

**DISTRICT
HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT
REPORT
SOUTH 24 PARGANAS**

**DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL**

District Human Development Report: South 24 Parganas

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Government of West Bengal

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Foreword

Development is basically a dynamic process about people and their expansion of choices to live their lives creatively, with freedom and dignity. It has been the constant effort of the West Bengal Government for the past three decades and more to translate this very concept of development into discernible and measurable action.

It is keeping this approach at the centre of all our programmes that the State Human Development Report was brought out in 2004. This Report which won appreciation for its clarity and transparency, suggested a series of activities to bring about positive changes in the human development scenario of West Bengal. One such activity is the preparation and publication of District Human Development Reports as sequel to the State Human Development Report. So far we have been able to publish the reports of Bankura, Malda and Birbhum districts. We hope to publish the reports of three to four other districts by December, 2009.

The District Human Development Report of South 24 Parganas is one of these. This district, with its multi-dimensional variety is one of the more challenging areas of developmental activities in our State. The challenges are multi-layered. In almost equal proportions, the district places before us a wide arena of opportunities. The district level team and their counterparts at the State level have really done a commendable job in collating the areas of attention and earmarking the agenda of action.

I avail this opportunity to thank the peoples' representatives, the academicians the administrators and all those whose collective efforts have brought about this publication. I also record my appreciation to the HDRCC Unit of the Development and Planning Department and to the esteemed Members of the State Planning Board for their contribution in this regard.

I am hopeful that this Report will provide to all concerned a better understanding of South 24 Parganas, both as a district, as well as a centre of development related activities. It will also help to extend and ensure our objectives of inclusive growth, sustained development and equitable distribution of resources.

(Nirupam Sen)

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Preface

All development initiatives aim to improve the quality of life of the human being. This improvement can not be brought about simply by a growth in national production. Improvement of quality of life will happen only when people are provided with a range of choices and an enabling environment where they can explore their potential to the fullest.

Preparing the Human Development Report of South 24 Parganas was an exercise in identifying the most pressing developmental constraints in the district and putting together a document that would serve as a base for policy formulation and strategies. We have explored the state of education and health-care in the district, looked at the changing employment trends, calculated a standard of living index. Given the geographical position of the district which comprises one of the largest estuarine deltas in the world, we have examined the people's capacity to cope with natural calamities and computed a vulnerability index. A chapter has been devoted to the Sunderbans, which with its mangroves, other flora, ecology and fauna, gives the district its unique and distinctive character. Gender issues have been discussed in a separate chapter.

When we were assigned to the responsibility of preparing a Human Development Report for our district, we formed a Core Group consisting of the Sabhadhipati of the Zilla Parishad, the District Magistrate, the Members of Parliament from Jadavpur and Diamond Harbour Parliamentary Constituencies, the Additional District Magistrate (General), the District Planning Officer, and Shri Sukanta Bhattacharya, the Lead Coordinator. This Core Group would act as the decision maker and coordinator. A district level workshop was arranged with the Panchayat functionaries, line departments, government officials and NGOs. At this workshop, which was the first of many brainstorming sessions, the various sectors which would form part of the report, were identified. Core Groups, one for each sector, were formed. The Core Groups had government officials, NGOs, academicians and public representatives and were led by the Group Coordinators. Over the next few months, the Core Groups collected and analysed data, held discussions, did case studies and collated the material. The District Core Group sat in with the Sectoral Groups severally, and also arranged for joint sessions where findings could be shared and validated. The chapters were presented at district level workshops at various stages of preparation, and the draft report was presented at the state level several times.

For us, preparing the DHDR was like embarking on a journey of discovery of South 24 Parganas. The largest district in the state is a huge, populous landmass characterized by heterogeneity, with the teeming urban metropolis Kolkata in the northern fringes giving way to the uninhabited forested islands of the world's largest prograding delta, the Sunderbans. The smallest unit of study was the development block : there are 29 such blocks in the district, each with its individual problems and policy requirements. Given the differences in topography, resources and demands of the people, ideally, policies should have been prescribed for each block separately.

However, while we were comparing the performances of these blocks in various developmental indices, we found that that blocks were resolving themselves into three distinct regions : 1) the north-west, which was the highly urbanized area surrounding Kolkata, 2) the Sunderbans in the south, and 3) the north-east and mid-west region which was really a buffer zone between the other two regions and which was a region in transition. Analysis of data and findings pertaining to the individual blocks held good when looked at from the perspective of these three regions. While we deliberately desisted from making macro level policy recommendations for the district as a whole, the emergence of these distinct regions in the course of the study helped us to make some necessary generalisations.

Overall coordination of the DHDR exercise was maintained by the DHDR Core Committee under the chairmanship of Shri Bimal Mistri, Sabhadhipati, South 24 Parganas Zilla Parishad, who

was always ready with his kind advice and support. Shri Sukanta Bhattacharya, Reader, Department of Economics, University of Calcutta, was the Lead Coordinator of the Project. From preparing the concept note, to coordinating with the sectoral group coordinators, to himself writing the introductory and concluding chapters as well as the chapters on “Human Development Indicators” and “Material Conditions and Standard of Living”, Shri Bhattacharya’s involvement was complete. This report would not have materialized without him. The Group Coordinators handled their sectoral reports independently, collecting data, consulting and interacting with stakeholders, conducting surveys etc. Smt. Piyali Sarkar, Sr. Lecturer, Fakir Chand College, Diamond Harbour, was the leader of the group which studied “Employment Trends and Livelihood Patterns”. Shri Chirodip Majumder, Sr. Lecturer, Barjora College, Bankura, surveyed the “Literacy and Education” scenario in the district. The chapter on “Health Status in South 24-Parganas” was put together by Smt. Mousumi Datta, Reader, Presidency College, Kolkata. Shri Prasenjit Sarkhel, Lecturer, Lalbaba College, Howrah led the group which examined the issue of “Human Security and Vulnerability”; Shri Priyam Sengupta, Lecturer, Bankura Sammilani Mahavidyalaya, also participated actively in preparing this chapter. Smt. Pampa Sengupta, Reader, Vivekananda College, South 24-Parganas, wrote the chapter on “Gender and Development”, with Smt. Chandreyee Das of “Inspiration” providing valuable inputs on Women Trafficking. The chapter on “Sunderbans and the Remote Islanders” was written by Shri Santadas Ghosh, Reader, Visva Bharati University, Shantiniketan. Mention must also be made of the contribution of Shri Rajkumar Chakraborty, Sr. Lecturer, Jhargram Raj College, for preparing the historical profile of the district. I put on record our deep gratitude to all these representatives from academia, whose handiwork this report is. I would also like to thank all the officers of the line departments: Land, Labour, Education, Health, Public Health Engineering, Disaster Management, Police, Fisheries, Agriculture, Forest, Food and Supplies, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, District Industries Centre, Literacy : for providing the data which formed the basis of all the studies and analysis. The Karmadhyakshas of the Zilla Parishad participated freely in the discussions, as did many local NGOs. The Members of Parliament, Shri Sujan Chakraborty and Shri Samik Lahiri, put us in touch with various resource persons and offered us valuable insights. Shri P. B. Salim, IAS, Additional District Magistrate (General) and Shri Surojit Bose, WBCS (Executive), District Planning Officer, as members of the District Core Group, worked quietly in the background, liaisoning between the coordinators and the government departments, arranging for meetings, sitting in on discussions of the sectoral groups, making presentations. I put on record my appreciation for their dedication and hard work. Finally, we are grateful to the Development & Planning Department, Government of West Bengal, for their constant guidance and support.

Preparing the Human Development Report for South 24 Parganas has helped crystallize our vision for the district. In this report, we have tried to present frequently required data, analyses, comparisons of achievements in various sectors and regions and policy indications. We have intended it to be easily comprehensible and usable – we hope we have succeeded. We believe that the Report will fulfil its objective of acting as a ready reckoner, and as the base document, for any development planning exercise in the district.

Sanghamitra Ghosh, IAS

*District Magistrate
South 24-Parganas*

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