

RTI IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY FOR WEST MEDINIPUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

To strengthen economic development of West Bengal, rural quality of life requires to be addressed with due importance. In spite of acting as a pioneering state in establishing three tier system of rural administration, West Bengal lagged behind many other Indian states in bringing improved condition of living especially in its rural counterpart. There has been lack of transparency and accountability in panchayat led delivery of services in West Bengal. The broad objective of the present study is to establish the usefulness of the RTI act in economic development of rural West Bengal. The study selects the West Medinipur district of West Bengal as the focus area. The living condition of rural people has been used as a measure of rural development. This measure consists of four service facilities as the parameter of development. These facilities are availability of safe drinking water and electricity as also availability of primary health facilities and primary school facilities. Quality of life has been measured through delivery status of these four selected service facilities. Dark areas in rural W. Bengal hence got identified. Probability of RTI application towards improvement in quality of life of households remains high for these areas.

INTRODUCTION

In simple words, development is defined as a change which is desirable. There are three basic elements which act as the constituents of development¹: The first and foremost is the element of 'basic necessities of life' which include food, shelter, basic education, clothes, primary health facilities etc. Second is 'self respect' which every person seeks to achieve as a consequence of development. 'Freedom' is the third essential factor which refers to the political, cultural and socio-economic freedom of people. The term rural development

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¹ Todaro, *Economics for a Developing World: An Introduction to Principles, Problems and Policies for Development*, (Longman, 1977)

basically means improvement in the quality of life of rural people. It is a multidimensional concept comprising of the development of socio-economic infrastructure and community services². However, as far as the development of rural poor is concerned, it may be restricted by formal or informal institutions and, or local peculiarities. Hence, in developing a rural economy, it is important to engage the state who may ensure an entirely new institutional base without any exclusionary practices. The rural community indeed needs their own institutions which would help them to create space in state institutions and voice for social equity and inclusion. They need to play a key role in formulation and implementation of those projects that protect their right of living a quality life. A right based approach may lead to a more responsive and sustainable development process in which poor get the space for their action and may change the states development initiative in the intended direction.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Development of rural economy is an all-time challenge before the nation of India. Along with vast unemployment and severe malnutrition among children, miserable rural infrastructure has intensified the problem of rural economic development. It doesn't mean that the nation has not formulated appropriate policies to address the thrust areas. Failure rather lies in the aspect of implementation. West Bengal is no exception and holds the pioneering position in this respect. From past experiences the impressions of many deficiencies have come out in the implementation of development schemes and programs in rural West Bengal. The delivery of services did not accrue to the rural poor as was widely expected. Rural administration perceived a relatively low perception of its developmental task as well as had been much influenced by the narrow local level politics. The state failed to ensure an effective delivery system due to its biased development depending on socio-political considerations of local settings³. The public delivery mechanism of the state had been severely criticized over the years due to its target oriented focus rather than result oriented target. There had been lack of transparency and accountability in implementation of development projects. In addition to this, the strong caste and class division had intensified the problem of concentration of power across villages of West Bengal. In many cases, the allocation of resources across villages had been mostly guided by the political priorities of

² Singh, Sharma, *Decentralisation- Institutions and Politics in Rural India*, (OUP, 2007)

³ Niraja, Prakash, Sharma, *Government as Practice: Politics and Policies of the Indian Left*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015)

the localities along with political bargaining strength of the local representatives⁴. In West Bengal, the areas where the opposition threat was more, to acquire electoral support, service delivery had been effectively made. It has been observed that a near monopolistic control had been held by left government over the panchayats in the state of West Bengal which directly influenced the development of villages in the state⁵.

The true and meaningful rural development necessitates a bottom up approach with more importance on grassroot level decisions and preferences. It boosts up the spirit of rural poor and is able to bring a positive attitude of them towards the current situation. However, their knowledge and awareness have to be geared up for their meaningful participation in the said activity. Here comes the role of Right to Information (RTI). It makes rural poor conscious about value of information in their daily life. Bringing transparency in public administration is the major objective of the RTI act. RTI has made possible the regular disposal of information to villagers via panchayats. As most of the schemes and programmes meant for rural masses are mainly operated at the block level, this was not possible before enactment of RTI. However, the successful utilization of the RTI act demands a good level of awareness. It also demands consciousness and concern of rural people.

OBJECTIVE & METHODOLOGY

The broad objective of the present study is to give direction to the usefulness of RTI act in improving the quality of life of rural West Bengal. The study selects West Medinipur district of West Bengal as the focus area. West Medinipur has been selected as the focus area since with almost 90% of rural population the district has been relatively backward in development of rural infrastructural facilities with respect to other districts of West Bengal. The district was formed on January 1, 2002 after the partition of Medinipur district into West Medinipur and East Medinipur. The W. Medinipur district comprises of 29 blocks. There are four sub-divisions in W. Medinipur district: Medinipur Sadar, Kharagpur, Jhargram and Ghatal.

In the present analysis the living condition of rural people has been used as a measure of rural development. Since poors in rural economy mainly depend on Government sponsored schemes and programmes, the present exercise has used four basic service

⁴ Bardhan, Mukherjee, *Pro-poor Targeting and Accountability of Local Governments in West Bengal*, (2003)

⁵ Bardhan, Mukherjee, *Decentralisation and Local Governance in Developing Countries*, (OUP, 2007)

facilities as the attributes of rural development. They are: availability of safe drinking water and electricity as also primary school and primary health facilities. As apart from supply of services, rural quality of life is also governed by demand sides purchasing ability, the study examines the living condition of the people of W. Medinipur district in the backdrop of demand and supply side influences.

The investigation goes through five steps of analysis:

1. A district level study has been conducted in terms of supply of selected public services which identifies the poor performing districts of rural West Bengal. It also justifies the selection of the West Medinipur district as the focus of the present study.
2. The district of West Medinipur has been scrutinized in terms of supply of four selected services and blocks major deprived (poor in supply of two or more of the selected service facilities) have been identified.
3. Blocks of the concerned district suffering from poor living condition have been identified thereafter.
4. An investigation has been made to enquire about the blocks economically well off across the concerned district.
5. Lastly, the study focuses on the extent of social involvement of people across the blocks of W. Medinipur district by the number of rural cooperatives formed by the people of the concerned areas.

Summing all, the study finds out those areas of West Medinipur district (at the sub-district level) where people have reasonable purchasing ability but fail to live a reasonable quality of life due to poor supply of public facilities. The study intends to establish the usefulness of the RTI Act for these areas. It also identifies those areas of the concerned district where probability of RTI application remains high towards improvement in quality of life of rural households.

WEST BENGAL ACROSS DISTRICTS: THE SUPPLY SCENARIO

The present section intends to assess the supply performance of the districts of rural West Bengal in the selected four service facilities. This will enable us to find out the poor performing districts which are responsible to worsen the relative position of W. Bengal vis-à-vis the other major states of India. This will also focus on the relative position of W. Medinipur district in delivering the selected facilities vis-à-vis the other districts of West

Bengal. The exercise has been carried out for two groups of variables: (a) Physical facilities and (b) Social facilities. Under the group of physical facilities the drinking water facility and electricity have been included. Whereas the selected social facilities are primary health sub-centre and primary school facility. As far as the two selected physical facilities are concerned, the exercise concentrates on identifying the relative position of the districts in terms of percentage of mouzas enjoying the selected facilities across the districts. However, in case of the two selected social facilities, districts have been scrutinized based on the number of facilities available in each 100 mouzas of the concerned districts. The performance of a district has been evaluated by making a comparative assessment of the performance of the concerned district in relation to the performance of the state across the selected facility services. For any selected facility, a district has been identified as a developed one, when it occupies a position, equal to or better than the position of the state in supply of the concerned facility. In the opposite case, the district is identified as a backward one. However, a district has been evaluated as major backward when the performance of the concerned district falls short of the achievement of the state in supplying two or more of the selected facilities. The present exercise has been carried out using district level statistical database for the year 2007.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED SERVICES BY DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL (RURAL); 2007

Districts	Electricity	Primary Health Sub-Centres	Primary Schools	Drinking Water
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Bankura	86	11	87	96
Burdwan	100	24	131	99
Birbhum	93	14	92	97
Dinajpur (S)	96	7	69	96
Howrah	100	34	225	100
Hooghly	100	19	134	99

Jalpaiguri	98	30	249	81
Koch Bihar	96	15	144	96
Maldah	99	12	100	91
Murshidabad	86	19	132	89
Nadia	92	22	168	93
24 Parganas (N)	100	20	149	99
Medinipur (W)	59	6	50	88
Medinipur (E)	76	10	102	98
Puruliya	74	12	107	94
24 Parganas (S)	93	18	159	96
Dinajpur (N)	100	8	90	99
West Bengal	91	17	129	95

Source: District Statistical Handbook, 2007

Note: (1) Figures of PHSCs are not available in the public domain. These figures (col.3) are derived from the available figures of PHCs by use of state policy characteristics- there is one PHC against six PHSCs.

(3) For any facility, state value= average of the district values

Findings

Altogether there are nine districts whose performances have fallen short of the achievement of the state in supply of two or more of the selected facilities. They are Bankura, Birbhum, S. Dinajpur, Maldah, W. Medinipur, Murshidabad, Puruliya, N. Dinajpur and E. Medinipur. These districts have been identified as major backward districts of West Bengal. Among these districts Puruliya and W. Medinipur have been found to be poor performing across all the selected facilities with respect to states performance. Moreover, in three of the selected four facilities the performance of W. Medinipur has been found to be poorest of the poor. Hence, we find enough justification behind the selection of W. Medinipur district as the major focus area for the present analysis.

It is of no doubt that the delivery status of any macro unit of observation (e.g. districts of West Bengal) is dependent on the performance of the micro units (i.e. the blocks of the districts) in the said activity. More specifically, the more is the number of blocks with

poor facilities, the more will be the incidence of deprivation for the concerned district. Hence, to have minute observation on the backwardness of W. Meiniपुर district we need to investigate carefully the dark areas at the micro level of the district.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION (%) OF MOUZAS BY SELECTED SERVICES BY BLOCKS OF W. MEDINIPUR ; 2010

District/Blocks	Electricity	Primary Health Sub-Centres	Primary Schools	Drinking Water
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Jhargram	73 (P)	5 (P)	33 (P)	80 (P)
Binpur-I	73 (P)	6 (P)	25 (P)	77 (P)
Binpur-II	58 (P)	8 (P)	40 (P)	83 (P)
Jamboni	72 (P)	6 (P)	29 (P)	84 (P)
Nayagram	40 (P)	8 (P)	49 (P)	95
Sankrail	47 (P)	8 (P)	53	86 (P)
Gopiballavpur-I	44 (P)	10	61	92
Gopiballavpur-II	71 (P)	11	70	92
Shalboni	87	7 (P)	32 (P)	80 (P)
Keshpur	77	8 (P)	39 (P)	89
Garbeta-I	100	10	48 (P)	82 (P)
Garbeta-II	72 (P)	8 (P)	50	81 (P)
Garbeta-III	96	10	53	84 (P)
Medinipur Sadar	100	9 (P)	43 (P)	83 (P)
Debra	99	9 (P)	43 (P)	99
Pingla	99	16	80	96
Keshiari	72 (P)	12	55	91
Dantan-I	73 (P)	14	54	95
Dantan-II	99	18	72	93
Narayangarh	68 (P)	9 (P)	45 (P)	90

Mohanpur	89	17	79	100
Sabang	86	16	99	100
Kharagpur-I	55 (P)	9 (P)	36 (P)	86 (P)
Kharagpur-II	64 (P)	7 (P)	40 (P)	98
Chandrakona-II	98	17	88	98
Chandrakona-I	99	18	84	92
Ghatal	100	22	116	99
Daspur-I	100	19	80	100
Daspur-II	100	39	186	100
W. Medinipur	77	10	50	88

Source: Human Development Report Paschim Medinipur, 2011

Note: (i) 'P' within the parenthesis implies poor performance.

(ii) In column 4, for a district more than 100% performance implies more than 100 primary schools are available in every contiguous group of 100 mouzas.

Findings

In W. Medinipur district 52 percent of blocks have been found to be backward in two or more selected services. They have been identified as major backward blocks. These blocks are Jhargram, Binpur-I, Binpur-II, Jamboni, Nayagram, Sankrail, Shalboni, Keshpur, Garbeta-I, Garbeta-II, Medinipur Sadar, Debra, Narayangarh, Kharagpur-I and Kharagpur-II. Amongst these blocks Jhargram, Binpur-I, Binpur-II, Jamboni, Kharagpur-I are the blocks found with backwardness across all selected amenities.

MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE

The standard of living of resident households, especially in rural areas is largely governed by the performance of the region in supplying supporting facilities. However, to what extent households are capable of making the requisite expenses to avail the (selected) facility services is also a matter of concern. Hence, it may be stated that improvement in quality of life of rural households depend on improved supply condition of selected service facilities and requisite purchasing power of resident households to avail the services. In the present study to examine the quality of living of rural households in W. Medinipur district, the composite measure of Living Condition Index (LCI) has been developed. The LCI will be

responsible to find out the impact of the selected four rural facility services in association with the purchasing capability of households on the quality of living of people in W. Medinipur district. There are five components in LCI out of which four components accommodate the four (selected) service facilities and the fifth component considers the purchasing ability of the households of respective areas. Each of five components has been accommodated in LCI in the form of the respective sub-indices. They are Poverty sub-Index (PI), Drinking Water sub-Index (DWI), Primary School sub-Index (PSI), Health Centre sub-Index (HCI) and Domestic Electricity sub-Index (DEI). For every sub-index values vary between 0 and 1. The value of LCI also moves between 0 and 1. As the value of LCI moves towards unity, standard of living improves, opposite otherwise. In the same way, it may be stated that if the value of the sub-index moves towards unity, the performance of the concerned area in the respective variable improves; opposite otherwise. For construction of the respective sub-indices the following formula has been used:

The concerned sub-index =

$$\frac{(\text{actual } X_i - \text{min } X_i)}{(\text{max } X_i - \text{min } X_i)}$$

whereas for the selected two physical facilities (such as Electricity and Drinking water) X_i implies the percentage of mouzas enjoying the respective facility in the i^{th} block of the concerned district. However, in case of the two selected social facilities (i.e. Primary schools and Primary health sub-centres) X_i implies the percentage of mouzas enjoying the respective facility in the i^{th} block of the respective district. Further, in case of Poverty sub-index, X_i denotes the percentage of households lying above the poverty line in the i^{th} block of the W. Medinipur district.

The performance of the blocks across the district of W. Medinipur according to the value of the Living Condition Index and its sub-indices are reported in Table 3. As the value of the sub-index moves toward unity, influence of the concerned facility on quality of life goes up; opposite otherwise.

**TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF BLOCKS OF W. MEDINIPUR BY
PARAMETERS OF QUALITY OF LIFE; RURAL, 2010**

District/ Blocks	Poverty index (-)	Drinking water index	Electricity index	Primary School index	Health Sub- centre index	Living condition index
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Jhargram	0.41	0.14	0.55	0.05	0.01	0.23
Binpur-I	0.44	0.01	0.55	0.00	0.03	0.21
Binpur-II	0.01	0.25	0.30	0.10	0.08	0.15
Jamboni	0.04	0.31	0.53	0.03	0.04	0.19
Nayagram	-0.01	0.78	0.00	0.15	0.10	0.20
Sankrail	0.36	0.38	0.11	0.17	0.08	0.22
Gopiballavpur- I	0.54	0.66	0.06	0.22	0.14	0.32
Gopiballavpur- II	0.43	0.64	0.52	0.28	0.19	0.41
Shalboni	0.67	0.11	0.78	0.04	0.05	0.33
Keshpur	0.59	0.52	0.61	0.09	0.08	0.38
Garbeta-I	0.66	0.21	1.00	0.14	0.15	0.43
Garbeta-II	0.37	0.19	0.53	0.15	0.10	0.27
Garbeta-III	0.76	0.29	0.93	0.17	0.16	0.46
Medinipur Sadar	0.41	0.28	1.00	0.11	0.12	0.39
Debra	0.72	0.96	0.98	0.11	0.12	0.58
Pingla	0.38	0.83	0.99	0.34	0.32	0.57
Keshiari	0.45	0.62	0.54	0.19	0.20	0.40
Dantan-I	0.41	0.80	0.55	0.18	0.25	0.44
Dantan-II	0.45	0.69	0.99	0.29	0.38	0.56
Narayangarh	0.56	0.57	0.47	0.12	0.11	0.37

Mohanpur	0.38	1.00	0.82	0.33	0.37	0.58
Sabang	0.65	1.00	0.76	0.46	0.31	0.64
Kharagpur-I	0.21	0.39	0.26	0.07	0.13	0.21
Kharagpur-II	0.31	0.91	0.40	0.09	0.06	0.36
Chandrakona-II	0.55	0.90	0.97	0.39	0.37	0.64
Chandrakona-I	0.51	0.67	0.99	0.37	0.37	0.58
Ghatal	0.62	0.97	1.00	0.56	0.50	0.73
Daspur-I	0.94	1.00	1.00	0.34	0.42	0.74
Daspur-II	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
W. Medinipur	0.48	0.59	0.66	0.23	0.21	0.43

Source: Computation by author. The results have been computed from the data obtained from Human Development Report Paschim Medinipur, 2011

Findings

Notably, in W. Medinipur district almost all the major backward blocks, hence identified, have been found to live poor quality life. The relevant blocks are Jhargram, Binpur-I, Binpur-II, Jamboni, Nayagram, Sankrail, Shalboni, Keshpur, Garbeta-II, Medinipur Sadar, Narayangarh, Kharagpur-I and Kharagpur-II. Hence, it may be stated that the poor supply condition is mainly responsible for the substandard living of people of the concerned areas. However, Gopiballavpur-I, Gopiballavpur-II and Keshiari are the blocks where residents live a poor quality life inspite of improved supply condition.

Availability of good infrastructure is of no use until and unless it could be availed of by the targeted beneficiaries. If beneficiaries fail to incur minimum expenses needed to personalize the public facilities, then adequacy in service delivery may not result in quality life of rural people. Nevertheless, inspite of being economically well off, people may fail to enjoy the essential services, if these services are not made locally available by the local administration. As far as the index of affluence [refer to col. 2 of Table 3] across the district of W. Medinipur is concerned 45 percent of the blocks hold better position than district average. The relevant blocks are Gopiballavpur-I, Shalboni, Keshpur, Garbeta-I, Garbeta-

III, Debra, Narayangarh, Sabang, Chandrakona-II, Chandrakona-I, Ghatal, Daspur-I and Daspur-II. Hence, poor quality of life across these blocks may be attributed to poor state-led delivery of services.

THE RTI ACT: A CLOSE LOOK

The RTI act 2005 empowers citizens to question or seek any information of government. RTI enables a citizen to inspect government work or documents and if needed collect copies of government documents. Except Jammu and Kashmir, the RTI could be used across all over India. All Government bodies including NGOs- owned, financed or controlled by government are included under the purview of the law. Private bodies- owned, financed or controlled by government, directly or indirectly, also comes under the laws purview. However, for eleven areas enlisted in section 8 of the RTI act, information could be refused to public. They may be confidential information accepted from foreign government, issues related with security, strategic, scientific or economic interest of the country, against privilege of legislatures etc. Along with this, there are eighteen agencies for which RTI could not be applied. However, in case of allegation of corruption, and violation of human rights, these agencies will also come under the law's purview. As per the law, the information seeker needs to pay a minimum fee which varies depending on the type of information on demand. In case of delay or refusal of information the responsible authority could have been fined upto Rs. 25000. The time limit for furnishing any information addressed to Public Information Officer (PIO) is 30 days. In case the application has been filed addressing Assistant Public Information Officer (APIO), the time limit is 35 days. However, within 48 hours information will be furnished if the information affects personal liberty. One can make more than one appeals to retrieve required information within 30 days from receiving information or within 60 days from filing of RTI application. The first appeal should be made in case of delay or refusal of information. Within 90 days from the first appeal the second appeal should be made to get the required information which is the last option to the information seeker to retrieve needful information.

RTI IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: ROLE OF COOPERATIVES

RTI may be utilized as a powerful instrument to challenge the secrecy of public administration system. However, such a utilization of RTI by a poor villager is not an easy

task. Usefulness of RTI mainly in rural areas gets facilitated when people get organized through an institutional framework which enables them to become familiar with the national, social and economic consequences. Any cooperative in rural areas is a socio-economic organization aimed at fulfilling the socio-economic interest of its members. Cooperatives are one of the perfect democratic institutions much essential in rural development. They are formed on the idea that a group of people can have those achievements which is difficult for an individual to achieve. The major advantage of a cooperative lies in securing its members dignity and self respect as a human being. Cooperatives encourage universal respect for human rights and people's fundamental freedoms. These are the institutions which promote social integration and cohesion by empowering and giving voice to the poor and marginalized. Hence, cooperatives in rural areas could act as an effective institution to make an instrument like RTI popular within rural poor. Therefore, to identify the qualifying blocks for the proposed application of RTI in W. Medinipur district, areas suffering from poor living condition but equipped with good number of rural cooperatives get identified.

APPROACH DEVELOPED: AREAS SUITABLE

In the present sub-section an inter-block level analysis across W. Medinipur district has been conducted based on four basic criteria. They are (a) Good capability criteria (b) Poor supply criteria (c) Poor living condition criteria and (d) Good social network criteria (refer to col. 5 of Table 4). Under the first criteria of 'good capability' blocks have been scrutinized based on their index value of poverty. A block has been qualified under the good capability criteria if in terms of the index value of poverty it occupies equivalent or better position with respect to district level poverty index value. Under 'poor supply' criteria blocks poor performing in supplying two or more of the selected service facilities with respect to district performance have been qualified. Notably, these are the blocks that could be identified as major backward of the concerned district. Further, a block gets qualified for the third criteria of 'poor living condition' if the LCI (Living Condition Index) value of the respective block is less than the district equivalent position. Under the fourth criteria of 'good social network' blocks have been scrutinized based on the degree of social involvement of people which gets measured by the degree of formation of rural cooperatives by the people of the respective blocks.

**TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF BLOCKS OF W. MEDINIPUR BY SELECTED
CRITERIA, 2010**

District/ Blocks	Good Capabilit y	Poor Supply	Poor Living Conditio n	Rich in Cooperativ e Societies	Suitable of Proposed Applicati on
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Jhargram	√	√		√	
Binpur-I	√	√		√	
Binpur-II	√	√		√	
Jamboni	√	√			
Nayagram	√	√			
Sankrail	√	√			
Gopiballavpur-I		√	√		
Gopiballavpur-II					
Shalboni	√	√	√	√	√
Keshpur	√	√	√	√	√
Garbeta-I	√	√	√	√	√
Garbeta-II	√	√		√	
Garbeta-III	√	√	√		
Medinipur Sadar	√	√			
Debra	√		√	√	
Pingla				√	
Keshiari					
Dantan-I					
Dantan-II		√			
Narayangarh	√	√	√	√	√
Mohanpur					

Sabang			√	√	
Kharagpur-I	√	√			
Kharagpur-II	√	√			
Chandrakona-II			√		
Chandrakona-I			√		
Ghatal			√	√	
Daspur-I			√		
Daspur-II			√		

Source: Computation by author. The results have been computed from the data obtained from District Statistical Handbook, 2007 and District Human Development Report, 2011

A block qualifies to enter into col. 6 only when it belongs to the intersection of columns 2, 3, 4 and 5 together. Blocks covered under col. 6 thus satisfy the following characteristics:

- (a) The households of the selected blocks are economically well off. [col. 2]
- (b) These blocks are poor performing in two or more selected facilities. [col. 3]
- (c) Quality of life of the concerned blocks is below the district average. [col. 4]
- (d) The total number of rural cooperatives across the blocks is above the district average. [col. 5]

Hence, it may be stated that altogether four blocks have been identified in W. Medinipur district which are suitable for application of RTI towards improvement in rural quality of life. They are Shalboni, Keshpur, Garbeta-I and Narayangarh.

RTI IN RURAL WEST BENGAL

As per the RTI Act 2005, state governments should opt for the rule within 120 days of the enactment of the law. In West Bengal with a clear delay of 47 days the RTI act has been enacted. Hence, a slow pace is visible from the course of action taken by Government of West Bengal as far as the implementation of the law is concerned. In rural West Bengal, the instrument of RTI got its value when poor villagers started utilizing it against several government sponsored economic schemes and programmes like NREGS, IAY, SGSY etc.

However, while analyzing the nature of RTI usage within people of rural West Bengal, it has been noticed that utility of RTI has been mainly generated against those projects which provide instant socio-economic advantage to the beneficiaries. Although, such gains have good implication on livelihood of rural households, application of RTI could have been much more beneficial, if they contribute to sustained economic development of rural community. As far as the sustained economic development is concerned, it is more about judging whether a generation is leaving behind the resources adequate for the successor. It is a natural phenomenon that people in rural West Bengal have been more interested to use RTI for personal gains rather than for community interests where the benefit has to be shared.

As far as the supply of information against the requests is concerned, Non-response and limited action are much evident in rural West Bengal. Delay in information supply being a common limitation, sometimes non disposal of requested information is also visible. It shows an unfair motive of public officials to restrict a common man to be involved in the process of decision making. As per the law, in case of intentional delay or any of the malpractice in supply of information, the responsible officials should be show-caused. Hence, Show-cause cases are much evident in rural West Bengal

CONCLUSION & WAY FORWARD

Although more than ten years have been passed after the enactment of the RTI law, a meager percentage of people know about RTI act in the villages of West Bengal. As far as the rural economy of West Bengal is concerned, the major problem in successful implementation of the law has been persistent lack of action and intentional delay in provision of information by responsible officials. The unfair motive of public information officers and the appellate authorities led to harassment of common people seeking information. It could have a dangerous impact as far as the success of RTI act in rural West Bengal is concerned.

The intended success of the RTI act may be achieved if the following implementational weaknesses could have been solved⁶:

⁶ Jena, Das, '*Right to Information Act and Obligation of Public Authorities*' (New Century Publication, 2009)

- The spirit of the law gets determined by public awareness of it. Lack of institutional and financial provision to raise awareness of people made the utilization of the law a mess.
- The institutions for providing information are not sufficiently equipped by adequate manpower.
- Quick and effective information supply is difficult due to inadequate and inefficient supportive staff.
- Lack of adequate training and orientation of public officials has reduced the productivity of the law.
- Employment of Information Commission in future course of time is not directed in the law which disturbed the functioning of the act.
- Ample number of excuses could be generated by unscrupulous functionaries against the inset exemptions reported under section 8 of the act.