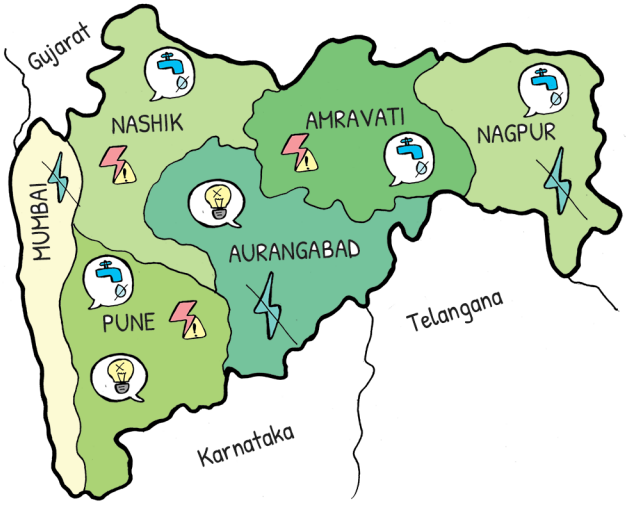
Take our school. Our principal takes care of the school, and worries about what the school needs. Even though she is worried about how many students will pass their tenth standard, she cannot know what help Priya needs in Maths or Ami needs in Chemistry. That's why we have class teachers who understand what each student needs. Even class teachers need help in understanding all students – so we have class monitors who tell teachers about what made a particular student upset.



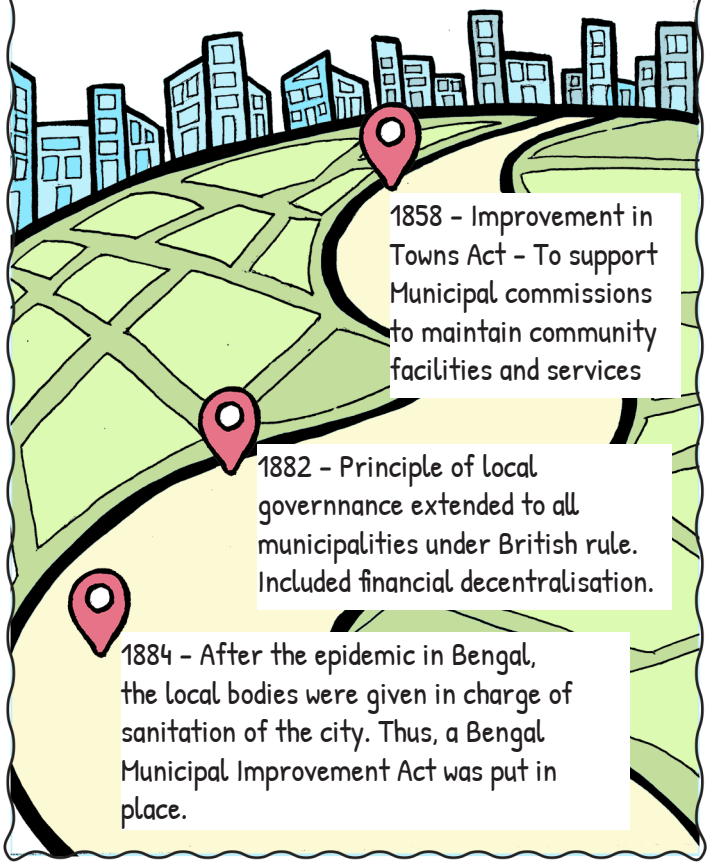
Similarly, the Government of India worries about what the country needs. But the Central Government cannot know what specific needs of Karnataka or Maharashtra are. And so, we need State Governments.



But even inside Maharashtra, what Nagpur needs is different from what Mumbai needs. So we need City Governments.



In fact, City Governments were created in 1858

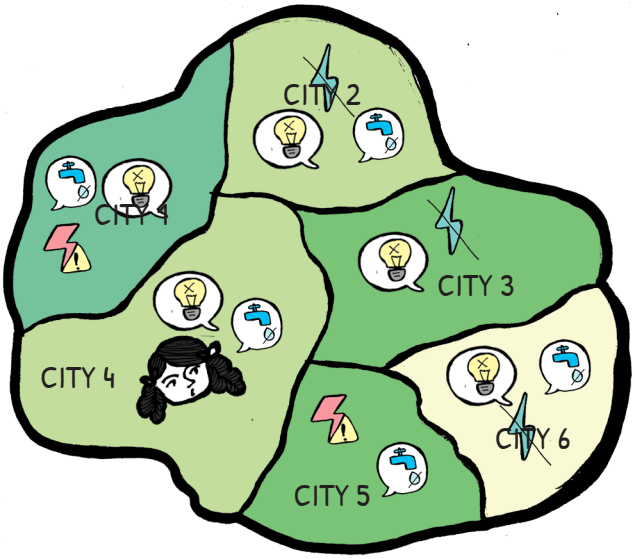


1858 - Improvement in Towns Act - To support Municipal commissions to maintain community facilities and services

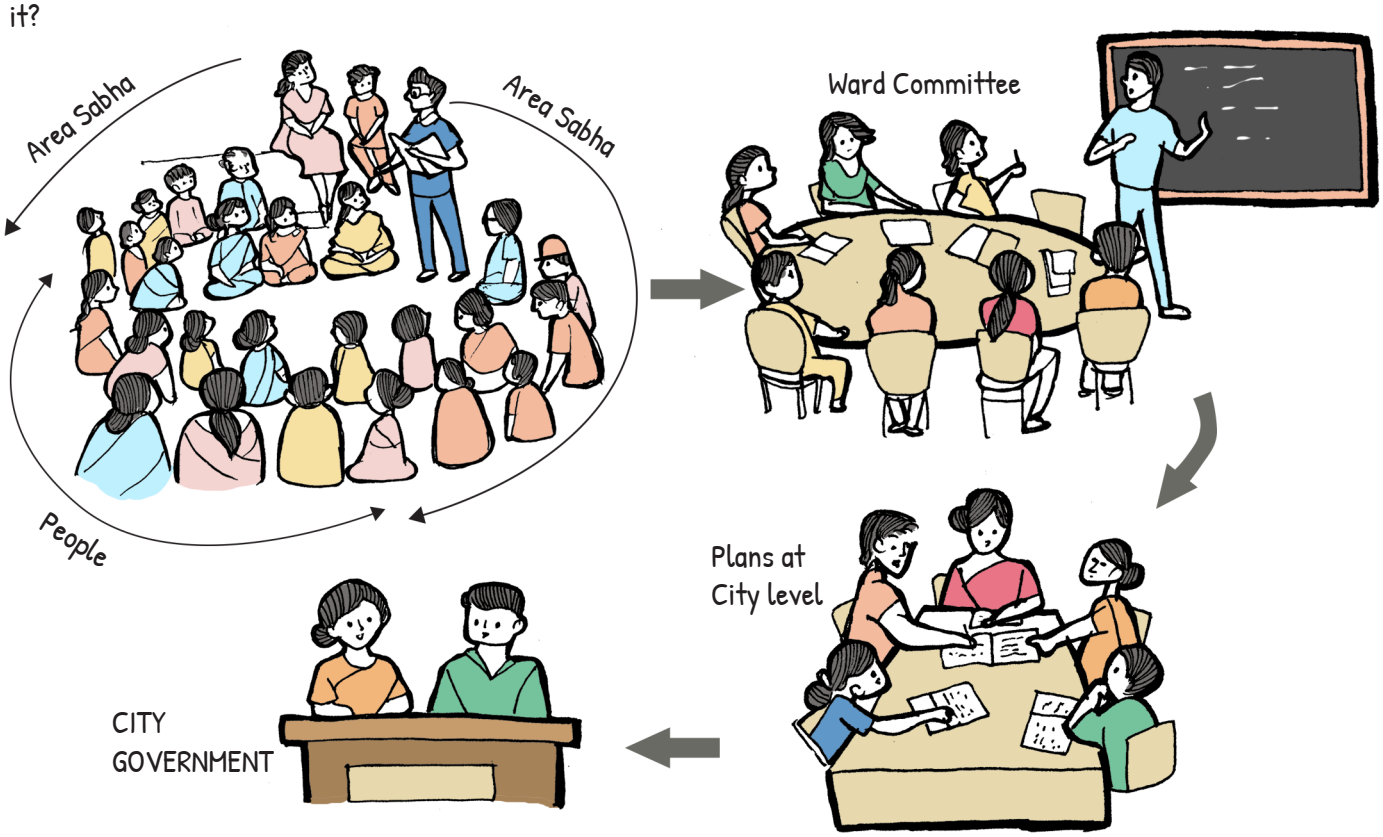
1882 - Principle of local governnance extended to all municipalities under British rule. Included financial decentralisation.

1884 - After the epidemic in Bengal, the local bodies were given in charge of sanitation of the city. Thus, a Bengal Municipal Improvement Act was put in place.

Even when a City Government takes care of water, lights, roads, and garbage, how do they know what each neighbourhood needs? Ami's house has water problems. How can the City Government know about it?



Imagine this - what if Ami can tell the government the problems she has with water? And the Government plans for it?



As people closest to the problem know it best, it became clear that local planning has to be done by local governments. That's why the 74th Amendment was introduced in the Constitution in 1992.

When you go home today, see what are the problems that are best known by the people closest to it- we can then discuss what problems the city government should focus on

As Ami went home that day with Noor...
Every time it rains, this road just floods. Unless you come here when it rains, you will never know there is a problem.

They went to pick up Noor's brother from the Anganwaadi.
Let's go home soon! I want to go to the bathroom!
Oh the toilet doesn't have water.

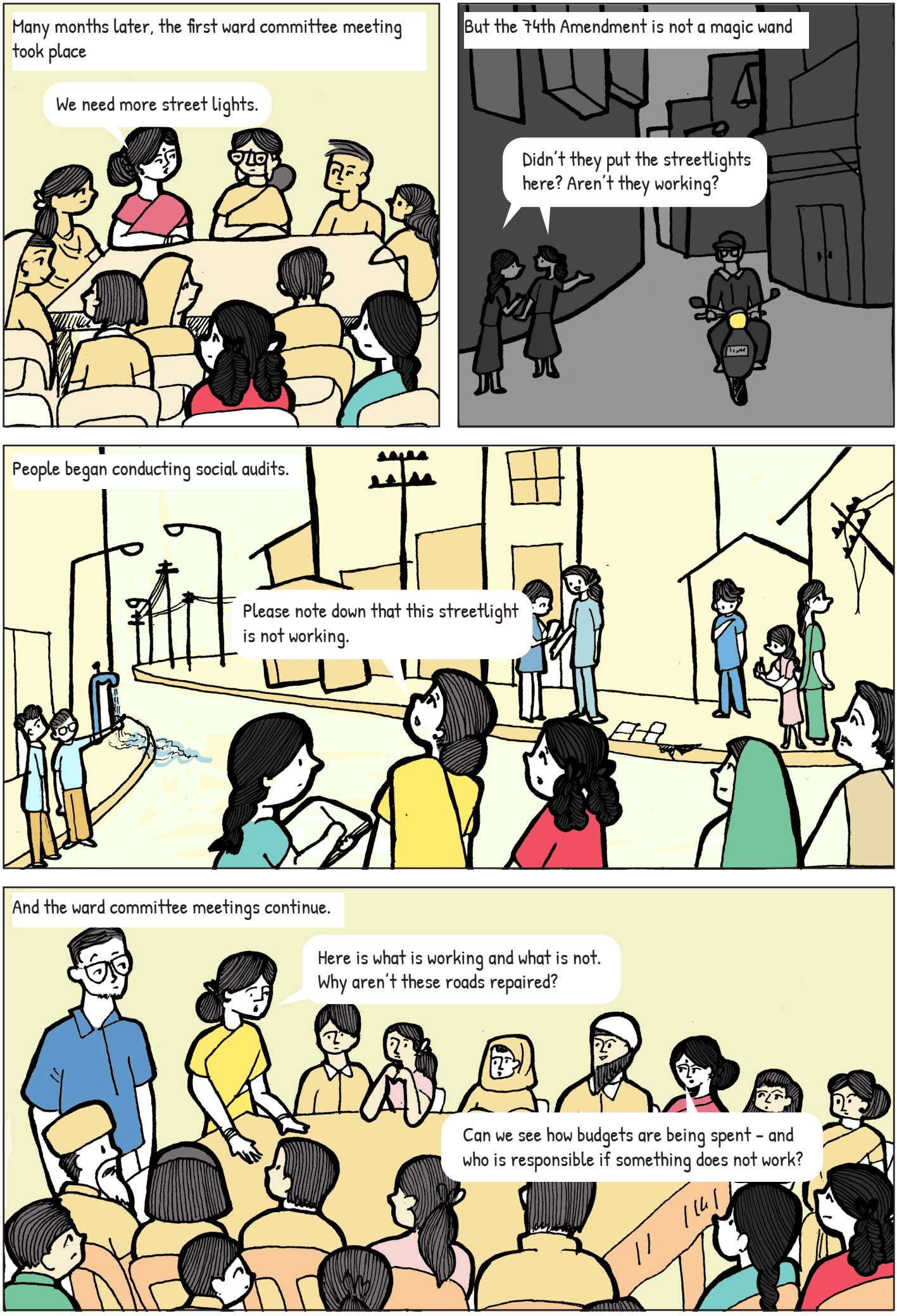
They then decided to finish all their homework together at Ami's house.
Come back soon, ok? It gets dark near the Xerox shop.
Oh yes, the streetlight there never works. And the Xerox shop is closed now as that uncle has gone to his village.

NEXT DAY
All students spoke of the problems they saw that only people closest to it could know about. And everyone had the same question...

As the teacher asked them to talk to people in their neighbourhood, Ami and Noor met the group who helped people in the locality with different issues

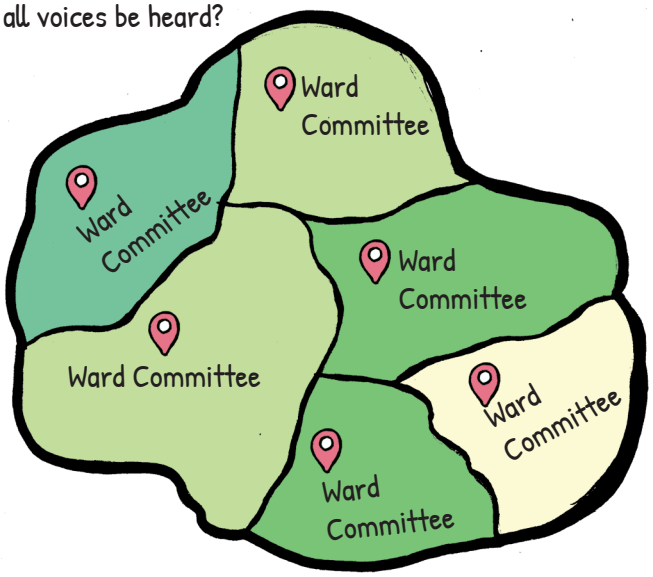
A few weeks later

Many people joined into petitition the Government, meet politicians, and NGOs to start ward committee meetings .


Many months later, the first ward committee meeting took place
We need more street lights.
But the 74th Amendment is not a magic wand
Didn't they put the streetlights here? Aren't they working?
People began conducting social audits.
Please note down that this streetlight is not working.
And the ward committee meetings continue.
Here is what is working and what is not. Why aren't these roads repaired?
Can we see how budgets are being spent – and who is responsible if something does not work?

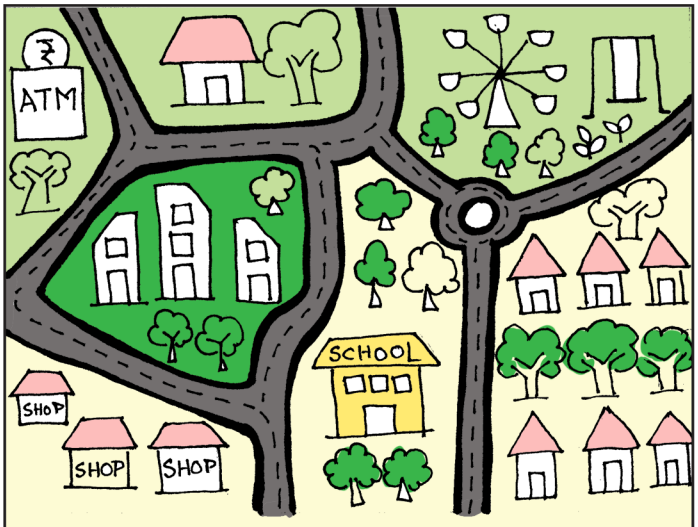
Eventually, the water connection issue was resolved.

But the story does not end here, rather it has just begun. How can we ensure ward committee meetings happen in every ward? How will existing differences due to gender, caste, and class affect participation? How can all voices be heard?



What we have is a start, a law that says that local government has to listen to our needs. But we have to claim what is ours, be it our city or our rights.

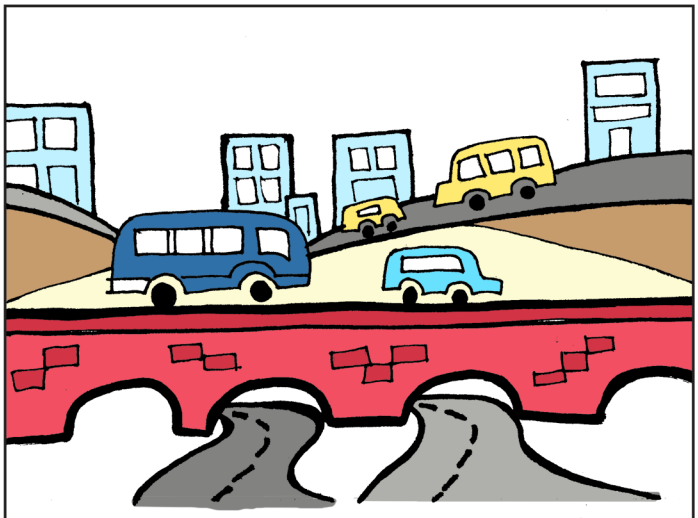
Functions that can be under the Municipality according to the 74th Amendment



1. Urban planning including town planning.

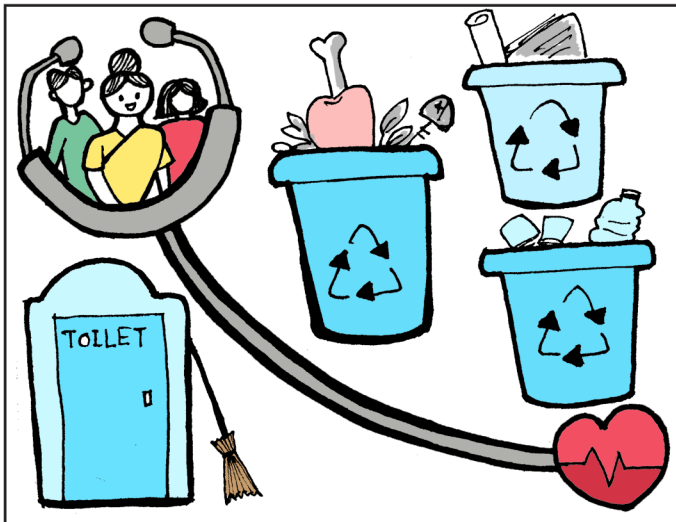
2. Regulation of land-use and construction of buildings.

3. Planning for economic and social development.



4. Roads and bridges.

5. Water supply for domestic, industrial and commercial purposes.



6. Public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management.

7. Fire services.

8. Urban forestry, protection of the environment and promotion of ecological aspects.

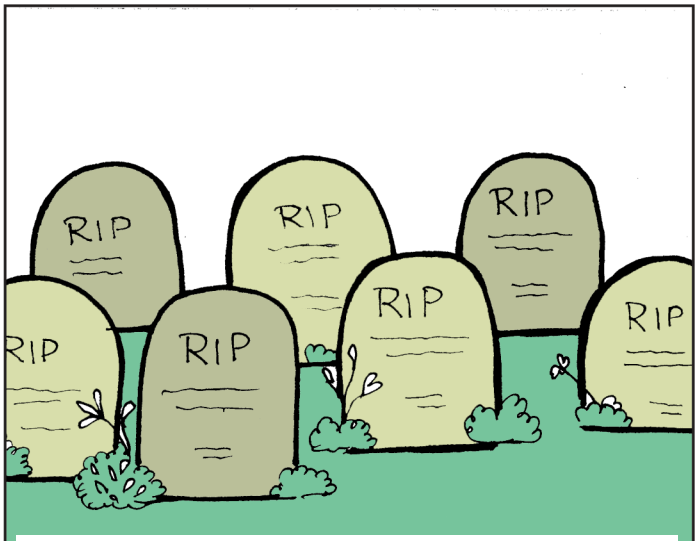
9. Safeguarding the interests of marginalised sections of society, including the disabled communities.

10. Slum improvement and upgradation.

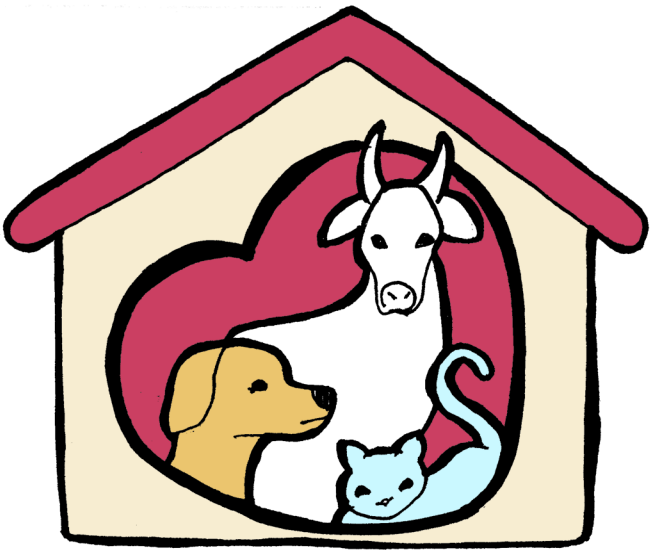
11. Urban poverty alleviation.

12. Provision of urban amenities and facilities such as parks,gardens, playgrounds.

13. Promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects.

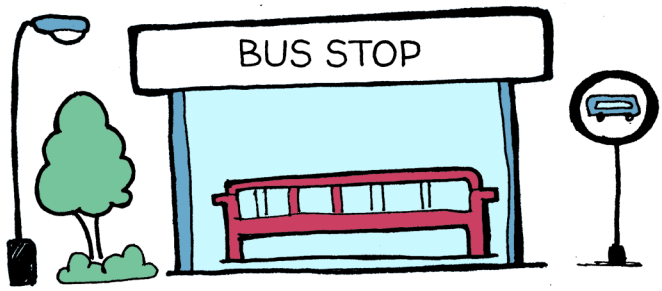


14. Burials and burial grounds; cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums.

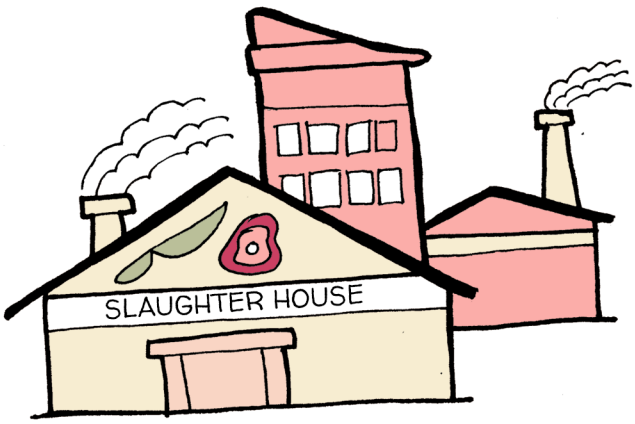


15. Cattle pounds; prevention of cruelty to animals.

16. Vital statistics including registration of births and deaths.



17. Public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops and public conveniences.



18. Regulation of slaughter houses and tanneries

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Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) is a non-profit organisation working with the mandate for a humane social order based on truth, justice, freedom and equity. Established in 1960, IGSSS works for development, capacity building and enlightenment of the vulnerable communities across the country for their effective participation in development. With its presence in 25 states and one Union Territory of India, IGSSS has set its thematic focus on promoting sustainable livelihood, energising the youth as change makers, protecting lives, livelihood and assets from the impact of hazards, advocating for the rights of CityMakers (Urban Poor Residents) and developing cadre of leaders from the community and civil society organisations. Gender and Youth are underlining theme across all its interventions.

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To help make better public policy, we need to both deepen and broaden the dialogue between the government and different actors, such as civil society, academia, and industry. At Fields of View, we design different tools to help facilitate this dialogue. Our games help improve participation of people in the policy process, and our simulation help policymakers use data and research to plan for our future. We are a non-profit research organisation based in Bangalore. For the seventh consecutive year, FoV has been featured in the 'Best New Idea or Paradigm developed by a Think Tank'; category of the 'Global Go To Think Tank Index Report'; created by the University of Pennsylvania ranking think tank organisations worldwide. We have also been featured in the list of 'Top Think Tanks in China, India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea'.

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