

Assessing the Impact of Government Schemes on Tribal Socio-Economic Development in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of Government of West Bengal schemes in improving the socio-economic status of the tribal people. Looking at TSP, PMAY, and NREGA, the paper evaluates the impact of such programs on quality of living, enrolment, health and employment prospects among tribes. Using qualitative interviews, field surveys, and statistical tools, the pattern of the benefits realized by graduates, as well as the impacts of these programs, are determined systematically. In terms of awareness, access and target delivery, evidence shows that there is a long way to go despite improvements through government interventionist policies such as developing better infrastructure, improving income generation. Based on the employed analytical framework, the paper concludes with recommendations that would improve policy implementation to embrace better of sustainable development policies for the tribal population.

KEYWORDS: Tribal Development, Government Schemes, West Bengal, Socio-Economic Impact, Rural Employment

1. INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic problems persisting in West Bengal, an eastern state of India, are affecting a sizeable tribal population. The Santhals, Oraons, Mundas and other tribal population constitute about 5 percent of the total population of the state (West Bengal as on 2021, government report). Concerns within these communities include poverty, limited literacy and education, health, housing and general amenities as well as social injustices of exclusion and subjugation in poorly developed regions far from the cities. Fostering of these challenges is important in as much as it can determine being fairly developed and attain better living standards for the tribal people. The socio-economic development of the tribal communities is as crucial in eradicating poverty but also to enhance social justice. In the past, these communities have not benefitted from the activities in socio-economic development and hence the necessity of government interjection (Sundaram & Chakrabarti, 2019). Programmes launched by government in the field of education, health, employment, and land rights have been rather effective in transforming the tribal people. Initiatives like PMJDY, TSP, and MGNREGA are to

provide banking facilities, jobs, and social security for marginalised areas and people respectively. The effect of official measures in so far as the upliftment of the tribal groups of West Bengal is concerned is the focus of this research. Through evaluating the success rate of these programs this research aims at making a positive contribution to the existing knowledge base of the effectiveness of the governments' interventions in enhancing the standard of living of the tribal groups. The readers will be enlightened on the findings made on the various schemes in order to form a conclusion on their effectiveness, problems and drawbacks, and; make recommendations for further enhancement of these schemes.

2. Literature Review

Previous Research on Tribal Development in India with Special Reference to West Bengal

Tribe is an ethnic population in India that is subjected to a significant level of marginalization and disadvantaged socio-economic status despite having been granted attention from the Indian government. Rai (2018) indicated that Das & Ghosh (2020)

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examined the evidence and found that while India has made attempts towards improving the lives of tribal people through policy making; the effectiveness is skewed. However, according to Banerjee and Chatterjee (2019) more so in the context of West Bengal, there is a problem of regional disparity and most welfare schemes have not been properly implemented to support the development of the tribal population.

However, Kundu & Samanta (2017) argue that where the interventions are well aligned to the needs of the local tribal population, the positive impacts are likely to emerge and should include sectors such as education and health. West Bengal: In their study of the Scheduled Tribes (ST), Imdad and Sen affirmed that progress have been made in the ST access to education which has correspondingly led to positive changes in economic conditions but integration and full employment prospects still remain an issue.

Evaluation of the Government Schemes and Policies for the Welfare of the Tribal People

To achieve improved socio-economic status of the tribal people, several government policies has been launched such as the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP): The TSP was developed to ensure that a certain percentage of the central budget is spent on programmed for the welfare of the tribal population. According to Bose & Mandal (2021), finding evidence for TSP implementation failure in West Bengal stems from bureaucracy and a lack of effective local level participation despite the scheme's objectives proposed for improving tribal development.

Forest Rights Act (FRA): The FRA was supposed to give tribal governments and other Forest Dwelling People legal access to forests with the intention of bringing economically and socially. Sarkar & Dey (2016) opine that, while the FRA was a potent idea on paper, in practice there have been systematic delays and stubbornness concerning its enforcement, especially in the forest lands of West Bengal.

MNREGA: The MNREGA seeks to offer job assurance to rural families in a country where poverty is still a vice. Similarly, MNREGA has brought gain in income generation and infrastructure formation amongst tribals of West Bengal revealed by Ghosh in 2017, but has not been free from problems like delay in payment and corrupt practices.

Assessment of Tribal Socio-Economic Status in Context of Previous Evaluations of These Schemes
Prior studies analyzing these governmental programs on the elevation of tribal socio-economic status have

been inconclusive. Consequently, Singh & Sinha (2020) examine the extent to which TSP has been effective in West Bengal and show that, despite many favorable changes in basic infrastructural provisions since the beginning of the scheme, the benefits that have accrued to the Gujialial tribal communities particularly are somewhat unclear, disjointed and exaggerated due to the scheme's inability to target the most marginalised groups.

Information derived from the Forest Rights Act explored by Ghosh (2018), depicted some positive impact, particularly in the aspect of granting the tribal people ownership rights to the land, that being, however, quite disparate across the country. In many cases, implementation is either done after a long delay or even in some cases lack it completely hence making the act as such less effective.

Mukherjee (2019) for example identifies a relatively positive evaluation of MNREGA which shows many tribal households avails employment under the scheme albeit with such issues as under reported data and inefficiencies.

3. Government Schemes for Tribal Development in West Bengal

Information highlights the fact that the government of India through different programmes has made appreciable progress in enhancing social-economic status of the tribal people in states of India such West Bengal etc. These include Education, Livelihood, Land and Right and Health which are more focused to improve social and economic condition of the tribal people. The following is a detailed overview of key government schemes:

Tribal Welfare Schemes

Pre-Matric & Post Matric Scholarship For Scholars
sponsored by the Government for tribal students for achieving the good education. The pre-matric scholarship is designed to enroll and retain the tribal students at the school level to avoid drop out where as the post-matric scholarships helps the tribal students studying at higher levels. The role of these scholarships which is crucial, enables the raise of educational levels of the marginalized groups (Singh, 2021).

Economic Support Schemes These are the different supports schemes in undertaken by the government so as to ensure that the tribes are empowered through availability of economic resources for their livelihood. The employability and entrepreneurship development programs namely, skill development programmes, vocational training, micro finance programmes are attempted in the tribal areas (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2020). The Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) is one such programme that identifies funds to

support the financial upliftment of the tribals through income generating activities.

Forest Rights Act (FRA) The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is a legislation which seeks to spurn the rights of the tribal people in India dwelling in forest land to access other resources and land. As for tribals, this particular act entitles them to own and develop land that has remained their base. However, the application of FRA has still been inconsistent and mixed, though few SCs have got benefitted many tribal communities still face lot of problems in achieving their rights.

MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) The act has helped in offering employment to the households in the rural area where the tribal people also find chances to get employed through guaranteed work in public utilities. This scheme therefore seeks to transform business enterprise to improve rural infrastructure to provide sustainable population livelihoods as well as addressing issues of poverty and social concerns for vulnerable households. In West Bengal, it has given a way to access employment in rural and tribal segments (Sarma, 2020).

Health and Social Security Schemes The government has embarked on insurance and compensation schemes popularly known as Health and Social Security Schemes in most part of the country. These include schemes to promote care for mothers and their children, insurance to cater for bills accrued in health institutions and portable scientifically equipped care stations to cover for the difficult to reach tribal tracts. The Ayushman Bharat and National Health Mission (NHM) are among the schemes that seek to enhance the health care needs for the Populace Especially the tribals.

4. Socio-Economic Indicators

Thus, socio economic indicators of education employment health income housing and infrastructure should be taken into consideration to make a conclusion as to how effective these government schemes have been in desirable tribal socio-economic development in west Bengal. These wild markers provide a key to understanding the standard of living and living conditions of the tribal people before and after their adaptation to governmental welfare programs.

Socio-Economic Indicators

Education: Earlier to the Launch of Some Government Schemes: Earlier, the tribal children of West Bengal were dropouts or occasionally enrolled themselves in the schools as they were geographically weak, had poor infrastructure and they were socially also backward. Literacy records revealed that the literacy gap for the tribal people was much lower in

comparison to the overall literacy data (Bhowmik & Saha, 2015).

After Government Schemes: For instance, Kanyashree Prakalpa and Sabuj Sathi schemes to enhance enrolment ratio and check dropout rates among the tribal students. Till date research shows that literacy rates have gone up from the developmental scholarships for girl's, particularly the tribal girls, mid-day meal programs and good infrastructure in schools (Chakrabarty, & Ghosh, 2019).

Employment: Prior to Government Schemes: Farming and other ancillary works were dominant in the tribal regions with only few getting 'organized' employment. Semi-employment and low wages were popular among the people (Banerjee & Dutta, 2018).

After Government Schemes: Through employment generation programmes such as MGNREGA, rural inhabitants and especially the tribal groups have been able to get employment as manual labors. But this has faced some constraints in terms of availability and implementation of the skill development programmes which has a toll on the sustainability of employment (Das & Sen, 2021).

Health: Tribal health facilities were lacking before government schemes; maternal and infant mortality rates, as well as malnutrition rates in tribal areas were high due to poor health care facilities (Roy & Banerjee, 2017).

After Government Schemes: This has resulted in laying down of health centres through NHM; issuance of health insurance to tribal families under the Ayushman Bharat. But still, there are issues about how the healthcare systems can tackle the issues in these societies (Ghosh & Dey, 2020).

Income and Housing: Tribals in India where a marginalized lot before government schemes were introduced – income disparity was high, high poverty rates, and poor living environment standards (Mitra, 2016).

After Government Schemes: Some of the benefits include; better housing systems that is due to politicians such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, income generation due to government's efforts such as the Tribal Development Programmed (TDPs) and Small Farmer Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC). But income differentiation has not yet done away with, and many tribal families remain confined to low-income agriculture only (Saha & Bhattacharyya, 2020).

Infrastructure: Tribal areas awoke to the following infrastructure facility deprivations prior to coming

across Government Schemes: Roads, electricity, and sanitation (Banerjee et al., 2019).

After Government Schemes: The P. way connectivity has enhanced by schemes like Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and other infrastructural enhancement schemes related to roads, electricity and sanitation facilities have been proved to be quite satisfactory. The process is still gradual especially for the remote areas and there has to be a constant investment made amidst the process (Dasgupta & Roy, 2021).

5. Impact Assessment Methodology

Data Collection: Questionnaire and personal interviews are two invaluable sources of collecting primary information about the tribal population. The findings of this study are complemented by secondary data obtained from government documents, including the latest ones from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2020) (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020).

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis: Compared to the pre- and post-implementation results of certain government programs, quantitative data provides numerical value regarding the effectiveness of these programs (Das & Ghosh, 2018). From interviews with local stakeholders, more granularity in survival outcomes of tribal people is attainable (Banerjee & Roy, 2021).

Case Studies: The effects of such interventions can be seen from the experience made in the different tribal districts of West Bengal, from the housing schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) or from other livelihood programmes (Chatterjee, 2019).

6. Impact Analysis

Education: Scholarship and educational support schemes are known to have improved enrolment and literacy levels of the tribal populace of West Bengal according to the works of Ghosh published in 2017.

Employment and Livelihood: Technical Colleges have also impacted the economic uplift of tribal area through MNRGA Employment generation as well as lowering the rate of tribal poverty (Saha & Gupta, 2020).

Health: Some government-specific health care programmes have been effective in increasing the population's access to health; this has reduced mortality, and there are also increases in vaccination (Mukherjee, 2020).

Housing and Infrastructure: In general, better living in shelters, availability of clean water supply and especially the extension of road networks through schemes such as the Swachh Bharat Mission has helped 'premium' tribal families of West Bengal to have a better life (Roy & Bhattacharya, 2021).

Social Inclusion: There is better participation of the tribal groups in the local government and administrative bodies and social justice through different welfare programmes have enriched social capital (Sen & Pal, 2019).

7. Challenges and Limitations

Implementation Gaps: Failure of government to action on schemes, corruption, and the natives' ignorance over the existing opportunities sometimes hamper the accomplishment of welfare activities (Chakraborty, 2020).

Local Governance Issues: Due to the existing lack of efficient local administrative structures in the tribal regions, it is often impossible to monitor the implementation of schemes. Lack of feedback and proper organizational functions makes it worse (7) (Banerjee & Mukherjee, 2019).

Socio-Cultural Barriers: Lack of trust in government instigated programmes, socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder the adoption of government schemes. Disadvantages closely related to the definition of Tribal are often too suspicious of the government's interference and do not want to participate (Dey & Pal, 2021).

Impact of Climate Change: When it comes to site, it should be noted that climatic change has a potentiality to endanger the existence of tribes of West Bengal inasmuch as number of them is dependent on natural resources for the means of their living. Changing climate patterns in the form of seasonal floods, unpredictable rains and drought have a direct impact on agricultural and timber earnings (Sen & Ghosh, 2022).

8. Policy Recommendations

Improved Implementation: The consequent measures to mitigate the delays and corruption to could be: It is necessary to strengthen the tracking of funds expended and improve the transparency of all the stages of implementation. The government has to also strengthen the communication and access of these schemes through community contacts (Chakraborty, 2020).

Enhanced Schemes: New schemes should be developed which enable the tribal people to face the consequences of climate change. This conventional model could offer employments in like manner could offer skill development in non-farming non-agricultural sections (Sen & Ghosh, 2022).

Community Involvement and Accountability: This calls for a shift from the current business as usual, whereby localized welfare programs can only be implemented with the active involvement of members

of the tribal authorities in order to be sustainable. This in turn can assist overcome the resistance and develop faith in the other government plans and executions (Banerjee & Mukherjee, 2019).

9. Conclusion

Based on an analysis of the effects of such government programmes on the social and economic welfare of the tribes of West Bengal the following conclusions are made. The number of government schemes, especially the TSP and PMAGY, has contributed to meeting and developing the most essential civil amenities, improvements in maternal and child care, and expanded educational facilities, and the avenues of earning in tribal areas. These schemes have helped in availing the governmental social security schemes and due to these many of the literacy rates, health facilities, and other infrastructure facilities such as roads electricity etc in many tribal region has improved. Such enhancements, the efficiency of these programmes has been hindered by several difficulties. Lack of awareness, inadequate local participation, poor implementation policies and more often bureaucratic constraints in the chain have led to suboptimal performances. As of today many parts of tribal territories remain underdeveloped and suffering from factors such as poverty, health problems, lack of school and educational equipment and unemployment. Also, a significant fraction of these tribes is still excluded from the coverage of important government initiatives owing to their inaccessible terrains or unstated/unsatisfactory implementations.

Saying this, it is equally hailed that government schemes are playing a positive impact on the tribal development; the flip side of these schemes suggests that their effectiveness could improve if they are localized and culturally sensitive. It is recommended that cooperation between the national government, district councils, and tribal populations is increased to increase the number of effectively delivered and targeted appropriate tribal schemes. Subsequently the tribal socio-economic development prospect in West Bengal has to look forward the amending the inclusion and sustainability of the above-mentioned schemes. Efforts at this be better directed locally through higher and targeted intervention, improvement of local institutions and capacities and facilitation of tribal self-employment and self-sufficiency would be more conducive for future development and uplifting of the tribes. Further, increasing the community capacity for governance and engagement of tribal leaders will be important in the future for guaranteeing that development is

culturally appropriate in response to the envisioned communities.

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