



# The Story of Rural Development Programmes in West Bengal since Independence

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## Abstract:

According to 2011 Census 68.84% of population lives in villages. Naturally Rural India is the backbone of Indian economy. Hence, rural development is important not only for the majority of the population residing in rural areas, but also for the maximum national economic of the nation comes from rural sector.

**Key words:** Rural Development, West Bengal, Programme, Poverty, Panchayat.

## Introduction:

Rural development in India has a long history. Although, before Independence there was no major effort made for the rural development in India. After Independence, the government of India was created Planning Commission of India and also taken different initiatives for overall development at the rural areas. Since, Community Development Programme in 1952 to present-day, a large number of centrally programmes as well as state sponsored programmes were implemented in West Bengal.

## Objective:

The principal objectives of this article are-

- a) To discuss about the concept of rural development;
- b) To discuss about the rural development programmes in West Bengal ;and
- c) To evaluate the impact of the rural development programmes in West Bengal.



## **Methodology:**

The article is purely a descriptive in nature. For the purpose of the article secondary data is used. The secondary data collected from the published books, research papers in journals and government annual reports.

## **Discussion:**

The term rural development simply suggests overall development of rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural people. The World Bank defines rural development 'as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people' (Ramanujan, 1995, p-3). Uma Lata defined rural development in terms of raising standard of living of rural people (Lata, 1975, p-20). Rural development is not merely development of rural areas but also the development of quality of life of the rural masses into self-reliant and self-sustaining modern commodities (Mishra and Sunderam, 1979, p-4). Satraj Aziz has identified the following objectives of rural development in India. These are-

1. To organise, develop and utilise the available resources of land, water and man power,
2. To improve productivity and wages of rural people,
3. To generate employment possibilities,
4. To guarantee an increase in the standard of living of the underprivileged people,
5. To provide the basic needs: elementary education, healthcare, cleans drinking water, rural roads, etc. (Aziz, 1978, p-99)

Since independence, the government of West Bengal has been implemented various centrally sponsored schemes and programmes for rural development. The government has been created Community Development Blocks in West Bengal for overall development at the rural level and passed various panchayats acts like 1957 West Bengal Panchayats Act., 1963 Zilla Parishad Act., 1973 West Bengal panchayat Act., 1994 West Bengal Panchayat Act. 1994 in accordance with 73rd Constitution Amendment Act., to administer the rural development programmes as a unit of decentralised governance in West Bengal. Beside the centrally sponsored scheme, the government of West Bengal has taken numerous rural development schemes on agricultural growth, poverty alleviation, rural infrastructural development and also social security measures. The important development programmes are -

## **Operation Barga 1978:**

Operation Barga was a land reform program started in the year of 1978 in West Bengal under the Left Front government. It was introduced to improve the lives of small farmers and sharecroppers who worked hard on land but did not legally own it. The main objectives of the program were-

- a) **Security for Farmers:** The program ensured that tenant farmers and sharecroppers were officially recorded, giving them protection from eviction and more control over the land they cultivated.
- b) **Fair Distribution of Land:** It was part of a larger effort to reduce inequality by limiting the power of big landowners and making land distribution more balanced.
- c) **Better Farming and Productivity:** When farmers felt secure, they were more motivated to improve the land, which helped increase agricultural production.



- d) **Reducing Exploitation: The system helped protect poor farmers from unfair practices, such as high rents and forced dependence on landlords.**
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#### **Jal Dharo Jal Bharo Programme 2011:**

Department of Water Resources Investigation & Development, Government of West Bengal was launched “Jal Dharo Jal Bharo” Programme in 2011 with focuses on creates awareness of water conservation and rainwater harvesting. The principal objectives of this abhijan are- conserving precious water resources through all kinds of water bodies, viz-tanks, ponds, reservoirs, canals etc. and through artificial recharging of underground water via rooftop rainwater harvesting.

#### **Kanyashree Prakalpa 2013:**

The Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare of West Bengal government has launched “Kanyashree Prakalpa” launched on 8th March, 2013. The basic objectives of this Scheme are to ensure women's empowerment, reducing school drop-out among girl students and delaying their marriage till at least the age of 18. Girls in the age bracket of 13 to 18 years and family income, not more than Rupees 1,20,000 annually (waived for the persons with disabilities) are the beneficiaries, provided they are not married till then. Beneficiaries can get the following two types of grants.

- a) One is a direct cash transfer of Rupees 1000 Annually when they are in class VIII and above, till their 18 years of age so that they can continue their education.
- b) Another one is provided when they turn 18. They can avail themselves one- a time grant of Rupees 25,000 if they are still associated with education or occupation and remain unmarried.

Furthermore, the State government declared 14th August every year as the Kanyashree Diwas to promote the Scheme to the entire state and also declared to set up a Kanyashree University in Nadia district and Kanyashree colleges across the state to promote women's education. The Scheme was ranked best among many social sector schemes worldwide and awarded with the highest public service award by the UNITED NATIONS in 2017.

#### **Yuvashree Prakalpa 2013: (earlier name “Yuva Utsaha Prakalpa”):**

The Scheme was formulated under the Labour Department of the Government of West Bengal on 1st October, 2013. The main objective of this scheme is to provide some unemployment assistance to the unemployed youth to enhance their soft skills and get employed or become self-employed. The beneficiaries of this scheme are the unemployed youth aged between 18-45 enrolled in the Employment Bank may receive a grant of Rupees 1,500 per month.

#### **Amar Fasal Amar Gari 2013:**

The Amar Fasal Amar Gari (My Crop, My Vehicle) scheme is a welfare initiative launched by the Government of West Bengal in 2013 to minimize post-harvest transit losses and empower small farmers to sell directly to consumers. Administered by the department of Agricultural Marketing, the scheme provides a flat ₹10,000 subsidy to eligible farmers for purchasing transport equipment.



### **Mission Nirmal Bangla 2013:**

The Department of Panchayats and Rural Development has launched another important programme on 19th November, 2013 under the name of “Mission Nirmal Bangla”. “Mission Nirmal Bangla” is a cleanliness drive by which the State government is working to make the rural sector Open Defecation Free. The government is setting up toilets in rural households with poor economic conditions under this scheme. They are working to provide safe and sustainable sanitation facilities in the schools, colleges, hospitals, ICDS centres and also in the regular intervals of roads.

### **Shikshashree Prakalpa 2014:**

Backward classes Welfare Department and Tribal Welfare Department of West Bengal government was launched Shikshashree Prakalpa in 2014. The government formulates the Scheme to provide financial support to the SC students studying in class V to class VIII, improving their participation in the educational institution and minimising the percentage of school drop-out. Benefits – Each of the Students belonging to the Scheduled castes community of class V to class VII will get a grant of Rupees 750 per annum, and for class VIII, it will be 800 rupees. The family income of the students should not be more than Rs. 2.5 Lac per annum.

### **Gatidhara Prakalpa 2014:**

Gatidhara Prakalpa was launched in August 2014 by the Transport Department of Government of West Bengal. Gatidhara Prakalpa is a self-employment generation scheme by the West Bengal government through financial support to the unemployed youths. The main beneficiary of this scheme is unemployed youths aged between 20 to 45 years with monthly family income lesser than Rupees 25,000 will get financial support of 30 per cent of their vehicle costs or Rupees 1,00,000 as subsidy under this Scheme. Women also will get the subsidy of Rupees 1,50,000.

### **Sabooj Sathi Scheme 2015:**

The most popular scheme namely Sabooj Sathi Scheme was launched in September 2015 by the Backward Classes Welfare department and the West Bengal SC, ST and OBC Development & Finance Corporation jointly. The main objectives of the Scheme are to decrease the school drop-out rate and access to quality higher education in a sustainable environment. It also aims at confidence-building among girl students in rural and urban area. Beneficiaries of this scheme are - students of classes IX to XII in Government and Government Aided Schools and Madrasahs will get Bi-cycle each to ease their mobility.

### **Khadya Sathi Scheme 2016:**

The Food and Supplies Department, Government of West Bengal was formulated the Khadya Sathi Scheme on 26th January, 2016. It is a poverty alleviation programme of the West Bengal government. The main focus of the Scheme is to ensure food security among the rural and urban poor. Beneficiaries of the scheme are Poor and economically backward classes, which are almost 90 per cent of the total population of the state. People get food grains at a very affordable cost (Rice Rupees 2/Kilo). From Covid-19 pandemic, it is free of cost.



### **Swasthya Sathi Scheme2016:**

The most popular scheme of the Health and Welfare Department of Government of West Bengal is Swasthya Sathi Scheme which was launched on 30th December, 2016. Objectives of this scheme are- a) It is a group health insurance scheme for a better health care facility. b) Under this Scheme, basic health coverage of 5 lakh per annum per family is secured, and there is no ceiling limit of the family size. Basically, it was launched for a few particular sections like ASHA workers, Civic Volunteers, ICDS workers etc. Still, from 1st December, 2020, it was opened for every family in the state.

### **Rupashree Prakalpa2018:**

This program was launched on 1st April, 2018 by the Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare of West Bengal Government. The Scheme aims to restrict Child Marriage and mitigate the problems of low-income families at the time of their daughter's marriage. Girls with a family income not more than Rupees 1,50,000 per year will get a one-time financial aid of Rupees 25,000 for economically stressed families when their adult daughters' marriages (must attain the age of 18 at the time of application).

### **Krishak Bandhu Prakalpa 2019:**

Krishak Bandhu Prakalpa was launched in the month of January, 2019 by the department of Agriculture, Government of West Bengal. The main purpose of this Scheme is to provide financial security to the farmers and their families due to crop loss, enhance their purchasing power, prevent incidents of farmers' suicide, etc. Needy farmers can be benefited by receive a cash benefit of rupees 10,000 maximum per year with landholding of 1 acre and more and rupees 4,000 minimum per year while landholding is less than 1 acre in two equal instalments.

### **Karma Sathi Prakalpa2020:**

It was launched in 2020 by department of MSME and Textile of West Bengal Government. Practically, it is an employment generation scheme under the government of West Bengal. Beneficiary of this scheme - One Lakh youths every year will get a loan up to Rupees 2,00,000 under the Scheme to set up their own venture.

### **Bina Mulya Samajik Suraksha Yojana (BM-SSY)' 2020:**

The state government launched the 'SAMAJIK SURAKSHA YOJANA (SSY)' in 2017, covering all eligible unorganized workers which was renamed as Bina Mulya Samajik Suraksha Yojana (BM-SSY)' from April 1, 2020.

The BM-SSY provided comprehensive benefits across several categories. These are-

- **Provident Fund:** State Government covers beneficiary contributions and provides interest, payable at the General Provident Fund rate.
- **Health & Family Welfare:** Financial assistance for medical treatment, surgeries, and compensation for accidents, as per the West Bengal Health Scheme, 2008.
- **Death & Disability:** Benefits for beneficiaries and their families in case of death, disability, or loss of eyesight or limbs.



- **Education: Financial aid for the education of beneficiaries' children, covering various levels of schooling and higher education.**
- **Training in Safety & Skill Development: Training provided by the Paschim Banga Society for Skill Development, funded through construction and transport workers' cess and the Labor Department's budget.**
- **To access these benefits, workers need a Samajik Mukti Card (SMC) issued by the West Bengal Unorganised Sector Workers' Welfare Board. The top 5 districts by benefits granted under BM-SSY are Malda, Murshidabad, Purba Mednipur, South 24 Parganas, and Nadia.**

#### **Jai Johar Scheme 2020:**

The government of West Bengal has launched 'Jai Johar Scheme'- a social security scheme - for all ST people with age of 60 years and above. Rs. 1,000/- per month is provided to the beneficiaries through DBT Mode. The scheme has been rolled out from 01.04.2020. Presently almost 3 lakh beneficiaries have been brought under the fold of the scheme.

#### **Duare Sarkar Scheme 2020:**

Duare Sarkar Scheme was launched on 1st December 2020 by the department of Finance, Planning & Statistics Department, Government of West Bengal. No doubt, Duare Sarkar (Government at Doorstep) is a massive outreach program and an administrative innovation of the West Bengal Government. The goal of the scheme is to make existing crucial public service flagship schemes such as globally acclaimed "Kanyashree", "Khadyasathi", "Swasthasathi", Social Pension schemes etc of the state government more accessible to the public entailing senior citizens, persons with disabilities, transgender, commercial sex workers, prison inmates, the poor and the marginalised who had not hitherto accessed government services. Duare Sarkar Phase-I was launched on 1st December 2020 by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal. During Phase-I, over 2.75 crores Beneficiaries During the first 15 days of Duare Sarkar Phase-2, over 2 crores beneficiary data are already captured in the DS Camps with the intention to deliver services.

#### **Hasir Alo Scheme 2020:**

Hasir Alo Scheme has started in February 2020 in West Bengal. The objective of the scheme is to provide better electric connectivity for poor households at a very affordable cost. Poor Households with power consumption less than or equal to 75 units quarterly will get the benefit of free connectivity.

#### **Karmai Dharma 2020:**

It is an employment generation initiative by the West Bengal Government in 2020. Under the Scheme, 2 Lakhs motorcycle will be distributed among the unemployed youth for their self-employment purpose.

#### **Taposili Bandhu Scheme 2021:**

The Taposili Bandhu Scheme is a social security pension initiative launched by the Government of West Bengal, providing a monthly financial assistance of ₹1,000 to senior citizens belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) community. It operates under the umbrella of the Jai Bangla framework.



### **Lakshmir Bhandar scheme 2021:**

The Lakshmir Bhandar scheme is a flagship social welfare program launched by the West Bengal Government in 2021. The Scheme is formulated by the government to alleviate poverty, generation of employment opportunities among women and empower them. Women belonging to SC/ST categories in all rural and urban households aged between 25 to 60 years will get an assured monthly income of rupees 1000, And women belonging to the other categories will get a monthly income of rupees 500.

### **Khela Hobe Scheme2021:**

This scheme was set up on -2nd August, 2021 under the supervision of the department of Sports and Youth Affairs Department Government of West Bengal. The principal objectives are to promote Sports culture in the state among youths and also to the cottage and handicrafts industry through the manufacturing of sports equipment. Under this scheme, Government will provide 1 lakh football to different sporting clubs. It is also noted that the State Government has declared August 16 as the "Khela Hobe Diwas".

### **Chokher Alo Scheme 2021:**

This popular scheme was Launched in 2021 by the department of Health and family welfare of West Bengal Government. The Chokher Alo Scheme is a massive, state-sponsored eye-care initiative launched by the Government of West Bengal. Its primary goal is to provide free eye health screenings, cataract surgeries, and spectacles to all citizens, with a major focus on the elderly and students.

### **Duare Ration Prakalpa 2021:**

This prakalpa was launched in 2021 by the department of Food and Supplies, Government of West Bengal. The main objectives of the prakalpa are to ease for the people to collect ration at the doorstep and also to mitigate corruption. Economically backward people will get food grains at very affordable costs under the prakalpa.

### **Maa Canteen Scheme2021:**

Maa Canteen Scheme was started in February 2021 by the department of Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Department of West Bengal government. The main focus is to provide food at a very affordable price to the poor people of the state in urban areas. Canteens have been set up where people will get launched at a price of rupees 5. The standard meal consists of rice, dal, a vegetable dish, and egg curry. Additionally, in some areas, subsidized fish and rice meals are served twice a week. The kitchens are operated and managed by Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

### **Taruner Swapno Scheme 2022:**

The West Bengal government has launched this Scheme to provide Rs. 10,000 as financial assistance to help students purchase tablets, Smartphones, or PCs for their Education. Students enrolled in Class XI in different Government/Government-Aided/Sponsored Schools/Madrasahs are eligible for the Taruner Swapno Scheme.



### **,Bangla Awas Yojana (BAY) 2024:**

The government of West Bengal introduced its state-funded housing initiative, Bangla Awas Yojana (BAY) which also known as *Banglar Bari*, in December 2024. Chief Minister of West Bengal launched the program after the state stopped receiving funds for the central Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G). The scheme targets poor and houseless individuals living in kutcha or dilapidated houses, utilizing a newly surveyed list of beneficiaries to avoid funding disputes.

### **Annapurna Yojana 2026:**

Annapurna Bhandar is a monthly financial assistance scheme launched by the Government of West Bengal in 2026. Under this scheme, eligible women across the state receive ₹3,000 every month directly into their Aadhaar-linked bank accounts through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. Basically, Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme is merged with this program. The scheme is officially called the Annapurna Bhandar Prakalpo and is also referred to as Annapurna Yojana or the Matri Shakti Bharosa Card Scheme in various government communications. It is administered by the Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal.

### **Conclusion:**

From the discussion, it is clear that the concept of rural development is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted process. The government of West Bengal has taken initiatives in intruding various rural development programmes from time to time for the overall development of rural people in west Bengal. But, the success of rural development programme depends on to proper implementation of the programme, periodical monitoring and regular evaluating.

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