

**CASE STUDY** Author: Ankita Khuntia

# Land, Governance and Institutional Reform

## Governance-Driven Slum Upgrading: Lessons from Odisha's JAGA Mission

Odisha's JAGA Mission shows how slum upgrading can succeed when infrastructure investment is combined with stronger local governance and community participation. By granting land rights, supporting Slum Dwellers Associations, and enabling collaboration with Urban Local Bodies, it transformed informal settlements into recognised neighbourhoods, improving services and inclusion and long-term resilience.



Community meetings form an important part of Jaga Mission. *Janaagraha*

## 1. Executive Summary

The JAGA Mission in Odisha began with a foundational shift granting land tenure security to slum households through Land Rights Certificates (LRCs) under the Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017. By recognising slum residents as legitimate urban citizens with secure tenure, the Mission created the conditions necessary for long-term investment, participation, and inclusion.

Building on this foundation, the programme moved towards in-situ slum upgrading, combining infrastructure development with community-led planning and implementation. Strengthened community institutions such as Slum Dwellers Associations (SDAs), along with structured engagement with Urban Local Bodies<sup>1</sup> (ULBs), enabled a collaborative model of upgrading that went beyond physical improvements to drive governance transformation.

Janaagraha<sup>2</sup>, a Bengaluru-based non-profit organisation working to improve the quality of life in Indian cities and towns by strengthening urban governance systems, promoting place-based governance, and enabling citizen participation, supported this by improving systems, processes, and governance so that large-scale collaboration was possible. This experience demonstrates that when communities, city officials, and state agencies work together in a structured manner, slum improvement can lead to substantive social and institutional change. These lessons can help other Commonwealth cities identify inclusive, sustainable approaches to upgrading informal settlements.

## 2. Context and Challenge

India's urbanisation has brought significant economic growth but has also led to the expansion of informal settlements, where access to services and tenure security remain uncertain. In Odisha, nearly one-fourth of the urban population historically lived in slums, many of which lacked basic infrastructure such as roads, drainage, sanitation, and a reliable water supply.

The lack of infrastructure was clear, but a bigger issue was how development was managed. Urban Local Bodies managed services but typically relied on contractors and did not involve communities extensively. Meanwhile, residents had little say in planning or upkeep, which made it hard to build lasting improvements.

The JAGA Mission introduced a shift by recognising slum dwellers as city residents with a stake in urban development. With land rights as the foundation, the Mission moved towards in-situ upgrading improving infrastructure while retaining existing social and economic networks. This required new forms of collaboration where communities, municipal officials, and state systems worked together through place-based processes.

For many cities facing similar challenges, the question was not only how to upgrade settlements, but how to do so in a way that strengthened long-term governance and ensured that improvements translated into lasting transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> Urban Local Bodies: <https://tinyurl.com/57tet5zx>

<sup>2</sup> Janaagraha: <https://www.janaagraha.org/>

### 3. Approach or Experience

The transformation under the JAGA Mission unfolded through a combination of policy support, structured processes, and community participation. Slum Dwellers Associations (SDAs) emerged as a critical bridge between communities and city governments, representing households and participating directly in the upgrading process.

The process began with participatory identification of infrastructure gaps within each settlement. Communities collaborated with municipal officials to identify and prioritise critical infrastructure needs in each settlement. The process focused not only on physical improvements but also on decision-making through participatory discussions that reflected local priorities, challenges, and experiences.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) helped structure these processes, clarifying roles, sequencing activities, and ensuring consistency across cities. Rather than introducing new institutional arrangements, the approach strengthened existing municipal systems by enabling them to work more closely with communities.

A critical pillar of the JAGA Mission was the structured capacity-building across institutional levels, which enabled the shift from contractor-led delivery to collaborative governance.

At the Urban Local Body level, Executive Officers and municipal teams were oriented on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for slum upgradation and delisting. Each ULB nominated a dedicated **Jaga Coordinator** to anchor implementation and ensure ownership within the municipal system. Officials were trained on participatory planning, infrastructure prioritisation, monitoring of works, and documentation processes.

At the ward level, Ward Officers were positioned as nodal actors for implementation. They were trained to facilitate community engagement, coordinate with Slum Dwellers Associations (SDAs), and oversee the execution of infrastructure within settlements. This ensured that state-level programme design translated effectively into ward-level action.

At the community level, extensive capacity-building for SDA members enabled them to function as active partners in the upgrading process. SDA leaders were trained in Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA), Infrastructure Gap Analysis (I-GAP), conducting structured community meetings, financial management, and supervising infrastructure works.

Importantly, joint training sessions were conducted with SDA leaders and Ward Officers to build a shared understanding of roles, processes, and expectations. This helped foster trust and enabled coordinated action on the ground.

This layered capacity-building approach ensured that all stakeholders, communities, ward-level officials, and municipal leadership were equipped to participate meaningfully in the upgrading process, making the transformation both scalable and sustainable.

As infrastructure works progressed, SDAs played a role in supervising implementation, managing community assets, and ensuring that improvements reflected local priorities. This created a sense of ownership and accountability that extended beyond project completion.

The culmination of this process was the **delisting of slums**, where upgraded settlements were formally recognised as part of the city and renamed as Adarsh<sup>3</sup> Colonies. This transition represented more than physical improvement; it marked a shift in identity, dignity, and recognition for residents who had previously been regarded as informal occupants.

Technology platforms and monitoring systems further supported transparency, allowing progress to be tracked and enabling quicker resolution of service gaps. Over time, the upgrading process strengthened trust between communities and municipal institutions, facilitating future collaboration on development initiatives.

## 4. Insights and Lessons

A key insight from the experience is that visible transformation in informal settlements is sustained when governance processes evolve alongside infrastructure investments. Roads, drainage, and services improved living conditions, but the long-term impact emerged from strengthened relationships between communities and city governments.

Community institutions such as SDAs provided continuity at the local level, helping maintain assets and ensuring that improvements were not seen as external interventions. Municipal systems, in turn, gained confidence in working through participatory processes rather than isolated delivery mechanisms.

The experience also demonstrated the value of operational clarity. SOPs and clearly defined roles reduced ambiguity and enabled the model to be implemented across multiple cities without losing local flexibility.

At the same time, this shift required patience. Building trust between institutions and communities took time, and the early stages involved continuous engagement and problem-solving. However, as improvements became visible and settlements transitioned into Adarsh Colonies, confidence in the process grew significantly.

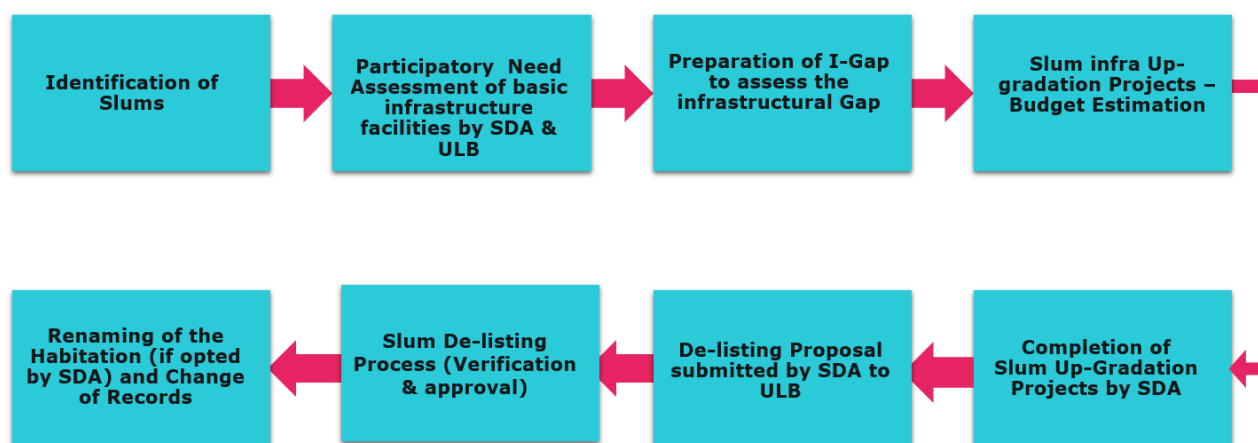
For other cities, the lesson is clear: sustainable upgrading is achieved when infrastructure improvements, institutional capacity, and community ownership evolve together.

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<sup>3</sup> Adarsh: a Sanskrit word meaning an ideal, model or exemplar.

## 5. Key Takeaways

- Sustainable slum transformation requires combining infrastructure upgrading with strengthened local governance processes.
- Community institutions such as Slum Dwellers Associations can act as effective partners in planning, implementation, and long-term management of upgraded settlements.
- Clear operational processes and SOP-led implementation enable participatory approaches to be applied consistently across cities while retaining local flexibility.
- Capacity building embedded within implementation strengthened both community institutions and municipal systems, enabling the transformation to be sustained beyond project completion.
- In-situ upgradation and formal recognition as Adarsh Colonies supported the integration of informal settlements into the formal city, improving dignity, ownership, and long-term urban inclusion.



Process flow showing how community institutions and municipal systems jointly enabled the upgrading and formal integration of informal

**This Case Study was prepared by Ms Ankita Khuntia, Manager, State Program (Odisha), Janaagraha<sup>4</sup>, way of contribution to the work of the CSCC Housing Action Group, March 2026.**

<sup>4</sup> Janaagraha: <https://www.janaagraha.org/>



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