

PRESS RELEASE

A brief note on progress of realisation of MDGs in West Bengal on 07.07.07

The Millennium Development Goals(MDG) are the targets to be achieved within 2015 to reduce poverty and hunger, to attain quantified targets in the fields of health, education, gender, environment, public health and to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS. 07/07/07 is the half-way mark of MDG timeline and it is therefore the time to revisit the achievements attained so far. The aim of this report thus is to evaluate the progress regarding realisation of MDGs in West Bengal. The present report is part of a national initiative by Wada Na Todo Abhiyan to publish a national report to which the state reports will contribute.

The report has faced great difficulties due to unavailability of MDG specific data for West Bengal as a result of which justice could not be done to all MDG indicators while doing the performance evaluation of the same in the state. The data provided by the state government to assess human development in most cases do not follow MDG indicators. MDG has eight Goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators. Goal 8 (Develop a Global Partnership for Development) has not been discussed in the present report as this does not come under its scope. Some other indicators under different goals could not be assessed adequately due to lack of data.

The most important features that have come out of the report are as follows:

- ❖ A critical evaluation of different indicators of MDGS in West Bengal reveals a state of uneven development, which is a feature of underdevelopment, throughout the state. In West Bengal most of the districts in the North and Central Bengal show results far below the state averages in poverty, income, health, education and gender
- ❖ The most serious concern is the prevalence of hunger in West Bengal (NSS 61st Round 2004-2005). West Bengal has 10.6 % households (the highest among Indian states) not having enough food everyday for some months of the year followed by Orissa (4.6%).
- ❖ West Bengal (1.3%) also holds the third place after Assam (3.6%) and Orissa in respect to percentage of rural households not getting enough food everyday in all months of the year.
- ❖ In the rural areas, as an economic class the agricultural labourers are the worst sufferers from the viewpoint of seasonal inadequacy of food.
- ❖ Among the social groups in rural areas, the worst hit are the ST households (3.7%) followed by the SC households (3.3%).
- ❖ Apart from regional imbalanced growth, disparity among the economic classes has been aggravated and this has been the feature of the districts where the numbers of BPL families, SC, ST and minority population are higher. This is also associated with lower health, education and income indices of the said districts.
- ❖ The state government has made some significant progress in gender development in the state and also initiated gender budgeting to spot the areas where further development is required most. In case of some gender related indicators the state figures are higher than national figures registering better

progress. However, the report has revealed that much need to be done to improve gender balance in the state in particular regarding effective participation of women in decision making processes at all levels.

- ❖ In respect to education the state has achieved some progress but its performance lags far behind other best performing states. In Education Development Index the state rank is below thirty among all the states.
- ❖ In respect to health indicators the state is lagging behind. There are ample opportunities to improve the public health related services. The indicators on access to water also registered poor progress as the scarcity of drinking water both in rural and urban areas increased, so has the scarcity of water for irrigation from the government sources.
- ❖ The progress related to indicators on environmental awareness and HIV/AIDS are also not encouraging. The particular point of concern is the rapid increase in the number of HIV Affected persons. The no. of new HIV infected persons in West Bengal was 304 in 1996. In 1997 it was 371 and in the year 2006 the number has increased to 3610

The achievement of Millennium Development Goals is synonymous to progressive realization of human rights. However, in recent drive for industrialization, the state government has violated certain fundamental constitutional rights of the citizens and provisions of the Directive Principles of the State Policy. The state government has breached its obligations under Right to food as enshrined in International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and also violated International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This report recognises the fact that the state government has failed to ensure inclusive democracy at grassroots and often bypass Panchayat structure in order to impose decisions from above. This is a violation of the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution.

The status report recommends that:

- The state should be aware of its MDG and human rights obligations as duty holder and should remain accountable to people
- The state policies should emphasise on implementation of genuine agrarian reform in the state as this is the only way to ensure all round development of all stakeholders.
- The policies related to facilitation of MDGs should be consulted at grassroots and decision making process should be inclusive to ensure peoples aspiration and priorities are reflected in policies and programme rather than neo-liberal agendas of a few powerful global actors.
- The state should refrain from all such acts (destruction of livelihoods as manifested in Singur & Nandigram incidents) which endanger food security of people, violates human rights obligations and hinder progressive realisation of MDGs
- As progressive realisation is the key in realizing MDG Goals, the state government should strive hard to set specific targets with intent to realize Millennium Development Goals within the target period of 2015

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