

**Final Report on “Poverty, Hunger and Public Action”:
An Empirical Study of on-going Decentralisation Initiatives in
West Bengal**

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FOREWORD

No Social or economic problem in the world today, both developed and developing, is more urgent than that of hunger. While this distressing and unhappy state of affairs is not new, its persistence in spite of the remarkable technological and productive advances of this century, is a matter of deeper probe into the questions of poverty and social justice.

In developing countries, there exists an ‘overdeveloped’ bureaucratic apparatus inherited as a colonial legacy and tackling poverty and hunger is still considered to be an administrative responsibility.

It is true that many developing countries are experimenting with decentralization of public service delivery to elected local governments as they are directly responsive to the citizens’ needs. The extent of economic distress experienced by different individuals is to a great extent, a matter of common knowledge within the community. When the Panchayats and Rural Development Department decided that they would address hunger through a decentralized initiative, it was an unique opportunity to study as for the first time, the problem was looked upon as an issue of underdevelopment and the responsibility was given to the local government.

In the proposed project, we intended to portray the problem of acute under-nourished and near-starvation conditions for the bottom most segment of population. It was contextually relevant at the Government of India is seriously considering legislative action to ensure food security to the poor.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not express my gratitude to the members of the Planning Commission for entrusting me with the project with the help of Loka Kalyan Parishad. In a separate acknowledgement, I have recognized contributions of a few but I can not forget those who openly told their stories of sufferings to our field investigators. We have tried to be as true as possible to reflect their woes and sufferings and our failures to respond. I must acknowledge that without the help of Shrimati Mitra Bose, the project would not have been successfully implemented and managed in good time.

Poverty, hunger and environmental syndrome has to be broken and food security ought to be the fundamental right of the people to live a decent life. In a nutshell, community-led initiatives and self-governance can ensure what Mahatma Gandhi said, ‘there is sufficiency in the world for man’s need *ibid*’. In the preface, I have tried to present a historical perspective so as to learn from the past as if we fail, we are condemned to repeat it.



PREFACE

A Historical Background and Notes on Poverty, Famines, Hunger and Decentralised Public Action –
Prof. Durgadas Roy

“Poverty, Hunger and Public Action : An Empirical Study of on-going Decentralisation Initiatives in West Bengal “

“Famine has been defined as ‘a state of extreme hunger’ suffered by a population of a region as a result of the accustomed food supply” – Encyclopedia of Social Sciences.

Hunger and malnutrition are generally symptoms of a larger underlying problem – poverty in an economic system that recognizes, as Rachel Carson put it, no other gods but those of profit and production. Food is treated in almost all of world’s countries as just another commodity, like clothes, automobiles, pencils, books, diamond jewellery, and so on. People are not considered to have a right to purchase any particular commodity, and no distinction is made in this respect between necessities and luxuries. Those who are rich can afford to purchase anything they want while the poor often are not able to procure even their basic needs. Under capitalist relations people have no right to an adequate diet, shelter, medical attention. As other commodities, people without what economists call ‘effective demand’ cannot buy sufficient nutritious food. Of course, lack of effective demand in this case means that the poor don’t have enough money to buy the food they need.



Ending world hunger is conceptually quite simple. However, actually putting it into practice is far from simple. First, the access to a healthy and varied diet needs to be recognized as the basic human right that it clearly is. Governments must commit to ending hunger among the people and they must take forceful action to carry out the commitment. In the short run, the emergency situation of increasingly severe hunger and malnutrition needs to be addressed with all resources at the country’s disposal.

Agriculture must become one of the top priorities for the third world. Even the World Bank is beginning to stress the importance of governments assisting agriculture in their countries. As Dr. Ngozi Okonjo – Iweala, Managing Director of the World Bank, has stated – “Today the attention of the world’s policy makers is focused on the sub-prime woes, and the financial crisis. But the real crisis is that of hunger and malnutrition.....this is the real problem that should grab the world’s attention. We know that 75 percent of the world’s poor people are rural and most of them depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agriculture is today, more than ever, a fundamental instrument for fighting hunger, malnutrition, and for supporting sustainable development and poverty reduction”.

An important issue in the definition of famine pertains to the distinction between the event of famine and processes of hunger, undernourishment and starvation. Famines have generally occurred in societies in which some or many people do in fact suffer from chronic hunger and seasonal variations in food intake. Yet, there have been some attempts to make such a distinction. Three things are generally noteworthy about the connection between famines and official response. All were similar features either of the regime or of the period or both. The British had a centralized bureaucracy to deal with and discuss a policy on famines. It was a top-down effort, unlike the more decentralised, segmented, formless and chaotic collection of efforts that characterised most pre-colonial regime’s response to famine. The second feature was the great reluctance to give up revenues on the part of the East India Company, which imposed a human cost in times of famines. That feature, however,

was seemingly related with the third, pervasive asymmetric information and inadequate information on what was going on during a famine. Information problems were probably more serious because the rulers were foreign in origin and trying to set up a more centralized administration than in regimes before, who was affected and how badly were not definitely known, and the officials thought, probably rightly on many occasions, that these were matters of some false representation. Consequently, revenue remission and other forms of relief had a tendency to come in too late and too little.

The 1837 famine added another concern to this, dealing with famine-induced acts of crime or defiance. 'Depredations' were a symptom of famines throughout, but 1837 famine seemed to make such acts more frequent, and more general than before. The accent of these concerns changed overtime and so did the languages in which these issues were debated within the bureaucracy. For example, private trade tended to be debated increasingly in Smithian terms, which was an established paradigm by the end of the period of the study, but not at its beginning. Famines that occurred towards the earlier part of the study did not see large scale state action, but did anticipate some of steps that later became part of the famine relief policy. The 1883-84 became interlinked with a narrative of political dislocation and economic decay in the late 18th century, but led to a short-lived proposal of a set of public granaries. Two famines in the second decade of the 19th century brought the free versus regulated market question to the centre. FAMINES UNDER BRITISH RULE AND THE PROVISIONS OF THE 'FAMINE CODE' : "FAMINE COMMISSION" AND FAMINE RELIEF POLICIES :

Famine occurred in India at more throughout the period of British being the new Bengal Famine was first established, the rulers mitigate the effects of famine, were caused only by local failure widespread.



or less regular intervals rule, the last major disaster 1943. When British rule were all ill-prepared to even when such famines of crops and were not very

Before the Industrial and occurred in Europe, famine was a

no part of the world was completely immune. Actually there was no direct relation between the economic conditions of people and their vulnerability to famine. Thus, some of the most terrible famines known in world history occurred in India, Egypt, China, Greece and Rome at a time when these were economically most advanced countries of the world. On the other hand, in later times, Britain and countries of Western Europe, then economically backward and poor were more frequently menaced by famine other than any other part of the globe. But then, from the 19th century Europe began to forge ahead at first in commerce and then in industry. By the middle of the 19th century, it had already become the industrial and commercial leader and in material prosperity was the most advanced part of the world. "Famine was almost banished from Europe after 1850 but meanwhile Asia passed under its sway. Under the new conditions famine ceased to be a natural calamity and was transformed into a social problem of poverty and dearth. It did not offset the rich nations, or even richer sections of the poor nations, but a peculiar problem of the underdeveloped countries, where, even today, the larger portion of the population lives in a state of chronic hunger and undernourishment. A direct relation was thus established between poverty and the incidence of famine".

Commercial revolutions natural calamity from which

FAMINE COMMISSION AND THE FAMINE CODE :

The evidence from the 19th century data suggests that localized crop failures led to famines not because they created aggregate food shortages, but because they drastically reduced the demand for the services of segments of the population and consequently, deprived them of the manner to acquire food. Famines were therefore not natural phenomenon, but rather a result of the breakdown, in the wake of localized crop failures, of the social and economic networks in the affected regions. The

Famine Commission of 1880, appointed by the Government of British India, described the situation with clarity and poignancy :

“The first effect of a drought is to diminish greatly, and at least to stop, all field labourers, and throw out of employment the great mass of people who live on the wages of labour. A similar effect is produced next upon the artisans, the small shopkeepers and traders, first in villages and country towns, and later on in the larger towns also, by depriving them of their profits, which are mainly



dependent on dealings with the least wealthy classes, and lastly, all classes become less able to give charitable help to public beggars, and to support their dependents. Such of the agricultural classes as possess a proprietary interest in the land, or a valuable right of occupancy in it, do not require as a rule to be protected against starvation in times of famine unless the calamity is unusually severe and prolonged as they are generally provided with stocks of food or money or have credit with money lenders. But those owning only a small plot of land, take out by its profits their wages as labourers, and rack-rented tenants-at-will living almost from hand to mouth, are only a little way removed from the class of field-labourers ; they possess no credit, and on them pressure soon begins”.⁷

The ‘Indian Famine Codes’ developed by the colonial British in the 1880s, were one of the earliest famine scales. The Famine Codes defined three levels of food insecurity : near-scarcity, scarcity and famine. ‘Scarcity’ was defined as three successive years of crop failure, crop-yields of one-third or one half of normal, and large populations in distress. ‘Famine’ further included a rise in food prices about 140% of normal, the movement of people in search of food, and widespread mortality.⁸

In fact, the Famine Commission did not produce a code itself, but its secretary Charles Elliot wrote a ‘draft code’ which was not only in line with the findings of the majority of the Commission, but also stemmed from his own experiences in North Western Provinces and Mysore. This was circulated in the provinces in 1880 as a model for provincial codes, though at the time neither the Government of India nor the India offices in London had approved of it or of the principles of relief exposed by the Commission. Criticisms of the Commission’s Code by the provinces prompted the Revenue and the Agricultural Departments of the Government of India to issue its own ‘provisional code’. This was to be a model code for provisional use until codes based on principles agreed to by the Government of India and India office and adopted to their own particular circumstances had been developed by the provinces.



Two major explanations of British Policy at that time have been advanced. The first demonstrates the influence of the classical economic of British thinking in India on the question of famine policy. It is clear that many officials at the time were convinced by the arguments of Adam Smith etc. about the inadvisability of interfering with the grain trade. Their minutes and lectures give ample evidence. Moreover, there does seem to have been a shift of policy during the first sixty years of the 19th century in the direction such views would indicate. Nevertheless famine policy from that time started to swing back against laissez-faire towards greater intervention. The very fact famine codes were constructed for intervention, even though ‘political economy’ was still a potent weapon in arguments about the extent of government responsibility for food supplies.

The second explanation concludes that a major concern of the British was to keep famine relief as cheap as possible , so that new taxes did not have to be raised. Behind the smokescreen of laissez-

faire lay the fear that new taxes would undermine the British hold on the large owning and mercantile classes whose support was required to hold India. This is an attractive argument since there is ample evidence of the administration's concern for economy. A significant possibility was the influence of developments in Britain not concerned with famine, which had vanished as a threat, but in relation to the operation of the New Poor Law of 1834, Relief to the poor was a hotly debated matter in England, and the issues debated there included a number of the same issues which were involved in famine relief in India. And those responsible for policy both in England and in India, also shared a concern about the possible demoralizing effect of reliance upon relief. Endemic pauperism was perceived as of a different order from poverty. In both systems, administrators were faced with the problem that the poor lived such deprived lives that too often they were better off on relief than they were in normal times. The logic of imperialism intruded here too ; the District Officer was to remain the key executive in famine relief. As well as attempting to avoid the continuing commitments of the New Poor Law, the rulers in India believed that any large scale famine relief had to be kept under their control.

In this short background, we have traced the early development of the famine codes during which process provincial and personal loyalty, along with earlier considerations were important elements in the protection of policies developed in the famine years. The process was to be repeated nearly twenty years later when, between 1896 and 1901, famine again ravaged much of India and the government responded with massive relief schemes, two Famine Commission and a revision of the Famine Codes. From the interplay of the problems and bureaucratic conflict associated with these famines emerged the 'Famine Codes' that were to remain the basic guide to the British response to famine in India over the next forty years.

There was no major famine in the country after 1908 till fateful Bengal tragedy of 1943. "The responsibility for the latter must be placed in the circumstances created by the war and on the inefficient handling of the situation by the administration".

When India achieved independence, more than 60 years ago, the people of India were much afflicted by endemic hunger. They still are, Since India is often considered to be one of the great success stories in tackling the food problem, the belief in success has to be scrutinized in the light of the grim reality that we observe. It is true that substantial famines that so plagued India until independence has been effectively eliminated ; the sizable famine occurred in 1943 – four years before independence. And yet this creditable achievement in famine prevention has not been matched by a similar success in demonstrating the pervasive presence of endemic hunger that blights the lives of hundreds of million of people in India, Endemic hunger is a far more complex phenomenon than open famine, arising out of deeply entrenched socio-economic system. Consequently eradicating completely it demands more from the state and from civil society than the focused interventions required to avert starvation.

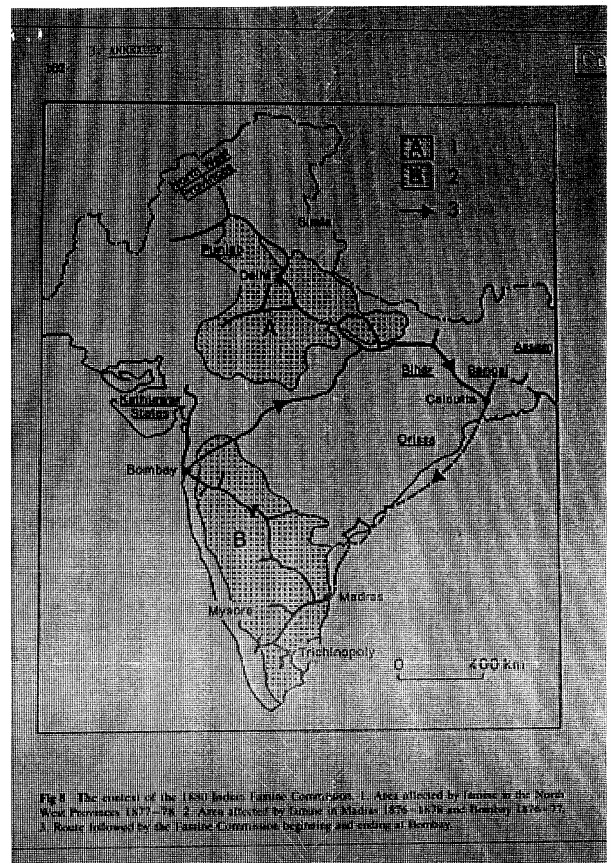


Fig 8 The extent of the 1830 Indian Famine Commissions. 1. Area affected by famine in the North West Provinces 1877-78. 2. Area affected by famine in Madras 1876-1878 and Bombay 1876-77. 3. Route followed by the Famine Commission beginning and ending at Bombay.

ABBREVIATIONS

GHI	:	Global Hunger Index
ICDS	:	Integrated Child Development Services
IGNOAPS	:	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
IAY	:	Indira Awas Yojana
NFBS	:	National Family Benefit Scheme
SC	:	Scheduled Caste
ST	:	Scheduled Tribe
OBC	:	Other Backward Classes
SHI	:	State Hunger Index
PRI	:	Panchayati Raj Institution
PRDD	:	Panchayat and Rural Development Department
GP	:	Gram Panchayat
PS	:	Panchayat Samity
AAY	:	Antyodaya Anna Yojana
BPL	:	Below Poverty Line
NREGS	:	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
DRDC	:	District Rural Development Cell
BDO	:	Block Development Officer
AAP	:	Annual Action Plan
PDS	:	Public Distribution System
NSAP	:	National Social Assistance Programme
SGSY	:	Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana
SHG	:	Self-help Group
RKVY	:	Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana
KSY	:	Kishori Shakti Yojana

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Block Development Officer - Coochbeher I & Dinhata I, Coochbeher

Block Development Officer – Malbazar & Kalchini – Jalpaiguri

Block Development Officer – Kashipur & Purulia II – Purulia

Block Development Officer – Goalpokhari & Itahar – Uttar Dinajpur

Block Development Officer – Domkol & Jalangi - Murshidabad

Gram Pradhan – Dumurgram, Murarai & Barla, Kalitha - Birbhum

Gram Pradhan – Patchhara, Putimari-Fuleswari & Oklabari, Purimari I – Coochbeher

Gram Pradhan – Kumlai, Odlabari & Garopara, Malangi – Jalpaiguri

Gram Pradhan – Belma, Pindra & Gorandih, Kalidaha – Purulia

Gram Pradhan – Dharampur I, Sahapur II & Gulandar I, Suran I – Uttar Dinajpur

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Concept and Background

India's Global Hunger Index indicates large-scale poverty and hunger and our failure to meet the challenge despite positive legislative provisions like NREGA and remarkable policy initiatives like ICDS, Mid-day Meal, Public Distribution System and National Social Assistance Programmes.

The State Hunger Index reflects an alarming state of hunger in West Bengal despite its good record of food grains production in 1990s and poverty reduction through decentralization and land reforms. According to RHS (2005-06), about 15% of rural households in West Bengal are suffering from moderate to alarming state of hunger.

On review of the situation, the Government of West Bengal in the Panchayats and Rural Development Department decided to address hunger through a decentralized initiative called SAHAYA (Nov 2007). It is for the first time that the problem was looked upon as an issue of under-development (not of relief which is the common belief even now) and the responsibility was given to PRIs for preparation of a poverty sub-plan to be eligible for special assistance. In brief, this is the current context of undertaking the study.

2. Objectives and Methodology

Since SAHAYA was unique in addressing poverty and hunger through decentralized institutions and processes, the study was proposed with the following objectives :

- I. To understand the present socio-economic status of the families identified through rural household survey.
- II. To find out, to what extent, the identified families have been able to access programme benefits and public services to which they are entitled.
- III. To find out enabling factors and scope of mainstreaming these families through decentralized institutions and processes.

For the purpose of the study, six districts of West Bengal namely Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Purulia were selected on the basis of head-count ratio of the poor according to rural household survey (2005-06). All these districts are identified to be backward by the Planning Commission. These districts fall in the bottom line of the human development index.

A multi-stage stratified sampling strategy was followed to select blocks, gram panchayats, and villages strictly on the basis of indicator-based scoring model.

Finally, 1691 households were randomly selected from the bottom 30% of the poor households from 12 Blocks of six districts covering 24 GPs and 48 villages.

The household survey was conducted by a trained team of field investigators after piloting of the schedule in Cooch Behar district supplemented by focus group discussions with elected panchayat representatives, block and district officials, community leaders and self-help groups. The data collected from the field were processed through SPSS package under the guidance of a statistical expert.

3. Major findings (See Chapter IX for details)

Disaggregated analysis of household data indicates that hunger is directly co-related to landlessness, wage employment in agriculture (lean season unemployment being very high) and inability to seek employment because of old age, disability, chronic illness in the family and contingent poverty because of closure of tea garden, river erosion, natural calamity etc.

Analysis of data reveals that access to benefits from the flagship programmes of the government is critically limited by lack of awareness, delay, procedural complexities, harassment, insensitivity of implementing officials and elected representatives, adverse selection and opportunity cost being higher than benefit. In case of students reading in schools, they are found to be not deprived of stipendiary benefits even if they are from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes or minorities.

The responses of the affected families indicate that unless off-farm employment opportunities are created, little occupational diversification is possible under the existing conditions of asset holding and natural resource management.

The survey finds that the state of hunger is also associated with various forms of exclusion – social, financial, cultural, geographical and political exclusion.

The survey finds that panchayats do not have the capacities, funds, functionaries and freedom to meet the challenges of hunger and slowly they are functioning as extended parts of insensitive bureaucracy.

The survey finds that out migration is steadily on the increase in search of employment leaving women and children to fend for themselves.

The survey finds that there are very strong public grievances against the process of selection of BPL families and none including elected representatives seems to be happy.

The survey finds that the public distribution system is virtually on the verge of a collapse and the poor have largely failed to access the benefits of buying subsidized food grains in the absence of vigilance, and transparency in the system – even the elected panchayat representatives do not have control over functioning of fair price shops.

The survey finds that the supplementary nutrition programme for women and children run by ICDS centres and mid-day meal scheme run by schools are regularly functioning though the supplies may be inadequate and service delivery may be inefficient. The survey also finds that basic preventive health care services like universal immunization are largely functional.

The survey finds that the people have lot of grievances against administration of national social assistance programmes and also the largest social safety net programme namely NREGS.

The survey finds that there is strong social mobilization to form self-help groups especially amongst women though their qualities of functioning are poor and capacities largely remaining undeveloped. It is suggestive that community-based groups can be used as vehicles for social and financial inclusion, if there is an institutional failure.

The survey finds that agriculture is still the principal means of livelihood though productivity is declining and operations tending to become uneconomic. Integrated management of natural

resources is selectively tried with success through ecological sustainable technologies with low external inputs. There is scope of optional use of natural resources through distributive land-leasing policies and public-private partnerships.

The survey finds that though the awareness of Gram Sabha is increasing, participation of electors is declining indicating that the community is getting disinterested to be associated with the functioning of the local government institutions.

The survey finds from disaggregated analysis of BMI data high levels of under nutrition across age groups with old persons suffering most followed by children in growth period (0 – 14).

There is a perceptible absence of association between state-level growth of per capita domestic product/per capita income with poverty and hunger co-existing.

Lacklustre performance of poverty alleviation programmes implemented largely by PRIs in West Bengal indicates that unless there are structural and functional changes in the process of decentralization and unless the communities are empowered to take control of their life and livelihood, the MDG of reducing extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 will be too distant a goal to be achieved.

There is a case for revisiting decentralization which has been found to be inadequate in absence of participation of community and social action.

4. Recommendations (see Chapter X for details)

Global analysis of agricultural knowledge, science and technology has raised the primary question whether science and technology be used to reduce hunger and poverty, improve rural livelihoods and facilitate equitable development. The eight cross-cutting themes include bio-energy, bio-technology, climate change, human health, natural resource management, trade and markets, traditional and local knowledge, community-based innovation and women in agriculture. Action research has demonstrated that with facilitation, community participation and support of self-help groups, decentralized initiatives of food security can be synchronised with government programmes and services and technical support. Some of the following replicable models can be tried after experimentation.

Type 1: Grain Bank

This traditional food security measure can be entrusted to self-help groups for management under the supervision of the community and the gram panchayat.

Type 2 : Nutrition Garden

Marginal and landless farmers can be given homestead land under 'bhoomi dan' prakalpa' to utilize front and backyard open spaces to grow more nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables. Community nutrition gardens can be set up by gram panchayats on unused common land with the help of self-help groups under NREGA to supplement nutrition in mid-day meals of schools.

Type 3 : Food Forest

There exist a wide variety of indigenous trees with high tolerance value that supply food and fruits which are rich in nutrition value but fetch a low price in the market. These trees have an important role to serve in bio-diversity web. Food forest is a climate friendly model that makes use of the unutilized land resources to provide nutritious food to the vulnerable community.

Type 4 : Common Property Resources

Common properties like fallow lands, water bodies, river and pond banks, embankments of irrigation /drainage canals, roads and railway tracts etc. remaining unutilized or degraded can be leased out to self-help groups to produce food, fodder and firewood along with medicinal plants.

Type 5 : Rainwater Harvesting

Self-help groups/marginal farmers in Chotonagpur plateau can be assisted to use barren lands through rainwater harvesting on water shed technology for food production under NREGA.

Type 6 : Integrated Farming

Integrated farming refers to agricultural systems that integrate different sub-systems like livestock, fishery, poultry and seasonal/perennial crop production. Land-based works can be done under NREGA while fish and livestock can be supported under RKVY.

Issue 7 : Biotechnology

Adoption of ecologically sustainable bio-technology such as breeding techniques, tissue culture etc. are readily acceptable as a cutting edge of change.

Issue 8 : ICDS

Gram Panchayats are to be assisted to use self-help groups to prepare nutritious food supplement with locally available foodgrains/legumes/nuts in the form of nutritive fortified with vitamins and other critical micro-nutrients. Coverage of adolescent girls of poor families under KSY is also recommended.

Issue 9 : Mid-day Meal Scheme

Mid-day meals can be served from the school to school drop-outs to encourage them to join schools. Self-help groups are to be given responsibility of cooking and serving mid-day meals. The community should be involved in management so as to supplement the meals with vegetable by contributing their surplus.

Issue 10 : Janani Suraksha Yojana

In stead of cash assistance, pregnant women who are poor should be given nutritious food supplement in the form of Nutrimix under supervision of the community.

Issue 11 : National Social Assistance Programme

In cases of destitute, infirm, old disabled persons, special provision may be made for serving hot cooked mid-day meals through self-help groups.

Issue 12 : National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

Synchronisation of public works of Forest Department, Irrigation Department, etc. which are labour-intensive is recommended for extended coverage under NREGA.

Issue 13 : Targeted Public Distribution System

Unless some radical reforms like fortification and transformation of food grains which are only acceptable to those who are in hunger, empirical evidence indicates that leakages can not be done away with.

Finally, improving public service delivery and reducing poverty and hunger depend on the political and economic context and how decentralization is designed and implemented.

I

Context, objectives, methodology and study design of the project on poverty, hunger and public action study of on-going decentralisation initiatives in West Bengal

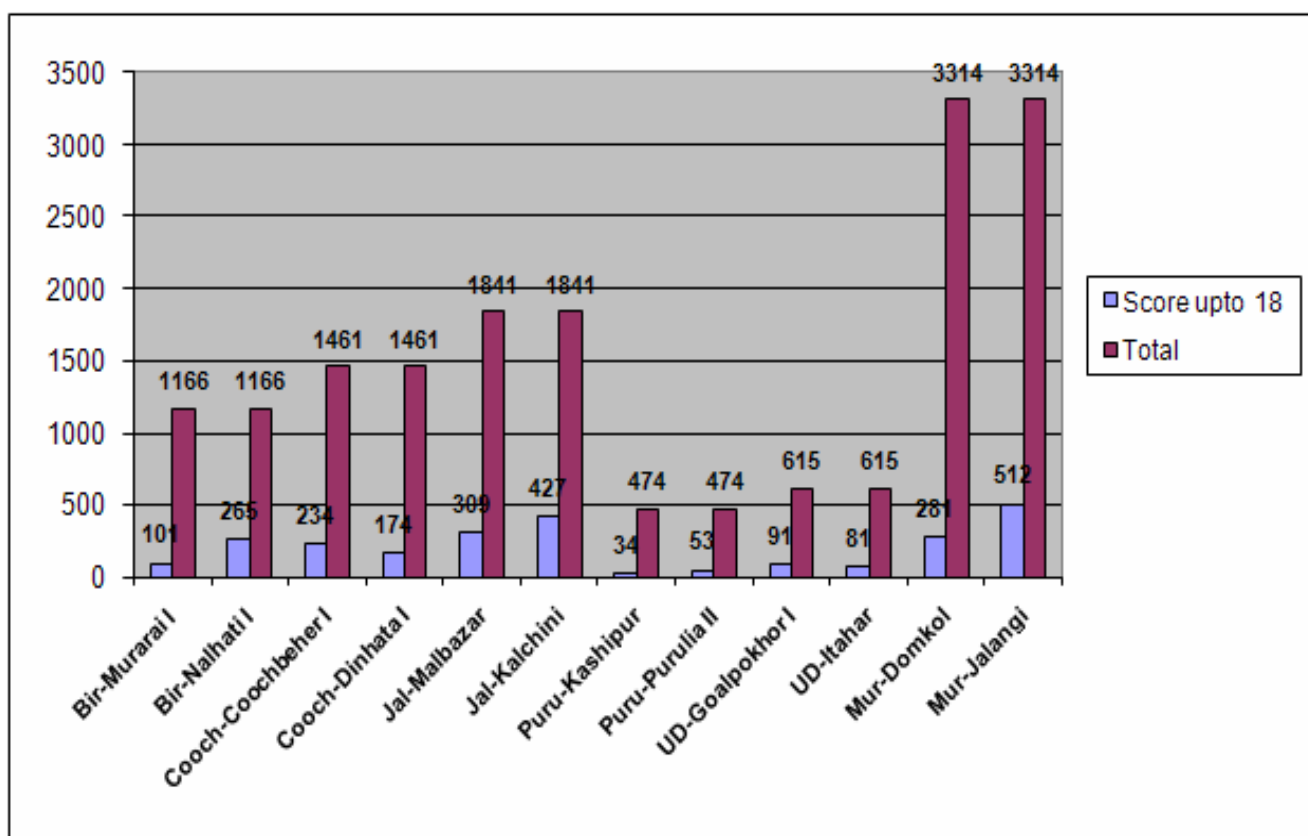
India's Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2008 score is 23.7, which gives it a rank of 66th out of 88 countries. The score indicates continued poor performance at reducing hunger in India. It ranks slightly above Bangladesh and below all other South Asian nations. It also ranks below several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa even though their per capita income is much lower than that in India. The World Food Summit target of reducing the number of undernourished people by half to no more than 420 million by 2015 will not be reached if the trends are not reversed. The state is not oblivious to the needs of the poor and hungry as is evident not only from positive legislations like National Employment Guarantee Act and Food Security Bill but also launching of pro-poor programmes like Mid-day Meal in elementary schools, supplementary food through ICDS centres and various other social assistance programmes like IGNOAPS, IAY, Widow Pension, NFBS, Assistance to SC/ST/OBC/Minorities etc. and Public Distribution System.

The right to food is a fundamental human right recognized by international law. The state has an obligation to ensure that no citizen is deprived of their right to food. The Supreme Court has issued several directions to the state to protect the rights of citizens for access to minimum level of nutrition including provision of mid-day meal to school children, supplementary food to poor women and children and distribution of food grains through fair price shops. Yet, there are concerns; a) the per capita production of food grains and their per capita availability are consistently declining and b) chronic food insecurity persists in a significantly large proportion of the bottom 30% of the population. The currently high rise in food prices and dwindling state of nature resources providing life support to the poor, are likely to affect the coping mechanism of the chronically malnourished. The issues and concerns have logically led to an inquiry into poverty, hunger and public action again.

West Bengal has SHI of 20.97 (see table below) and the state of hunger is considered to be alarming in spite of its good record of foodgrains production upto mid-90s and of poverty reduction through decentralization.



Dist.&Block	Score upto 18	Total
Birbhum-Murarai I	101	1166
Birbhum-Nalhati I	265	1166
Cooch Beher-Coochbeher I	234	1461
Cooch Beher-Dinhata I	174	1461
Jalpaiguri-Malbazar	309	1841
Jalpaiguri-Kalchini	427	1841
Purulia-Kashipur	34	474
Purulia-Purulia II	53	474
U. Dinajpur-Goalpokhor I	91	615
U. Dinajpur-Itahar	81	615
Murshidabad-Domkol	281	3314
Murshidabad-Jalangi	512	3314



Graph of Selected Blocks in Birbhum, Coochbeher, Jalpaiguri, Purulia, U.Dinajpur & Murshidabad

Districts Scoring upto 18 pts. in score of 100

Table 1.01 : India State Hunger Index and its underlying components, 2008

State	% of caloric under nourishment,	% of under weight children 5 years	% of under 5 mortality Death/100)	State Hunger Index Score	Rank
Punjab	11.1	24.6	5.2	13.63	1
Kerala	28.6	22.7	1.6	17.63	2
Andhra Pradesh	19.06	32.7	6.3	19.53	3
Assam	14.6	36.4	8.6	19.83	4
Haryana	15.1	39.7	5.2	20.00	5
Tamilnadu	29.1	30.0	3.5	20.87	6
Rajasthan	14.4	40.4	8.5	20.97	7
West Bengal	18.5	38.5	5.9	20.97	8
Uttar Pradesh	14.6	42.3	9.6	22.13	9
Maharashtra	27.0	36.7	4.7	22.80	10
Karnataka	28.1	37.6	5.5	23.73	11
Orissa	21.4	40.9	9.1	23.80	12
Gujarat	23.3	44.7	6.1	24.70	13
Chattisgarh	23.3	47.6	9.0	26.63	14
Bihar	17.3	56.1	8.5	27.30	15
Jharkhand	19.6	57.1	9.3	28.67	16
Madhya Pradesh	23.4	59.8	9.4	30.87	17
India	20.0	42.5	7.4	23.30	66

Source: India State Hunger Index, 2008 – International Food Policy Research Institute

According to Rural Household Survey (2005-06), 3.58% of the rural households (4.8 lakh households) and 11.54% of the rural households (15.45 lakh households) are suffering from extremely alarming to alarming state of food insecurity in West Bengal.

On review of the state of hunger in so many households (first reported in the media), PRDD decided that they would address hunger through a new initiative called SAHAY (Nov,2007). It was unique in the sense that since the introduction of famine code in the nineteenth century, it was the primary responsibility of the Collector to rush relief in case of distress. It is the first time that the problem was looked upon as an issue of under development (not of relief which is the common belief even now) and the responsibility was given to PRIs-as institutions of local governance – to analyse the situation, assess the needs and scope of assistance and prepare a poverty sub-plan through decentralized institutions and processes. Guidelines were prepared by the PRDD and the District Magistrates and the Presidents of Zilla Parishads were called upon to start implementation from October, 2008.

Guidelines suggested the following steps to prepare the poverty sub-plan for these families:

- a) A quick survey of the families identified by earlier survey to find the demographic profile, factors for destitution, access to government programme benefits and then prepare a family-based sub-plan for special assistance. The work will be done under the direct supervision of gram unnyan samity and gram panchayat. The survey will be undertaken by 'SAHAY Bandhus' (friends of SAHAY) who are generally members of Self-help Groups.
- b) Upon receipts of the village-wise plan, the gram panchayat will collate and analyse data and information and prepare a poverty sub-plan which, on approval of gram sansad, (gram sabha) will become a part of GP plan.

c) After finalization of the plan and making budget estimate for special assistance, GP will start implementation with their own fund to be reimbursed by the government.

The following activities were suggested in the guidelines for inclusion in the poverty sub-plan for SAHAY:

Proposed outcome	Possible Action Initiative
Food Security throughout the year	i) Linking old, helpless families with Mid-day meal scheme or arranging for home delivery of prepared food ii) Increasing units (if necessary) in AAY card iii) Issue of new BPL cards (if necessary)
Shelter for the homeless	i) Provision of IAY house to eligible BPL families ii) Providing government land to houseless families iii) Building housing units for community shelter iv) Other form of assistance for construction of a house
Livelihood scoping	i) Wage employment under NREGS ii) Assistance for nutrition garden or for horticulture iii) Assistance for crop cultivation iv) Assistance for fishery activity v) Assistance for household craft or processing or home-based industrial activity vi) Enrolling them as members of self-help groups and helping them to secure a livelihood vii) Special assistance to SC/ST/Minority families
Education of children	i) Enrolment of drop-out in schools ii) Distribution of books, stationeries, uniform or granting special stipend to children of destitute iii) Arranging special coaching through community initiative
Remedy in case of chronic illness	i) Arranging for treatment in government hospital or health centre ii) Purchasing life-saving drug iii) Arranging diet for sick patients
Clothing for the families	i) In case of extreme need where the poor are unable to buy cloth, distribution of ready-made clothing to them particularly in winter
Remedy in case of contingent poverty	i) Old Age Pension, Widow Pension, Social Assistance ii) Provision of facilities for the disabled persons
Reducing debt burden (specially of money lenders)	i) Membership in self-help groups ii) Linkage with bank/co-operative iii) Assistance for livelihood
Any other	Any effective intervention or special arrangement

Since this is a unique innovation of the PRDD to address the issue of poverty, hunger and public action through decentralized institutions and processes, the study was proposed with the following objectives:

- To understand the present socio-economic status of the families for identification of causes of extreme poverty and destitution
- To find out to what extent, they have been able to access benefits and services from the government as their entitlements and if not, what are the deterrents?
- To find out enabling factors and scope of mainstreaming them in the process of development through decentralized institutions and processes.

Methodology:

For the purpose of the study, six districts namely Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Purulia were selected on the basis of poverty indicators suggested by the Planning Commission. These districts represent agro-climatic diversities to capture context-specific realities. They are all identified to be backward by the Planning Commission. They are also in the bottom line of Human Developed Profile (WBHDR, 2004).

In the second stage, two Block were selected based on the number of poverty households found in the bottom 30% of the list in the Rural Household Survey (2005).

In the third stage, two GPs were selected from each of the six selected Blocks based on the survey data indicating that these households often remain hungry and for the maximum part of the year, they do not get a full meal once in a day.

In the fourth stage, two villages from each of the GPs were selected on the basis of the highest number of hungry population.

Finally, the households were selected randomly from the list of families scoring up to 18 in a scale of 100.

Table 1.02 : Survey Location

Sl. No.	District	Block	GP	Village
1	Cooch Behar	Cooch Behar	Putimari-Fuleswari	Sansad -9
.		Dinhata-I	Patchra	Sansad -12
			Putimari -I	Sansad - 12
			Okrabari	Sansad - 10
2	Jalpaiguri	Kalchini	Garopara	Sansad - 2
.		Malbazar	Malangi	Sansad - 21
			Kumlai	Sansad - 5
			Odlabari	Sansad - 16
3	Uttar Dinajpur	Goalpokhar-I	Dharampur-I	Sansad - 6
.		Itahar	Sahapur -II	Sansad - 7
			Gulandhar - I	Sansad - 5
			Suran - I	Sansad - 11
4	Murshidabad	Domkol	Dhulauri	Sansad - 3
.		Jalangi	Jitpur	Sansad - 8
			Ghoshpara	Sansad - 6
			Sadhikanderha	Sansad - 13
5	Birbhum	Murarai - I	Dumurgram	Sansad - 4
.		Nalhati - 1	Murarai	Sansad - 2
			Barla	Sansad - 13
			Kalitha	Sansad - 1
6	Purulia	Kashipur	Gorandih	Sansad - 2
.		Purulia - II	Kalidaha	Sansad - 2
			Belma	Sansad - 7
			Pindra	Sansad - 6

Table 1.03 District	Sex			Religion				Caste			
	Male	Female	Total	Hindu	Muslim	Other	Total	SC	ST	OBC	General
Jalpai-guri	184	171	355	220	89	46	355	43	188	15	109
Uttar Dinajpur	152	108	260	147	113	-	260	142	-	8	110
Murshidabad	162	160	322	3	312	-	322	1	-	1	320
Birbhum	145	145	290	63	227	-	290	61	5	3	188
Purulia	165	96	261	233	28	-	261	99	24	54	84
Cooch Behar	99	104	203	140	63	-	203	132	-	1	70
	907	784	1691	806	839	46	1691	478	217	115	881
	(53.6)	(46.4)	(100)	(48)	(50)	(2)	(100)	(28)	(12.8)	(6)	(52)

Source : Field survey

[Figures in brackets indicate % to total]

Structured schedule was administrated through trained investigators followed by group discussions with community leaders, elected representatives, and officials involved in implementation.



II

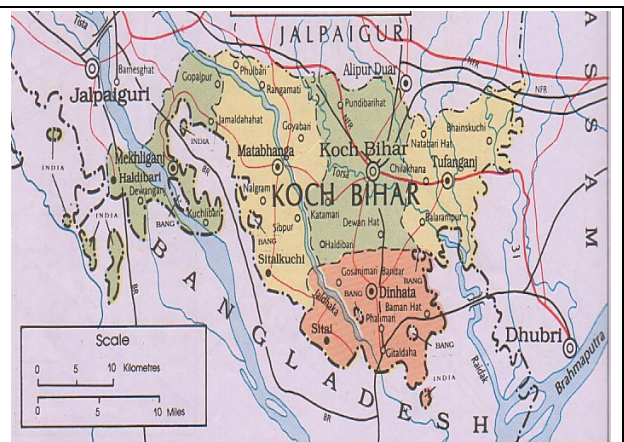
Poverty, Hunger and Public Action Study of decentralisation initiatives in West Bengal – Pilot Study in Cooch Behar District

Cooch Behar lies in the north-eastern part of West Bengal bounded by the district of Jalpaiguri in the north and north-west, Assam in the east and the international border in the form of Indo-Bangladesh boundary in the south and south-west.

Cooch Behar is essentially a flat country with a slight South Eastern slope along which the main rivers of the district flow. Most of the high lands appertain to Sitalkuchi area and most of the low lands lie in Dinhata area. The soil is alluvial of very recent formation. It is mostly sandy and loose. Annual average rainfall is 3,201 mm and is received during the south-west monsoon season. Favourable climate helps agricultural activities as population live in rural area and it has the highest percentage of scheduled castes (53%).

Human Development Profile of Cooch Behar District

Sex Ratio: 949 (West Bengal 934) (2001)
 Female Illiteracy: 43.88% (2001)
 Gender Gap in Literacy: 19.81 (2001)
 Pupil – Teacher Ratio: 85.83 (SSA-2006)
 Net Enrolment Ratio: 55.85 (SSA – 2006)
 Drop-out Rate: 33.45 (SSA-2004)
 Infant Mortality Rate (2005): Male - 76, female - 76
 Life Expectancy Rate (2001): Male – 53, Female – 57
 Work participation Rate (2001) :
 Rural – Male – 55.1, Female – 23.3
 % of agricultural labourers – Male – 24.4, Female – 43.0
 % of cultivable area to total area – 77.32 (2004-05)
 Cultivable area per agricultural worker (04-05) (in ha) – 0.40



Human Development Index (WBHDR-2004)

Index	Value	Rank
Human Development Index	0.52	11
Gender Development Index	0.45	12
Education Index	0.65	10
Health Index	0.50	16
Income Index	0.41	9

Source: Development and Planning Department (2007)

According to Annual Rural Household Survey (2005), 51.81% of the rural households (5,97,817) fall below poverty line – 54.28% of them are landless and 59% of them are agricultural labourers. 23% of the families migrate out for casual employment.

The pilot study was carried out in Cooch Behar district which was selected based on the following indicators:

- a) 51.81% of the families were found to be living under poverty line in Rural Household Survey (2005-06) (highest in West Bengal)
- b) 54.28% of the families are landless agricultural labourers
- c) 23% of the families are found to be migrating out in search of employment (highest in West Bengal)
- d) 3.59% of the families are women-headed households (they are generally found to be suffering worst)
- e) More than 50% of the households belong to scheduled castes who are generally found to be deprived (highest in West Bengal)

In the pilot study, the following sampling techniques were followed:

- i) Selection of two GPs from two Blocks which do not have similar socio-economic and demographic characters and have the highest incidence of hunger
- ii) Selection of two gram sansads from each GP having the highest incidence of alarming hunger
- iii) Selection of 203 families from the bottom 30% of the BPL households

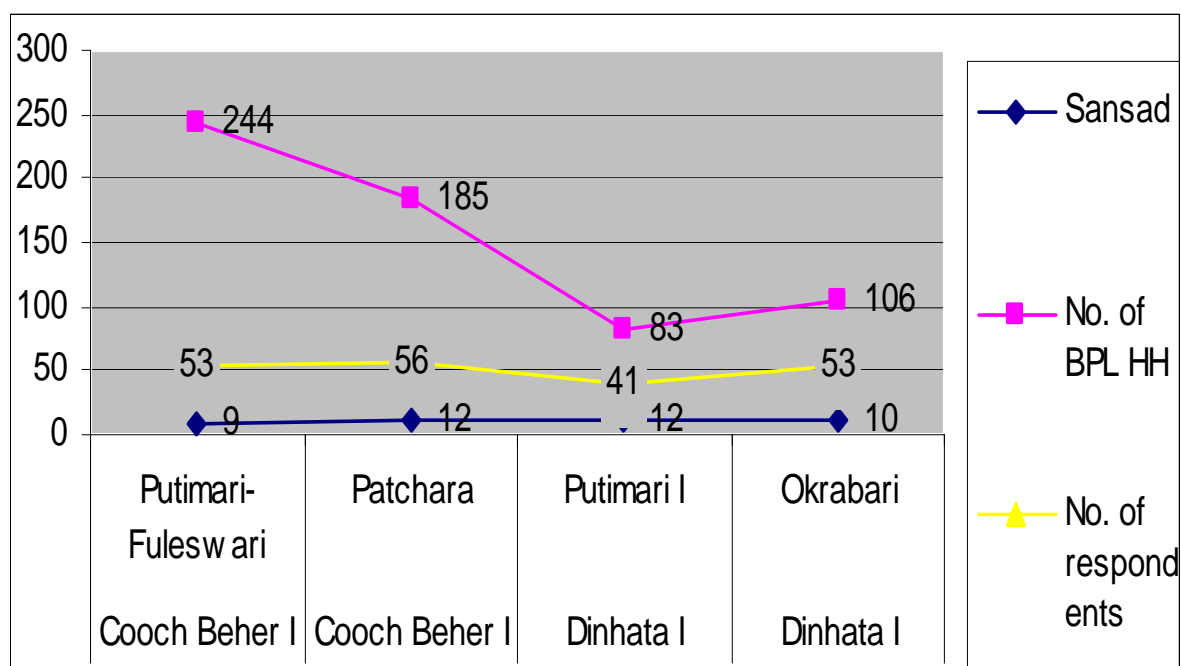
Structured schedule was administered through trained investigators followed by focus group discussions with the families, community leaders, elected panchayat representatives, GP-level, Block-level and District-level officials concerned.

The following table indicates the sampling size in the pilot study:

Table 2.01: Sampling Design of Cooch Behar I Block

Block	GP	Sansad	No. of BPL HH	No. of respondents
Cooch Behar I	1. Putimari-Fuleswari 2. Patchara	Sansad-9	244	53
		Sansad 12	185	56
Dinhata I	1. Putimari I 2. Okrabari	Sansad 12	83	41
		Sansad 10	106	53

Source: Field Survey/RHS (2005-06)



The demographic characteristics of the households interviewed are indicated in the following table:
Table 2.02: Distribution of households according to demographic characteristics (N=203)

Demographic Character	No. of respondents	% of total
Sex	203	
Male	99	48.8
Female	104	51.2
Literacy	203	
Illiterate	105	51.7
Neo-literate	31	15.3
Primary	42	20.7
Elementary	12	5.9
Secondary	8	3.9
Others	5	2.5
Caste	203	
Schedule Caste	132	65.0
OBC	1	5.0
General	70	34.5
Religion	203	
Hindu	140	69.0
Muslim	63	31.0

Source: Field Survey

- Analysis of household survey as to conditions of the bottom 30% of BPL households indicates that:
- All of them live in hutments made of clay and locally available cheap materials like jute, bamboo and straw
 - Destitution of the poorest families is caused either by the death of sole breadowner or lack of employment opportunities
 - The poorest of the poor still have to depend on money lender or advance payment against wage to be adjusted at lower wage rates of future employment
 - Interestingly, all the families depend on tube well as the source of drinking water indicating that the general level of consciousness about safety of drinking water is very high (Incidentally, Cooch Behar has abundance of ground water)
 - None of the poorest families surveyed has a sanitary toilet in their house
 - All the poorest families depend on daily labour with low wages and for a period of two months at a stretch during the crop season. Conditions of wage employment are uncertain.
 - All of the poorest families studied do rear livestock as supplementary source of income
 - All of the poorest households studied spend whatever they earn on food for survival and do not have a stock of food at home to cope with uncertainly. None of the villages studied has a grain bank (Dhan Gola) which can meet food requirement in emergencies.
 - All the families studied have at least one person migrating out in search of employment
 - 50% of the families surveyed very often face hunger while all of them have to go to bed hungry from time to time.
 - All of the families surveyed have reported conditions of total unemployment for half of the year except months of crop season
 - All of the families surveyed can earn Rs. 21 to Rs. 40 per day through wage employment on an average.

The survey finds strong co-relationship of hunger with landlessness, unemployment, low income and unforeseen contingencies.

Disaggregated data of household survey indicate that:

- a) 54% of the families surveyed do not have more than one member capable to work and earn
- b) 33% of the families surveyed have reported to be having two capable adult members to work and earn.
- c) 4.9% of the families surveyed do not have any earning member in the family
- d) 14.8% of the families send their children to anganwadi centre

Disaggregated analysis of household data indicates that those who suffer from chronic hunger and live under extremely alarming state of hunger are those who do not have any earning member in the family either because of death of the sole breadearner or because of disability caused either by old age or by chronic illness.

They survey finds that access to government programmes is very limited to the poorest families as indicated below:

- a) No family has got any wage employment during the month of survey (February-March,2010) under NREGS as no public work was executed-reported to be caused by paucity of funds
- b) 75.4% of the families surveyed have not received any benefit under IGNOAPS. Only 7.4% of recipients reported regularity in payment
- c) 2.5% of the families have received benefit under NFBS. There is absence of awareness about national social assistance programmes
- d) 1% of the families surveyed do receive disability pension. Others fail to get their entitlement as the procedure to get a certificate is complex and there is none to help
- e) Though 48.8% landless families know that they can be given patta (land right) for homestead land, yet, only 3.5% of them have applied for it. None of them has yet received any patta. One application is reported to be in process
- f) 25% of the scheduled caste families have reported to have received stipend for their student child

It seems for the analysis of disaggregated data that access to programme benefits for the poor from the government is critically limited by lack of awareness, delay, procedural complexities, harassment, insensitivity and opportunity cost being higher than benefit: only, in case of stipend from school, students belonging to scheduled castes do not seem to be deprived.

The survey further finds:

- a) When asked what kind of assistance they would like to seek from the government, most of them reported that they would seek assistance for livelihood –petty trade and services (43.3%), agricultural land (34%), livestock (14.8%), fish (2%), handicraft (1.5%), others (4.4%)

The responses indicate that unless off-farm employment opportunities are created, little diversification is possible under the existing considerations of asset holding and natural resource endowment.

- b) About 40% of the families surveyed are members of a self-help group and 18% of members have secured micro-credit from the group. Those who are not members of self-help group depend largely on money lenders. Of late, commercial micro-finance institutions are found to be making inroads into the rural credit market.

It is discernible that financial inclusion can be hastened up through the route of self-help groups if the public sector banks and financial institutions consider rural market as a business proposition.

Asked how they would use financial assistance if they would have it-the responses are in the following order: income generation (48.8%), consumption (22%), emergencies (7.3%), education of children (4.9%), daughter's marriage (4.9%), repair of house (2.4%), Asked about what type of income-generating activity a disabled person can be engaged in, the responses mostly are running shops or making paper bags/cups.

98% of households have reported that the panchayat members do not visit their houses or make inquiries of them. 62% of the respondents are aware of Gram Sansad (Gram Sabha). Only a few (3%) have attended it. 45% of the respondents have reported living under the same condition while 38.9% are finding these to be worse in the last 10 years.

The survey finds that the panchayats are slowly being disassociated with the people they represent. They are either following precepts of guided democracy or have become extended part of unenlightened bureaucracy.

Guidelines for implementation of SAHAY were issued for implementation by the PRDD in October, 2008. The pilot survey finds that the programme to address the issues of poverty, hunger and public action is almost a non-starter and has not been taken up with all seriousness either by the district administration or by the PRIs. The status report of SAHAY implementation in Cooch Behar district is quite indicative of its stagnation (see table below). Project Director, DRDC who is responsible for planning, monitoring and supervision of the programme in the district, considers this to be an additional responsibility in addition to implementation of SGSY which has the highest priority to him. DRDC considers its role as a channelising agency for funds and expresses their inability to implement it if funds can not be utilized by PRIs in the district. Most of the members of GPs visited by study team are neither aware of nor oriented on the deliverables of the programme. They are vociferous in protesting against the names in SAHAY lists and consider the programme to be another relief programme for feeding the destitutes by opening gruel kitchen. SAHAY Mitras can not be put in place as the remuneration for this work is too insignificant to attract any member of SHG. Pradhans are not prepared to run the programme from their own fund and wait indefinitely for reimbursement. Only BDO, Cooch Behar I has shown a positive attitude to give SAHAY a fair trial (see Boxes for observations recorded during focus group discussions).

Table 2.03: Report of SAHAY programme in Cooch Behar district (As on 31 January, 2010)

Sl. No.	Block	GP covered	Fund Released (Rs.)	Status
1.	Cooch Behar I	6	1,86,900	No fund released from PS to GP
2.	Cooch Behar II	1	32,760	Released to GP
3.	Mathabhanga I	8	1,65,900	No information
4.	Mathabhanga II	7	1,90,680	No fund released from PS to GP-GP continuing
5.	Dinhata I	8	3,38,100	3 GPs continuing
6.	Dinhata II	1	8,820	No fund released from PS to GP
7.	Tufangunj I	10	2,50,320	2 GPs continuing
8.	Haldibari	6	1,66,320	No fund released from PS to GP-1
9.	Tufangunj II	3	49,560	No fund released : I GP continuing
10.	Sitalkutchi	-	-	Not yet started
11.	Sitai	1	12,180	No information
12.	Mekligunj	2	29,400	No fund released 1 GP continuing

Total fund received - Rs. 40,00,000 . Fund lying with DRDC - Rs. 18,69,060
Fund released to 56 GPs -10 GPs continuing Source : DRDC,Cooch Behar

<p>“SAHAY list has not been properly prepared. Patchara, Chilkirhat, Suktabari are excluded though these are backward villages. We had to terminate the programme as we can not continue with our own fund” Pradhan, Putimari-Fuleswari GP Cooch Behar I</p>	<p>“Though we have opened a bank account, we have not yet started operation. There is still disagreement amongst GP members as to the centres where gruel kitchens will be set up. Pradhan does not agree to run it with mid-day meal programme of schools. Disabled people can not travel too far to eat food. GP had to pay Rs. 50,000 from own fund for distribution of clothings. No volunteer is ready to work with Rs. 5 per day” - Executive Assistant, Okrabari GP</p>
<p>“ Three of us are identified to be extremely poor in BPL survey and should have been included in SAHAY programme. To our misfortune, we are excluded. Haridas Dutta and two others” - Putimari – Fuleswari GP</p>	<p>“SAHAY lists are to be redrawn. All members of GP are to be oriented. SHGs are to be given responsibility to save cooked food, they should be paid in advance. I have recently joined. I shall give it a fair trial” BDO, Cooch Behar I</p>
<p>“ SAHAY is not now operating. Once I was advised to go to Baxirhat with old people. I was told that there would be a feeding programme for them. I took them in cycle vans. I waited long only to be informed that the programme had been cancelled. I had to feed them from my own pocket. When asked again, I refused to go.” -Kalisankar, Member Puti-Ful GP</p>	

Pradhan, Panchayat members and members of public - all have voiced grievances against lists published after BPL survey [see boxes to get a feel of public reactions to BPL lists]

<p>“ In our GP, we identified 29 families who should have been included. One of them is disabled, one a beggar and the third is homeless. Yet, they are excluded.” Budeswari Barman and others of Patchara GP</p>	<p>“9 families of Ramprasad village and 10 families of Barafulmari village are excluded though all villagers agree that they should have been included.” - Sayjan Bewa and 29 others of Okrabari GP</p>
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National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which could have provided safety net to the extremely poor households has been very tardily implemented. The fund flow was irregular as it was admitted even by BDO. Public works could not be carried out during monsoon months. There was delay at the end of the bank branches in payment of wages. Though almost all have job cards, few apply for wage employment under NREGS. They prefer to migrate and use job card for identification. Others prefer to work in brick kiln where wages are higher. The only safety net that is available to the poor can not be used to protect the hungry (see observations in Boxes)

<p>“We submitted AAP under NREGS with schemes and estimate in time but as there was no fund flow, we could not execute the works.” - Pradhan, Put-Ful GP</p>	<p>“Every family has a job card. Last year, only 6-7 days of employment were generated for a few. Many of them did not get wages in time.” - Villagers of sansad 9, Put-Ful GP</p>
<p>“In our GP, only 14 mandays of employment could be generated on an</p>	<p>“For one year, no work has been executed in Ramprasad and Barafulmani villages of Okrabari GP because of</p>

average. Neither fund is adequate nor flow is regular. Bank takes 7-10 days in payment.”	internal conflict amongst members of GP.” Villagers
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When asked why we observe significant differences across villages in performance under NREGS, BDO, Cooch Behar I who is dynamic and positive remarks:

‘In a GP, there are even 15 constituencies. All members are not equally active. Those who are active visit PS office and get their scheme vetted. Others take time to prepare scheme. Vetting also takes some time. That is why you can not see uniformity in performance across villages in my Block.’

In the pilot study the operation of public distribution system was observed and the experience had been sharply different in Cooch Behar I Block compared to that in Dinhata I Block. In Cooch Behar I Block, the supplies are regular in fair price shops for the last 6 months and even BPL card holders get 250 gms of sugar per unit per week. AAY card holders usually lift rice which is of fair average quality. Other card holders do not lift rice from fair price shops though the price is lower than the market. Some of the villagers have said that they can not buy on cash from time to time as they do not get cash in lean months and fair price shops do not supply foodgrains on credit.

Experience in Putimari I GP of Dinhata I Block is quite the opposite-people have grievances against PDS. Supplies are not regular. Even, AAY cardholders do not get ration according to their entitlement Quantity given is also less than that of entitlement. Shop owners take the plea of short supply. The lists of BPL survey and of Food Department are not reconciled and as a result, many families are deprived of AAY card. Pradhan expresses his inability to intervene as he is not informed of allotment nor given powers to interfere though he is a member of the monitoring committee.

The pilot study finds that mid-day meals are regularly served in elementary schools and ICDS centres. Generally, the quality of food grains is found to be fair. Villagers also confirm that quality of rice is fair though quantity may be inadequate.

National social assistance programmes are also of benefit to those who are hungry. The study came across lot of grievances against implementation of NSAP as also other central sector schemes (see observations of BDO, Pradhan and Villagers in Boxes)

‘There are 86 widows in our village. None of them has got widow pension. There are 40 holders of Old Age pension. They are not getting pension for 6 months.’ - Bidyadhar Barman and 48 others of Putimari-Fuleswari GP	Many old people are deprived of the benefit of old age pension because of their age wrongly recorded in voter identify card . - Villagers of Putimari Fuleswari GP (9 sansad) ‘I have selected 960 persons for old age pension but 400 persons can prove their age’ - Pradhan, Putimari – Fuleswari GP
‘We find many irregularities in implementation of IAY. Even cut money has to be paid.’ Villagers of Putimari I GP (Dinhata I Block)	‘Many wrong persons have been selected in BPL survey for IAY. We have undertaken case-by-case inquiry. Some of the cases have been held up.’ Pradhan, Okrabari GP
‘Nine of us are identified to be poorest in the BPL survey but none of us has got assistance under IAY.’ Manindra Barman and 8 others of Putimari-Fuleswari GP	‘Six of us have been sanctioned assistance under IAY, After release of the first instalment of Rs. 17,500, we could construct sanitary toilet and buy wood. We are waiting for second instalment. We are yet to complete construction’. Ukil Barman and 5 others of Putimari-Fuleswari GP
‘In one of my villages, the name of a	‘BPL survey identified 2000 families for IAY in my

shopowner has been selected for IAY. He has a house. When we refused to accept his application, he threatened us to go to court.’ Pradhan, Putimari-Fuleswari GP	Block. I made a detailed verification of the list and after getting necessary approval, could provide house to 4500 families.’ - BDO, Cooch Behar I
‘ Many families are not aware of NFBS. Some are suffering because of wrong identification in BPL survey.’ Pradhan, Okrabari GP	‘ In my Block, about 450 families have received benefit of NFBS. If papers are in order, cheque can be issued within a month though there is sometimes problem of funds.’ - BDO, Cooch Behar I

In the pilot study, the state of livelihood was also observed. Most of the rural households depend on agriculture as the principal means of livelihood. The area is still largely unirrigated . There is no power connection in villages studied. Productivity in agriculture is stagnating while costs are increasing. Agriculture is unable to absorb further load. Natural resources are dwindling. Dinhat I Block is under micro watershed programmes though no worthwhile watershed activity has been observed. Tobacco, jute and rice are major crops grown. Most of the people are landless labourers. They are left with no other option in the present state of environment but to migrate out to Northern and Western India in search of wage employment. Women have to work as day labourers, in absence of male persons, mostly in agriculture. They get better employment opportunities in tobacco cultivation.

In course of pilot study, cases of contingent poverty were noticed in sansad 12 of Patchara GP. They are victims of flood. The Saltia river passes through the village. Some of the neighbourhoods like Diglibari, Barmantadi, Mohammedanpara, Basirhat are severely affected by erosion of the river. About 20 years ago, there was an earthen embankment across the river which was out off by people of Putimari, Fuleswari and Chilkirhat forcing the river to cave into the village. The villages were in a green valley which soon became a huge sanddune. One-fourth of the cultivable area has become wasteland and communications are disrupted. Though the area was visited by the Central Team alongwith the local MP, no reconstruction has yet been done. People are leaving the village and migrating out in search of employment. The issue of resettlement looms large. This led the study team to make inquiries with the BDO about the right of the landless to homestead land [comments of BDO, Cooch Behar I are given in the Box].

“In Cooch Behar I Block , 47 families have been allotted homestead land. The awareness is increasing, so is demand. In Patchara GP, the worst problem is soil erosion because of change of course of the Saltia river. 7 families have been identified and the process of land allotment has started.” - BDO, Cooch Behar I

Of late, the poor households are mobilized into Self-help groups especially under SGSY and under SHG Bank Linkage Programme. SHGs visited are found to be weak. They are not properly trained. They have little skills to go for income-generating activity and financial management. In Patimari I GP of Dinhat I Block, none of the SHG members can explain the objectives of forming SHG. PD, DRDC who looks after SHGs under SGSY admits but argues that there are good SHGs too in Mathabhanga I and II Blocks. He can not, however, state any strategic plan to strengthen SHGs who can not be sustained unless capacities are built. Gram Panchayats studied have admitted the weakness of SHGs formed (see comments in Boxes).

“SHGs are weak. New groups are being formed. They have not yet been trained. They do not know how to generate income. They can only save. They do not have any future plan.”

Pradhan, Patchara GP, Cooch Behar I

“In our GP, there are 216 SHGs but none of them is functioning well. The Bank is not co-operating at all. Two NGOs are forming SHGs with two different approaches. SHGs get confused.”-

Executive Assistant, Okrabari GP



Women SHG members in Gram Sansad meeting



Women SHG members in Gram Unnanayan Samiti's meeting

BDO, Cooch Behar I is, however, optimistic. He has arranged training of SHG members in beautician's course and provided them kits to move from home to home. He is also planning to provide skills to SHG members on tailoring and mat making. He has no suitable premises for skill upgradation courses BDO admits that SHGs are not property oriented. They depend totally on government. They are not skilled enough in self-management and in income generation, Banks are insensitive to their needs. SBI has plan to open a branch at Putimari-Fuleswari.

SHGs are designed under SAHAY to take care of the families facing alarming state of hunger but their capacities are to be developed with strategic and planned intervention. Being poor themselves, they are appropriate social organizations to provide sensitive support to the hungry. They require intensive

social mobilization and hand holding support.

The pilot study finds that there is indeed scope to meet issue of poverty and hunger provided sensitive social mechanism works supported by a positively oriented development administrator like BDO, Cooch Behar I, Pradhan, Putimari-Fuleswari who has done good work under NREGA and GP member like Kalisankar Babu who has been able to provide even 100 days of employment. The hungry do not require only food to sustain but can be mainstreamed into the process of development by reaching out to them with escort services and provision of handholding support to generate employment and income. For the old and infirm, the social safety net is to be widened.

III

Poverty, Hunger and Public Action - Study of on-going decentralization in West Bengal - Jalpaiguri District

Jalpaiguri district in North Bengal is characterized by dependence of economy largely on tea plantation and diversity of ethnic communities. While tea plantation once secured livelihood of tea garden workers (mostly women), the industry has of late received market shocks rendering many gardens sick or closed and resulting in extreme contingent poverty, hunger, starvation, malnutrition and diseases. In plains, the people are dependent mostly on agriculture with low productivity in spite of high rainfall. There are occasional floods from the rivers affecting crops in the flood plains.

Jalpaiguri is a backward district in spite of its highest per capita income and 79 out of 756 villages (11%) are identified to be backward on the basis of female illiteracy and percentage of marginal workers. Its HDI rank is 10 out of 19 districts in West Bengal (see Human Development Profile below).

Human Development Profile : Jalpaiguri District.

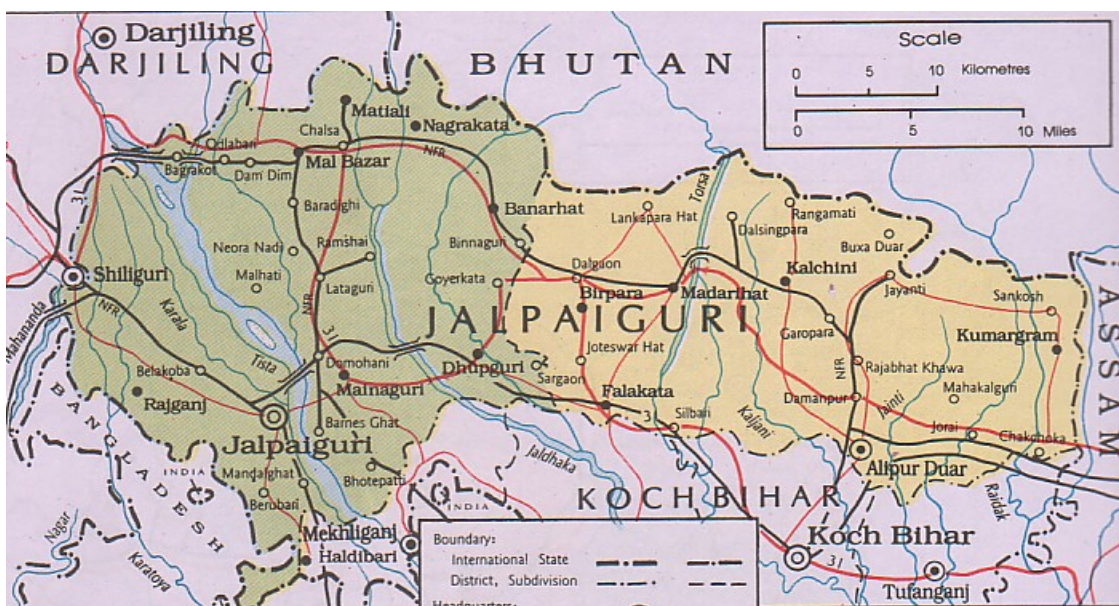
Human Development Index (WBHDR – 2004)

Rank

- Sex Ratio : 942 (WB-934) (2001)
- Female Illeteracy : 47.79% (2001)
- Gender Gap in Literacy : 20.62 (2001)
- Pupil-teacher Ratio : 64.70 (SSA 2006)
- Net Enrolment Ratio : 68.90 (SSA 2006)
- Drop-out Rate : 19.55 (SSA 2004)
- Infant Mortality Rate : M-62, F-58 (2001)
- Life Expectancy (2001) : M-61, F-63
- Work Participation Rate (2001) Rural :
Male – 52.2%, Female – 26.2%
- % of agricultural labours – M-14.2, F-25.7
- % of cultivable area to total area – 57.55 (04-05)
- Cultivable area per agricultural worker (ha) – 1.08 (04-05)

<u>Index</u>	<u>Value</u>	
HDI	0.53	10
Gender Dev. Index	0.45	12
Education Index	0.60	13
Health Index	0.61	12
Income Index	0.38	12

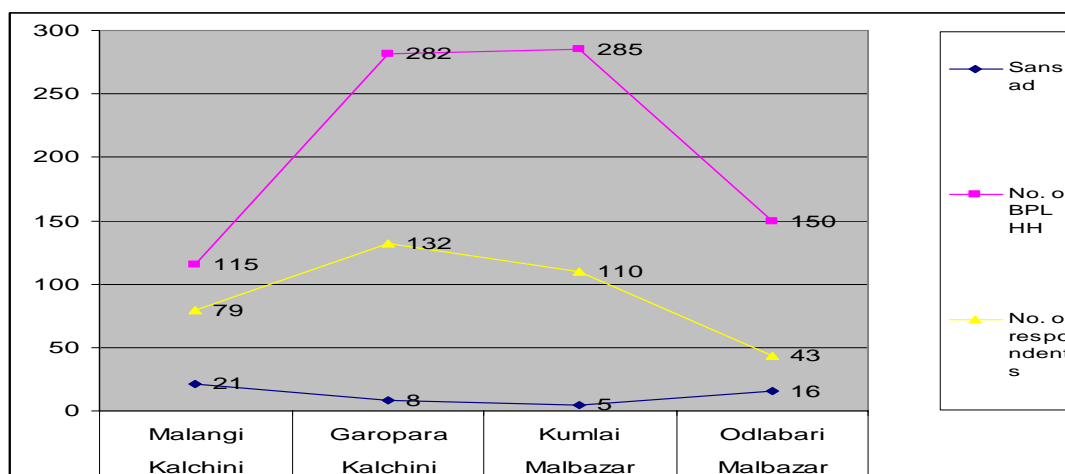
Source: Development & Planning Dept. (2007)



The study in Jalpaiguri district was carried out according to the following sampling design:

Table 3.01

Block	GP	Sansad	No. of BPL HH	No of respondents
Kalchini	Malangi	21	115	79
	Garopara	8	282	132
Malbazar	Kumlai	5	285	110
	Odlabari	16	150	43



According to Rural Households Survey (2005):

- 2,39,236 households (35.54%) are falling below poverty line based on score-based ranking model of poverty indicators.
- 70.46% of the households are landless and 20.43% of the households are marginal farmers.
- 7.33% of the households are homeless and 3.63% of the households are women-headed.

According to household survey of food insecure households conducted in the study area:

- In Kalchini Block, 93% of households are landless while in Malbazar Block 95% of households are landless.
- In Kalchini Block, 58% of the households do not have homestead land while in Malbazar Block 45% of the households do not have any homestead land.
- In both the blocks (Kalchini and Malbazar), all the households identified suffer from moderate to extreme food insecurity.
- In Kalchini Block, 81% of the households and in Malbazar Block, 88% of the households do not have any tangible asset to fall back upon in emergency.
- In Kalchini Block, 50% of the households and in Malbazar Block, 56% of the households are fully illiterate.
- In Kalchini Block, 33% of the households and in Malbazar Block, 35% of the families do not have any one in the family who can do manual job to earn a living.
- In Kalchini Block, 85% of the households and in Malbazar Block, 90% of the households are daily wage earners.
- In Kalchini Block, 80% of the households and in Malbazar Block, 77% of the households depend on non-institutional sources for household debt.
- In Kalchini Block, 49% of the households and in Malbazar Block, 58% of the households have at least one member migrating out in search of employment.

The survey finds strong corelationship of hunger with poverty, landlessness, homelessness, assetlessness, unemployment, low income, overindebtedness and other contingencies like closure of tea garden, low productivity in agriculture and floods.

The demographic characteristics of households interviewed are indicated in the following table:

Table 3.02 Distribution of households according to demographic characteristics (N=355)

Demographic Character	No. of respondents	% of total	Total Respondents
Sex	355		355
Male	184	51.8	
Female	171	48.2	
Literacy	355		355
Illeterate	148	41.7	
Literate	33	9.3	
Primary	63	17.7	
Elementary	60	16.9	
Secondary	41	11.5	
Others	10	2.8	
Caste	355		355
SC	43	12.1	
ST	168	47.3	
OBC	15	4.2	
General	129	36.3	
Religion	355		
Hindu	220	62	355
Muslim	89	25	
Christian	44	12	
Others	2	1	

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of survey data of the selected households in Jalpaiguri indicates that the primary causes of alarming hunger are the followings:

- a) Loss of land or other assets : (1.4%)
- b) Death of the sole breadearner : (14.6%)
- c) Widowed household : (9.9%)
- d) Disability because of age or otherwise : (9%)
- e) Addiction of the earning member : (7.6%)
- f) Victim of natural calamity : (2.3%)
- g) Overindebtedness : (9.3%)
- h) Social exclusion : (6%)
- i) Loss of income : (27%)
- j) Unforeseen medical expenses : (4.2%)
- k) Widowed household : (9.9%)
- l) Disability because of age or otherwise : (9%)

The household survey indicates that there is a need for a strong and an effective social safety net to ward off hunger prevailing in the bottom 30% of poor households.

In Jalpaiguri district, there is a disparity between tea garden workers and those who are living outside in terms of amenities. While of tea garden workers, 14% have TV sets in their houses, and 12.7% have a bank account, this is not the case with the poor living outside. Similarly, more than 70% of tea garden workers have some durable housing structure, those who are outside live on public land in insecure condition either on the river bank or by the side of the rail track. But tea garden workers

have also disadvantages. They do not have ration cards under statutory rationing system as they have limited opportunity of subsidized ration (for worker and her children) for the days of employment in the garden. The wages of workers are on an average Rs. 1200/- per month but deduction of Rs. 300/- is made for providing amenities. Their condition has worsened because of large-scale addiction. Moreover, the Panchayati Raj which has been lately constituted can not execute public works without obtaining consent of the tea garden management.

Analysis of households interviewed indicate that the major sources of livelihood in the study area of Jalpaiguri district is daily wage employment (82%) followed by petty trade (7.9%), livestock raising (6%), rural crafts (6%), household services (1.7%) and collection of minor forest produce (1.1%). The scope of employment in tea gardens having been severely restricted and unless off-farm enterprises are developed, livelihood scoping is full of uncertainties. The skills of workforce are also very low and migration is the only way out. The families interviewed are interested to raise livestock particularly dairy animals as the green feed is available locally. The tea garden management will not allow grazing cattle in the garden area but stall feeding is feasible. There is also scope of natural resource-based livelihood like mushroom cultivation, apiary or forest-based processing and value-addition.

Analysis of disaggregated data from household survey indicates that non-institutional sources of household debt are overwhelmingly high (84.6%) with shop-keeper accounting for 43%, moneylender (30.7%) and friends/relatives (8.9%). Of the institutional sources, micro-finance institutions have the largest share (12.6%), co-operatives (4%), SHG (2.2%) and banks (1.5%). Because of institutional void, micro-finance institutions, often, with usurious terms of tending, are making aggressive inroads into rural credit market. **Financial inclusion is a long way to come.**

Analysis of disaggregated data from households surveyed indicate that 73.3% of households are using tapwater facilities or tube-well water for drinking within a distance of maximum 200 meters from the house (In tea garden areas, drinking water supply is done by tea garden management for their workers). At Gangutia, water is supplied to the tea garden workers in tanks and the women have to travel upto 400 meters to fetch water. During inclement weather, water supply gets disrupted. At Purba Damdim in Malbazar Block which is not a tea garden area, the major source of water is well. In many houses, there are private wells, sometimes neighbourhood groups have community wells, some of the wells are also constructed under government programme. Coverage of houses with hygienic toilets is poor as only 21.4% of the households do have sanitary toilets. Road communication facilities in Purba Damdim GP are ill developed and the villagers have to travel long distance walking to reach gram panchayat office or the market. Situation becomes worse when the rivers are in floods.

Response analysis of food insecure families interviewed indicates that:

- a) In spite of tea gardens being the driver of the local economy, 15.8% of the families are suffering from hunger very often.
- b) In spite of subsidized ration available for tea garden under workers, 94% of the respondents have said that they have to buy food from the open market.
- c) Though average daily income of these families varies between Rs. 35 and Rs. 50, their purchasing power is limited because of rise in price of foodgrains in the open market.
- d) 56% of the respondents have to borrow from the money lender to buy food.

Family survey indicates that in spite of the local economy being dependent on tea plantations, tea industry is failing to generate multiplier effect which could have reduced hunger. Still, the survey finds that about 16% of the families either living within the garden or outside in the valley are often facing hunger. In some closed or abandoned tea gardens, there had been reports of starvation deaths. Sporadic dole-outs immediately after closure or some temporary measures have failed to reduce the rate of hunger in vulnerable families.

The survey attempted to probe into access of programme benefits or public services. Field survey reveals that:

- a) In spite of 90% of the families having job cards, 62.8% of job card holders have got wage employment upto 15 mandays in a year and 14.6% upto 30 days. It is admitted that in tea garden land, no public work can be executed without the permission of the garden management but even in plain areas (Purba Dim Dim – Malbazar Block), not more than 20 person days of wage employment could be created under NREGA. At least, road works could have been executed to improve communication from GP to Purba Dim Dim which otherwise remains inaccessible. There was also scope of excavating water courses like Kumlai (Malbazar Block) or the Chel (Odlabari).
- b) 65% of the families do not have school going children but those who have are regularly getting mid-day meals.
- c) 58% of respondents reported regular functioning of anganwadi centres, 24.3% reported irregular functioning and 17.6% of reported closure of the centre.
- d) PDS which operates in non-tea garden areas is virtually dysfunctional with irregular and inadequate supplies. The tea garden workers are entitled to get subsidised ration but the supplies, though cheap, are irregular and inadequate. Entitlement is for the tea garden worker or her minor children – not for others in the family. If the worker is absent, she is not entitled to draw ration.
- e) 98% of the respondent households have health cards and they have access to basic preventive health services.

The survey finds that except supplementary feeding in elementary schools all other public services which could have acted as safety nets have failed to deliver. SAHAYA, a state sponsored programme to address hunger has not been found to be operational though training of SAHAYA Bandhu has been done in Malangi GP and Purba Dim Dim GP.

Focus group discussions with the villagers reveal that:

- a) As most of the families do not have homestead and, they have started to seek shelter by the side of railway track, public road or river bank.
- b) Only limited no. of families have access to IAY. In Garopara GP, it has been decided to assist tea garden residents under IAY as the grant land is ultimately owned by the government.
- c) Tea garden families are addicted to liquor and living in a cash society, and they do not think of future.
- d) Migration of non-workers including girls is increasing in these areas.
- e) Targeting of BPL families has been wrongly done, biased or manipulated.
- f) The residents of tea garden areas are not entitled to get ration from the PDS.
- g) After deduction of charges for provision of services, the tea garden workers get inadequate wages to provide for food security. Addiction has worsened their situation.
- h) Whenever tea garden closes, school drop outs go on increasing.
- i) The villagers are not fully aware of social security benefits like old age pension, widow pension, social insurance.

The survey finds that with the closure or abandonment, tea garden workers and their dependents are facing extreme pangs of contingent poverty and there is an institutional failure to ward off hunger when it occurs. The Panchayats are in the first generation and should be given adequate powers, functions, funds and functionaries to provide basic services to the people in the tea garden areas.

In extreme cases, people have to depend on natural resources which can provide life support to them. They collect minor forest produce or dig out pebbles from the river bed to be sold for food. They prefer to raise livestock particularly house dairy as they can feed them from natural resources. Some of them prefer small business if finance is accessible.

Alternate Livelihood Options of Tea Garden Population – Radharani experience : Food Security for demobilized tea garden workers :

In the beginning of the new millennium economic crisis in tea gardens particularly in Kalchini Block, resulting in closure or suspension of work brought in its wake, untold miseries to tea garden inhabitants especially women who had to bear with the brunt of joblessness and hunger.



It was also the time when the women decided to mobilize themselves into self help groups and SGSY had become operational. This had a ripple effect and when the field studies were conducted, SHGs had been formed in all the villages. Most of the SHG are found to be weak because of absence of facilitation and hand-holding support for livelihood security.



In 2000-2001, Loka Kalyan Parishad initiated an action research project with the objective of providing food security to demobilized tea garden workers by utilizing natural resources and through decentralized institutions and processes in Radharani Tea Garden of Chuapara Gram Panchayat (Kalchini Block). Possible group activities identified after participatory resource mapping are:

○ **Planting and use of shade trees**

Given the continuing need of planning more shade trees within the tea garden to create a suitable micro-climate, groups can take up nursery and plantation of shade trees under the technical guidance of the garden management.



○ **Planting of trees on the garden perimeter, embankments, roadsides and at other spots identified by garden management**

Nurseries can be raised by groups and planting can be done by them with the right to the annual produce or yield from such trees.

○ **Productive use of fallows**

Garden management should give right of use to groups for fodder cultivation or growing of food crops such as maize or pulses intercropped with cassava and pigeon pea.

○ **Productive activities based on non-wood minor forest produce**



Appreciating that a large section of non-worker population depends on collection of minor forest products and with processing and value addition, the minor forest products can be used for commercial use.



○ **Black pepper**

Shade trees provide an ideal support for vines which do not interfere with tea production such as black pepper.

○ **Tea industry inputs**

Group members can take up vermin compost production either individually or as a group and this can be highly beneficial input for tea production.

○ **Livestock-based livelihood**

As this is a preferred activity of SHG members, upgradation of existing skills to rear RIR chicks or introducing artificial insemination to improve the local breed of cattle.

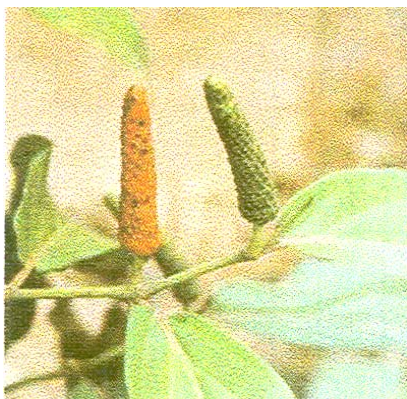
○ **Apiculture**

North Bengal with its largely forested areas and with a multitude of flowering plant species can provide the resource base for bee-keeping as a livelihood activity.

○ **Mushroom Cultivation**

North Bengal with its milder year round cultivation of oyster include mushrooms. Spawn production activity.

○ **Essential oils and medicinal plants**



summers is conducive to almost mushrooms. Cultural food habits production centres can help this



The soil and weather appear eminently suitable for both citronella and lemon grass which are source of essential oils. Livelihood activity can also be based on collection, processing and value-addition of plants which are used as natural food colorants.

Food Security in Sick Tea Gardens of North Bengal : Radharani Experience of Loka Kalyan Parishad in Jalpaiguri District :

After baseline survey of the tea garden families, the following livelihood options were explored by Loka Kalyan Parishad through MOU between the Management, the Sansad working committee (people's committee) and Chuapara Gram Panchayat.

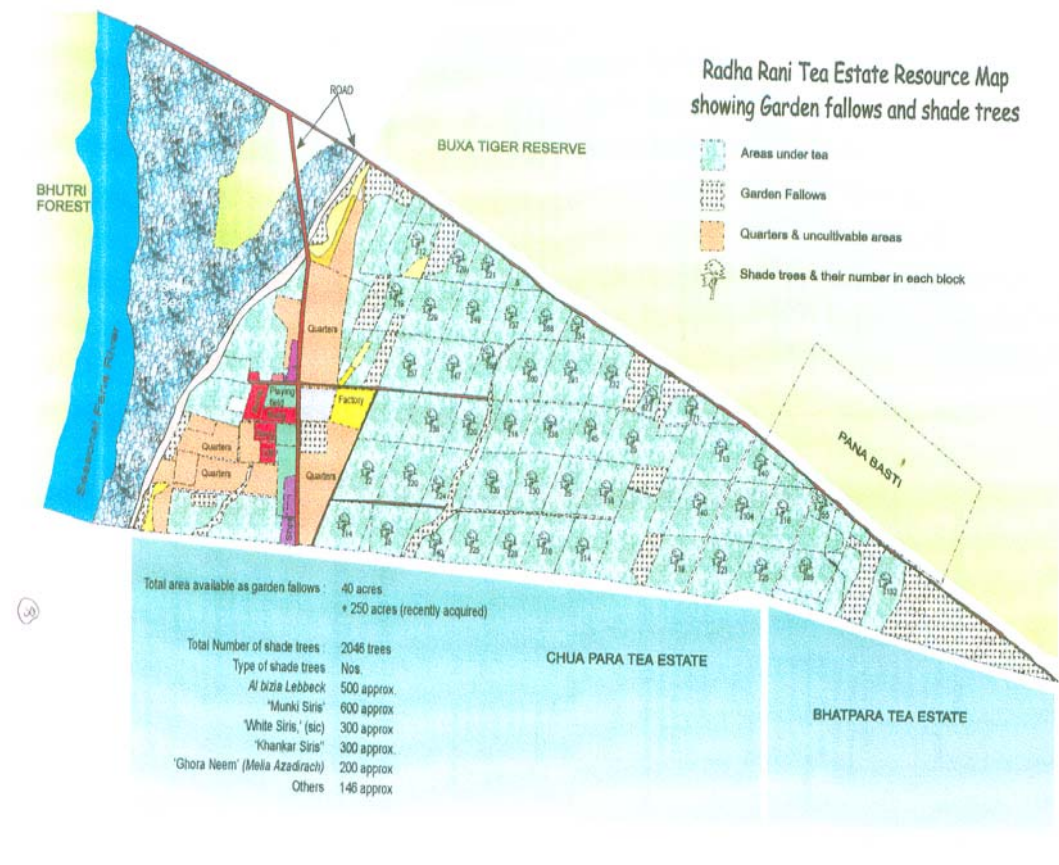
- A large number of families depended on livestock to supplement income.
- 131 families collected fodder from the forests and 120 families purchased feed. 305 families collected firewood from the forests and yet 133 families had need of buying more fuel.
- 151 persons were seeking wage employment and 219 persons reported seeking home-based employment. A total of 1707 person-days of labour remained unproductive.

The Action Plan for addressing food security included :

- A livestock upgradation programme with units of 2 RIR cocks and two sets of 10 RIR chicks each.
- Nutrition garden programme for all families (each family has land attached to their dwelling unit).
- Groups were allotted one proximal plot of unutilised land for food production (mainly maize).

- The garden parameter and the river embankment were selected for the first six groups to plant pigeon pea.
- Black peeper samplings were provided to groups for planting in about 200 shed trees besides planting at home.
- Training on vermin – composting was conducted as the management evinted interest to buy organic manure from the groups.
- Training was given on bee – keeping and mushroom growing as home based activities.

Radhani experience demonstrated how demobilized women workers of tea gardens could seek alternative livelihood options to ward off food insecurity. This experience is now replicated by 300 women self-help groups of Kalchini Block where there is largest number of sick gardens.



IV

Poverty, Hunger and Public Action – Study of on-going decentralization initiatives In West Bengal - Uttar Dinajpur District

Till independence, Uttar Dinajpur was an important constituent of the Rajshahi Division in undivided Bengal. The Radcliffe award in 1947, which assigned the western portions of Dinajpur to West Bengal was followed by the transfer of a narrow land corridor from Purnea district for connectivity to the north and the north-east. The district of Uttar Dinajpur came into existence on April, 1992 after bifurcation of the erstwhile West Dinajpur district. It is predominantly agricultural with very rich soil, which helps to grow jute, paddy, vegetables, wheat, mustard and tea in the Teesta Valley. The agro-climatic condition is favourable for horticulture, sericulture and floriculture. The district is rich in ground water reserve as also in surface water resources. The district is used as a transit route for smuggling and trafficking. The border regions suffer from the corrupting influence of the smuggling trade.

The HDI rank of the district is 13 (WBHDR 2004) out of 19 districts in West Bengal. In spite of its rich natural endowment, 760 villages (50.53%) out of 1504 villages are identified to be backward. (see HDI profile below).

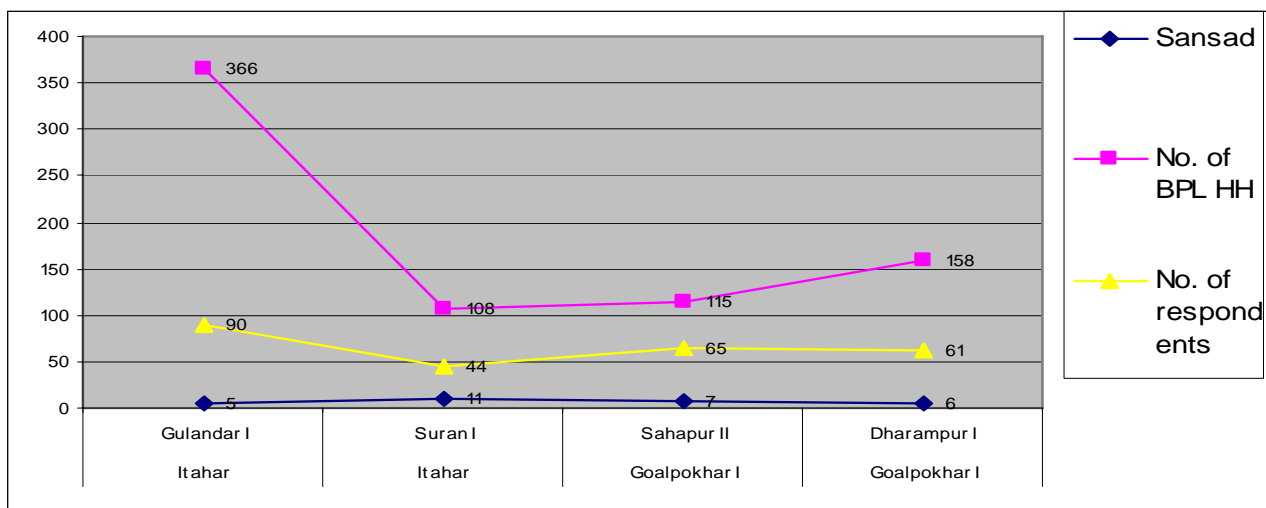
HDI Profile: Uttar Dinajpur District

<p><u>Demography</u> % of rural population (2001)-87.94 % of Muslim population (2001) – 47.36 % of SC population (2001)-27.71 % of ST population (2001) – 5.11</p>	<p><u>Health</u> IMR (2001) Male - 68 Female – 59</p>																		
<p><u>Education (Literacy rate%)</u> All (2001) 47.89 Male 58.48 Female 36.51 SC (2001) Male 63.49 Female 35.71 ST (2001) Male 39.61 Female 17.63 Net enrolment in primary School (2006) : 94.43 Drop-out rate in primary school (2006) : 42.33</p>	<p><u>Employment</u> Work participation Rate (2001) –Rural Male 52.1 Female 25.5</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><u>WBHDR</u></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u>Value</u></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u>Rank</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Human Development Index</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0.51</td> <td style="text-align: center;">13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gender Development Index</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0.46</td> <td style="text-align: center;">10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education Index</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0.53</td> <td style="text-align: center;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Health Index</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0.62</td> <td style="text-align: center;">11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Income Index-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0.39</td> <td style="text-align: center;">11</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<u>WBHDR</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	Human Development Index	0.51	13	Gender Development Index	0.46	10	Education Index	0.53	15	Health Index	0.62	11	Income Index-	0.39	11
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Education Index	0.53	15																	
Health Index	0.62	11																	
Income Index-	0.39	11																	

The study in Uttar Dinajpur district was carried out according to the following sampling design:

Table 4.01

Block	GP	Sansad	No.of BPL HH	No.of respondents
Itahar	Gulandar-I	Sansad 5	366	90
	Surun – I	Sansad 11	108	44
Goalpokhar I	Sahapur-II	Sansad7	115	65
	Dharampur- I	Sansad 6	158	61



According to Rural Household Survey (2005):

- 1,96,303 households (40%) out of 4,90,360 households are identified to be living below poverty line.
- Of the BPL families, 58% are landless and 27% are marginal farmers
- Of the BPL families, 4% of the households are homeless and 2% are women-headed
- Of the BPL families, outmigration of male members in 15% of the rural households for casual employment outside.

Human Poverty Index

Human Poverty Index (HPI) is an inverse-valued coefficient that indices current levels of human deprivation. HPI of Uttar Dinajpur blocks has been computed drawn on data from the 2001 census and the block-wise BPL data available from RHS (2005).

Modified Human Poverty Index

<u>DD Block</u>	<u>HPI (value)</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Goalpokhar II	0.542	1
Itahar	0.503	2
Goalpokhar I	0.499	3
Hemtabad	0.473	4
Karandighi	0.459	5
Islampur	0.454	6
Chopra	0.436	7
Raiganj	0.408	8
Kaliaganj	0.406	9

Source : Uttar Dinajpur DHDR, 2010



According to household survey of food insecure families in Uttar Dinajpur district :

- 93.7% are landless and 39% do not have any house of their own

- b) Almost all of them have reported that they can secure one meal a day for most of the time
- c) 89% of them have reported that they do not have any tangible asset to fall back upon in emergency
- d) 70% of the households surveyed do not have any literate member
- e) 42% of the families surveyed have reported that they do not have any member who can do manual labour and earn for them



- f) 62% of the families have to depend on non-institutional sources and 27% do not have any external borrowing
- g) 90% of the families have reported that they have to depend on daily wage employment for livelihood
- h) 52% of the families have reported that the male members migrate out in search of casual employment

The survey finds strong corelationship of hunger with landlessness, assetlessness, illiteracy, absence of skills for wage employment, large-scale unemployment and absence of able-bodied persons to work and earn for the family.

The demographic characteristics of households interviewed are indicated in the following table:

Table 4.02 Distribution of households according to demographic characteristics (N=260)

Demographic Character	No. of respondents	% of total	Total Respondents
Sex	260		260
Male	152	58.5	
Female	108	41.5	
Literacy	260		260
Illeterate	190	73.1	
Literate	15	5.8	
Primary	30	11.5	
Elementary	17	6.5	
Secondary	7	2.7	
Others	1	4.0	
Caste	260		260
SC	142	54.6	
ST	Nil	-	
OBC	8	3.1	
General	110	42.3	
Religion	260		260
Hindu	147	56.5	
Muslim	113	43.5	
Christian	Nil	-	
Others	Nil	-	

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of data collected through survey of selected households suffering from hunger in Uttar Dinajpur district indicates that the proximate causes of hunger are attributed to:

- a) Death of sole bread-earner in the family - (19.2%)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---------|
| b) | Addiction of the earning member - | (1.9%) |
| c) | Victims of natural calamity - | (2.3%) |
| d) | Dependence on money lender - | (4.2%) |
| e) | Loss of income - | (61.2%) |
| f) | Widowed household - | (12.7%) |

The household survey indicates that there is a need for a strong and an effective social safety net alongwith family-wise planning for generation of either wage employment or self-employment and endowment of appropriate skills.

As Uttar Dinajpur district is predominantly agrarian, people depend totally on agriculture for their livelihood – 73% of households surveyed are agricultural labourers, followed by 14% (self-cultivation) fishing (4%), petty trade (4.2%), livestock (1.2%) and domestic service (1.2). In spite of bountiful natural resource endowment with rich soil and abundance of ground/surface water, the productivity is low because of inadequate development of irrigation facilities and skewed distribution of land holdings. Rich, jute wheat, mustard and vegetables are grown but there is insignificant forward linkages like storage, processing, value-addition of agro-based products and services. Optimum utilization of natural resources and land reforms may become viable options to ward off hunger besides increasing agricultural productivity. There are, however, some external constraints like floods and limitations of agricultural operations in border villages. In one of the border villages visited, agriculturists having lands beyond the fenced area are allowed to work between 9 AM and 4 PM and are not allowed to grow crops like jute or sugarcane whose height is longer than 4 feet from the ground. Further, Muslim women who are heads of households can not engage in cultivation by themselves.

The dynamics of work participation differ strongly between rural and urban Uttar Dinajpur. Holding more than two-thirds of the district work force, the rural areas have been subject to much stronger livelihood pressures arising out of the relative decline in main work availability, which has forced a switchover from main work to marginal work for new entrants into the rural workforce. Consequently, a gradual footlooseness has evolved amongst rural male wage-workers, encouraging them to shift local land whenever they can find better work opportunities. Labour dynamics of a similar kind have long been in evidence in the neighbouring state of Bihar. Their recent emergence in Uttar Dinajpur raises serious concern about rural livelihood security in the district.

Labour Migration in the Goalpokhar Region



As a populous but economically backward district, with livelihood choices within it being scarce, Uttar Dinajpur seasonally or temporarily exports a part of its labour force to relatively advanced states in India. During survey work, a case study was done on the village of Dumuria in Goalpokhar Block. Landless ness or marginal holdings



characterised the village. The village has 150 households almost totally inhabited by Hindu refugees and a few Santhal families. The village is educationally backward.

As far as outmigration is concerned 59 out of 100 families studied have migrants mostly male belonging to the age group 20-35 years. Among them, two had migrated outside the village to places – in the Northern India.

In Uttar Dinajpur district, the survey find that almost all the families use tubewell as the source of drinking water as groundwater is abundantly available. In 43% of the houses studied, there is private tubewell. People generally do not go beyond 200 meters to fetch water. Yet, only 6.5% of the houses visited have hygienic toilet. 89% of the houses are living in mud houses with poor sanitation facilities.

As regards access to financial services, the survey finds that 80% of the households are excluded from access to institutional credit. Of the institutions providing credit, the largest source is micro-finance institutions (8.6%), SHG (6.2%), co-operative (5%) and banks (4.8%). The survey indicates that the cost of credit is very high which will have a dampening effect on consumption. Financial inclusion is a long way to go and the people are still dependent on usurious sources of credit. Hopefully, SHGs are generally but slowly trying to cover the gap and their strengthening may facilitate the process of financial inclusion.

Response analysis of families suffering from hunger indicates:

- a) 85% of the families suffer from moderate to severe hunger while 7% of them are in an alarming state of hunger
- b) Those who suffer from alarming state of hunger are those whose daily income is within Rs. 20. Those who suffer from moderate hunger are those whose daily average income is within Rs. 35.
- c) 68% of them have to buy food from the open market and with the rising prices of food grains, they have little purchasing power to ward off hunger.
- d) 41% of the respondents have to borrow from moneylender when there is a severe food crisis in the family.

Family survey indicates that at least 15% of the families in Uttar Dinajpur district suffer from extremely alarming state of hunger as they do have little purchasing power because of low income and with the rise in prices of foodgrains, the situation will tend to be worse. This is happening in a district where soil is very fertile and water resources are abundant.

A probe into access to benefits under flagship programmes and public services, presents a dismal picture. In spite of 86% of the families surveyed having job cards, the survey indicates that: a) 69.6% of the families have secured 11 to 20 mandays of wage employment and b) 16.5% of the families have secured wage employment upto 10 days in a year. 57% of the respondent households do not have school-going children and thus are out of cover of Mid-day-Meal Scheme. Those who send their children to schools, mid-day meals provide them some supplementary feeding. Not many irregularities have been reported in operation of mid-day meal. Almost all the families have health card and the preventive health care facilities are accessible. The public distribution system is dysfunctional and supplies are irregular, often, only 'atta' and kerosene are available. People are not fully aware of their entitlements under Antodaya Anna Yojana. 60% of the respondents have reported regular functioning of ICDS centres.

Family survey finds that the NREGA and the PDS which would have acted as safety nets have failed to deliver. But, supplementary feeding services through schools and anganwadi centres as well as basic health services through subsidiary health centres are found to be functional. Surprisingly, SAHAYA, a state-sponsored programme for the food insecure families is virtually a non-starter in the district.

Focus Group discussions with the villages of the GPs studied indicate that:

- a) There is wide-spread discontent against targeting and identification of families under poverty line.
- b) There is a general feeling of party-based discrimination in selection of families for benefits and services under government programmes.
- c) There are large-scale complaints of leakages under IAY.

- d) There is lack of transparency in the working of panchayats.
- e) People are not informed of gram sabha meetings and they do not get opportunity of articulating their demands.
- f) There are exclusions of eligible old people or widows from pension benefits.
- g) In border villages, there are severe restrictions of movement affecting livelihood of the people. (See case study below).

Food and Livelihood Security Border Areas of Uttar Dinajpur

Nargaon is a village in Sahapur GP bordering Bangladesh. Earlier, the village had been prone to dacoities, smuggling and other anti-social activities. Now the whole village is fenced with barbed wire and under the round-the-clock vigilance of BSF. This has no doubt brought trans border crimes under control but seriously affected livelihood security. Families having agricultural lands beyond the fence are allowed to do cultural operations between 9 AM and 4 PM when the gates remain open. This affects the livelihood of the agriculturists as they are required to water plants in the morning. Further, they are not allowed to cultivate crops which grow to a height of more than 4 feet. This restriction prevents them from growing maize which is a food crop. Some of the lands are lying fallow because of these restrictions.

Interview with the food insecure families indicate their urge to income generation through wage employment or self-employment. They are mostly interested in livestock raising particularly house dairy, small-scale agriculture and small business (at Nargaon in Goalpokhar –I), food-processing at (Dharampur in Itahar Block).

Self –help Groups have been formed in all the village visited but because of absence of hand-holding support, are found to be disintegrating. Mobilisation of the poor into self-help groups can be transformed into livelihood security groups through decentralized institutions and process as has been demonstrated by Loka Kalyan Parishad. Strong SHGs can also provide protection to gender vulnerability and trafficking

Gender Vulnerability and Trafficking

Rural North Bengal has been frequently identified as a source area from which women and children are being trafficked to other states. Such cases of trafficking were reported during field survey. A 2006 study by the Centre for Womens Studies, North Bengal University has found that Uttar Dinajpur has become the principal conduit for cross-border trafficking of victims from North Bengal and Bangladesh to other Indian states. Trafficking is observed from deprived community groups such as the SCs, STs, and the rural Muslims. Commonality was observed between them in terms of low educational achievement, poverty, assetlessness and rootlessness. Entry to wage work took place as low as 10-12 years in Itahar Block. Daily wages are low. Persisting social evils such as dowry-related indebtedness amongst the rural poor also compelled young children and women to leave their hearths and homes and immigrate outwards in search of casual or seasonal work, which was one of the principal reasons why they often become easy victims of trafficking.

Food Security through Self-help Groups: Case study of Itahar Block

Decentralised Natural Resource Management for Food Security : Action Research Project of Loka Kalyan Parishad in Uttar Dinajpur District :

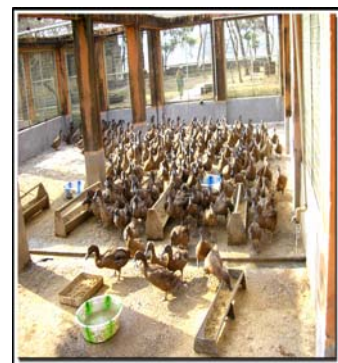
To increase the food security of poor women and their families, a number of activities were undertaken by Loka Kalyan Parishad. These include home garden, production of fruits and

farming, school garden, dykes, grain banks, forestry, fishery, introduction of new food vermin composting, bee-keeping, green manuring and seed production. These are all based on low external input and environment friendly. All these activities were planned by women family – based self –help groups trained by LKP and implemented through Gram Unnayan Samity and Gram Panchayat.



community garden, vegetables, crop-

cropping on field nursery, agro-livestock, crops, mushroom,



According to End Evaluation of Food Security Project (Phase II) (2004 – 07), more than 5000 families could ensure 30 – 40 days of food security in Uttar Dinajpur District.



Self help groups arranged meetings of the village education committee, parents and teachers and with their permission, organically cultivated vegetables in the nutrition garden in the school premises. They used vermin – compost and liquid manure in the garden. The local pond was the

source of watering the plants. Parents, teachers and school children also joined them. To protect the garden, live fencing work was done. Several fruit trees were also planted within the school compound. Leafy vegetables, legume vegetables and strategic crop like yam, arum were produced to enrich mid – day meals in schools where their children were studying.



School Garden : Nutrition Enrichment in Mid – Day Meals

Case study of Joyhat Gram Panchayat

Joyhat GP is one of the II GPs of Itahar Block in North Dinajpur district. It has a population of 23,006 (2001 census) of which 11,361 are women. It has eight villages which are considered to be backward on considerations of landlessness and female illiteracy. LKP has initiated its phase 2 FS project in collaboration with the GP. Gradually, all the villages have been covered. Joyhat GP has constituted GUS in all the 16 Sansads with 319 members (of which, 100 are women) elected by the villages through open voting or consensus. With the help of LKP, Joyhat GP has been able to mobilise 204 women groups (2360 members) and involve them in NRM activities with budgetary expenditure of about Rs.1 million (up to 30th September, 2006).



In course of participatory assessment of collaborative action initiatives with LKP, the following changes have occurred as perceived by the members of GP:

- Because of intensive campaign, the attendance in the meetings of Gram Sansad (village council), particularly those of women and backward sections has vastly improved. They are speaking out, demanding facilities like leasing-out unused lands, water bodies and common property resource in favour of women's groups and access to various health and educational services to improve their quality of life.



- The annual plans are prepared by the GUS after intensive consultations with all sections of people through neighbourhood meetings and submitted to the GP after approval in the meeting of the village council. In the annual plan outlay of Rs.20 million for 2007-2008, an allocation of Rs.5 million has been kept for livelihood activities of women's groups. Similarly for employment guarantee scheme, out of the local allocation of Rs.21 million for 2007-2008, an outlay of Rs.10 million is proposed for women self-help groups.



- GP is holding regular meetings (once every month) with GUS and a regular monitoring mechanism has evolved. Once every month, the activities are reported to the members of GP. The activities are also reported to the electors in the village council in May and November (2005).

- GP has helped the GUS to open savings bank account with banks, to keep records and to make their accounts transparent.

- GP has so far spent (up to September, 2005) Rs.1.42 million against

LKP's contribution of Rs.0.7 million (2:1).



The positive response of Joyhat GP is indicative of sustainability of FS 2 project.

**Poverty, Hunger and Public Action - Study of on-going decentralisation in West Bengal
Murshidabad District**

Murshidabad looks like an isosceles triangle in the map of West Bengal with apex pointing to the north-west. It is bounded along its whole eastern frontier by the mighty Padma river (the main channel of the Ganga) which separates it from the West Bengal districts of Malda in the north and Bangladesh in the east.

The economy is mainly agrarian with mango/lichi orchards and fisheries. The major crops grown are rice, wheat, potato, jute, sugarcane, pulses and vegetables. Floods occur annually during the monsoon months due to the riverine nature and unusual slop of the district. Among the districts in West Bengal, Murshidabad has the largest number of households engaged as bidi workers. Most of the village dwellers engage themselves in making local cigar (bidi) and it is fast growing as a cottage industry. Silk weaving is also a traditional handloom activity. Due to acute prevalence of unemployment, a large number of adult male members migrate out in search of employment mainly as masons.

Above 60% of the population follow Islamic faith and most of them have low socio-economic status. Increasing incidence of child labour has led to a sharp rise in the number of drop outs. Owing to low level of literacy, health indices of rural population are low and mortality rates of mothers and children are higher. The state of Muslims closely resemble the scenario as depicted in the Sachar Committee Report. As the international border line lying between Murshidabad and Bangladesh is riverine, it is porous and serves as a convenient route for drug trafficking along with trafficking of women. In Murshidabad, 242 villages (10.95%) are identified to be backward and its HDI rank is 15 (out of 19 districts) [see Human Development profile below.]

Human Development Profile: Murshidabad

Demographic

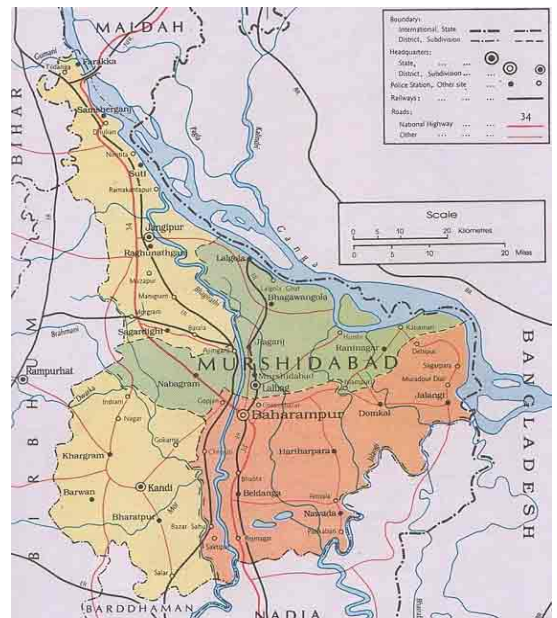
% share of rural population	-	87.51 (2001)
% share of Muslims	-	63.67 (2001)
% share of SC	-	12.00 (2001)
% share of ST	-	1.29 (2001)
Sex Ratio	-	952 (2001)
Population Density (per sq.km)	-	1102 (2001)
Decadal growth rate (%)	-	23.7 (2001)

Education

Literacy rate (%) – 2001 Census –		
Total -	All -	54.35
	Male -	60.71
	Female -	47.63
(2006) Pupil Teacher Ratio (Govt.) Primary -109.29		
(2004) Drop-out Rate - 33.73		

Health

Infant Mortality Rate (2001)	
Male -	61
Female -	59



Employment (2001)

Work Participation Rate (2001) – Rural

Male - 51.3

Female - 14.7

Indices (WBHDR – 2004)

Human Development Index - value 0.46 – Rank – 15

Gender Development Index - value 0.41 – Rank – 15

Education Index - value 0.52 – Rank – 16

Health Index - value 0.57 – Rank – 14

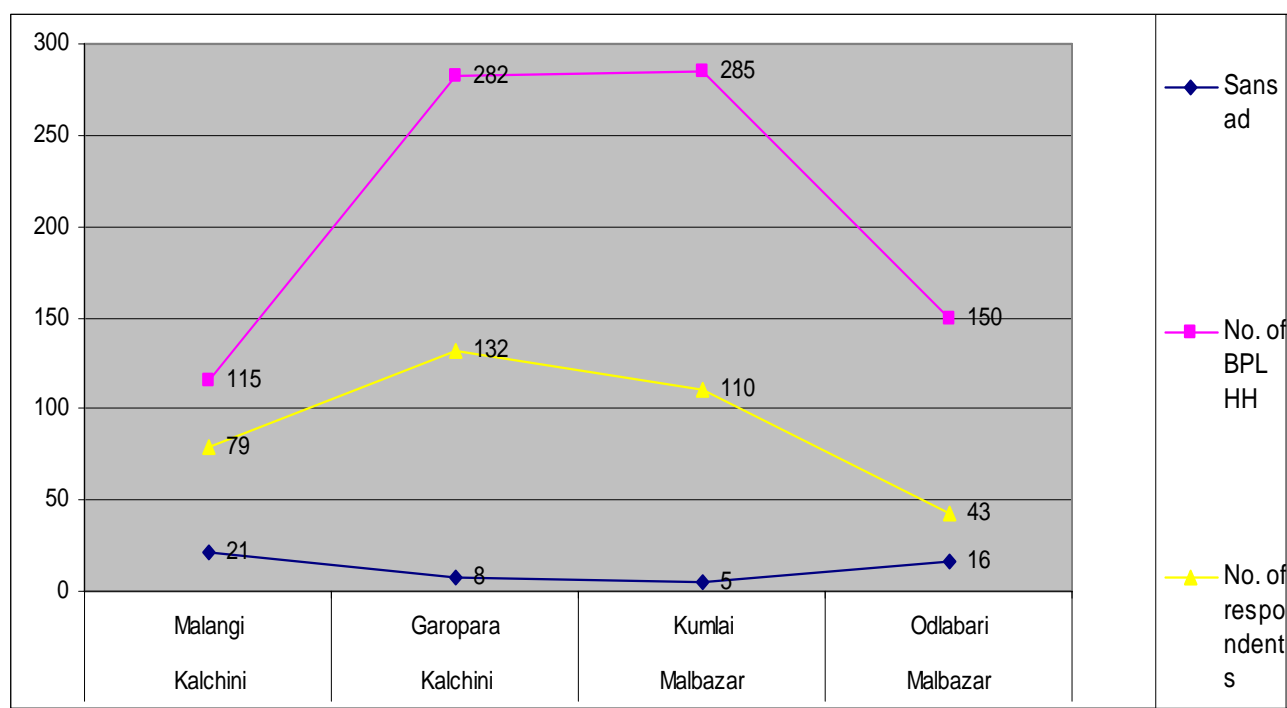
Income Index - value 0.29 – Rank-14



The Study in Murshidabad district was carried out according to the following design.

Table 5.01

Block	GP	Sansad	No of BPL Households	No. of respondents
Domkal	Jitpur Dhulauri	Sandad-8 Sansad-3	258 125	106 58
Jalangi	Ghoshpara Sadikhanderah	Sandad-6 Sansad-13	444 197	102 56



According to Rural Household Survey (2005):

- 4,61,192 households (39.17%) are falling below poverty line on score-based ranking of poverty indicators.
- 66.31% of the households are landless and 21.93% of households are marginal farmers.
- 20.24% of the households are found to be all male members migrating out in search of employment.

Analysis of household survey of food-insecure families in the study area indicates that:

- a) In Domkol Block, 4842 families (92%) and in Jalangi Block, 6805 families (94%) are landless.
- b) In Domkol Block, 2271 families (43%) and in Jalangi Block, 3656 families (50%) do not have any homestead land and are living on other's land with or without permission.
- c) In Domkol Block as well as in Jalangi Block, all the families have reported that they are suffering from moderate to severe hunger.
- d) In Domkol Block, 4535 families (86%) and in Jalangi Block, 6765 families, families (93%) have no tangible asset to fall back upon in emergency.
- e) In Domkol Block, 3017 families (57%) and in Jalangi Block, 5004 families (69%), there is no literate.
- f) In Domkol Block, 2303 (43%) families and in Jalangi Block. 3542 families (48%) have reported they do not have any one who can do labourious work and earn living for them.
- g) In Domkol Block, 4521 families (86%) and in Jalangi Block.6785 families (93%) are daily wage labourers.
- h) In Domkol Block, 170 families (3%) and in Jalangi Block, 170 families (2%) have taken loan from an institution and in Domkol Block, 969 families (18%) and in Jalangi Block, 596 families (8%) have reported that they do not have any external borrowing.
- i) In Domkol Block, 1994 families (37%) and in Jalangi Block, 4330 families (59%) have reported that their male members migrate out in search of employment.
- j) In Domkol Block, 2505 families (47%) and in Jalangi Block, 4788 families (66%) have reported that they have members with disability, old age, chronically illness or other form of disadvantage.

Analysis of household survey data in Domkol and Jalangi Blocks, indicates that landlessness, homelessness, assetlessness, unemployment, disability/old age, chronic illness, financial exclusion have strong corelationship with hunger and outmigration.

5.02 The demographic characteristics of households interviewed are indicated in the following table:

Demographic character	No. of respondents	% of total	Total Respondents
Sex	322		322
Male	162	50.3	
Female	160	49.7	
Literacy	322		322
Illeterate	211	65.5	
Literate	27	8.4	
Primary	42	13	
Elementary	32	9.9	
Secondary	8	2.5	
Others	2	6	
Caste		290	322
SC	1	1	
ST	Nil	-	
OBC	1	1	
General	320	98	
Religion	322		322
Hindu	3	1	
Muslim	319	99	

Source : Field Survey

Analysis of survey data of the selected households in Murshidabad district indicates that the primary causes of alarming hunger are the following:

- a) Unemployment and low income (67.1%)
- b) Death of the sole bread earner (13.00%)
- c) Victim of natural calamity (5.6%)
- d) Over indebtedness (9.0%)
- e) Medical expenses (4.7%)
- f) Female-headed or widowed household (13.3%)

This indicates that provision of wage employment opportunities and extension of social safety net are urgently needed to ward off hunger .

Distribution of households according to occupation indicates that:

- a) 79.2% of the households depend on wage employment for their livelihood.
- b) 86% of the households depend on agriculture and allied activities (as agricultural labourers).
- c) 86% of the households depend on home-based activity (bidi making) to supplement income.
- d) 3.4% of the households are engaged in hawking and retail services.



This indicates that occupational diversification and development of marketing skills are needed to create opportunities of self-employment.

Distribution of households according to sourcewise data indicate that non-institutional sources are still predominant recourse to household debt:

- a) friends and neighbour (38.8%), moneylender (29.8%), shopkeeper (23.9%), SHG (8%), Bank (2.7%), MFI (2.4%) and co-operative society.

Analysis of data indicates that financial exclusion is overwhelmingly high and micro-credit are gradually taking over institutional void to a limited extent.

Analysis of disaggregated data finds that the families surveyed are using tubewell water for drinking and most of them have a source either in house premises (42.5%) and within 200 meters (56.3%). Because of high water table and availability of ground water, tubewell water is the only source of drinking water and this is a definite indication of change of behaviour. It is not so hopeful in case of sanitation as only 15% of the families surveyed have sanitary toilets in their house.



Response analysis of families suffering from severe food insecurity indicates that:

- a) These families spend 91% of their earning on food.
- b) 74.5% of the families buy food from the open market.
- c) 58.4% of the families have to borrow from money lender when they have no food.
- d) Daily average income of these families are so low [upto Rs. 20(15.2%) upto Rs. 35 (37.3%) and upto Rs. 50 (33.9%)] that they do not have the purchasing power to buy food from the open market.

As a result, almost 20% of the families studied are found to be living under alarming conditions of hunger.



Field study finds that the poorest have the least access to programme benefits and public services as indicated below:

a) In spite of 80% of the families having job cards, the worst-affected families could get hardly 30 mandays of wage employment but the payment of wages has been delayed for months. This has created demotivation of agricultural labourers who prefer to



migrate rather than wait for wage payment. In many villages studied, no more than 12 mandays of wage employment had been created (for example 6-7 days in Rosulpur of Domkol Block, 10-12 days in Dhulauri of Domkol Block, 6-10 days in Enayetpur of Jalangi Block). In the survey, more than 70% of respondents have reported that they could secure 11-20 days of wage employment under NREGA. Many villagers have identified the scope of reconstructing water bodies in Murshidabad district which could create durable assets. This has not happened and the strongest safety net of landless daily labourers remained largely unused, compelling wage earners to migrate out in large numbers from the district.

b) The PDS has virtually collapsed in the rural areas where the field studies were conducted. In the words of a GP member:

“Not only in this village, PDS is virtually dysfunctional in Domkol Block. There is no notice board, there is no price list, no cash memo is given. If we ask for cash memo, we are told to see the District Controller of Food.”

There are complaints about quality of mid-day meals served in primary schools and the children find the quantity inadequate to meet their hunger.

a) Of the national Social Assistance Programmes, national family benefit scheme is almost unheard of though there are cases where the major earning member had died. The benefit of old age pension which has been extended to persons above 65 years of age in BPL households, the exclusion is large and payment in sanctioned cases also gets delayed for months.



b) In some of the villages studied, it has been found that anganwadi centres are located at places which are either inaccessible or can not be operated because of erosion of the Padma river.

c) SAHAYA, especially designed to address the needs of the hungry and food insecure households, is a non-starter in the villages studied.

Focus group discussions with the villagers where field studies were conducted bring out utter despair and discontent of the people in delivery of public services as indicated below:

a) Targeting of BPL households is wrongly done, biased or manipulated.

b) There is party-based discrimination in provision of public services.

c) There are irregularities and leakages in implementation of Indira Awas Yojana.

There is inordinate delay in payment of wages under NREGA or old age pension under IGNOAPS.

a) In low-lying and water-logged areas, no crop other than jute or mesta can be grown.

b) Because of erosion of the right bank of the Padma river, many families who were better off had become destitute.

c) After disturbances in Gram Sabha meetings, people are not informed of Gram Sabha meetings now.

d) Only 20% of the villagers have access to the panchayat functionaries or the grass-roots level workers.

There is also total institutional exclusion of the families who are suffering from chronic food insecurity.



SHGs have been formed in all the villages studied but are found to be weak in their functioning. A few groups have passed the first grading test and are carrying out home-based livelihood with revolving fund they have got under SGSY. Some of the members are trained in embroidery work. Some of the members living in border villages are interested in house dairy but because of restrictions of cattle movement in the border areas do not venture out.

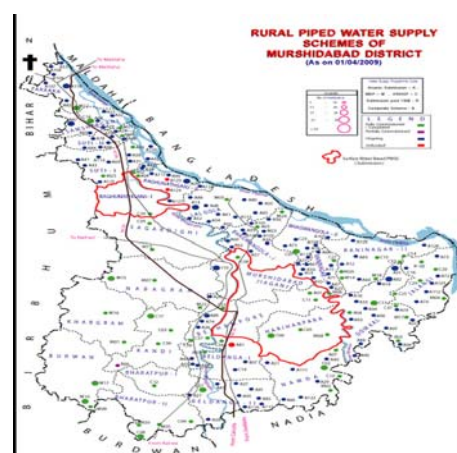
It is indicative from the member of households visited and the discussions had with the villagers, families are interested to take up agriculture, livestock rearing and home-based craft or trade to increase their income. About 60% of the families are interested to take up crop cultivation for subsistence provided they are given ownership or leasing rights on land. Given facilitation and assistance, the families are capable of making both ends meet (other than those who are old or physically infirm)

On the brink of survival: Case study of the people living on ‘char’ lands of the Padma river in Jalangi Block:

Paraspur is a border village of Jalangi Block where people evicted by the erosion of the Padma river are living on char land. They have to cross the dead course of the Jalangi river to reach their homeland. Everytime they have to go out of their homeland, they must not forget to take alongwith them the voter identity cards which act like a passport to travel within their own country. If one forgets, one has to walk back 3-4 km. over hot sand to bring the card. When relatives visit them, they are asked to bring their identity cards with them.

As the people have all been rendered homeless by the corrosion of the Padma bank, the habitation is dispersed. If the corrosion worsens, the habitation will be wiped off. The BPL families who have got assistance under Indira Awas Yojana, have set up the dwelling structure with cement pillars and tin roof, walled with the reeds wildly growing on char land. Most of the houses are made of reeds so that in case of cyclone or flood, people know they will again be evicted.

There is no primary school in the village. Children can go to the primary school 3 km. away hazarding their journey through the char land, border security and sensitive neighbourhood. People have themselves set up a child education centre which they run themselves. They can not provide mid-day meals. Children suffer from severe malnutrition. There is an anganwadi centre in the village which remains closed often because of the difficulty of anganwadi worker to reach the village from outside. The children and pregnant mothers do not get the benefit of supplementary nutrition. The health centre is about 3 km. away and one has to be transported by bullock cart through the sandy char land. As a result, all deliveries take place in the so called home. Maternal mortality rate is high.



Agricultural lands are covered with sand; with time and effort, the people are trying to find out soil. On these lands, jute, mesta and sesame are grown. Most of the lands lost by the Padma erosion are lying fallow. As grasses grow profusely on char land, the families are interested to raise livestock but fear to raise dairy as cattle movement is restricted by BSF.

There are problems of carrying food grains into the village as there are restrictions on movement of goods. Special permission is needed when food is required to be served during festivals.

The people have been rendered destitutes by the erosion of the river Padma but they are determined to fight it out for their survival. The institutions, programmes and services have failed to reach out to them. The case illustrates the need for social mobilization and building people's organizations to take care of their own life and livelihood. They need only facilitation and hand-holding support. Plethora of programmes and multitude of institutions will alone not do.

Case study of Nutrimix preparation by Women Self – Help Groups in Murshidabad:

Women groups in Bhgawan II Block of Murshidabad district were encouraged by a reputed NGO and the Gram Panchayat to prepare Nutrimix for distribution to severely mainourished children through. ICDS centers. Training was organized by the NGO and financial support was given by the GP from united fund. Technical assistance and the ingredients were supplied by the NGO.

To prepare one kg. of Nutrimix, ingredients are mixed in the following proportions :

Ingredient	Amount (gm)
Wheat	400
Rice	400
Mung Bean (Pulses)	75
Fresh Black Gram	75
Dried spinach, curry leaves, bean seed	50
Cashew nut, Ground nut, Raisins, Palm candy	75

Ingredients were thoroughly washed, dried in the sun, lightly heated before mixing after each is separately grinded. The cost of preparation of a kg of Nutrimix was Rs.26.55 (at 2006-07 prices) and the finished Nutrimix was purchased by the GP at Rs.40 per kg. Each SHG gained Rs.13.45 per kg pack of Nutrimix. The packets were distributed to severely malnourished children by ICDS centres.

Contribution : Child-in-Need Institute

Groundnut – a possible choice in the climate change area

Because of unpredictability of monsoon, farmers are feeling the need for diversification of crop. Marginal farmers of Murshidabad were persuaded to grow groundnut instead of boro paddy particularly in critical areas. Each farmer was supported with 20 k.g. groundnut seeds for one-third of an acre with 300 gms of bio-fertilisers. The farmers found from cost-return analysis that ground nut can give almost three times more surplus than boro paddy. The marginal farmers are happy as the water requirement is less, need for fertilizer is less and risk is much less. Ground nuts help to keep the soil alive. As a cash crop, its demand in the market is also high.

Contribution : Development Research, Communication and Service Centre

VI

Poverty, Hunger and Public Action : Study of on-going decentralisation initiatives in West Bengal - Purulia District

Purulia is the western most district of West Bengal characterized by undulating topography with rugged hilly terrains in the western and the southern parts. In general, three types of soils are found in the district-residual, lateritic and clayey loam. The fertility of soil is low as the soils contain very little organic matter. Soil erosion is the most predominant phenomenon in the district resulting in huge deposition of fertile soil in the valley region. As a result, vast areas of land remain uncultivable wasteland. Purulia is a drought-prone district and falls within the semi-arid region of West Bengal. 50% of the total cultivated land is upland and mono-cropped. The crops are generally grown under rainfed conditions and 90% of the net cropped area is under cultivation of kharif rice. Most of the blocks in the district have a preponderance of SC, ST and OBC population with habitat, social customs, cultural pattern and economic activities markedly different from that of other sections of the society. Their low literacy rate and inadequate income opportunities have filled them with a sense of alienation from the mainstream.

Purulia is one of the identified backward districts of West Bengal and 33% of rural households are living below poverty line. Its HDI rank is 16 and it is just above Malda in HDI ranking. 33% of the households are landless agricultural labourers and 44% of the households are marginal farmers. (see HDI profile of Purulia district below). 994 villages (37%) are identified to be backward in terms of female illiteracy and marginal workers.

HDI Profile : Purulia district

Demography

% share of rural Population	: 90
% share of SC Population	: 18.29
% share of ST Population	: 18.27

Literacy

Total (2001 census)	: 55.57%
Male (2001 census)	: 73.72%
Female (2001 census)	: 36.50%
Gender Gap (2001 census)	: 37.22%

Health

Infant Mortality Rate (2001)	:	
Male	:	46
Female	:	46

Employment (Rural)

Work Participation Rate	:	
Male	:	52.9%
Female	:	39.2%

Indices (WBHDR 2004)

Indicator	Value	Rank
HDI	0.45	16
GDI	0.40	16
Education	0.55	14
Health	0.61	12
Income	0.18	17

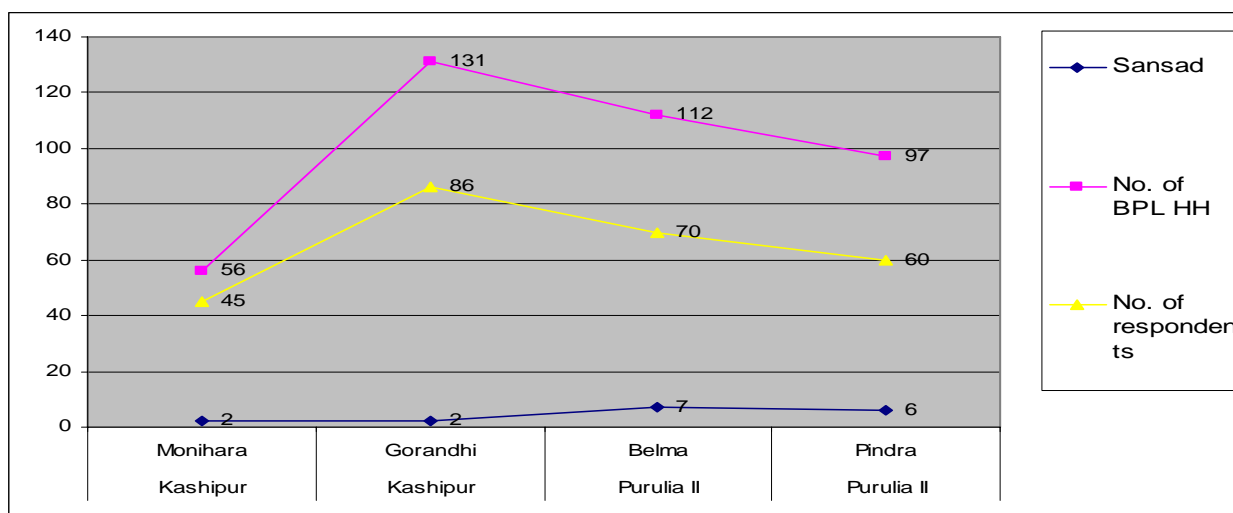


The study of Purulia district was carried out according to the following sampling design :

Table 6.01 : Sampling Design

Block	GP	Sansad	No. of BPL HH	No. of Respondents
Kashipur	Manihara	Sansad - 2	56	45
	Gorandi	Sansad - 2	131	86
Purulia II	Belma	Sansad-7	112	70
	Pindra	Sansad - 6	97	60

Source : Field Survey



The demographic characteristics of households interviewed are indicated in the following table:

Table 6.02 : Demographic Characteristics

Demographic character	No. of respondents	% of total	Total Respondents
Sex	261		261
Male	165	63.2	
Female	96	36.8	
Literacy	261		261
Illeterate	127	48.7	
Literate	26	10	
Primary	39	14.9	
Elementary	45	17.2	
Secondary	13	0.5	
Others	11	4.2	
Caste	261		261
SC	99	38	
ST	24	9	
OBC	54	21	
General	84	32	
Religion	261		261
Hindu	233	89.3	
Muslim	28	10.7	

Source : Field Survey

Analysis of food insecure families in the study area in course of the household survey indicates that :

- a) In Kashipur Block, 1376 families (84.5%) and in Purulia II Block, 1346 families (85%) are landless agricultural labourers.
- b) In Kashipur Block, 689 families (42%) and in Purulia II Block, 1212 families (76%) do not have any homestead land and live on other's land with or without permission.
- c) All the households surveyed in Kashipur as well as in Purulia II Blocks have reported that they suffer from moderate to severe food insecurity almost throughout the year.
- d) In Kashipur Block, 1470 families (90%) and in Purulia II Block, 1395 families (83%) do not have any tangible asset to fall back on in case of emergency.
- e) In Kashipur Block, 1046 families (64%), and in Purulia II Block, 1361 families (86%), all the women in the families are illiterate.
- f) In Kashipur Block, 839 families (51%) and in Purulia II Block, 1403 families (88%) have reported that they do not have any capable person in the family now to do manual work for them to earn a living.
- g) In Kashipur Block, 1553 families (95%) and in Purulia II Block, 1510 families (95%) have reported that they depend solely on wage employment for their livelihood.
- h) In Kashipur Block, only 40 families (2%) have taken loan from an institutional source and 236 families (14%) have not taken any loan. In Purulia II Block, only 13 families (1%) have taken loan from an institutional source and 86 families (5%) have no external borrowing.
- i) In Kashipur Block, 318 families (19%) and in Purulia II Block, 112 families (7%) have reported that they do not need to migrate out in search of employment.
- j) In Kashipur Block, 632 families (38%) and in Purulia II Block, 113 families (7%) have reported that they do not have any old or physically infirm person in their families.

The analysis of household data in Kashipur and Purulia II Blocks studied indicates that landlessness, unemployment, low income, physical infirmity, dispossession of assets are the major factors contributing to food insecurity for them.

Diaggregated data from sample surveys conducted in the selected households reveals the proximate clauses of severe food insecurity

a) Loss of income	:	59.4%
b) Death of the sole bread earner	:	19.2%
c) Women-headed household	:	11.0%
d) Addiction to liquor	:	6.9%
e) Victim of natural calamity	:	4%

It is discernible that apart from unemployment and loss of income, there are special circumstances which make the families vulnerable to food insecurity without a social safety net.

Occupational distribution of families interviewed indicates that 60.9% of them are dependent on daily wage employment, 14.6% are employed in self-cultivation, 3.8% are engaged in household crafts, 3.4% provide domestic services and for the rest, the life is uncertain. With little diversification in traditional livelihood, low productivity in agriculture and absence of skills make these families, vulnerable to hunger.

Disaggregated data analysis from sample survey indicates that only 13.8% of the families selected have institutional sources of household debt (SHG-5%, Bank – 3.7%, MFI – 3.7% and Co-operative – 1.4%). Of the non-institutional sources, shop-keepers (44%), money-lender (22.5%), friends and relatives (19.7%) are dominant. Financial inclusion is still a far cry.

Family survey indicates that 94.6% of the families use tubewell water for drinking while 5.4% of them use dugwell as the source. This is a positive change in behavior and awareness about use of

safe water. Though very few (2.7%) have a tubewell in their house premises, 84% of them can access a public tubewell within a distance of 200 meters. There are problems in summer when the water table falls. While this is a positive outcome of development, use of hygienic toilet is awfully low (4.2%). Unless there is a change in behavior towards sanitation, the positive gains from use of safe water for drinking will be counter protective from health point of view.

Response analysis of families interviewed indicates that:

- a) 92.7% of the family expenditure is incurred to secure food.
- b) 54.8% of them buy food from open market.
- c) 10% of them go hungry to bed often.
- d) 70% of the families who are hungry are forced to borrow money from money lender.

Family survey indicates that 15% of the families suffer from extremely alarming state of hunger as they have little purchasing power to buy food from the open market

In a situation where the families suffer from hunger, it is imperative that they should have access to public services as they are identified to be suffering from hunger. Field survey reveals that:

- a) 84% of the families have job cards but 93% of them have got wage employment for not more than 20 days under NREGA. Agriculture can not provide wage employment for not more than 60 days in agricultural seasons. This is the primary cause for large-scale out-migration.
- b) 54% of the families do not have any school going children; as such, they do not have recourse to supplementary food.
- c) Those who have children upto 6 years of age get supplementary food from Anganwadi Centre which is functional for most of the time.
- d) Only 26.5% of the families interviewed know about their entitlements from the public distribution system but because of lack of purchasing power and irregularities in the functioning of fair price shops, they can not access their entitlements to food grains.
- e) 77% of the respondents are satisfied with preventive health care services.

The survey finds that supplementary feeding services to pre-school children from ICDS centers, mid-day meals to school children and basic health care services are almost regular though some irregularities have been reported. But, the PDS is dysfunctional because of irregular supplies and lack of purchasing power of those who are facing chronic hunger.

SAHAYA, a special scheme designed by the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, is almost a non-starter in the district and SAHAYA Bandhu who is required to facilitate the process of addressing their needs through a micro-poverty plan has not been seen by those for whom they have to work. About 20% of the families interviewed have reported that they have access to the GP member and also the grass-roots level workers mostly health worker. The reality indicates almost total institutional exclusion.

Focus group discussions with the selected households bring out their utter despair in provisioning and implementation of public services as pointed out by them :

Targeting of BPL households has been wrongly done, biased or manipulated.

- There is party – based discrimination in providing benefits or services under flagship programmes of the government.
- No redressal system works even after filing complaints to the Programme Officer under the NREGA.
- Inordinate delay has occurred in payment of wages under NREGS.

- Public distribution system does not work for the poor and the hungry. It is virtually defunct. People are not aware that they can articulate their demands in the Gram Sabha as people are not informed.

Asked what benefits they would like to have from the government to ward off hunger, the response is overwhelmingly in favour of patta land or leasing facility followed by livestock and home-based activity. Given financial assistance, they will prefer to use the fund for income generation rather than for consumption.

Self-help groups have been formed in all the villages studied and they are found to be intermediating in meeting financial needs of the poor. Their quality, however, remains to be poor and for lack of facilitation, they are sometimes drifting from their mission.

Purulia is one of the most backward districts in West Bengal. Being in the semi-arid zone, it is mono-cropped and the economy is totally dependent on vagaries of nature. There is greater scope of providing wage employment under NREGA than in other districts. Micro-watershed development on a large scale will be of immense help to restore nature as the strongest life support system. Examples have been created by non-government organisations and these are worthy of replication.

CASE STUDY FOR NURSERY IN PURULIA

Activity : Nursery

Participants : Agricultural Labourers of Purulia Project

Address : Village :- Kroshjuri; PO.- Sonatholi Block
- Kashipur. District:- Purulia, West Bengal

When : From 2007 to 2009 in every kharif and rabi season

Why : To conserve the traditional variety of plant and to re-introduce the absolute plant variety in nursery has been effective step.

They have also decided to make vegetable nursery to produce good quality of seeds.

ARTC has created nursery as a support service facility.

How : A training was organized from DRCSC about nursery. Then the plot was protected by bamboo fence. Then they made a nursery with 52 types of conventional plants. Most of the seeds were locally produced and a few were collected from the neighbouring district, having the same type of agro climatic condition. Cow dung compost, pond silt etc. were used to prepare soil. They have taken all necessary technical procedure to make the nursery.

Output : 51 types of plant and 13000 effective seedlings were produced in the nursery. They have sold those seedlings to various local groups and network partner and earned 30,000 INR.

Outcome : The soil in nursery is enriched in organic matter. So, they can start vegetable Nursery from 2008. To make and maintain this nursery 100 working days are created for a labour. Numbers of local variety of plant have increased in the area and the demand of those plants is also very high.



Income & Expenditure From 2007 to 2009 :

In 2007 DRCSC supported with a grant of Rs.9,000 and the local contribution was Rs.3,800 for the nursery. After that they have revolved the fund and made nursery every year.

YEAR	INCOME	EXPENDITURE
2007	30,000	9,000 + 3,800
2008	20,465	9,765
2009	31,844	7,071

Contribution : Development Research, Communication and Service Centre.



GRAIN GOLA : COMMUNITY INITIATIVE FOR FOOD SECURITY

In most of the villages in Purulia there is no agricultural work during September – October and April – May. Naturally, hunger looms large over the poor families who earn their bread by working as agricultural labour. The living condition gets even worse in the event of natural calamities like flood, drought or cyclonic storms. With only the walls at their backs, they are compelled to take loan from the local moneylenders at abnormally high interest by mortgaging their assets and labour. In many cases they have to migrate to neighboring districts in search of work. Therefore the members of Mehi Tikababa Teksai Krishak group of Purulia decided to build Grain Bank. Each member donated 78 kg paddy. They also decided that when the members will take loan from the gola they will pay it back with 15% interest. In the year 2002 the structures was made. This time DRCSC supported Rs. 500 for the structure and contribution for the same amount of paddy. In each season the members take paddy as loan and pay it back for twice. Now they have 4628 kg of paddy stored in their bank. At present there are 21 no of members in this group and they have reduced their interest rate 5%. The members now do not also have to go to the money lenders to secure loans at high rate of interest. They also support paddy as loan to the other villagers who are not members of the group and they take interest @ 20% from them.



As an impact, this year none from the group has taken loan or migrated to other districts for food shortage. They also get food security for 3-4 months from the Gola. The groups have already been inspired to develop 10 no of new Grain Golas in this area.

Year by Year status of Grain Gola

Year	Paddy at the beginning of the year (kg)	Paddy at the end of the year (kg)	Comments
2000	364	364	7 members contribute @ 52 kg grains
2001	364	546	Interest 20 ser in 26 kg
2002	546	1560	13 new members given @ 78 kg grain
2003	1560	2340	
2004	2340	2340	No interest due to drought
2005	2340	3510	Sale 910 kg grain for land buying
2006	2600	3900	Reduced interest 10 Ser
2007	3900	4862	Sale 234 kg grain for Pond excavation
2008	4628		

Contribution : Development Research on Communication and Service Centre.

VII

Poverty, Hunger and Public Action : Study of on going decentralisation initiatives in West Bengal - Birbhum District

Birbhum district is bounded on the north and west by Santhal Parganas, on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan and on the south by Burdwan, which is separated by the Ajay River. Called by the name of 'the land of red soil', Birbhum is unique for its topography and cultural heritage. The western part of the district is undulating, made up of red soil, rain-fed and drought-prone while the eastern part is densely populated being in the alluvial plain of the Gangetic valley. The agro-climatic conditions are favorable for cultivation of rice, wheat, sugarcane, mustard and pulses. Sericulture is a traditional activity on both sides of the river Mayurakshi and Brahmani.

Birbhum is one of the identified backward districts in West Bengal and 42.33% of the rural households are living below poverty line, Muslims (35%), SC (29.5%) and ST (6.74%) indicate preponderance of disadvantaged social groups. Its HDI rank is 14 and in terms of human development. It is only above Malda, Purulia and Murshidabad. 58% of rural households are landless agricultural labourers and 24% of the households are marginal farmers (see HDI profile of Birbhum district below).

HDI Profile: Birbhum District

Demography (2001)

% of rural population – 91.4

Sex Ratio

All	950
SC	948
ST	995

Literacy (2001) (%)

Male	70.89
Female	51.56
Total	61.48

Infant Mortality Rate (WBHR 2004)

Male	38
Female	39

% Work Participation Rate (2001)

Rural : Male	54.5
Female	20.3

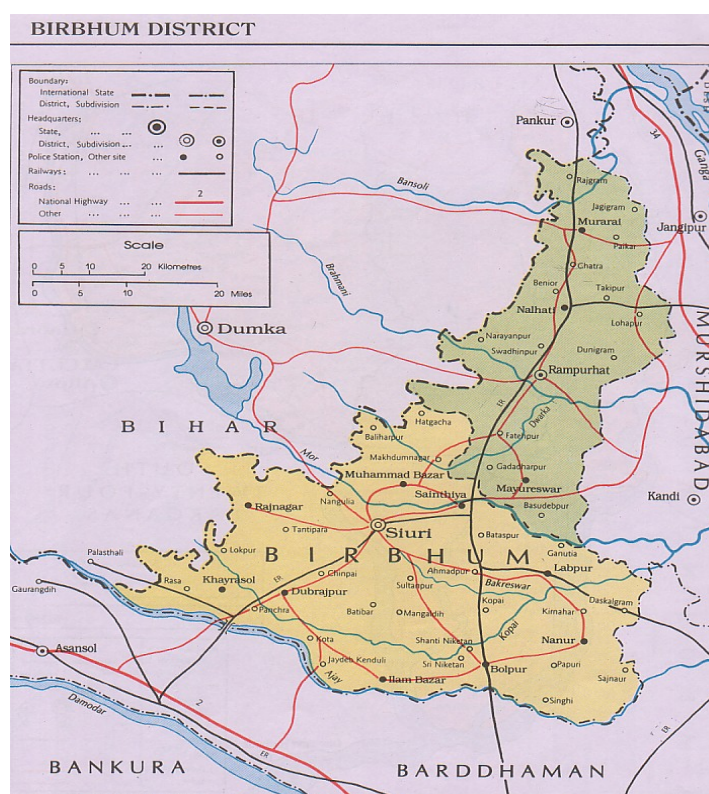
% of marginal worker (2001)

Male	8.6
Female	12.4

% of agricultural labour (2001)

Male	33.6
Female	47.1

Indices		
<u>Index</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Human Development	0.47	14
Gender Development	0.42	14
Education	0.61	12
Health	0.53	15
Income Index	0.27	15



Source : SSPHD (Government of West Bengal)

The study of Birbhum district was carried out according to the following sampling design :

Table 7.01 : Sampling Design

Block	GP	Sansad	No. of BPL HH	No. of Residents
Murarai I	Murarai	Sansad-2	256	73
	Dumurgram	Sansad - 4	245	102
Nalhati I	Barla	Sansad- 13	319	59
	Kalitha	Sansad - 1	326	57

Source : Field Survey

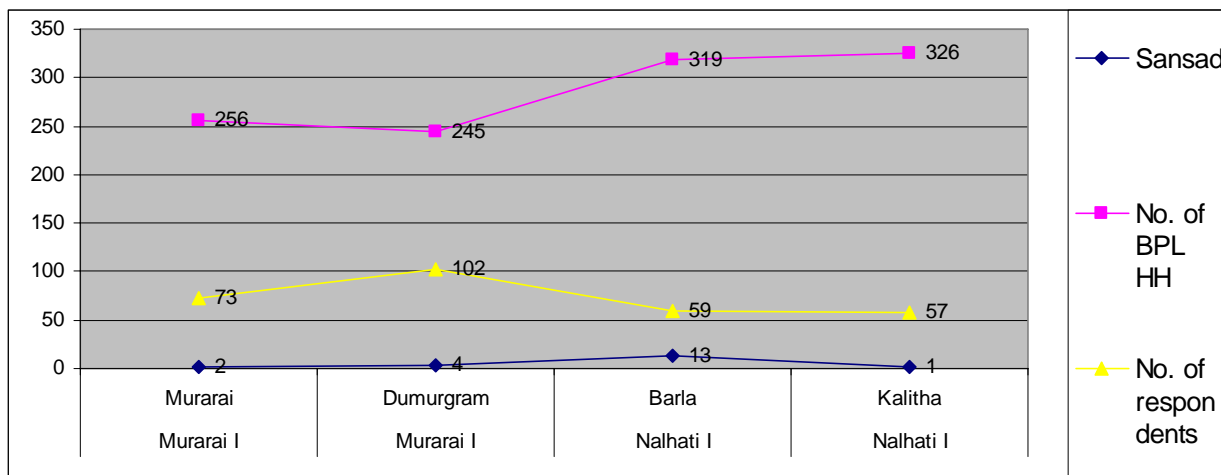


Table 7.02 : Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of households interviewed are indicated in the following table:

Demographic character	No. of respondents	% of total	Total Respondents
Sex	290	100	290
Male	145	50	
Female	145	50	
Literacy	290	100	290
Illeterate	176	60.7	
Literate	30	10.3	
Primary	37	12.8	
Elementary	34	11.7	
Secondary	7	2.4	
Others	6	2.1	
Caste	290	100	290
SC	61	21	
ST	5	-	
OBC	36	12.4	
General	188	64.8	
Religion	290	100	290
Hindu	63	21.7	
Muslim	227	77.3	

Source : Field Survey

Analysis of household survey of Food Insecure families in the study area indicates that :

- a) In Murarai I Block, 1681 families (97%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 2617 families (92%) are landless.
- b) In Murarai I Block, 610 families (35%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 1000 families (25%) do not have a house of their own and live on other's land with or without permission.
- c) In Murarai I Block as well as in Nalhathi I Block, all the families reported that they suffer from moderate to severe food insecurity.
- d) In Murarai I Block, 1504 families (87%) and in Nalhathi I, 2524 families (88%) have reported that they do not have any tangible asset to fall back upon in case of emergency.
- e) In Murari I Block, 980 families (56%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 1482 families (52%) have reported that they have illiterate members in the family.
- f) In Murarai Block, 539 families (31%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 1181 families (41%) have reported that they have limited capacity to work as daily labourers.
- g) In Murari I Block, 1563 families (90%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 2686 families (94%) are dependent on daily wage labour for their livelihood.
- h) In Murarai I Block, 216 families (12%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 562 families (19%) have reported that there are school dropouts who are forced to work outside for earning livelihood.
- i) In Murari I Block, 1296 families (75%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 2326 families (81%) have reported that they are required to borrow from money lenders, shopkeepers, friends and relatives regularly to make both ends meet.
- j) In Murari I Block, 1428 families (82%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 2373 families (83%) have reported that at least one member of the family has to migrate out in search of employment
- k) In Murari I Block, 888 families (51%) and in Nalhathi I Block, 1962 families (68%) have reported that they are female headed or are having disability or chronic illness in the family.

Based on the data generated through rural household surveys, ranking of blocks has been done on the basis of vulnerability :

Table 7.3 Ranking of blocks according to the index of Vulnerability

Block Name	Index of landlessness	Index of shelter	Index of food insecurity	Index of earning capability	Index of working status	Index of education deprivation	Index of special handicap	Vulnerability index
MURARAI-II	0.90	0.87	0.38	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.88
SURI-II	0.56	0.86	0.87	0.95	0.50	0.22	0.52	0.64
NALHATI-I	0.61	0.76	1.00	0.91	0.49	0.15	0.55	0.64
MURARAI-I	1.00	0.63	0.62	0.56	0.79	0.35	0.43	0.63
RAMPURHAT-I	0.55	0.71	0.81	0.56	0.62	0.26	0.48	0.57
RAMPURHAT-II	0.79	1.00	0.60	0.21	0.72	0.00	0.59	0.56
NALHATI-II	0.87	0.38	0.16	0.44	0.8	0.20	0.48	0.48
MAYURESWAR-I	0.53	1.00	0.42	0.49	0.35	0.06	0.34	0.46
MOHAMED-BAZAR	0.50	0.83	0.33	0.56	0.43	0.13	0.17	0.42
BIRBHUM	0.54	0.71	0.42	0.30	0.43	0.18	0.37	0.42
KHAYRASOL	0.50	0.57	0.41	0.52	0.36	0.11	0.29	0.39
MAYURESWAR-II	0.50	0.49	0.27	0.51	0.47	0.02	0.42	0.38
BOLPUR-SRINIKETAN	0.44	0.53	0.29	0.44	0.36	0.19	0.27	0.36
SAINTHIA	0.51	0.80	0.25	0.49	0.29	0.03	0.15	0.36
DUBRAJPUR	0.37	0.61	0.31	0.45	0.24	0.24	0.27	0.35
ILAMBAZAR	0.32	0.58	0.25	0.22	0.23	0.03	0.26	0.27
SURI-I	0.86	0.00	0.31	0.33	0.18	0.00	0.16	0.26
LABHPUR	0.28	0.78	0.17	0.00	0.07	0.06	0.21	0.22
NANOR	0.23	0.33	0.23	0.07	0.10	0.06	0.27	0.18
RAJNAGAR	0.00	0.68	0.00	0.49	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.17

Source: DHDR, Birbhum (December , 2008)

It is clearly indicative from the analysis that landlessness, unemployment, assetlessness, low level of skills, financial exclusion or some kind of disability or illness are the major factors for these families to suffer from severe hunger.



Disaggregated analysis of data collected from sample households indicates that the primary causes of alarming hunger are the following :

- | | | |
|--|---|-------|
| a) Unemployment or low income | : | 63.1% |
| b) Death of the sole bread earner | : | 23.1% |
| c) Women headed or households with inability to work | : | 17.2% |

This indicates that provision of wage employment opportunities and extension of social safety net are two important priorities to reduce hunger

Analysis of disaggregated data from selected households surveyed indicates that :

- 65.2% of the households depend on daily wage labour for their livelihood
- 9.3% of the households are engaged in self-cultivation and 6.2% of the households are engaged in home-based crafts.
- Livestock raising, collection of natural products, fishing are minor occupations.
- Almost 6% of the households have reported that they have to depend on donation, contribution or community help for survival.

It is evident that without occupational diversification or development of marketable skills or landright, it is not feasible to create opportunities of self-employment, even for able-bodied persons in the selected families

Disaggregated data analysis indicates that non-institutional sources are still dominant :

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|----------|
| a) Friends and neighbour | : | (34.45%) |
| b) Shop Keeper | : | (37.2%) |
| c) Money lender | : | (20%) |
| d) MFI | : | (8%) |
| e) Bank | : | (3.2%) |
| f) Co-Operative Society | : | (2.4%) |
| g) SHG | : | (2%) |



This is clearly indicative of almost total financial exclusion

Family survey indicates that all use tubewell water for drinking and most of the sources are within 200 meters of the house. It is indicative of gradual change of awareness to use safe drinking water. In Birhum, fluoride is found in many areas but facilities of testing water are still remaining unreached. Most of the houses visited (89%) do not have any sanitary toilet and 5% of those who have, are not using these. In case of sanitation, there is a definite need for change in awareness and behaviour.



Response analysis of families interviewed indicates that :

- The food insecure households spend 92.7% of their earning on food.
- 81% of the selected families buy food from the open market.

c)10,7% of the families borrow from money lender when they can not secure food.

Family survey indicates that at least 12% of the families suffer from extremely alarming state of hunger as they have little purchasing power to buy food from the open market.

In a situation where the families suffer from hunger, it is imperative that they should have access to public services as prioritized households.

Field survey reveals that :

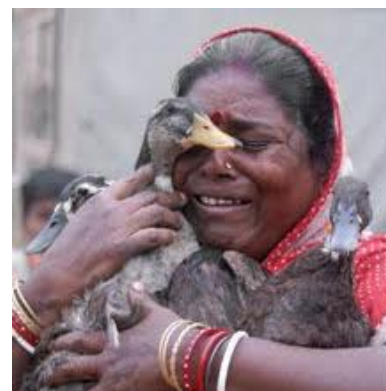
a) In spite of about 90% of them having job cards, 85% of them have reported that they have got wage employment under NREGA for not more than 20 days in the last year.

b)40% of the respondents have reported that their children going to school get mid-day meals.

c) 90% of the respondents who have children upto 6 years of age have reported that their children get supplementary food from the ICDS centers.

d) All of them have health cards and get preventive health care services from the subsidiary health centers.

e) Only 21.7% of the respondents are aware of their entitlements from the public distribution system. Only 39% of the respondents can get food grains from fair price shops, others can not draw their supplies because they do not have purchasing power. 70% of the respondents have expressed their dissatisfaction of the services from the PDS outlets.



The survey finds that supplementary feeding services of ICDS centers, mid-day meals in elementary schools and basic preventive health care services like immunization are functional though some irregularities have been reported but the PDS services are almost inaccessible to those who suffer from hunger.

SAHAYA, a special scheme designed by the Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal has been found to be partially implemented in Ghuskira village of Murarai I Block with the active involvement of a self-help group named “Sabuj Swanirvar Gosthi”. In Pagha village of Barla GP in Nalhati I Block, Sahaya Bandhu has been selected from a Self-Help-Group. Hashima Bibi of Swapnalu SHG has been trained as SAHAYA Bandhu. Because of non availability of funds, SAHAYA can not be implemented yet in this GP. In other villagers studied, SAHAYA is still not operational.



Case study of SAHAYA implemented by Sabuj SHG (Murarai I Block)



Gram Panchayat has prepared a list of 180 persons who need assistance under SAHAYA. Sabuj SHG has taken the responsibility of providing cooked food to old and infirm persons in the village. Mid-day meal is prepared in the house of Anguria Bibi who has herself purchased cooking utensils. She also buys rice and vegetables from the local market. Officials advised her to start gruel kitchen but the SHG decided to serve hot cooked rice and vegetables. The group gets Rs.4/- per person per day and Re.1/- for cooking from the GP that too at an interval of 3-4 months. The solitary example demonstrates that such a programme with laudable objectives, can not be implemented without social mobilization and community support.

Focus group discussions with the villagers of GPs studied in Birbhum district reveal that :

- There is a general feeling that targeting of BPL households has been wrongly done, seems to be biased or manipulated.
- Creation of mandays of wage employment under NREGA varies between GPs and villages studied as indicated below :

<u>Block</u>	<u>GP</u>	<u>Villages</u>	<u>Mandays Created</u>
Murarai I	Murarai	Ghuskira	10-12
Murarai I	Dumurgram	Baliara	20-25
Nalhati I	Barla	Pakha	20
Nalhati I	Kalitha	Amaipur	30-40

- Most of the villagers have expressed their discontent about implementation of Indira Awas Yojna – wrong selection, exclusion, leakages and incomplete work.
- Almost all villagers are dissatisfied about functioning of PDS – irregular and inadequate supplies, favouritism, lack of transparency.
- People generally expressed their satisfaction over the over-all functioning of mid-day meals in elementary schools, supplementary feeding in anganwadi centres and preventive health care services in subsidiary health centres.
- People are still unaware of Gram Sabha and their rights to articulate their demands there.

Self-help groups have been formed in all the villages studied but are in different stages of development. Most of these groups are engaged in thrift and micro-credit activities, some of these groups formed under SGSY have passed the first grading test and are engaged in traditional livelihood activities. While they are planning to graduate, they are facing problems of skill, infrastructure and market. Members of Sabuj SHG in Murarai I Block have been trained in vermi culture and assured of marketing. In spite of being trained, they can not scale up their activity in absence of marketing linkage. Muslim weaver families of Dumurgram GP in Murarai I Block are facing distress because of the sickness of traditional handloom industry. A few groups have set-up hiring services of power threshers with financial assistance under SGSY. Mostly, group members are engaged in home-based agro-processing or livestock raising. Yet, most of the extremely vulnerable families facing hunger have not yet been mobilized in groups as they are unable to save which is the entry-point activity. The idea of forming joint liability group has not yet been tried.



Asked what benefits they would require to change their state of food insecurity, majority of them have preferred land either on ownership or on lease so that they can grow food crop. Next in choice is livestock which they can tender at home. A few prefer to opt for home-based activity like rope making, food processing, ‘bidi’ rolling as they do not have higher skills. Given financial assistance, they would prefer income generation rather than consumption.

Women who bear the brunt of hunger and malnutrition are organizing themselves into self-help groups and are voicing their concerns before the Gram Panchayats. The potential of these groups can be harnessed through decentralized processes of natural resource management to address the issue of food security. Loka Kalyan Parishad has demonstrated through action research in Birbhum district how the GP can take the leadership in the process of decentralized planning for food security involving SHGs, community and the Panchayat through collaboration and synergy. Evaluation of such activities has been found to have reduced food insecurity by at least one month. If such action initiatives are combined with wage employment activities under, NREGA, the issue can partially be addressed (see activities and case study below).

Project Activities

- Production of cereals, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, herbs, fruits and other food crops through cultivation in intensive home / community gardens with women as the main actors.
- Establishment of food grain storages with women groups as custodians to tide over seasonal food insecurity.
- Food, fodder and fuel wood production on common property resources (CPR) by effecting a transfer of usage rights to women's group (public – private participation)
- Food production through private – private partnership by leasing out privately owned seasonal fallows, unutilized water bodies etc. to women groups.
- Sustainable and intensive integrated farming systems for landless and marginal landholders incorporating livestock, horticulture, agro-forestry and aqua culture
- Community seed banks and nurseries through women groups to strengthen crop diversification and to preserve biodiversity.
- NRM – based supplementary activities such as livestock and agro-processing to strengthen purchasing power.



Case Study : Integrated Farming towards : Food Security

Gram Sansad : Hansra – 2

Gram Panchayat : Mangaldihi

Block : Illambazar

Year : 2003-04

Three communities – Muslims, Tribals and Scheduled Castes – live in Hansra – 2 Gram Sansad. Mostly landless labourers, these families depend entirely on 'dadan' (a system of forward contract) for 6-7 months every year. Their diet includes only rice and potato.



46 members of four self-help groups worked under direct facilitation of Sansad Working Committee (a village development committee constituted by Gram Sabha) (SWC). From land records, SWC identified a pond named 'Katasayar' in Neemdanga area which is vested in the government. The SWC persuaded the GP to provide this to the four SHGs on lease for three years @ Rs.500 lease rent per year. This was the beginning. The women's groups took a loan of Rs.30,000 from the SWC.



All the women and their families worked for a month to refurbish the pond as well as to fill the pond sides to make it suitable for growing major Indian crops. These fish varieties took 7-9 months to grow. In the intervening period, vegetables were cultivated thrice by these groups. Brinjal, chilli, bitter gourd, bean, elephant foot, ladies finger and 'collo caspiasp' were some of the vegetable varieties. It is interesting to note that each family was provided with 750 sq.ft plot on the pond side to grow vegetables. Each took seeds as loan. These four groups had repaid their loan after securing food for a month each. The process of transformation was started and the groups realized their power to look for alternatives and bargain with the GP from a position of strength.

Source: Mid-Term Evaluation of Food Security Project.

VIII

Nutritional Study of households Suffering from food insecurity in the six districts studied under Poverty, Hunger and Decentralised Action

As a countervailing study, a cross-sectional study was undertaken find out nutritional status of the households suffering from food insecurity in each of the selected six districts. The objective of this study was to determine the anthropometric characteristics of the population through body-mass index (BMI). The study was conducted by the research team of the Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University under the guidance of Prof. Kausik Bose (see detailed report in Annexure1).

Caste, sex and religion specific distribution of the population is as indicated below

Table: 8.01 Caste, sex, religion-wise distribution of households studied

Indicator	Male		Female		Overall	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
General	651	66.45	645	71.59	1296	79.98
SC	88	9.25	76	8.44	164	8.86
OBC	84	8.83	91	10.10	175	9.45
ST	128	13.46	89	9.88	217	11.72
Hindu	278	29.23	239	26.53	0517	27.92
Muslim	673	70.77	652	73.47	1335	72.08

Source : Field survey

Disaggregated analysis of data collected during survey indicates that:

- a) high levels of under nutrition are observed across age groups with old persons suffering most, followed by children in the growth period (0-14).
- b) The chronically malnourished and the alarming malnourished will be around 22% amongst males and 20% amongst females (it may be noted that in Muslim families, girl child is less neglected than others).

This study confirms the earlier field observations from field studies that 15%-20% of the rural population are suffering from hunger and there is a strong co-relationship between hunger and malnutrition.



Sex and district-specific prevalence of under nutrition indicates that the highest level of under nutrition is in Purulia district (male – 58.43, female – 75.82%) and lowest level of under nutrition is in Cooch Behar district (male – 11.59% and female – 42.11%) as is indicated in the following table:

Table: 8.02 Sex and district specific prevalence of under nutrition (%) amongst rural population based on MUAC.

District	% of Under nutrition (Male)	% of Under nutrition (Female)
Purulia	58.43	75.82
Murshidabad	13.33	49.09
Cooch Behar	11.59	42.11
Jalpaiguri	30.00	46.24
Uttar Dinajpur	29.17	41.89
Birbhum	26.02	69.60

Source Field survey

The survey finds that under nutrition amongst females is alarmingly high and therefore, needs policy attention.

This study corroborates the findings of NFHS (2005-06) indicating malnutrition in rural areas of West Bengal 40% amongst SC, 59.72% amongst ST, 50% amongst OBC extremely poor households.



IX

Poverty, Hunger and Public Action – Study of on-going decentralization in West Bengal

Major Findings Of Research Study :

Despite impressive growth rate of foodgrains production during the late 80's till early 90's and its much-published record of land reforms and decentralization, West Bengal is passing through an alarming state of hunger particularly amongst the bottom 30% of the poor house holds. The situation is turning from bad to worse. According to the Global Hunger Index, 2008, West Bengal ranks 8 among 17 states of India. It has slipped from the 7th rank in a similar study done in 1994. 12 out of 18 districts of the state are amongst the 100 poorest districts of India. The per capita production of food grains, per capita availability and per capita public investment in agriculture are continuously declining in West Bengal. The currently high rise in food prices, alarming rate of degradation of natural resources, increasing rate of landlessness, climate change effects are likely to affect the coping mechanism of the chronically malnourished. A shadow of near famine is looming large. According to rural household survey (2005), 4.8 lakhs rural households are suffering from extremely alarming state of hunger while 15.4 lakhs rural households are suffering from moderate to high pangs of hunger.

It was unique when the Panchayats and Rural Development Department decided that the state would address hunger through the process of decentralization and direct action initiative called SAHAYA in November, 2007. It was the first time that the problem was looked upon as an issue of underdevelopment (not of relief which is the common belief even now). The programme was designed to be implemented through a poverty sub-plan by the PRIs. Besides, a number of centrally-sponsored poverty implementation programme like NREGA, Mid-day Meals, ICDS, NSAP, AAY, PDS ought to have impacted on poverty and hunger of the marginalized people. The PRIs have a role in implementing the programmes.

The objectives of the present study are:

- a) To identify the factors which can be attributed to the problems of poverty and hunger.
- b) To find out to what extent the existing state-led flagship programmes and services could reach out and impact on poverty and hunger.
- c) To find out how decentralized action initiatives through the process of strengthening decentralization could address the issues.

The study was carried out in six back-ward districts of West Bengal through stratified random selection of food insecure families identified from the list prepared in the rural households survey by the following sampling design:

Table 9.01 : Sampling Design of Research Study

Sl. No.	District	Frequency	Valid per centage
1.	Jalpaiguri	355	20.9
2.	Uttar Dinajpur	260	15.3
3.	Murshidabad	322	19.2
4.	Birbhum	290	17.2
5.	Purulia	261	15.4
6.	Cooch Behar	203	12.0
Total		1691	100.0

While all the districts studied are identified to be backward and all the households selected are from the bottom 30% of the BPL households, there are diversities in the area specificities, social grouping, ethnic composition and natural endowments. The study represents a mosaic of households living in different physical, social, economic and natural environment in West Bengal.

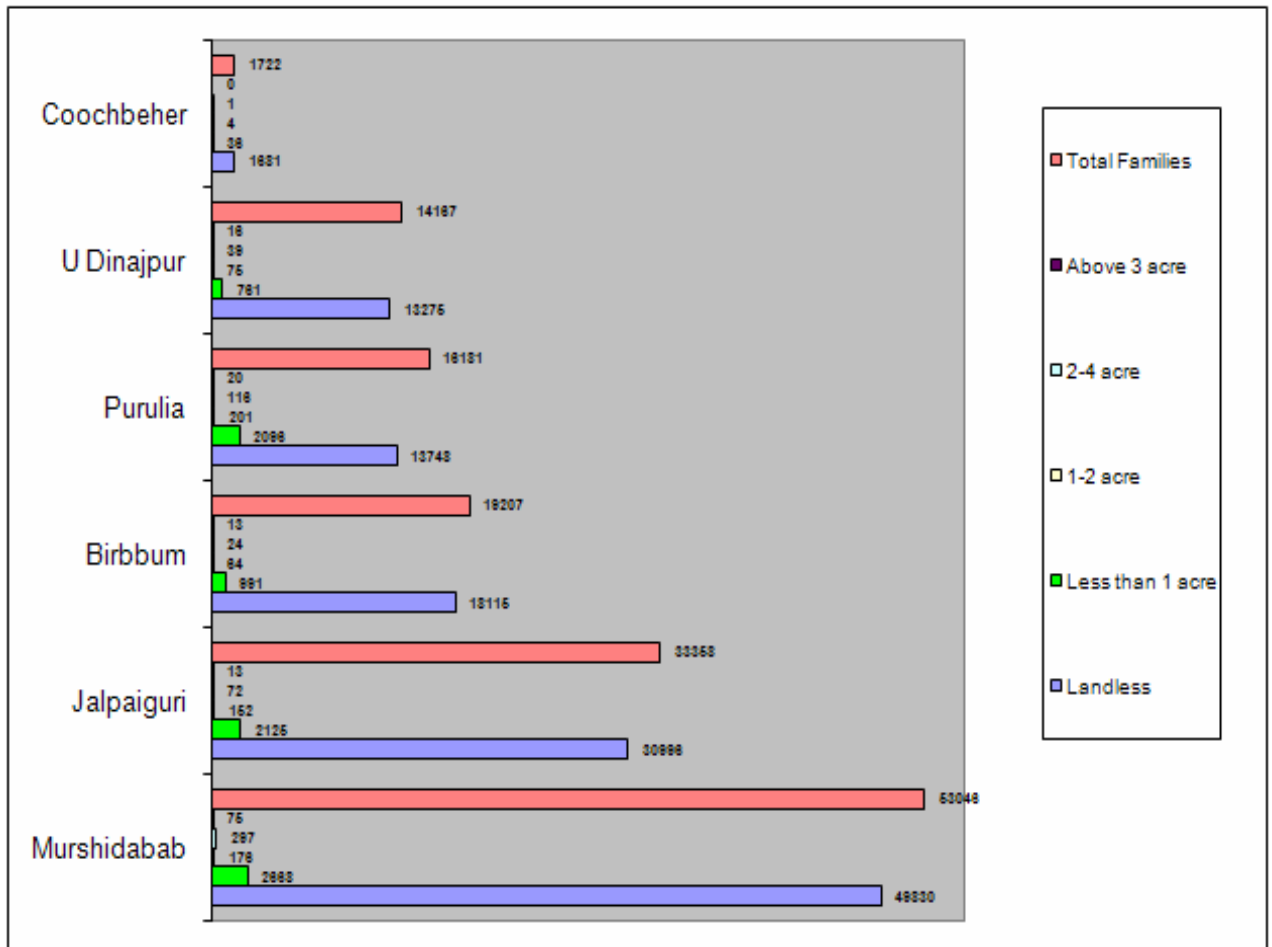
Cross tabulation of data collected from the households survey in the six districts indicates that:

- a) There is a strong co-relationship of hunger with landlessness, unemployment, low income or contingent poverty.
- b) Those who suffer from chronic hunger are those who do not at present have any adult earning member of the family because of death of the sole bread earner or being widowed or being old-aged or suffering from chronic illness.
- c) Those who chronically suffer from hunger are those who suffer from social, financial and institutional exclusion.
- d) Most of the households suffering from hunger are those who depend almost totally on agriculture as there has been little diversification either in agriculture or in off-farm occupations.
- e) Those who suffer from chronic hunger are those who do not generally get more than 30 days employment in the year.
- f) Those who suffer from chronic hunger are those whose daily average income does not exceed Rs. 50 and thus they have to spend almost 90% of their earning to buy food from the open market.
- g) Those who suffer from chronic hunger are those who borrow from money lender, migrate, eat less, send children for work, sell asset or simple depend on charity.



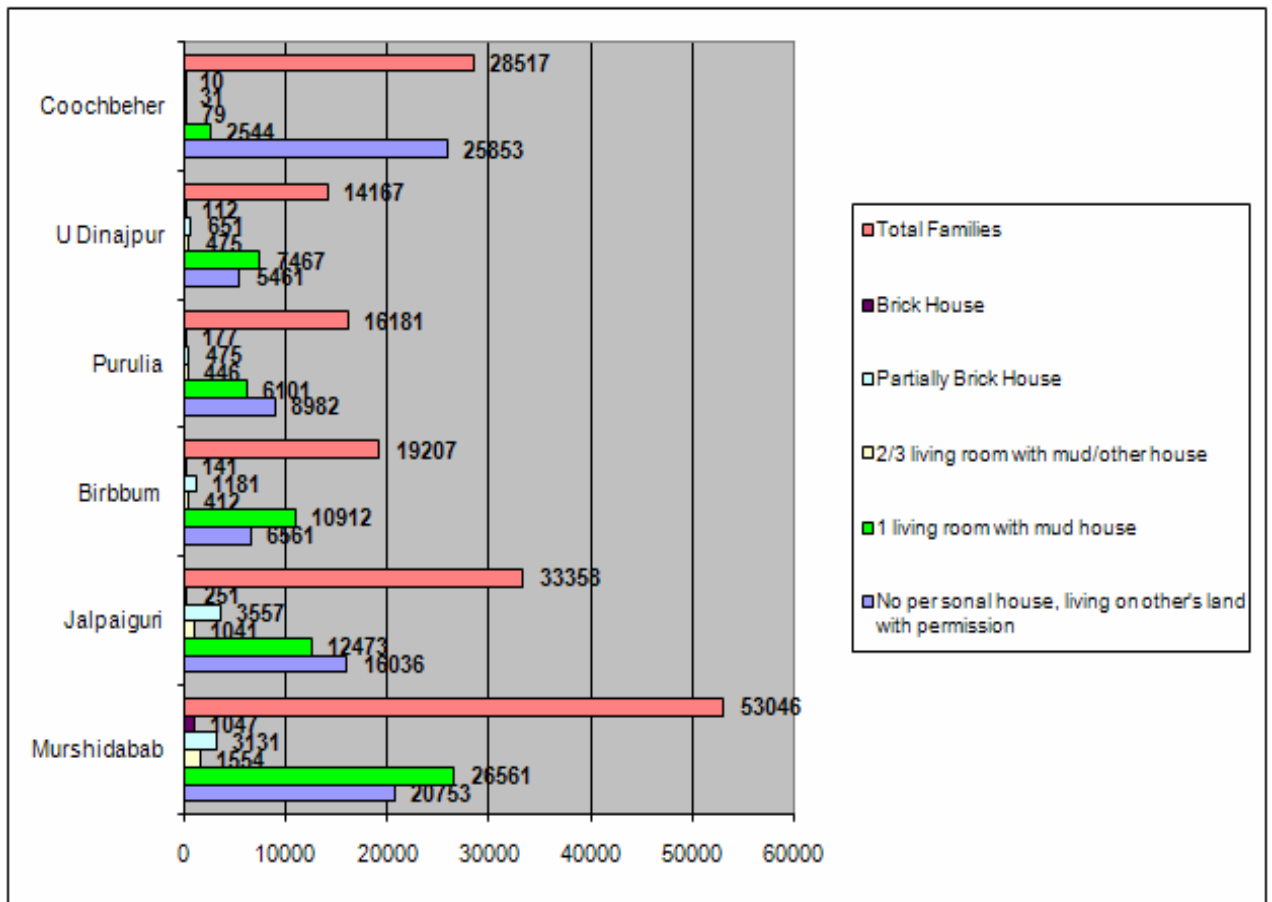
P1 - Distribution of rural households according to size of land holding

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Coochbeher
Landless	49830	30996	18115	13748	13275	1681
Less than 1 acre	2668	2125	991	2096	761	36
1-2 acre	176	152	64	201	75	4
2-4 acre	297	72	24	116	39	1
Above 3 acre	75	13	13	20	16	0
Total Families	53046	33358	19207	16181	14167	1722



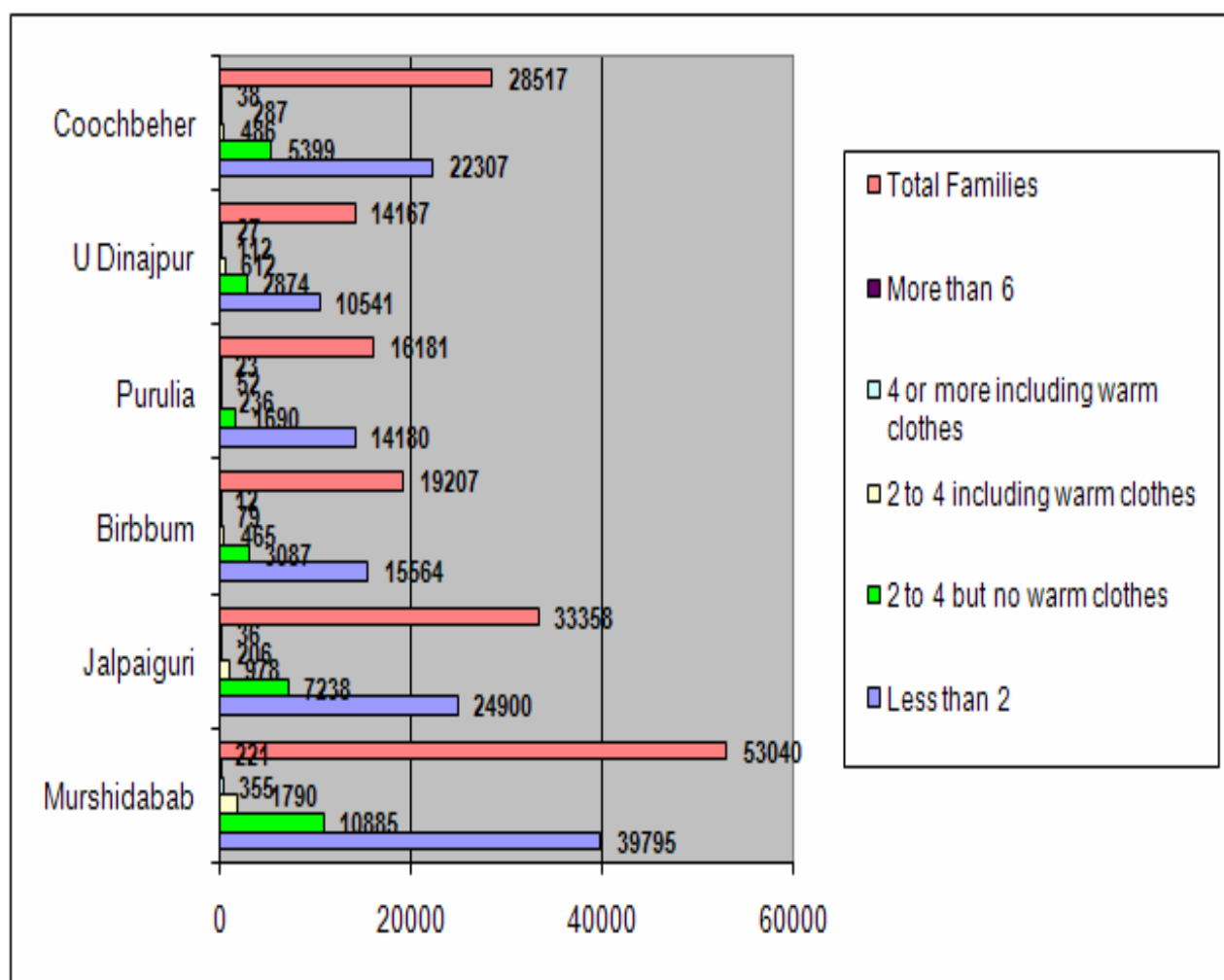
P2 - Distribution of rural households according to nature of dwelling house

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Coochbeher
No personal house, living on other's land with permission	20753	16036	6561	8982	5461	25853
1 living room with mud house	26561	12473	10912	6101	7467	2544
2/3 living room with mud/other house	1554	1041	412	446	475	79
Partially Brick House	3131	3557	1181	475	651	31
Brick House	1047	251	141	177	112	10
Total Families	53046	33358	19207	16181	14167	28517



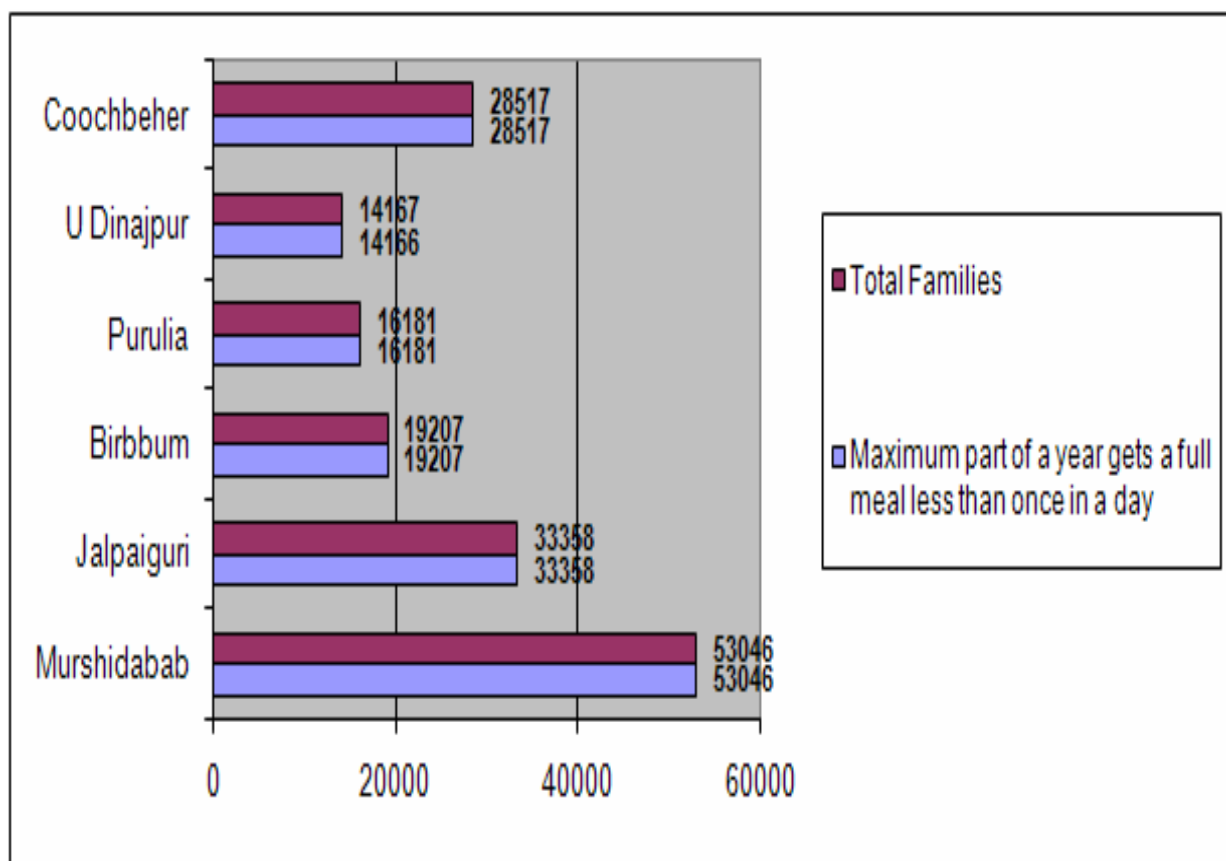
P3 - Distribution of rural households according to average no. of clothing (per member)

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Coochbeher
Less than 2	39795	24900	15564	14180	10541	22307
2 to 4 but no warm clothes	10885	7238	3087	1690	2874	5399
2 to 4 including warm clothes	1790	978	465	236	612	486
4 or more including warm clothes	355	206	79	52	112	287
More than 6	221	36	12	23	27	38
Total Families	53040	33358	19207	16181	14167	28517



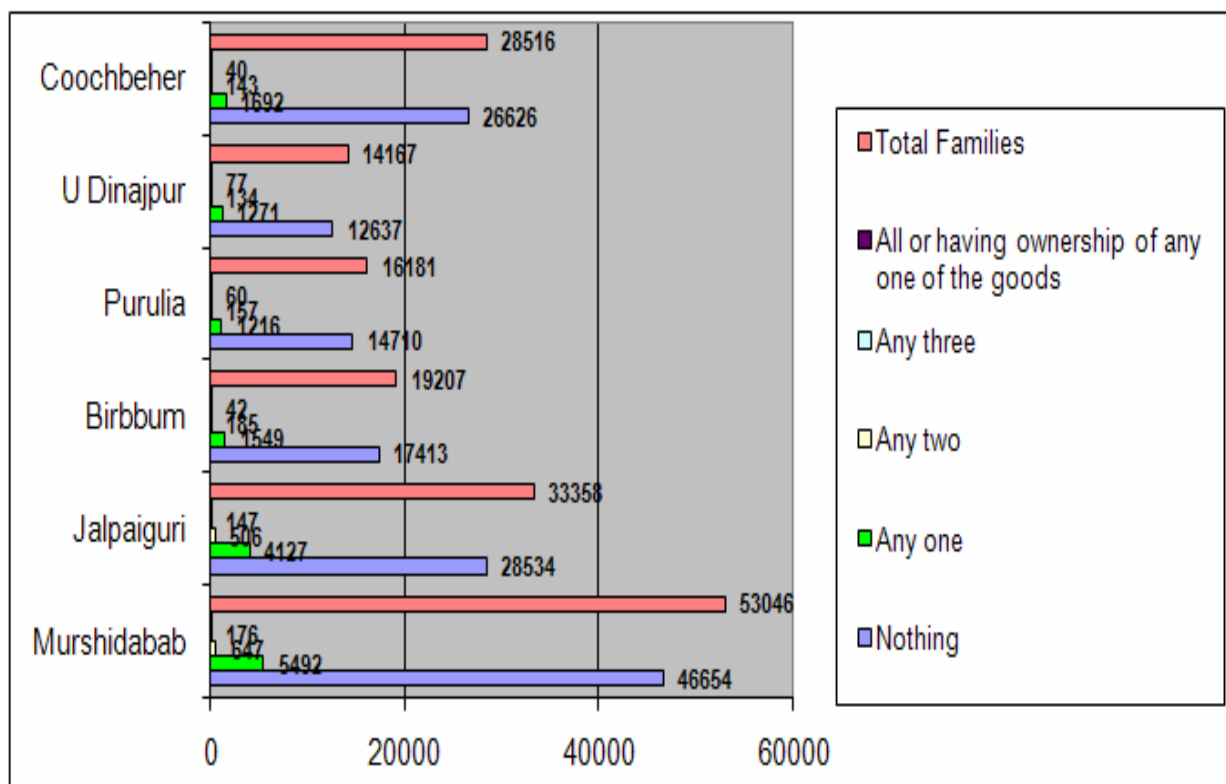
P4 - Distribution of rural households according to nature of food security

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Coochbeher
Maximum part of a year gets a full meal less than once in a day	53046	33358	19207	16181	14166	28517
Total Families	53046	33358	19207	16181	14167	28517



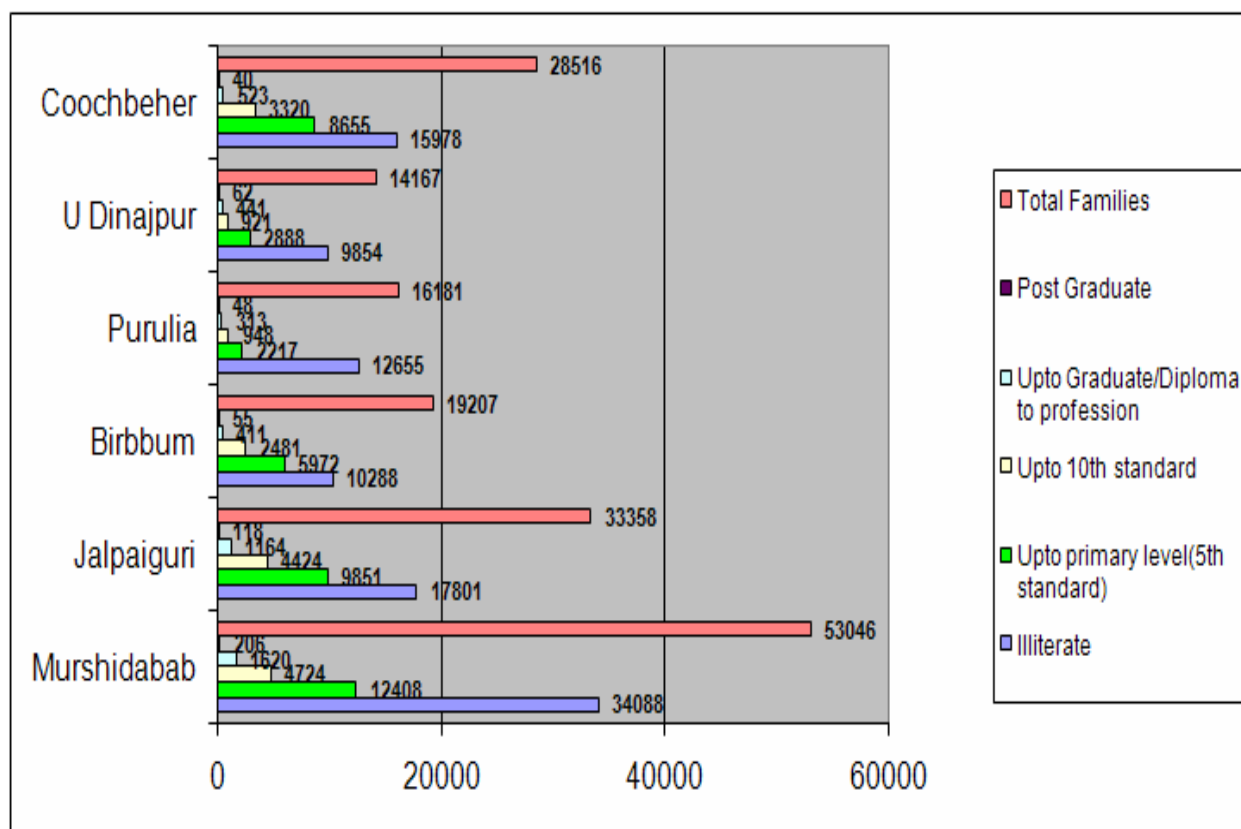
**P5 - Distribution of rural households by ownership of consumable goods:
What does the family have?-cycle, radio, television, electric fan, pressure cooker**

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	U.Dinajpur	Coochbeher
Nothing	46654	28534	17413	14710	12637	26626
Any one	5492	4127	1549	1216	1271	1692
Any two	647	506	185	157	134	143
Any three	176	147	42	60	77	40
All or having ownership of any one of the goods	77	44	18	38	47	15
Total Families	53046	33358	19207	16181	14167	28516



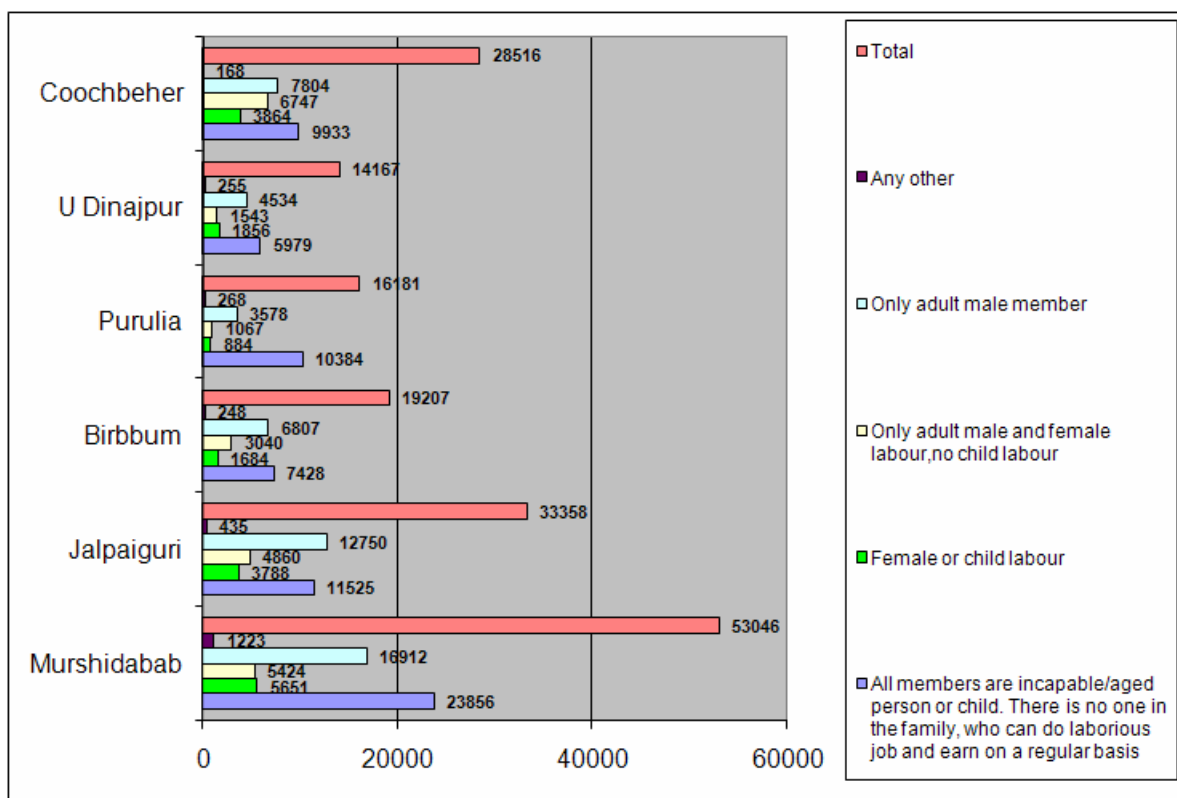
P6 - Distribution of rural households by education level (Most highly educated member of the family)

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch beher
Illiterate	34088	17801	10288	12655	9854	15978
Upto primary level(5th standard)	12408	9851	5972	2217	2888	8655
Upto 10th standard	4724	4424	2481	948	921	3320
Upto Graduate/Dip loma to profession	1620	1164	411	313	441	
Post Graduate	206	118	55	48	62	28516
Total Families	53046	33358	19207	16181	14167	



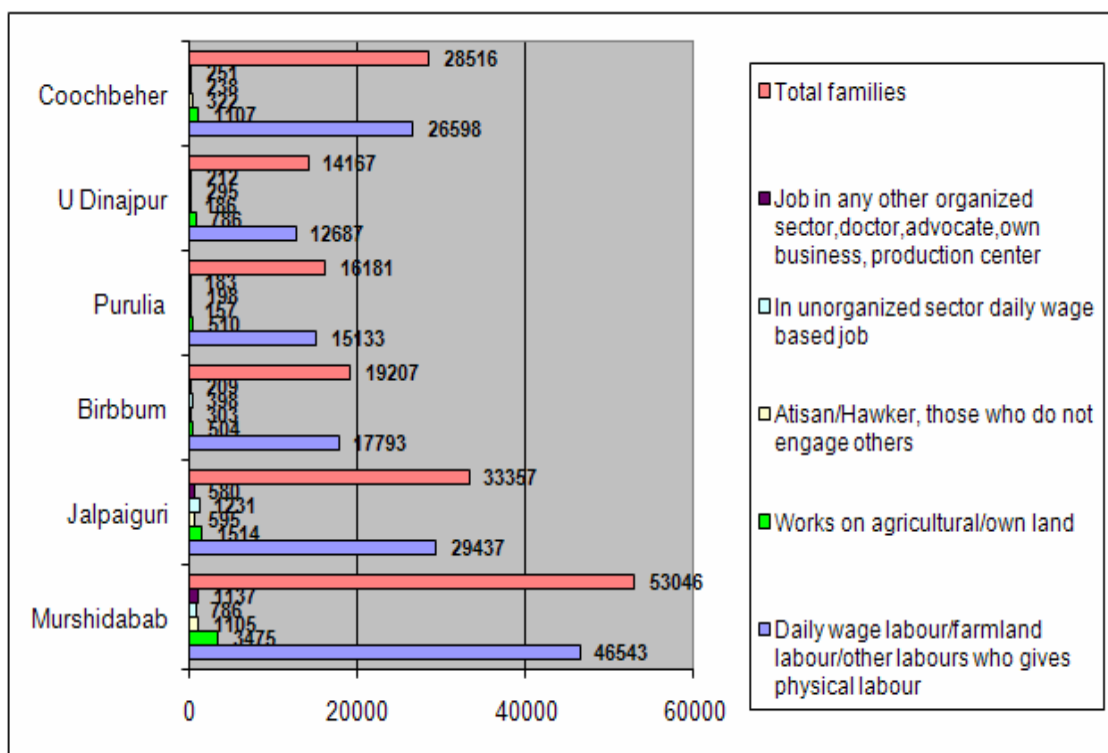
P7 - Distribution of rural households by condition of family on the basis of labour

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch beher
All members are incapable/aged person or child. There is no one in the family, who can do laborious job and earn on a regular basis	23856	11525	7428	10384	5979	9933
Female or child labour	5651	3788	1684	884	1856	3864
Only adult male and female labour, no child labour	5424	4860	3040	1067	1543	6747
Only adult male member	16912	12750	6807	3578	4534	7804
Any other	1223	435	248	268	255	168
Total	53046	33358	19207	16181	14167	28516



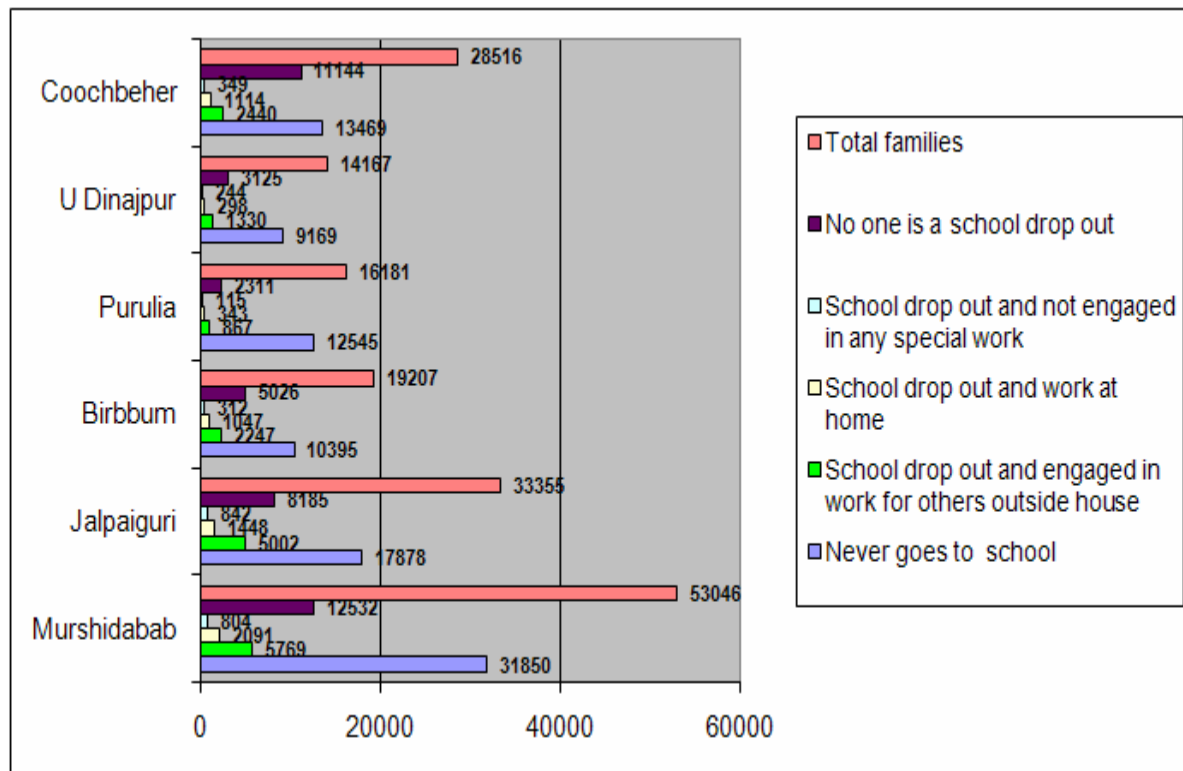
P8 - Distribution of rural households by source of livelihood

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch beher
Daily wage labour/farmland labour/other labours who gives physical labour	46543	29437	17793	15133	12687	26598
Works on agricultural/own land	3475	1514	504	510	786	1107
Atisan/Hawker, those who do not engage others	1105	595	303	157	186	322
In unorganized sector daily wage based job	786	1231	398	198	295	238
Job in any other organized sector,doctor,advocate,own business, production center	1137	580	209	183	212	251
Total families	53046	33357	19207	16181	14167	28516



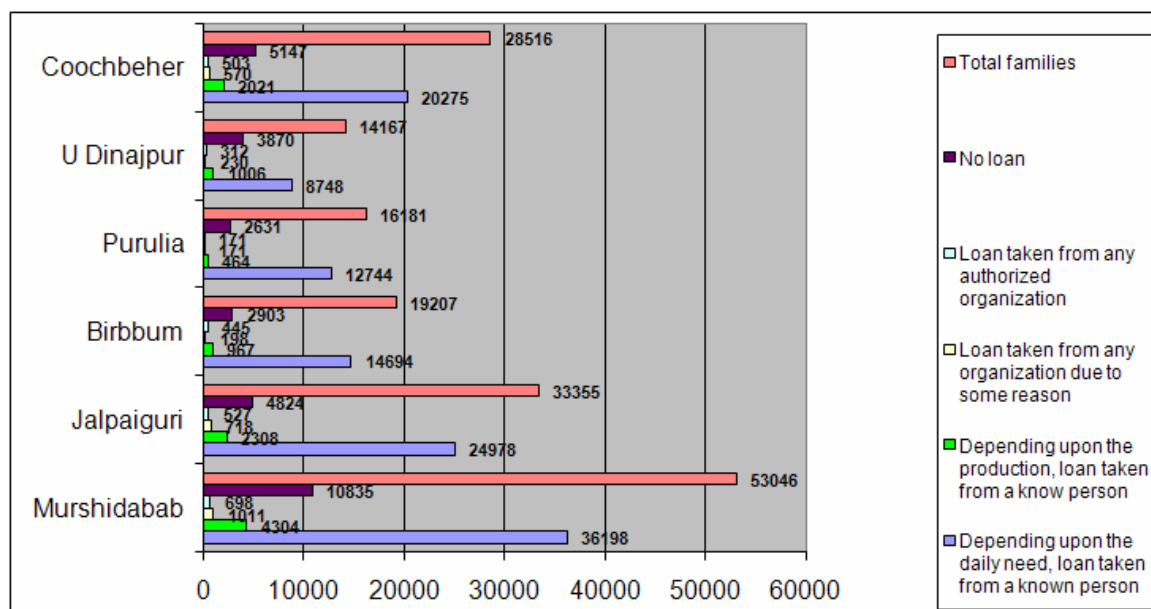
P9 - Distribution of rural households by situation of education of children from the age group of 9-14 years

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch beher
Never goes to school	31850	17878	10395	12545	9169	13469
School drop out and engaged in work for others outside house	5769	5002	2247	867	1330	2440
School drop out and work at home	2091	1448	1047	343	298	1114
School drop out and not engaged in any special work	804	842	312	115	244	349
No one is a school drop out	12532	8185	5026	2311	3125	11144
Total families	53046	33355	19207	16181	14167	28516



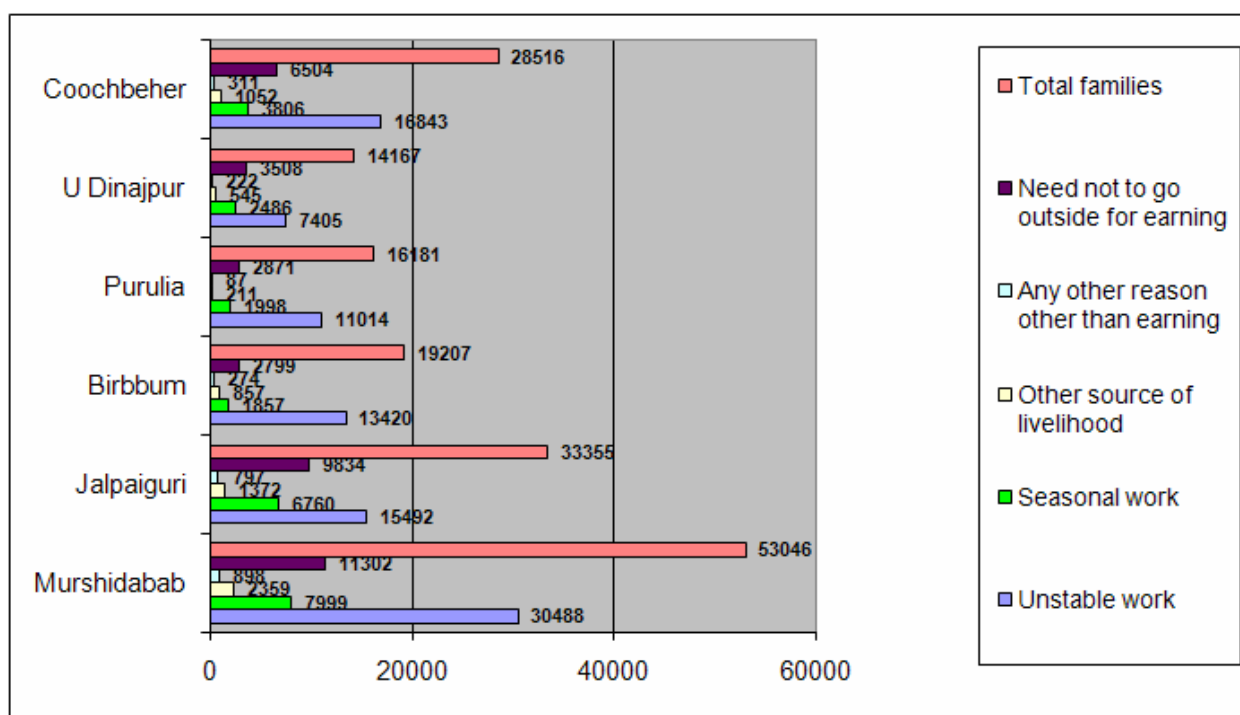
P10 - Distribution of rural households by type of loan

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch beher
Depending upon the daily need, loan taken from a known person	36198	24978	14694	12744	8748	20275
Depending upon the production, loan taken from a know person	4304	2308	967	464	1006	2021
Loan taken from any organization due to some reason	1011	718	198	171	230	570
Loan taken from any authorized organization	698	527	445	171	312	503
No loan	10835	4824	2903	2631	3870	5147
Total families	53046	33355	19207	16181	14167	28516



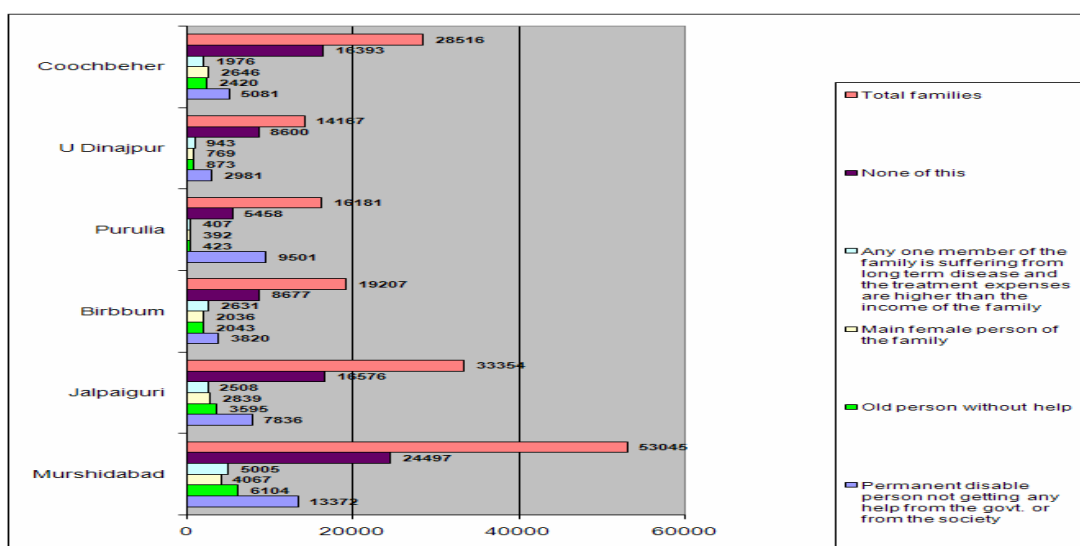
P11 - Distribution of rural household by reason for migration outside the village of main earner of the family for earning

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch beher
Unstable work	30488	15492	13420	11014	7405	16843
Seasonal work	7999	6760	1857	1998	2486	3806
Other source of livelihood	2359	1372	857	211	545	1052
Any other reason other than earning	898	797	274	87	222	311
Need not to go outside for earning	11302	9834	2799	2871	3508	6504
Total families	53046	33355	19207	16181	14167	28516



P12 - Distribution of rural household by special type of poverty

	Murshidabad	Jalpaiguri	Birbbum	Purulia	Uttar Dinajpur	Coochbeher
Permanent disable person not getting any help from the govt. or from the society	13372	7836	3820	9501	2981	5081
Old person without help	6104	3595	2043	423	873	2420
Main female person of the family	4067	2839	2036	392	769	2646
Any one member of the family is suffering from long term disease and the treatment expenses are higher than the income of the family	5005	2508	2631	407	943	1976
None of this	24497	16576	8677	5458	8600	16393
Total families	53045	33354	19207	16181	14167	28516



The study finds that those who suffer from chronic hunger need strong social safety net.

It is in this context that the study has probed into the extent of access of these families to state-led programmes and services for poverty alleviation like ICDS, Mid-day Meal scheme, JSS, NSAP, Targeted PDS, AAY and NREGS. The survey finds that there is wide spread discontent in targeting BPL families indicating that the process is neither transparent nor participatory. Unless targeting is correctly done, there are bound to be leakages in the system and in some cases, universalisation may be an option to be tried.

ICDS provides universal coverage of children below 6 years of age with services of supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring, nutrition and health education, immunization, referral and pre-school education. According to the directions of the Supreme Court, ICDS services should be accessible to all the children under 6, all pregnant women, lactating mothers and all adolescent girls. **Field studies find that anganwadi centres are generally operational to provide supplementary nutrition (only in 5% of the cases, the centre was closed) but the children find the food inadequate indicating that they do not get 300 calories and 8-10 gms. of protein from the food that is served.** In course of the survey, none of the adolescent girls who are entitled to 500 calories and 20-25 gms. of protein has been found. **Many pregnant women and nursing mothers can not travel upto the centre to get supplementary food (500 calories and 20-25 gms. of protein).** In one of the centres set up in the Padma erosion area, AWW is frequently absent because of inaccessibility to the centre. However, in one of the centres visited, GP is looking after the functioning of the AWC and supporting it with untied fund to enrich quality of food.

The Supreme Court has directed that “the State Government will provide prepared mid-day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 gms. of protein each day in every government-assisted primary school for a minimum of 200 days, **Field survey finds that mid-day meal scheme is operational except in tea garden areas but the children and parents have complained of poor quality in many cases (more water than foodgrains) indicating that there are supply side problems.** Those who are out of schools in case of vulnerability are deprived of mid-day meal. In most of the schools, mid-day meals are prepared by self-help groups who take care of feeding the children. One Gram Panchayat was found to have helped the self-help group with assistance of NGO to get up a nutrition garden in the school premises. This has helped the children to get leafy vegetables in the mid-day meal.

The national Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) was launched as a component of National Social Assistance Programme to provide through the GP nutrition support to pregnant women in the BPL category in the form of grant of Rs. 500, 8-12 weeks prior to delivery for each of the first two live births. NMBS was merged into the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) since 2005 to promote institutional delivery. **Field study finds that BPL women who were eligible to get benefit under NMBS and had home delivery, did not get the benefit. Since institutional deliveries were found to be around 40% most of the BPL women were deprived of the maternity benefit.**

Under Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), all old people above 65 years of age in the BPL category are eligible to get a pension of Rs. 400 per month. **Field studies find that there is a large exclusion of old people from the benefit of the scheme and lot of discontentment is seen in village studies.** In course of field work, the villagers were found to have prepared lists of excluded persons and submitted these to the BDO. On inquiry, it was found that those who were less than 60 years of age according to voter identity card, were excluded though such verification could have been avoided by obtaining declaration from them duly certified by GP Pradhan. Those who were recipients used to receive the pension at long interval sometimes at an interval of 6 months.

Under the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS), families are entitled to a grant of Rs. 10,000 in the case of the death of the primary bread earner. In course of focus group discussions with the villagers during the field study, **it is found that the general level of awareness is poor and because**

of wrong identification of families in the BPL survey, there are exclusions particularly amongst those who are the poorest and none to help them in completing formalities like obtaining a death certificate.

Under the targeted public distribution system (TFDS), at present, families below poverty line are entitled to 35 kg. of rice or wheat at subsidised rates and those who are in the bottom line and having Antyodaya Anna cards (AAY) are entitled to the same quantity at roughly half the price of that which is fixed for all the BPL families.

The Government of India was directed by the Supreme Court to place on AAY category the following groups of persons:

- a) Aged, infirm, disabled, destitute men and women, pregnant and lactating women.
- b) Widows and other single women with no regular support.
- c) Old persons (aged 60 or above) with no regular support and no assured means of subsistence.
- d) Households with a disabled adult and no assured means of subsistence.
- e) Households where due to old age, lack of physical or mental fitness, social customs, need to care for a disabled or other reasons, no adult member is available to engage in gainful employment outside the house.

Field study finds that these categories of households are worst sufferers of hunger but almost totally excluded from the benefit of subsidized foodgrains under AAY. There is incorrect targeting which is strongly resented by the community.

These who have got AAY cards or those who are identified to be BPL do not get, as revealed during focus group discussions, the full quota of their entitlement under PDS. **Many of them are not aware of their entitlement and do not have the power to articulate their demand.** In fact, the PDS system, as per opinion of the people interviewed or discussed with, is in total disarray. **The Food Security Bill ought to revamp the PDS before the right to food is legislated upon.**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 guarantees every rural household 100 days of work on demand from the household at minimum wages. NREGA has also provisions for payment of wages on time, social audit and unemployment allowance in case of failure of the state to provide work. **Field survey finds that 46% of the households did not get any work, 40% got work upto 15 days and 13% of them got work upto 30 days.** Less than 1% of the households surveyed got wage employment between 61 and 90 days. **Besides of late, there has been inordinate delay in payment of wages demotivating labourers to seek employment under NREGS. Field survey finds that the implementation machinery with GP at the centre, failed to provide safety net to the poorest who suffer from food insecurity.**

SAHAYA, which has been designed to target those who are hungry are more misunderstood or decried than understood or appreciated. DRDA considers this programme of the state government merely as a channel for disbursement of funds to GPs than to lead the programme from the front as in the case of SGSY. **Most of the GP members visited by study team are neither aware nor oriented on the objectives of the programme. They raise their protest against selection of the families by the PRDD. Most of them consider the programme to be another relief programme to feed the destitutes by opening gruel kitchen.** SAHAYA Mitras who are members of SHGs and have been trained in many of the GPs visited, are not interested to look after these families as the remuneration for the work is insignificantly low. Pradhans are not prepared to run the programme from their own fund and wait indefinitely for reimbursement. **In spite of laudable objectives, SAHAYA virtually has remained inoperative because no one is willing to take ownership of the programme.** The only exception found during the field survey is in Murarai I Block of Birbhum district where a women self-help group has been running the programme out of their own initiative and concern for the hungry in their own community.

Another programme of the state government which is much in need for these families is 'bhomidan prakalpa' of the Land Reforms Department. The scheme provides for granting land to the homeless and the landless out of state government's budget. In course of field study, it was found that many families have lost their home and agricultural land because of floods or erosion of the Padma embankment. This scheme is ideally suited to them. In Sansad 12 of Patchara GP in Cooch Behar district, the villagers were the worst victims of floods from the Saltia river. The villages were in a green valley-which soon become a sand dune. In spite of visit to these villages by the central study team alongwith the MP, no resettlement of these families could be done. In course of field inquiries, it is found that only seven families have been identified but the process of land grant under 'bhomidan prakalpa' is yet to start.

The field survey reveals that there has been almost total institutional and system failure to provide social safety net to the hungry families and this leads the field survey team to believe that the poorest the family is, furthest is their distance from the institutions that are professed to stand by their side. It is high time to think that unless the community takes care of the poor and the hungry, the institutions will not be able to reach out to them. Without this synergy, true decentralization will remain a pipe dream.

On the other hand, nature which for centuries provided strongest life support system to the poor is under severe stress, degraded or denuded in West Bengal. Some common problems are:

- Very small amount of land, often fragmented, per capita availability is around 0.08 hectare.
- Low land, which becomes uncultivable due to long and unpredictable water logging condition.
- Land remaining fallow because of monsoon failure or having no source of irrigation.
- Unpredictability of climate (rainfall/temperature/fog/storm).
- Where irrigation facilities are available, land is farmed intensively but only a few crops are grown in large scale. Most of these are input intensive/water demanding hybrid varieties.
- Gradual disappearance of common property resources and many aquatic organisms cutting off the practice of food collection from nature by the poorest.
- Loss of local variety fruits, vegetables, crops, birds, animals and germ plasm.

All these problems have resulted in:

- Poor suffer from seasonal or long – term shortages of food and gainful employment. Some farmers produce enough food in a good year but their production levels are highly unstable.
- Farmers depend on few crops and overuse of agri-chemicals which affect vulnerable groups such as landless families, indigenous people, female-headed households who are dependent on collection of wild plants, animals, fish / crab etc.
- Farmers have lost their collective knowledge and control over vital inputs (such as seeds) and have become dependent on external market / institutions who often promote their products to the detriment of farmer's interests.
- Increased use of toxic chemicals in agriculture affects health of both farmer and consumer, reduces populations of many beneficial insects and micro-organisms causing pest resurgences and crop losses.

High capital and input – intensive agriculture has not only caused loss of bio-diversity but also become unremunerative. Small and marginal farmers are looking for options which will utilise all space, improve soil resilience, extend growing season and enhance bio – diversity. Some NGOs who are working on sustainable agriculture have demonstrated examples of cropping sequence, multistory arrangement and integrated subsystem. West Bengal State Agriculture Commission has also recommended such models for food insecure families.

The state government in the Department of Agriculture depends largely on the centrally – sponsored schemes namely :

- National Food Security Mission
- Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojana
- National Project on Soil Health and Productivity
- Soil Nutrient Mapping
- Nutrient – based subsidy
- Micro – nutrient fortification

On use of technology, there is a debate going on but there is a general consensus that we must be more attentive to some of the unintended social and environmental concerns of our achievement. **This is the time to reflect on various policy options to meet the challenges ahead, perhaps best characterized as the need for livelihood and food security under increasingly constrained environmental conditions from within and outside the realm of agriculture and globalised economic systems.**



Poverty, Hunger and Public Action - Study of on-going decentralization initiatives in West Bengal - Issues and Way Forward

West Bengal with a state hunger index of 21 is in an alarming state of hunger. According to rural household survey (2005), 4.8 lakh households are facing hunger often and 15.5 lakh households are suffering from severe food insecurity. This is also reflected in the number of underweighed children below 5 years of age and malnourishment amongst poor women. Field studies reveal that the alarming state of hunger exists within bottom 30% of the BPL households. Those who often face hunger are:

- a) aged, infirm, disabled, destitute men and women, pregnant and lactating women;
- b) widows and single women with no regular support
- c) old persons (aged 60 and above) with no regular support and no assured means of subsistence
- d) households where no adult member is available to engage in gainful employment outside the house
- e) households with a disabled adult and no assured means of subsistence
- f) households which are victims of natural calamity like erosion of the Padma or the Ganges or victims of contingent poverty like sickness or closure of tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district.

These are the categories who are unfortunately still outside the adequate coverage of social safety net. The survey finds strong co-relationship of hunger with landlessness, unemployment, low-income and unforeseen contingencies. This implies that;

- a) the agenda of land reforms has been left incomplete
- b) the full benefits of employment programmes (wage employment as well as self-employment) have not reached out to them
- c) financial exclusion has deprived them of income generating possibilities.
- d) social safety nets are inadequate for them to cope with emergencies like floods, river erosion, drought or contingencies like sickness or closure of tea gardens

There is a perceptible absence of association between state-level growth of per capita domestic product or per capita income with poverty and hunger co-existing.

A participatory review of the on-going poverty alleviation programmes indicates that:

- a) the ICDS services are operational in most of the areas studied. 60% of the eligible children are covered under supplementary nutrition programme though nutrition is found to be inadequate.
- b) mid day meal scheme for children in elementary schools is found to be operational and the services of self-help groups are generally found to be satisfactory.
- c) coverage of Janani Suraksha Yojana is relatively low as 60% of deliveries take place at home.
- d) coverage of IGNOAPS has increased but not yet been universalized amongst BPL households.
- e) the benefit of NFBS is also found to be not yet universal amongst BPL households because of lack of awareness and hand-holding.
- f) Targeted PDS has failed to provide food security support to those who are in the bottom-line of the BPL households. Monitoring and vigilance system have failed to check leakages in the PDS.
- g) person-days of wage employment under NREGA are on an average 16 days during 2009-10 as found through household surveys of selected families.
- h) SAHAYA which is a state-sponsored programme to address hunger is virtually non-operational.

Lacklustre performance of poverty –alleviation programmes which ought to have impacted on hunger and are mostly implemented or monitored by PRIs in West Bengal indicates that unless there are structural and functional changes in the process of decentralization, social mobilization, community participation, and empowerment of the poor through organization,

capacity building and intensive facilitation, the millennium development goal of reducing extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 will be too distant a goal to be achieved.

It is high time to look for alternatives which can help fulfillment of the following goals dreamt of in our 'Tryst with Destiny':

- nobody ever goes to bed hungry
- mothers do not have to teach the children how to live with hunger.
- hunger and starvation deaths never happen
- foodgrains produced are not wasted
- malnutrition of women and children is prevented
- no woman suffers from anemia
- the old and the vulnerable are taken care of by the society
- food is available in the market at affordable price
- nature is restored to provide enough food to us"

There is a case for revisiting decentralization which has been found to be inadequate in absence of participation of community and social action. Mere structural decentralization will not be enough nor will macro-economic growth be capable of addressing poverty, unemployment, inequity, exclusion and hunger.

Agriculture is still mainstay of the rural economy in West Bengal as there is little diversification. Even with pre-ponderance of small and marginal holdings, West Bengal recorded impressive growth rate of food grains production in the late 80s till early 90's primarily because of HYV-water-fertiliser technology. Such growth was noticed in the districts of Gangetic Valley but the rain-fed areas failed to address the issues of food insecurity causing inter-district imbalances of growth and migration. The state of agriculture in West Bengal is now facing crisis and there are genuine concerns for deterioration in the conditions of food and livelihood security because of:

- a) stagnating and lagging foodgrains production
- b) increasing rate of landlessness and marginalization of agricultural households
- c) rapid degradation of soil, water and natural resources
- d) decrease in per capita availability of arable land and fresh water
- e) decline in fertilizer and water use efficiency
- f) high dependence of rice in food economy and little diversification of crops.
- g) increasing costs of cultivation making agriculture less remunerative
- h) decreasing levels of private and public investment in agriculture
- i) climate change and its adverse effect on crop production

The response of the state government is limited to the application of strategies prescribed by National Food Security Mission whose principal objective is to increase production of rice, wheat and pulses through area expansion and productivity enhancement. This is proposed to be achieved through promotion and extension of improved technologies. NFSM districts have been classified on the basis of crop as indicated below:

- I) NFSM 'Rice'- Uttar 24 Parganas, Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Howrah, Jalpaiguri, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Purulia.
- II) NFSM 'Wheat'- Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri
- III) NFSM 'Pulses'- Birbhum, Murshidabad, Malda, Nadia and Purulia.

West Bengal's official strategy is also based on Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana that incentivises states to increase public investment in agriculture and allied sectors including animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries. It appears from the analysis of the policy decisions that the state government

relies heavily on full exploitation of science and technology to address declining productivity in agriculture and depends heavily on capital transfer from the centre.

Global analysis of agricultural knowledge, science and technology has raised the primary animating question: how can science and technology be used to reduce hunger and poverty, improve rural livelihoods and facilitate equitable development- economically, socially and environmentally sustainable? The eight cross-cutting themes include: bio-energy, biotechnology, climate change, human health, natural resource management, trade and markets, traditional and local knowledge, community-based innovation and women in agriculture. 'Despite significant scientific and technological developments in our ability to increase agricultural productivity, we have been less attentive to some of the unintended, social and environmental consequences of our achievements' – international assessment admits. It is now high time that we reflect on these consequences and outline various policy options to meet the challenges ahead, perhaps best characterized as the need for food, livelihood and nutrition security under increasingly constrained environmental conditions from within and outside the realm of agriculture and globalised economic system.

A review of the on-going programmes and the state of agriculture in West Bengal, suggests that there should be a strategic shift from control to facilitation, from top-down to bottom-up planning from macro-initiatives to micro-initiatives, from directed development to people-centred development, from dependence to self-help. In West Bengal, the scope of strengthening decentralization involving village-level community-based organizations and decentralized natural resource management has been opened up because of formation of Gram Unnyan Samitis and mobilization of women self-help groups. Action research has demonstrated that with facilitation, community participation and support of self-help groups decentralized initiatives of food security can be synchronized with the government programmes, services and technical support through the Gram Panchayat. Some of the replicable models are illustrated below (see details in the Annexure titled 'Food and Livelihood Security Advocacy')

Issue 1. Grain Bank:

In most of the villages, there is no agricultural work during September-November and March-May. Naturally, hunger looms large over the poor families who earn their bread by working as agricultural labourers. The living condition gets worse in the event of natural calamities like flood, drought or cyclonic storms. With only wall at their backs, they are compelled to take loan from money lenders at abnormally high rates of interest by mortgaging their assets and labour. In many cases, they have to migrate out in search of employment.

Advocacy

Grain Bank is a traditional food security measure of many communities. Women groups are trained to construct large bins with local materials live straw rope, bamboo etc. A stone or concrete platform is used as a bar to avoid rodent and pest attack. Self-help Groups can be used as distribution outlets to store and distribute food grains to BPL families which will also help them to look after those families who are in hunger.

Issue 2. Nutrition Garden

The marginal and poor families usually have a small front yard and/or a backyard around their living space where they grow one or two vegetables haphazardly punctuated by two or three fruit trees. These families especially the women and children mostly suffer from malnutrition. The problem worsens during natural calamities.

Advocacy :

Marginal or poor farmers as well as landless households can utilize front and backyard or open space within their homestead to grow more nutrient rich vegetables, fruits etc. through cycling of household compost and grey water. The aim is to ensure that all family members especially women

and children consume at least 150-200 gm of green vegetables/fresh fruits per person per day round the year.

Such community nutrition gardens can be set up on unused common land or within school compound with the help of the Gram Panchayat by Self-help Groups. Leafy vegetables, legumes, roots and tubers can be used to supplement nutrition in mid-day meals of school or SNP of ICDS centres.

All such activities can be done by the poor families themselves by preparing appropriate scheme under NREGA.

Issue 3. Food Forest:

In most of the eco-geographically vulnerable regions in West Bengal like the coastal zone and the semi-arid lateritic undulated terrain, the marginal families have no work or food for 5-7 months in a year when they have to migrate. Those who have to stay back suffer from severe malnutrition. The crisis becomes acute at the time of natural calamities.

Advocacy:

There exist a wide variety of indigenous trees with high tolerance value that supply food and fruits which are rich in nutrition value but fetch a low price in the market. These trees have an important role to serve in the bio-diversity web. With the degradation of forest and other eco-systems, this source has gradually withered away. Food forest is a climate friendly model that makes use of the unutilized land resources to provide nutritious food to the vulnerable community. Food forest can be developed in fallow lands under NREGA.

Issue 4. Common Property Resource Management:

Chronic shortage of biomass in general and of food, fodder and firewood in particular continues to be a major problem in West Bengal. Shortage of firewood forces women in marginal families to burn cattle dung and agricultural waste. Gradual shrinking of grazing land and loss of access to forests/common lands are factors that create an acute crisis of fodder.

Advocacy:

Common properties like fallow lands, water bodies, river and pond banks, embankments of irrigation canals, roads and railway tracts etc. remain unutilized or are degraded due to overuse by communities resulting in massive soil erosion or destruction of eco-systems. Self-help Groups may be assisted to gain access to these common property resources and to plant trees on them to produce food, fodder and firewood alongwith some medicinal plants. All these works can be done under NREGA. It is necessary to grant land rights, usufructory rights and leasing facilities to Self-help groups for sustainability of these activities.

Issue 5. Rainwater harvesting:

The Chotonagpur range continues in the west of West Bengal. Here the topography is undulated. The top of the mounds are completely barren without any vegetation whatsoever. Here the soil is rocky lateritic with very low water retention capacity. Annual rainfall varies between 1200 and 1400 mm. Precipitation occurs within a period of 2 months every year. The rest of the year is absolutely dry that gives rise to a drought-like situation. The only rain-fed crop is getting disturbed due to global warming.

Advocacy:

Self-help Groups/Marginal Farmers are to be motivated to excavate new ponds and reexcavate old ones (locally called hapa). Three or four broad steps are made on all four sides of the pond to reach the centre. These steps remain submerged during the rainy season. In the dry months, when the level of water in the pond falls, vegetables are grown on the broad steps of the pond. Apart from the rainwater directly falling in the pond, trenches are made to channel the run-off from the adjustment plots to the pond. From the bank on all four sides, trellis is made hanging over the pond for supporting creepers yielding vegetables. The pond bank is utilized for growing different vegetables, pulses and planting seasonal, perennial, semi-perennial or multipurpose trees. Fish can be grown in the pond for additional income. Water stored in the pond may be utilized to irrigate fallows. All these works can be done through self-help groups/marginal farmers under NREGA.

Issue 6. Integrated farming:

Most of the households who suffer from hunger are those who are either landless or have sub-marginal holdings. Usually, they have one or two goats, 10-12 ducks or hens, one or two cattle.

Advocacy:

Integrated farming refers to agricultural systems that integrate different sub-systems like livestock, fish poultry and seasonal/perennial crop production. They are combined in such a way and proportion that each element helps the other, the waste of one is recycled as resource for the other, so that total biomass production is enhanced, both in terms of quantity and quality, incidence of risk is reduced and the system becomes energy efficient as a well. Partnership with self-help groups (public-private or private-private) can facilitate optimal use of natural resource. Land-based works can be done under NREGA while fish and livestock can be supported under RKVY.

Issue 7. Biotechnology:

Biotechnology is a broad term embracing manipulation of living organisms. It spans a large range of activities from conventional techniques for fermentation, plant and animal breeding to recent innovations like tissue culture, irradiation, genomics and marker-assisted selection to augment natural breeding.

Advocacy:

Conventional biotechnologies such as breeding techniques, tissue culture, cultivation practices and fermentation are readily accepted and used as a cutting edge of change. Between 1950 and 1980, prior to development of genetically modified organisms, varieties of wheat showed increase in yields by 33% even in absence of fertilizer. Currently the most contentious issue is the use of recombinant DNA techniques to produce trans genes that are inserted into genomes and adoption of such technologies will not only cause loss of bio-diversity but health hazards affecting plant and animal kingdom. Adoption of such form of biotechnology is ecologically unsustainable.

Issue 8. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

In spite of universal coverage, there is exclusion of households who can not come to AWC because of inaccessibility. Supplementary nutrition to severely malnourished children is not found to be adequate. In spite of Supreme Court's direction to include all adolescent girls, the coverage is insignificant. The Kishori Sakti Yojana (KSY) and the National Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) should provide universal distribution of supplementary nutrition to all adolescent girls. Further, the GP can use self-help groups for preparation of nutrition food supplement with locally available food grains, legumes and nuts in the form of nutrimix fortified with vitamins and other critical micro-nutrients for distribution to severely malnourished children, pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls. The GP can use untied fund for production of nutrimix and distribution through self-help groups. Proper infrastructure like cooking sheds, storage space, drinking water, ventilation, toilet should be provided.

Issue 9. Mid-day Meal Scheme:

Currently, Mid-day meal is provided only to children who are attending schools whereas it is found that in some areas which are inaccessible or in tea garden, the most vulnerable children in the school going age are out of formal schools.

Advocacy:

Mid-day meals can be served from the school to school drop-outs in the same age group. This might encourage those out of school to join schools. If the scheme is expanded to cover all children in the school going age, those who are poor but are reading in private schools (as there is no formal school within close proximity) will also get supplementary nutrition. This has become necessary as right to education has now been guaranteed. Self-help groups are to be given the responsibility of cooking and serving the mid-day meals as they are found to be caring for school children. Village education committee should create proper structure including cooking sheds, storage space, drinking water, ventilation, utensils etc. There should be nutrition gardens in the school premises which can contribute to supplement the meal with vegetables. The community should be called upon to contribute their surplus vegetables to school.

Issue 10. National Maternity Benefit Scheme (Janani Suraksha Yojana):

Many women who were eligible for benefit under NMBS were not getting the benefit as they had home deliveries.

Advocacy:

All pregnant mothers in the BPL category should get the benefit on being registered by ANM preferably in the form of Nutrimix to be prepared by SHGs with local ingredients of adequate nutritive value. Cash payment does not ensure intake of food.

Issue 11. National Social Assistance Programme:

Because of ignorance and in absence of hand holding support, many eligible families in the BPL category are not getting the benefit.

Advocacy:

Community mobilization should be encouraged to identify those who are left out and help them to fulfill procedural formalities. In case of destitute, infirm, old or disabled persons, special provision is to be made for serving hot cooked mid-day meals through self-help groups to ward off hunger as in the mid-day meal scheme.

Issue 12. National Employment Guarantee Scheme:

This is the strongest social safety net for those who do not get employment in agriculture (eg. Landless agricultural labourers) and are found to be victims of food insecurity. Unfortunately, the study finds that Gram Panchayats have largely failed to provide guarantee of wage employment beyond 30 days in a year in West Bengal. Delayed payment of wages has acted as a damper inducing migration or working outside at lower wages and in hazardous working conditions. Suitable work could not be provided to women who are worst sufferers of hunger in the household.

Advocacy:

The GPs do not have adequate planning abilities to get a shelf of projects approved by the Gram Sabha and included in the Annual Action Plan. There is also a need to strengthen administrative machinery at the Gram Panchayat. Many of the public works executed by the Forest Department, Irrigation Department or Public Works Department involving earth work are not synchronized with the NREGS. Community mobilization which alone can help GP to fulfill their mandate is not encouraged. CSO-PRI partnership in selected areas has demonstrated models of food and livelihood

security as illustrated earlier involving natural resource like nutrition garden, food forest, agro-forestry, rain water harvesting, integrated farming, tree plantation, nursery raising, mixed cropping on fallows, pond excavation in dry land areas, watershed development, land shapping, dyke and embankment construction or flood protection, soil conservation, water harvesting structures, re-excavation of old and derelict water courses etc.

Issue 13. Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and draft National Food Security Bill, 2010

Under the TPDS, over 500 million of the population are covered and it is one of the largest food schemes. At present, 35 Kgs. of rice or wheat are provided at subsidized rates to the families below poverty line. About 40% of these families are entitled to Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) who can get 35 kg of food grains at half the price (at Rs. 3 per kg for wheat and at Rs. 2 per kg for rice). Field studies find that the TPDS is in total disarray in the villages studied. There are many households who are entitled to AAY but do not have AAY cards. There is a discord in identification of BPL families between the Panchayat and Rural Development Department and the Food and Civil Supplies Department. Targeting is severely criticized by the villagers for adverse selection. In only a few cases, families got much less from the fair price shop than their entitlements. Functioning of fair price shops is reported to be irregular and supplies inadequate. Leakages are high. The entitlement of the severely malnourished households is severely curtailed because of

- a)irregular and inadequate supply and
- b)low purchasing capability.

The system is on the verge of collapse and needs to be restructured. Meanwhile the draft of the National Security Bill, 2010 is being considered by the Cabinet. This Bill intended to provide a statutory framework to entitle families living below the poverty line to certain minimum quantities of foodgrains per month through TPDS. The Bill is also criticized for its limited geographical coverage, reduced allocation per unit and limited application to BPL households and already debated because of exclusion and wrong targeting.

Advocacy:

There are some positive features in the draft Food Security Bill, 2010 like:

- a)Identification of BPL families shall be done by the concerned State Government through Gram Sabhas.
- b)Women shall be considered as the head of the household for the purpose of distribution of BPL Cards.
- c)The list of BPL families shall be placed in the public domain.
- d)The State Government may further assign, by notification, specific responsibilities for implementation of TPDS to the PRI.
- e)All PDS related records are to be placed in the public domain and open to public scrutiny and social audit.

In spite of all these positive features, there is no basic change in top-down approach and the control mechanism is in the hands of the political-burocracy-lobby nexus which manipulates the system to their advantage. Leakage of food grains from the PDS is lucrative because of rise in prices of food grains in the open market. Unless some radical reforms like fortification and transformation of food grains which are acceptable to only those who are in hunger, empirical evidence indicates that leakages can not be done away with. At the same time, community should have some role in distribution of food grains through fair price shops as the community traditionally look after those who are hungry. The agency of self-help groups for distribution of food grains to the severely malnourished may be an alternative option, to be supervised by the GP and the Gram Unnyan Samity (village development committee). Capability of the chronically malnourished is also to be enhanced for increased access to PDS.

Case study of LKP's Action Research Project on Food Security through Decentralised National Resource Management in five districts of West Bengal.

In the beginning of the new millennium, Loka Kalyan Parishad, as a civil society organization, was moved by the reports of starvation deaths in closed, abandoned, sick tea gardens of North Bengal (Kalchini Block) and decided to start an action research project on food security of the demobilized tea gardens by facilitating the establishment of decentralized institutions and processes involving community, as a sustainable and replicable strategy of food security through natural resource management. The strategy was to strengthen institutions of local self-government to facilitate community initiatives, processes and structures as the key to decentralized natural resource management and food security.

The implementation strategy started with collection of data and followed a detailed activity plan from identification of villages, sharing of project objectives and finalization of action plan with Gram Panchayat, organization of a special meeting of Gram Sansad (Gram Sabha), formation of Sansad Working Committee (later called Gram Unnyan Samity), family-based women groups, identification of NRM activities, support, services, implementation, establishment of a common fund in the village and creation of assets by poor women themselves.

The project activities include:

- Production of cereals, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, herbs, fruits and other food crops through home/community nutrition gardens with women as main actors
- Establishment of food grain storages with groups of poor women to tide over seasonal food insecurity
- Food, fodder and fuel wood plantation on common property resources (CPR) by effecting a transfer of usage rights to women groups through local government initiatives (public-private partnership)
- Food production through public-private, private-private partnership by leasing out privately owned seasonal fallows, unutilised water bodies etc. to groups of poor women
- Sustainable and intensive integrated farming systems for near-landless and marginal landholders incorporating livestock, horticulture, agro-forestry and aquaculture
- Community seed banks and nurseries through women groups to strengthen crop diversification and to preserve bio-diversity
- NRM based supplementary livelihood activities such as livestock and agro-processing to strengthen purchasing power

The pilot phase of the DANIDA Food Security Action Research Project was launched in September, 2002 when the Panchayat and Rural Development in the Government of West Bengal had prepared a project of strengthening decentralization in West Bengal with support of DFID. Deeply influenced by the outcome of LKP's Action Research Project, PRDD requested LKP to undertake such action research project in four more districts where food insecurity is high amongst the poorest families. The action research project is in the third phase and has the following coverage:

Table No.10.01

District	Block (No.)	GP (No.)	Groups (No.)	Families (No.)
Birbhum	Bolpur	20	1200	12000+
Dakshin Dinajpur	Itahar	16	1200	12000+
Jalpaiguri	Kalchini	3	300	3000+
Purulia	Jhalda	5	300	3000+

Source: Mid-term Evaluation of DANIDA Food Security Project (Phase III)

During the survey, the responses related to reduction of food deficit in the project area and outside reveal that:

- 60% of the households in the panel have been able to reduce food deficit by about 30 days on an average
- 40% of the households in the control (non-project area) still have to borrow food for 60-90 days

The Action Research Project indicates that food deficit can be reduced by about 30 days in a year through decentralized natural resource management with community mobilization, facilitation, support and public action but other social safety nets like NREGA, Food Security Act and National Social Assistance Programmes are simultaneously necessary to reduce severe malnourishment and hunger amongst the vulnerable groups. Along with these, the unfinished agenda of land reforms are to be revisited and the poorest households need not only right to food but also right to land in the present context of West Bengal.

Concluding Observation

Prof. Durgadas Roy

“True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village “. - Mahatma Gandhi

The typical assumptions of complete information, independent actions, perfect symmetry of interests, no human error, no norms of reciprocity, zero monitoring and enforcement costs, and no capacity to transform the situation itself will lead to highly particularized models, not universal theories. It is as essential to map the terrain for a family of models as it is to develop specific models. If the social sciences are to be relevant for analyses of policy problems, the challenge will be to integrate efforts to map the terrain and efforts to develop tractable models for particular niches in that terrain. Each CPR can be viewed as a niche in an empirical terrain, In contemporary conceptions of social order, the ‘government’ often is seen as an external agent whose behaviour is exogenous to the situations being modeled. Most modern economic theory describes a world presided over by a ‘government’ (not, significantly, by governments), and sees the world through the governments’ eyes. The government is supposed to have the responsibility, the will and the power to restructure society in whatever way maximizes social welfare.¹

(i) Elinor Ostrom – “Governing the Commons” – the Evolution of Institutions for collective action
Cambridge University Press, New York.

The literature on decentralization of service delivery stresses some inherent pitfalls. The most important of these is the possibility that local democracy may not function well in some countries’ contexts, e.g. when the distribution of assets, literacy and social status is highly unequal and where political competition amongst different entities is lacking. Under such conditions, political parties may be prone to capture by special interest groups, participation in elections in the rural set up may not be widespread, and votes may be swayed away more by campaign rhetoric or political handouts rather than genuine policy issues, Dreze & Sen (1989) explain this concern quite clearly : “The extent of economic distress experienced by different individuals is, to a great extent, a matter of common knowledge within a given rural community. An apparent solution to the selection problem would take the form of making the selection process rely on local institutions to allocate public support according to individual needs”.

While summarising the entire fact-finding study of the six districts, Dr. Manab Sen, Associate Director of the Project has rightly stated that. “The field survey reveals that there has been almost total institutional and system failure to provide ‘social safety net’ to the hungry families and this leads the field survey team to believe that the poorest the family is, farthest is their distance from the institutions that are professed to stand by their side”. With the introduction of economic liberalisation policy in 1991-92, the role of ‘safety net’ in poverty alleviation became much more important. Until that time, the PDS was considered the largest safety net to mitigate any adverse impact on the poor due to statuelisation and structural adjustment policies. Large amount of funds had also been allocated for wage employment programme.

In India there has been an increasing policy emphasis on improving anti-poverty schemes in recent years. According to the ‘Task Force on Employment Opportunities’ (2001), wage employment programmes can play a very useful role in providing supplementary employment to vulnerable sections of the population, especially in seasonal lean periods, which are common in agriculture and in the absence of an extensive system of social security. They can also act as a social safety net to help people deal with situations of exceptional distress, such as droughts and famine. Wage employment programmes should be focused as much as possible in marginalising the developmental impact on rural areas through the creation of durable assets in terms of economic and social

infrastructure. The experience of self employment programmes is mixed. There is a need to launch specific employment generating programmes in the areas where aggregate growth has had little impact. Wage employment programmes are more pro-poor than are programmes such as the PDS. Nutrition programmes and social security programmes are also better targeted to the beneficiaries. These programmes have helped in reducing the depth and severity of poverty in the country, although they may not have helped many more people to cross the poverty line. I fully agree with Dr. Sen when he says, “It is high time, to think that unless the community takes care of the poor and the hungry, the institutions will not be able to reach out to them. Without this synergy, true decentralization will remain a pipe dream”.

One particular aspect that deserves attention in this type of field based study is the prevalence of ‘corruption’ in the decentralization system. It is true that decentralisation has some positive or negative co-relation with corruption. Such a test must also include as many other factors as possible that may arguably affect either corruption alone or corruption and decentralization together – we should remember that social norms are very different in different countries. What is regarded in the culture as corrupt may be considered a part of routine transaction in another. Sometimes question arises, why the incidences of corruption is so palpably different in different countries and the related question of why in some cases corruption is so persistent. Liberal economists (Bardhan etc.) of course, have an easy answer to this : it is the regulatory state with its elaborate system of permits and licenses that spawns corruption, and in different countries with different degrees of insertion of the regulatory state in the economy give rise to varying amount of corruption. Policy issues on corruption cannot be discussed impartially without involving the larger question of the nature of the panchayat system that is supposed to carry out the policies.

The survey measures attitudes of the citizens included in our study, does not always contain information about our dependent variable, namely, the level of corruption in the process. We should remember that the level of corruption could be determined not only by the propensity of public servants to demand and accept bribes, but also by the propensity of the citizens to give bribes.

The whole question leads down to the fact that the whole analysis might be ended with this conclusion. Decentralisation is not directly related to the level of corruption. However, trust is – but not mainly the kind of trust that social capital theory predicts should be useful. The reaction to this conclusion would be to dismiss the survey as unreliable and simply conclude that we had better stick to the old

that decentralization is good for governance and bridging social capital is good for democracy. This study of the Panchayati Raj reform shows that a more realistic picture of the challenges that people face, when we discuss corruption and governance issues, is essential before we can expect radical ‘change from below’. The good news is that our survey results show how politics can matter – if leaders decide to push for reforms in one area in a focused and dedicated way, the chances are good that they may be successful although the condition on the ground looks unfavorable. Consequently if an area is poorly developed, (as evident from our survey) politicians are as responsible as when an area is well developed. In either case, there is great scope for political action when trying to promote development.

It is true that the literature on decentralisation in the context of rural development is still in its infancy. On the theoretical side, perhaps the key challenge is to find better ways to model the complex organisational and incentive problems that are involved, in a situation with pervasive problems of monitoring and enforcement. On the empirical side, there is a great deal of scope for rigorous work in evaluating the impact of on-going decentralization initiative, using detailed household and community surveys, comparing it with the experience with centralisation or some other counterfactual,. In such empirical work, one has to be particularly wary of several economic problems; some factual and some subjective it is true that some of the data involved in evaluating community participation and project performed may be subjective.