



# Rural Development after Panchayat: A study on Midnapore, West Bengal

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**Abstract:** If it is concerned about the future of a community, local government as an institution of local administration places a focus on the need for regular public participation in developing and carrying out local development plans. The local government facilitates communication between elected politicians and the general public. For a local authority to run smoothly, the concept of citizen participation in local administration is essential because it opens a line of communication between both the leader and team members. The Gram Sansad (Amendment) Act was passed in West Bengal due to the sizeable territory and population of the Gram Panchayat. The researcher chose West Bengal's undivided Medinipur region to study rural development communication & development by the Panchayat.

**Keywords:** Local government, Gram Sabha, Panchayat, Rural development, Medinipur, West Bengal.

## Introduction:

A new definition of People's Participation in the democratic local government has emerged since the 1970s, when it referred to the public's involvement as users of state-funded programs. The level of public participation has risen dramatically in the last few years [1]. Thus, it has become a fundamental part of all international development programs. More human-centered policies have been implemented in some countries' administrative & planning systems since the 1990s. This is the most critical moment ever for participatory development since it has moved from the margins to the centre of attention. People's participation and the establishment of a participatory development planning process based on people's demands were enacted in many countries in the 1990s, including the Philippines, India, Bolivia, Tanzania and Uganda. Governments are better able to recognise public interests and are held accountable as a result of increased public participation.

To far, West Bengal's Panchayat Raj have conducted a unique democratic decentralisation experiment, transforming rural society and raising awareness among the less fortunate elements of society about their ability and capacity for rebuilding the future. Communities were encouraged to play a role in rural development through Panchayati Raj, which was the state's local government system [2]. Despite the fact that the Panchayat experiment has been a great success, many challenges have arisen that must be solved for it to continue. In order to maintain the Panchayat system's efficacy and efficiency, these flaws must be discovered and addressed without placing the Panchayat organization or its field employees in the spotlight. The Panchayat institutions need to have their flaws well identified in order to prevent the system from becoming entropic. Taking a closer look at this grassroots effort, let's see what went wrong there. Power & decision-making authority have been transferred from elected officials to non-elected leaders in rural development, which has upset the traditional "balance" between the two. Even though it's still in the early stages of the trial-and-error phase or the adjustment phase, there is a growing understanding of how important it is for the people to have a say in how their elected leaders are governed and how important it is for bureaucrats to help them implement their decisions.

On the other side, Panchayati Raj organizations lack sufficient administrative or technical employees, therefore they must serve both the local Panchayats as their department heads. As a result, it's difficult to

establish a solid command and control structure during the course of the program's development [3]. An evaluation system is still being created for monitoring, implementation, and implementation. All of the most critical growth components are lacking in trustworthy feedback from the field. The information system is indeed lacking. Departmental projects and programs smother the Panchayats, making it difficult to coordinate.

However, they are not insurmountable problems. A statement by Debabrata Bandyopadhiya, the Panchayati Raj Minister, stated: "We lacked the necessary rural development & Panchayati Raj experience and infrastructure at the beginning of the process. However, they may be able to achieve if they have faith and perseverance." We're certain that we'll be able to overcome our current shortcomings in the near future. No matter where they are located, all Panchayats confront the same problems. In addition to talking to District Panchayat Officers, Sabhapatis, Pradhans, members of the legislature, editors of local newspapers in Midnapore District, and other political party leaders, I've also interviewed B.D.O.'s, common citizens, and educated members of the public. As a result, I'm well-versed in many issues that affect the Panchayat system. An organization's budget for a certain development project may not be fully utilised for a variety of reasons, including a lack of employees, resources, managers, and specialists. As an example, let's look at some money that wasn't put to use. The Gram Panchayat now has administration and monitoring of all the village's vested tanks, allowing it to best use the area's limited natural resources while also creating jobs for the local fishing community and others. The government's Board of Revenues was responsible for this. Rural communities in the Midnapore district can benefit from a variety of government and private development initiatives.

### **West Bengal's Decentralization Process:**

An essential part of self-governance is ensuring that the people are represented through democratic means. A lengthy history of decentralized and participatory government may be seen in West Bengal [4]. It was introducing local panchayats made possible by the Bengal Chowkidary Act in 1870. Local rural boards were proposed in the 1882 Ripon Resolutions. Those choices were put into action in Bengal through the Bengal Local Self Rule Act of 1885. The Bengal Local Self Government Act of 1919 was a second attempt at decentralization during the colonial period. An upper-level district board and a lower-level union board were created as a result of this law. In the state, this law was replaced by the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957. It established a four-tiered structure with general practitioners in each neighbourhood. It was abolished and replaced with a three-tiered system by the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, is a pioneering initiative in India to establish a three-tier Panchayat system in rural areas (West Bengal Act XLI, 1973). Panchayat Samiti (PST) and GP are the three types of Panchayat in each district [5].

The PRI's local governance experience in West Bengal is distinct from that of other Indian states. Second-generation Panchayat governance in West Bengal has been ruled since 1978 by the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 (the West Bengal Act XLI of 1973). Since then, Panchayat elections have taken place every five years. With these modifications, local governments now have the power to collect taxes and levies on behalf of their businesses and residents. Most important since 1978 has been the improvement of women's and other underrepresented groups' representation in politics. A third of the PRI members in West Bengal were women in the 1980s, notwithstanding the 1992 Constitutional Amendment guaranteeing backward-class and female reservation in the system. It's also heartening to see that the lower sections of society have acquired substantial representation since 1978 thanks to the panchayat system. PRI's representation of small peasants & landless labourers increased between 1978 and 1988, according to Webster (1990). Electing women to panchayat positions is a noteworthy achievement.

Village government (GP), block government (PS), and district government (D) are now included in the state's political decentralisation (ZP). In order to promote economic growth and social fairness for everyone in their respective jurisdictions, the three levels of self-government, GP, PS, and ZP, are expected to devise and implement plans and schemes of their own accord.

### **In PRI, the Invited Space plays an important role:**

As noted in this article, West Bengal PRI has undertaken policy changes to create certain 'invited spaces,' so that decision-making is more decentralized and direct. A number of state government policy measures aimed at enhancing the state's participative development cycle are outlined in the following sections. Gram Sansad and other grassroots democracy-building organisations regard participation in community developmental decision-making processes as essential. Government that involves the public in decision-making might be

considered more democratic. There were Gram Sansad meetings set up in 1994 under the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 (Section 16A), so that more people may take part in decision-making. With this project, individuals were given a chance to have their voices heard on sustainable growth and social justice activities now underway or planned for the area.

**Gram Sabha:** Gram Sabha's position as a decision-making body for decentralization was restored in 1992 with the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (Article 243A). A 1994 amendment to a West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, mandates the holding of Gram Sabha meetings in the state. Members of a Gram Sabha must be on the electoral roll for the Gram Panchayat (GP). The Gram Sabha's December meeting is intended to serve as a starting point for discussions and ideas for local development activities. Gram Sabha is designed to be a nonpartisan platform where individuals can engage in planning and decision-making without fear of political bias.

**Gram Unnayan Samiti (GUS):** Additionally, increasing community involvement can be achieved through the use of GUS (Village Development Committee). As an apolitical organisation, the GUS encourages everyone to participate, not just political parties. GUS was introduced under the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2003. Members of the Gram Sansads elected as chairpersons and ex-officio members with the second-highest number of votes form a GUS. The Gram Sansad assembly called for the formation of GUS also nominates and/or elects members of Self-Help Groups, local NGOs, retired or current teachers, retired or energetic government officials, and other village inhabitants. Following the recent order from the West Bengal govt's Panchayats & Rural Development Department, founding the GUS has been revised. Candidates are nominated by elected authorities and those who obtained the second-highest number of votes, instead of open voting. In order to ensure that people are actively involved in implementing, maintaining and distributing the benefits of GUS, it has been implemented. Due to the implementation of different government-sponsored development programmes, a GUS has the right to receive untied cash from the GP and can open a bank or postal account.

**Sansad siblings:** West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2003 established the Block Sansad and Zilla Sansad to ensure vertical accountability among Panchayats. The West Bengal Panchayat Act requires block Sansads of 1973 in order to advise the PS on any and all development-related problems. They are held twice a year and include all representatives of the block's GPs and all members of the PS. All PS has Sabhapati, Sahakari Sabhapati, and Karmadhyakses in a Zilla Sansad, just as the Pradhans and the Sabhapatis. In order to provide ZP with assistance and advice on all matters relating to district development, Zilla Sansad meets twice a year.

**Information Gathering:** No matter where they are located, all Panchayats confront the same problems. In addition to talking to District Panchayat Officers, Sabhapatis, Pradhans, members of the legislature, editors of local newspapers in Midnapore District, and other political party leaders, I've also interviewed B.D.O.'s, common citizens, and educated members of the public. As a result, I'm well-versed in many issues that affect the Panchayat system. An organization's budget for a certain development project may not be fully utilised for a variety of reasons, including a lack of employees, resources, managers and specialists [6]. As an example, let's look at some money that wasn't put to use. So that these valuable natural resources can be utilised to their maximum potential while also providing work for local fisherman and other skilled professionals, the Board of Revenue has handed over all of the village's khas and vested tanks to their respective Gram Panchayats [7].

### **I.R.D.P.:**

In this paradigm, numerous concerns are addressed simultaneously. Community involvement and self-improvement are essential in this endeavour. "Integrated Rural Development could well be characterised as an attempt to implement Gandhiji's Sarvodaya notion, which is to promote a well of all rural residents while also making sure accelerated development and very well for the most vulnerable groups, such as the poorest and most vulnerable among them," R. N. Azad wrote in a statement. Those are the people who are supposed to be reading this stuff, according to the I.R.D.P Midnapore, the project's officer. The majority of agricultural workers in the region are small farmers, local farmers, landless people, farm labour, bargadars & pattadars, and rural craftsmen. The recipient's annual income is limited to Rs. 3,500/- per year. The I.R.D.P. Midnapore has taken several steps to assist these underserved groups. Creative business models can take many forms. For all of these programmes and projects to be successful, Panchayats must be fully engaged and actively involved in the selection of recipients, act as a guarantee for bank loans, & ensure prompt loan repayment [8].

The members of the Panchayat are close neighbours of rural people, thus they are well-versed in their requirements. Because they are constantly monitored and supervised, they may produce the best outcomes.. The I.R.D.P. project's objective is to annually include 600 families out of each Midnapore district block under its auspices Finally, by completing its requisite five-year timeline, the project is expected to cover 3000 (600 X 5) families from each block. According to a well-argued argument, keeping in mind the three sides of the triangle is critical to I.R.D.P.'s success. The programmes, the bureaucracy and other implementing agencies, and the people and the institutions of the people are all interconnected.

### Planting of betel nut vines:

However, even though betel-vine farming has been around for centuries and has the potential to generate significant foreign exchange, the government and agricultural institutions have failed to recognise its importance. A little parcel of land can make a substantial profit if it is under a lot of demand from people. Planners and economists have taken notice of Uttar Pradesh and Hariyana's betel-vine production achievements.

Bullock carts to pull ploughs	Betel-vine	Cultivation
Three-wheeler carts	Mat-stick	Cultivation
Polugh bullock scheme	Cajuput	Cultivation
Irrigation Dams	Banana	Cultivation

In spite of its excellent genetics, West Bengal has only made sporadic attempts to cultivate this plant. There are only a few companies that have made these kinds of advancements. The Panskura Banamali College Science Club's initiative, led by Professor Gajendranath Si, to improve this agricultural scientifically is an inspiring exemplar case. An interview with Gajendranath Si indicated that a land area of 10 decimal acres provides a net profit of Rs. 4000/- annually, providing employment for three persons throughout the year. An initial cost estimate from Prof. Gajendrath Si is that it is possible to keep maintenance expenses low if proper plant protection measures are implemented following a comprehensive evaluation. Many nations in South and Southeast Asia where betelvine is exported are important markets for this product. Betel-vine stems, leaves, and roots can also be used in a wide range of industrial and other applications. Companies can expand their customer base by participating in international trade shows [9]. Betel-vine growing areas in Midnapore district include Tamluk I and II, Ramanagr I and II, Sutahata I, Mohanpur, and Egra. According to Prof. Gajendranath Si, the government, agricultural universities, or cooperatives all play a key role in strengthening this style of farming. Because of this, the above-mentioned groups should take action. There's already been some recognition of this by the Midnapore-based IRDP, which recently extended loans to betel-vine growers. DRDA, Nationalized Banks and cooperatives can all lend money to farmers who meet their requirements.' Panchayats and industrial agencies at the Panchayat Samiti Level can provide direct government loans & subsidies to cultivators. Choosing who gets a loan and helping farmers pay it back are two ways Panchayats can help financial institutions out. Farmers' co-ops are "Growers Organizations" that supply raw materials at fair prices, eliminate marketing obstacles, provide transportation facilities, pack and bleach, and so forth. The government and agricultural colleges may set up research and teaching arrangements to build a modern farming "package of practises" and popularise farming and its uses all through the Midnapore areas generally.

### Conclusions:

Decentralization hasn't yet yielded its full benefits to West Bengal, despite the fact that it was the state that pioneered democratic government in India. Participation of the local population in governance is still a significant obstacle. The PRI's stated goals of increased effectiveness, openness, and accountability may be thwarted by the very nature of this document. Local governments could fight this problem by promoting 'invited space.' In order to be successful, PRI needs more public participation because its foundation is based on the devolution of power to ordinary citizens. Because of this, West Bengal must take all necessary steps to ensure that the same standard is met.

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