

Variation in Accession of Household Assets and Resulting Inequality in Level of Development in the Districts of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT: Household assets and amenities are key indicators of development. The level of development and purchasing power of households gets exposed with the accession of these assets. All the districts of West Bengal are rich in various types of resources, but accession of these resources depended on efficiency which is cost effective in nature. The government only ensures the availability of life supporting amenities like availability of drinking water and food as policies and governance at state level are much more important for better outcomes (IDR, 2015), but improvement in the standards of living or techniques of earnings totally depends on the level of efficiency and opportunities provided by government and non-government agencies. In West Bengal, a spatial variation exists in the level of development. Development is centralised in and around the capital city of West Bengal, Kolkata. With increasing distance, income opportunities decrease and also the people's quality of life. In this present study an attempt has been made to analyse the causes of district-wise variation in accession of household assets and amenities and inequalities present in case of level of development in different districts.

KEYWORDS: housing condition, household assets and amenities, level of development, inequality

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I. INTRODUCTION

Accession of assets is the key indicator of development and development is nothing, but an improvement in the quality of life. The quality of life is dependent on freedom of choice of various existing opportunities. Developed nations can provide more opportunities to people rather than developing nations. The United Nation fixes up Sustainable Development Goals where accession of life sustaining amenities such as availability of drinking water, fuel for cooking, good residence, electricity for lighting have been prioritised. Concept of improvement in standard of living is also appropriate in this context. Improved way of life includes good residence, availability of life supporting assets and amenities. Noble Laureate Professor Amartya Sen in his book "Development as Freedom" (1999) elaborated "Freedom means increasing access and opportunities to the things they have reason to value."

In the developing state of West Bengal, living standards of the people vary from north to south and east to west due to diversity in physiography, climate, vegetation and different types of livelihood. So, the possession of natural as well as household assets has a wide variation. Socio-economic factors also have a strong influence on the livelihood practices of the people. As a result, district-wise inter and intra inequality increases day by day. Presently, this endeavour is to analyse the causes and intensity of disparity existing among the districts in West Bengal.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- i) To find out the nature of accession of household assets among the districts
- ii) To evaluate the causes of spatial variation in case of accession of household amenities.
- iii) To calculate the level of development of the people in various districts
- iv) To assess the inequality prevailing among the districts

III. STUDY AREA

West Bengal is located in the eastern part of India with various types of landforms. Physiographically most of the part in West Bengal is located in the Lower Ganga Plain but, the northern district of Darjeeling is located in Eastern Himalayan mountain range. In the western region, the districts of Purulia and Bankura is an extension of the Chotanagpur Plateau fringe. East Medinipur and South 24 Parganas have a coastline along the

Bay of Bengal with a long stretch of beach favourable for developing tourism. It is one of the most densely populated states in India. Agriculture is very well-developed in this state for its favourable conditions in respect of physiography, soil, water availability, labour force and market. Industrial development, urbanisation and tourism is not at par in comparison with the developed states in India.

IV. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

Three parameters such as a) Housing condition, b) Household amenities and c) Household assets have been selected for this study. Three types of housing condition such as good, liveable and dilapidated types have been considered here. The household amenities included are various sources of drinking water, energy for lighting, types of waste water outlet, latrine facility, and availability of banking services. Household assets are composed of radio/transistor, television, computer with internet, mobile phone, landline phone, bicycle, scooter, motorcycle, moped, car, jeep and van. Data has been collected from Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics of West Bengal, Census of India (2011). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been followed in this study. Quantification of the accession of assets has been done by percentage calculation in respect of total households in the district.

Level of development has been calculated by Kendall's score of development and deviation from average score measured by Z score. Collected data has been tabulated, computed and analysed with maps and diagrams.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) Housing Conditions: Housing is one of the basic needs for survival, and maintaining it in a pristine condition is a priority for safety and security. Housing condition is also the reflection of the economic condition of a household. The overall performance of various districts in case of housing conditions reveals that, Kolkata has 66 percent households with good housing conditions. North 24 Parganas, Haora, Hugli, Bardhaman and Darjeeling also have more than 45 percent households with good housing conditions. Beside these, all the other districts have nearly 30 percent households with good housing conditions which is not a satisfactory performance. The reason behind these performances are multiple-folded. Kolkata and its surrounding districts is developed in respect of income level of the people for having sufficient job opportunities rather than other districts. So people live in houses with good condition.

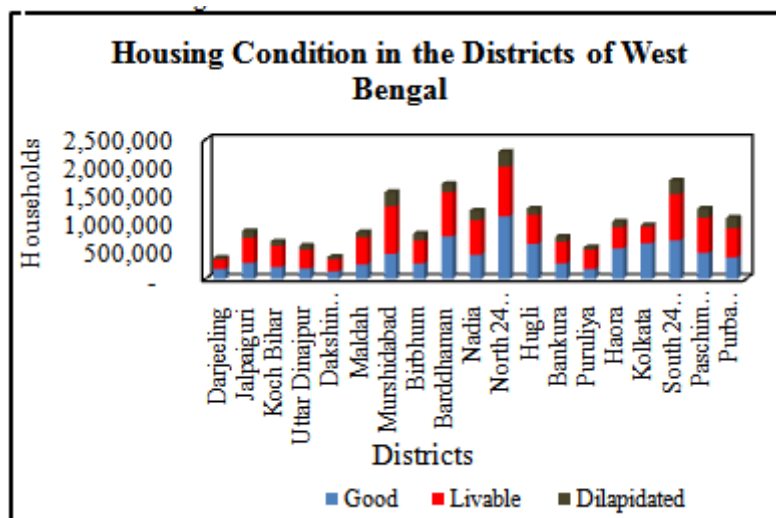


Fig-1 Source: Census of India, 2011

b) Household Amenities: i) Sources of drinking water is a most important indicator of regional development.

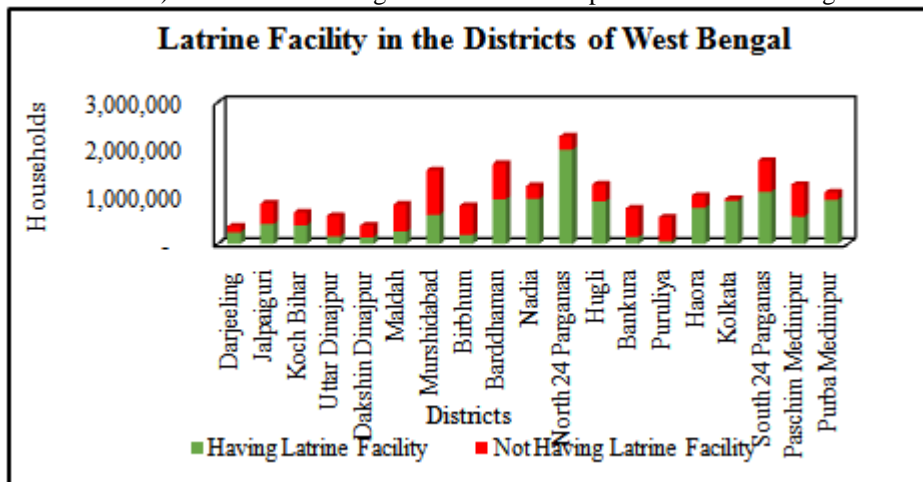


Fig-2 Source: Census of India, 2011

Developed regions have safe sources of potable water whereas underdeveloped area lack it. Tap water from treated sources, hand pumps and tube wells are considered as safe sources of drinking water. Districts of North Bengal, Bankura and Puruliya are worst affected because of this prevailing water crisis. Only 35 percent of people in Darjeeling and 50 percent of the people in Jalpaiguri have access to safe drinking water. The hilly terrain in Darjeeling and the foothills in Jalpaiguri are impediments to lift groundwater for drinking purpose. On the contrary, the plateau fringe in Bankura and Puruliya are not suitable for lifting groundwater. So plain areas of river Ganga and Teesta have sufficient drinking water available. Treated tap water is available in Kolkata, other districts have handpump or tube well facilities to collect drinking water.

ii) In the era of science and technology, livelihood mostly depends on alternative sources of energy rather than

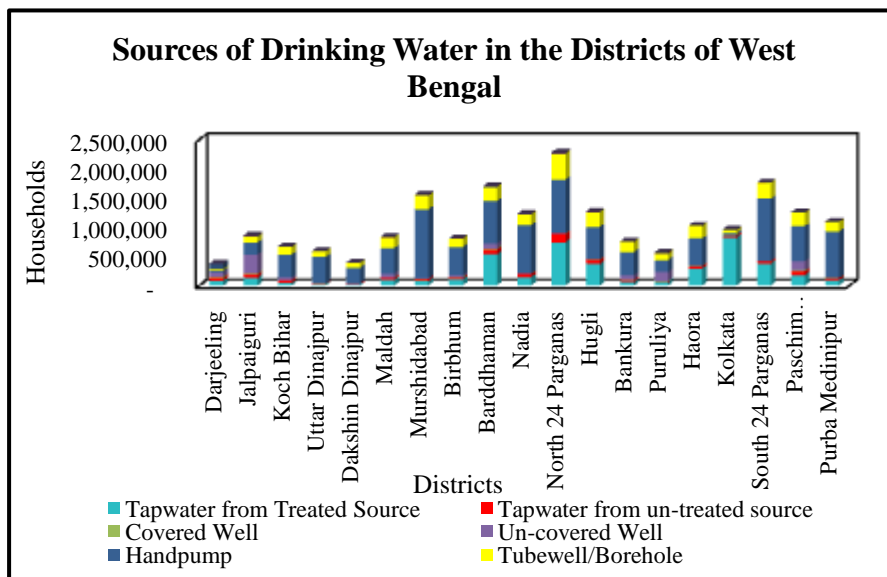


Fig. 3 Source: Census of India, 2011

conventional sources of energy. The scenario in this field is not satisfactory in West Bengal. Only Kolkata has electricity in 96 percent of its households. Except Darjeeling, North Bengal districts have less than 40 percent household with source lighting as electricity. Western districts also deprived from electricity. So working hours are totally restricted in between sunrise and sunset in most parts of West Bengal.

iii) Latrine Facility: It is most important indicator of improved way of living. Only three districts such as Kolkata, North 24 Parganas and Nadia have more than 80 percent household with this facility. Puruliya has only 11 percent household, all North Bengal districts except Darjeeling, and Bankura have less than 50 percent household with this facility.

iv) Waste water Outlet: This facility is only well improved in Kolkata and all district municipal towns. As most of the districts have nearly 80 percent rural area, improved sewage outlets are totally absent, though it is not hygienic.

v) Availability of banking facility: Banking facility now available in most of the remote rural areas of West Bengal, but the scenario is not satisfactory. Except Kolkata, less than 50 percent people of other districts do not avail this facility.

c) **Household Assets:** Household assets like bicycle, car, and computer with internet are treated as an improvement in standard of living as well as quality of life. In Kolkata, 26 percent of the households have any of these assets, whereas other districts have less than 15 percent household with these assets. So quality of life in the district of West Bengal is far behind modern standards.

VI. REASONS BEHIND UNAVAILABILITY OF ASSETS AND AMENITIES

Various factors are responsible for this present situation. It may be broadly categorised into two parts: Physical and socio-economic. Presence of hilly terrain, adversity of weather, rocky outcrops are constraints of development in Darjeeling, Bankura and Purulia districts. Salinity in soil and water, attack of tigers and crocodiles are impediments in South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas districts. Districts in plain areas have socio-economic constraints like, high man-land ratio, low purchasing power of the people, labour intensive agriculture mainly presence of agricultural labourer, lack of profitable market for agricultural products etc. Effective implementation of land reforms and Panchayati raj were enhanced peoples earnings in 1970s and 1980s but increasing cost of seeds, fertiliser, irrigation and labour minimise profit from agriculture. Most of the people in West Bengal depended on agriculture for earning but now unavailability of other jobs restricted the youth to engage in it. So people cannot afford higher cost to avail various amenities and assets. Government initiatives are not sufficient enough for this densely populated state.

VII. LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT

Rural development broadly has economic as well as social dimensions. These can again be classified into two parts: one that is induced by economic growth within the region; and the other one depends on the devolution of funds and schemes from above, say, from the central government, state government and other agencies at home and abroad (West Bengal Development Report, 2010). Level of development in this study has been computed by Kendall's score of development. Important indicators of development such as housing condition, availability of drinking water, electricity as sources of energy, latrine facility, waste water outlet facility, banking facility, households for improved standard of living have been considered for this study. The rank of every parameter has been calculated on the basis of score (percentage). Maximum percentage is treated as rank one and consequently other ranks are calculated. Summation of all ranks is the total score of the particular district. Here lower value of ranks indicate higher level of development. All the values have been categorised into four types. Total score less than 30 has very high level of development and only Kolkata is included in this category. Darjeeling, Bardhaman, North 24 Parganas, Haora, Hugli have a higher level, Nadia, South 24 Parganas, Paschim and Purba Medinipur district have a medium level and rest of the district have lower level of development. Nearly half (47 percent) of the districts in West Bengal have been categorised as low level category. Reasons behind these lower levels of development are mainly economic. Mainly traditional agriculture, agglomerative tendencies of industries, low infrastructural development along with sluggish rate of urbanisation are prime causes of low per capita income of the people. Development in social sector also vital as it help to improve quality of life through enhancement in literacy rate, sanitation, uses of advanced technology etc. In economic and social development, disparities prevail among all districts in West Bengal.

Table-1: Level of Development in the Districts of West Bengal

Districts	Total Score	Level of Development	Districts	Total Score	Level of Development
Darjeeling	49	High	North 24 Parganas	33	High
Jalpaiguri	89	Low	Hugli	33	High
Koch Bihar	109	Low	Bankura	81	Low
Uttar Dinajpur	106	Low	Puruliya	105	Low
Dakshin Dinajpur	89	Low	Haora	30	High
Maldah	102	Low	Kolkata	11	V.High
Murshidabad	94	Low	South 24 Parganas	63	Medium
Birbhum	95	Low	Paschim Medinipur	74	Medium

Bardhaman	43	High	PurbaMedinipur	62	Medium
Nadia	62	Medium			

Data Source: Census of India, 2011

VIII. INEQUALITY INLEVELOFDEVELOPMENT

Inequality in the level of development is computed by Z score. Here deviation from average score is indicated. In case of housing condition, it is observed that only six districts such as Kolkata, Haora, Hugli, Bardhaman,

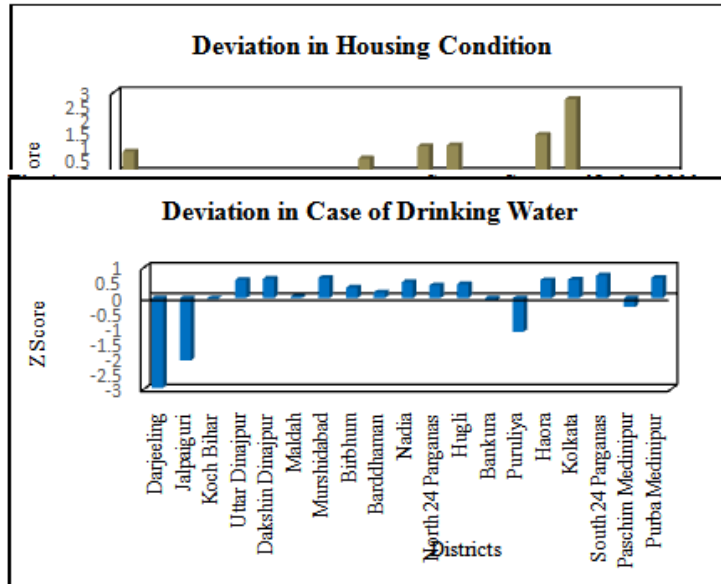


Fig-4 Source: Census of India, 2011

Fig 5 Source: Census of India, 2011

North 24 Parganas and Darjeeling have score more than the average value. In Murshidabad and Malda districts deviation from average is maximum. Drinking water is basic requirement for life, but four districts, viz, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Bankura and Puruliya are incapable to provide this facility to the people. Z score value is

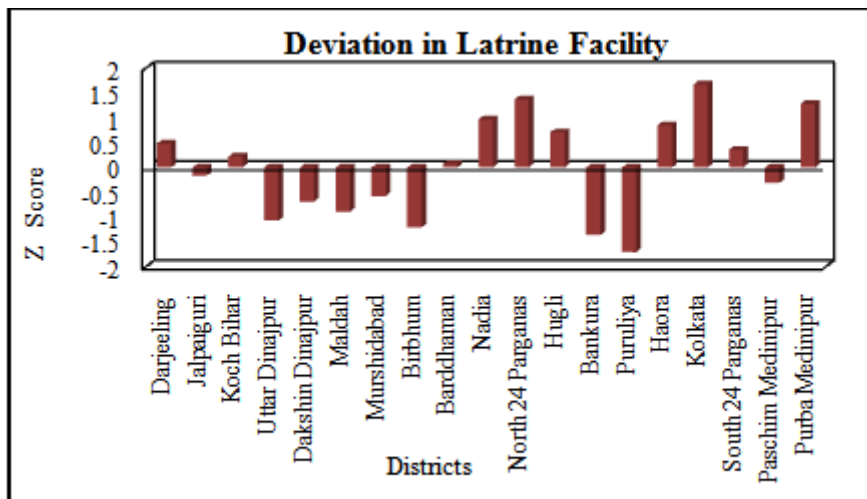


Fig 6

Source: Census of India, 2011

far behind the average value which is unexpected in these recent time. Miserable conditions are also seen in case of latrine facilities. Nearly half of the districts have score far behind the average value. The scenario is more or less same in case of accession of other assets and amenities. The problems of regional disparities and economic development are so complex that it is difficult to suggest what combination of techniques can be used to analyse certain problems. The resulting recommendations must be supplemented with first-hand knowledge of political, institutional and cultural factors (Sarkar and Bagchi, 2016).

IX. CONCLUSION

West Bengal is a very promising state in case of resource potential. All types of resources such as agricultural, aqua-cultural, horticultural, forestry, plantation and industrial resources are bountiful in this state. This state is also developed in infrastructure and human resources. It has large hinterland to flourish the import and export based trade. But the policy formulation and execution to utilise these resources are not effective. All types of development is centralised in and around Kolkata, the capital of this state. Now it occupies the 11th position in economic development among the Indian states. Difference in income level creates inequalities in accession of household assets and amenities and on level of development.

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