Chapter 12: Grassroots Democracy Part 3: Local Government in Urban Areas

Questions — Questions, Activities and Projects

Q1 On your way to school, you and your friends notice that a water pipe is leaking. A lot of water is being wasted on account of the leak. What would you and your friends do in such a situation?

SOLUTION

Citizens have a duty to report problems to their urban local body so it can act.
We should note the location of the leak and inform the nearest ward committee or the municipal corporation/council helpline as quickly as possible.
We could also alert an adult in the neighbourhood who can follow up if we are unable to do so ourselves.
The chapter reminds us that reporting a water leakage promptly prevents further wastage of precious water.

Answer: We should report the leak to the ward committee or municipal helpline as soon as possible. The chapter says that responsible citizens report water leakages promptly to prevent wastage — this is how participatory democracy works at the local level.

Q2 Invite a member of an urban local body near you to your class. Discuss with them their role and responsibilities. Prepare a set of questions to ask them so that the meeting is fruitful.

SOLUTION

This is a class activity. Here is guidance on how to do it:
Step 1 — Identify a suitable guest: Your teacher can help contact a local ward councillor, the ward committee secretary, or an officer from the Municipal Council/Corporation office.
Step 2 — Prepare questions in advance. Good questions to ask:
What are the main duties of a ward councillor?
How does the ward committee decide which problems to solve first?
How can citizens report problems like broken roads or water leaks?
What services does the municipal body provide to residents?
How is the annual budget of the ward decided?

Step 3 — During the meeting, listen carefully and take notes.
Step 4 — After the meeting, discuss what you learned about how local democracy works in your city.

Answer: Prepare thoughtful questions about the councillor's duties, how the ward committee works, how citizens can report problems, and how the budget is planned. Listen carefully during the visit and discuss key learnings with the class afterwards.

Q3 Discuss with adult members of your family and neighbourhood, and make a list of their expectations from the urban local bodies.

SOLUTION

This is a community discussion activity. Here is guidance:
Talk to parents, grandparents, neighbours, or shopkeepers and ask what they expect from their Municipal Council or Corporation.
Common expectations you might hear (based on the chapter's list of functions):
Clean drinking water supply at all times.
Regular garbage collection and clean streets.
Good drainage and sewage systems to prevent flooding.
Well-maintained roads, streetlights, and footpaths.
Proper maintenance of parks and public spaces.
Prompt action when problems like water leaks or potholes are reported.
Fair and transparent use of tax money collected from residents.
Record the responses and present them as a list in class.

Answer: Talk to family members and neighbours and record their expectations. Typical expectations include regular water supply, clean streets, good roads, proper drainage, maintained parks, and quick response when problems are reported — all functions described in this chapter.

Q4 Make a list of characteristics of a good urban local body.

SOLUTION

Based on the chapter, a good urban local body should have these characteristics:
Elected representatives: Members are chosen by the citizens of each ward through free and fair elections.
Responsive: It listens to citizens' complaints and acts on them quickly.
Transparent: It shares information about how public money is spent.

Inclusive: It ensures that the needs of all groups — including the poor and marginalised — are met.
Efficient: It provides essential services (water, sanitation, roads, health, education) reliably.
Participatory: It encourages citizens to attend meetings, report problems, and take part in decisions.
Accountable: Elected members and officials can be questioned if they do not do their work properly.
Financially sound: It collects taxes fairly and uses the money wisely for the public good.

Answer: A good urban local body is elected by citizens, responsive to their needs, transparent about spending, inclusive of all groups, and provides essential services efficiently. It encourages citizen participation and holds its members accountable.

Q5 What are the similarities and differences between the Panchayati Raj system in rural areas and the urban local bodies?

SOLUTION

Similarities:
Both are forms of decentralised local government — they give people a direct say in managing their own areas.
Both have elected members who represent local citizens.
Both are divided into smaller units: rural areas have the Gram Panchayat at the base, while urban areas have ward committees.
Both aim to involve citizens in participatory democracy.

Differences:
Panchayati Raj works in rural areas (villages), while urban local bodies work in cities and towns.
Urban areas are larger, more complex, and more diverse, so urban local bodies manage more varied needs.
The tiers are different: rural governance runs from Gram Sabha to Gram Panchayat to Panchayat Samiti to Zila Panchayat; urban governance runs from the ward to a Municipal Corporation (above 10 lakh population), Municipal Council (1-10 lakh), or Nagar Panchayat (smaller towns).

Answer: Both systems are decentralised and have elected representatives, but Panchayati Raj serves villages while urban local bodies serve cities and towns. Urban bodies have three tiers — Municipal Corporation (above 10 lakh population), Municipal Council (1-10 lakh), or Nagar Panchayat (smaller towns) — compared to the rural Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Panchayat structure.