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A West Bengal Case Study**

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Abstract

In order to assess the potential of the data available with the Indian Gram Panchayat for use in local level planning and policy implementation we have studied a relatively advanced Gram Panchayat in self-governance, the Raina Gram Panchayat and Bidyanidhi village within this Gram Panchayat to review the overall sources of the statistical system there. Our study suggests that the Gram Panchayat has substantial potential to generate and maintain statistical data at the level of the Gram Panchayat and below. The major findings of our investigation are as follows.

Firstly, the Gram Panchayat has well maintained administrative registers at the village and Gram Panchayat level. Administrative records of some liaison agents around the Gram Panchayat are closely interlinked.

Secondly, our assessment of the IDCS register in Bidyanidhi village shows how high quality data are generated and maintained in the village.

Thirdly, the experience of the alternate Rural Household Survey independently conducted by the Raina Gram Panchayat shows that the panchayats have the ability and expertise to identify the discrepancies in data from surveys conducted by other organisations. According to our evaluation of the Rural Household Survey in Bidyanidhi village, the official Rural Household Survey data seemed to be inaccurate and hence the discontent about this survey among Panchayat officials was not misplaced.

Finally, certain micro-level informations which are commonly known to the residents of the village but are not documented in any statistical database are adequate for some types of developmental and planning works of the Gram Panchayat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper studies the overall status of data available at a gram panchayat in West Bengal. The purpose of this study is to assess the potential of the gram panchayat database as an instrument for planning and policy implementation.

Under the system of centralised planning, there was little development of local-level databases in India. However, the need for decentralised databases at the village level has been felt for some years. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India necessitated the development of databases systematically from below. In 2001 the National Statistical Commission of India recommended that a Committee of Experts be constituted to review the record with respect to basic statistics for local-level development and suggest a minimum list of variables on which data need to be collected at the local level.¹ As a result, the High Level Expert Committee on Basic Statistics for Local Level Development was established to consider different aspects of the problems of databases for local level development.²

The focus of the High Level Expert Committee has not been quite the same as that of the National Statistical Commission. While the National Statistical Commission focussed on *block* level statistical organization as key to the construction of local-level databases, whereas the High Level Expert Committee has focussed on *villages* in the course of its pilot studies. The Committee recommended that the gram panchayat should consolidate, maintain and own village-level data. Indeed, a village is the very first stage of collection and recording of data, and village-level data are at the very root of statistical system in rural India. This study of panchayat-level data has been stimulated by this perspective of the High Level Expert Committee.

In order to assess the potential of the panchayat-level data base, we will take up a relatively advanced gram panchayat and review the overall set up of its statistical system.

¹ National Statistical Commission (2001), para 9.2.22 and 2.7.8.

² Government of India (2006).

Our study is limited to a single gram panchayat since the total statistical system of the panchayat raj institutions is too complicated to be examined in detail here. There is no standardised system for collection of local level data in India. Large scale sample surveys do not fulfill the data requirements for local level planning since such surveys usually provide estimates at the national and State levels. Thus, according to the National Statistical Commission (2001), “there should be a set of core variables/indicators on which statistical data should be compiled and aggregated at appropriate levels, analysed and published at regular intervals of time. The sources of this data could be both the decadal population census and administrative records of the Government Departments. Further, additional data requirements for local level planning specific to local area also should be looked into and the local bodies should be given a free hand in deciding their data requirements, which otherwise could not be met through the standardised system” (para 9.2.21).

We visited the Raina gram panchayat and conducted interviews with panchayat members and officials on their administrative set up and collected various data used for their governance. We checked actual documents and records there. We visited Bidyanidhi village in the jurisdiction of this panchayat to assess actual records collected and available at the village level. We identified the main data sources available at the gram panchayat and below for local-level planning and its implementation.

3. PROFILE OF THE RAINA GRAM PANCHAYAT AND THE BIDYANIDHI VILLAGE

We selected Raina gram panchayat in Barddhaman District in West Bengal for our study. Barddhaman District is a region of relatively high incomes and literacy in the State. In 2005, the Human Development Research and Coordination Centre, Development and Planning Department, Government of West Bengal carried out a study on ‘Landlessness and debt in rural West Bengal’.³ As part of the study, census type surveys were undertaken in seven villages in different agro-climatic regions of the State in May-June 2005. Subsequently, one of us was involved in detailed surveys on various aspects of incomes and employment in three of the seven villages the following year. Bidyanidhi in Raina gram panchayat was one of the villages that were studied. Raina gram panchayat

³ The study was directed by V. K. Ramachandran and Vikas Rawal.

was specifically chosen for this study since our previous experience suggested that this panchayat was more efficient and successful in implementing different development programmes compared to the other village that were studied in 2005-06.

Household level data collected in the 2005 and 2005-06 surveys were available to us. This enabled us to assess the quality of some of the data available at the gram panchayat, based on comparisons with the survey data.

3.1 Profile of Raina gram panchayat

Raina gram panchayat in Raina I Block is situated in the South Eastern part of Barddhaman District. Raina gram panchayat consists of 13 mouzas⁴ covering a geographical area of 20.8 square kilometers. The total population of Raina gram panchayat is 14967 (Census of India 2001) of which, 35.2 per cent are Scheduled Caste households and 4.5 per cent are Scheduled Tribe households. The literacy rate in this panchayat is 75 per cent, which is higher than the average literacy rate in West Bengal.

The panchayat office is situated in Rayna mouza, which is also the Block headquarters. Rayna is 25 kilometres from the district town Barddhaman and is well connected to the town by road. The nearest railway station is also Barddhaman. There are 10 primary schools, one secondary school and one higher secondary school in the gram panchayat. There is one Primary Health Centre and two sub-centres.

⁴ The mouzas under Raina GP are, Pipila, Ibidpur, Fatepur, Bidyanidhi, Hakrishnapur, Bokra, Birampur, Rayna, Raynagar, Jot Rajaram, Bishwesharbat, Maheshbati.

WEST BENGAL



● State Capital
 ● District Headquarter

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Map not to Scale
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Bardhaman district is one of the most agriculturally advanced districts in the State and leads in the production of rice and potato, the two main crops of West Bengal. Bound by the Damodar River on the east, Raina is an agriculturally advanced area. According to the Census of India 2001, 79.3 per cent of the geographical area of Raina gram panchayat is agricultural land, of which 95.6 per cent is irrigated. The main sources of irrigation are canals and tubewells. Mainly three crops are grown in the year in this region. The main

crop is Aman (monsoon) paddy (July to October), which is mainly rainfed. In the irrigated tracts, a second crop of potato or oilseeds are grown in winter or a short duration paddy is grown in summer. Since there is some overlap in time in the winter and summer crops, either of the two crops is grown in a single plot. A high value aromatic variety of paddy (Gobindo-bhog) is grown in the region during the Aman season.

According to Census data, the work participation rate, defined as the proportion of workers in total population in Raina gram panchayat is 35.2 per cent - 57.3 per cent for men and 12.1 per cent for women. Of all workers, 15 per cent are cultivators and 47 per cent are agricultural labourers. There is also a sizeable share of non-agricultural workers (other workers) in the total work force.

Table 1 *Profile of Raina gram panchayat, 2001*

Total population		14967
Geographical area (in sq km)		20.8
Scheduled Castes (as percentage of total population)		35.2
Scheduled Tribes (as percentage of total population)		4.5
Literacy rate (7 years and above)	Person	74.6
	Male	83.2
	Female	65.5
Work participation rate (Proportion of workers in total population)	Person	35.2
	Male	57.3
	Female	12.1
Cultivators (as percentage of total workers)		15.0
Agricultural labourers (as percentage of total workers)		47.0
Household industry (as percentage of total workers)		3.5
Other workers (as percentage of total workers)		34.6
Agricultural land (in hectares)		1650
Irrigated area as percentage of agricultural land		95.6

Source: Census of India 2001.

The Raina gram panchayat consists of 12 sansads (rural wards). Eight of the sansad seats in the present term (2008-2013) are held by Communist Party of India (Marxist) and four by the All India Trinamul Congress. The panchayat Pradhan is Madhabilata Dhara, a Dalit woman.

3.2 Profile of Bidyanidhi Village

Bidyanidhi is situated about four km from Raina panchayat office. The village is two km off the main road that connects Rayna to the district town Bardhaman and is connected to the main road by an all-weather road.

The population of Bidyanidhi was 669 in 2001, and total geographical area is 1.35 sq km. Dalit households constitute 48.6 percent of the population in Bidyanidhi. There are no Adivasi households in the village. According to the survey data, the households resident in Bidyanidhi owned 60 ha. Of the total ownership holdings, 84 per cent is irrigated. The actual area that is irrigated in any year is however lower because the main source of irrigation a deep tubewell and only half of the total command area of the deep tubewell can be irrigated in a year.⁵ Thus the irrigated plots receive water every alternate year. A small proportion of land is also irrigated from tanks.

There is one pre-school child education centre (Shishu Siksha Kendra) and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centre and one primary school in Bidyanidhi. During our visit to the village, the total enrollment in the Shishu Siksha Kendra (children in the age group of 3 to 6 years) was 22 and the number children registered at the ICDS centre (in the age group of 0 to 6 years) was 60. The total number of children enrolled in the primary school was 40. The primary school had two class rooms and two teachers.

There are eight functioning self-help groups in the village. One of the self-help groups is a men's group while the remaining are women's groups.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE GRAM PANCHAYAT AND LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

4.1 Organisation of the gram panchayat

The gram panchayat forms the lowest tier of the three-tier panchayat System in West Bengal. The functions of the gram panchayat involve local-level planning and implementation of various development programmes. The gram panchayat consists of

⁵ The command area under the deep tubewell is 35.6 hectares.

gram Sansads or rural wards. Each gram Sansad has an elected panchayat representative/member. The Pradhan is selected from among the panchayat members. A specific number of members are elected from each gram panchayat for representation at the higher tier of the panchayat, that is, the panchayat Samity. Elected members of the panchayat Samity are also ex-officio members of the gram panchayat. There are 12 gram Sansads and consequently 12 gram panchayat members and three members representing the panchayat Samity from Raina gram panchayat.

The panchayat members form five committees that plan and monitor the different development work taken up by the gram panchayat. The committees are:

- i. Finance and Development
- ii. Agriculture and animal resources
- iii. Education and Public Health
- iv. Woman and Child Development
- v. Industry and Infrastructure

Each committee has a convenor selected from the panchayat members. The panchayat Pradhan and the Upa-pradhan (Deputy Pradhan) are convenors of the Finance and Development Committee.

The panchayat works closely with departments of the State administration for implementation of various government programmes. The departmental liaison officers who are responsible for assisting the Panchayats are as follows:

Krishi Prani Sahayak: Department of Animal Husbandry

Krishi Prajukti Sahayak: Department of Agriculture

Fishery Officer: Department of Fisheries

Health Supervisor: Department of Health

Female Health Assistant: Department of Health

Auxilliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM): Department of Health

ICDS supervisor: Department of Woman and Child Health

Revenue Inspector: Land and Land Reforms

4.2 Policies implemented and monitored by the gram panchayat

The gram panchayat acts as a direct implementing agency for some government schemes and assists in the implementation of some others. The schemes directly implemented by the gram Panchayats are Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), Provident Fund for Landless Agricultural Labourers (PROFLAL), National Maternal Benefit Scheme (NMBS) and the State Sanitation Programme. In each of these schemes the gram panchayats receive funds directly from the government agencies for implementation of the scheme. The gram panchayats are also responsible for maintaining financial accounts for such schemes.

The gram panchayat also oversee the implementation of certain other schemes though they are not directly involved in the funding and administration of these schemes. They assist in the formation and functioning of self-help groups under Swarna Jayanti gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), work with the Health department to implement programmes under National Rural Health Mission and oversees the functioning of ICDS centres, Shishu Siksha Kendras, primary and upper primary Schools.

4.3 Local level planning

Each gram panchayat prepares an Action Plan each year for implementation in the succeeding financial year. The preparation of the Action Plan begins at the sansad-level general body meetings in November. The people attending the meeting make an assessment of the work that needs to be done in the year in the village and an Action Plan is drawn up for each sansad based on these demands. The panchayat receives all Action Plans from the sansads to prepare the gram panchayat Action Plan.

The gram panchayat Action Plan takes into account the total financial resources available to the panchayat and how the resources can be spent to meet the demands of individual Sansads. The financial resources available to the gram panchayat are broadly as follows:

- a. Funds generated by the panchayat through taxes, fees etc.
- b. Grants from the State Department of panchayat and Rural Development
- c. Grants from other State Departments

- d. Funds from Centrally sponsored schemes (NREGA, SGRY, IAY, NMBS)
- e. Funds from panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad
- f. MP/MLA Area Development Fund

The projects that can be taken up under the different types of schemes and funds are mostly specified by the funding authority.⁶ The funds generated by the gram panchayat and a part of the State and Central government funds (untied funds) can be spent by the panchayat in any area they find suitable. Based on the nature of the funds and the local level demands the gram panchayats draw the annual Action Plan.

An executive body called the gram Unnayan Samity (GUS) is responsible for implementation and monitoring of the various schemes at the gram Sansad level. The GUS comprises “elected member or members to the gram panchayat from the gram Sansad, the opposition candidate obtaining second highest vote in the last gram panchayat election, three representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations/Community Based Organisations, three representatives of active SHGs with at least two members from women led SHGs, one serving or retired Government employee, one serving or retired teacher (all being voters of the area i.e. members of the gram Sansad), and another 10 members or 1% of the total number of members of gram Sansad whichever shall be higher” (GoWB 2007). gram Panchayats devolve a part of the funds to the GUS for implementation of different developmental programmes. The implementation of the Annual Action Plan is assessed in a Sansad level meeting in March every year.

⁶ For example, in case of central government funds, specific funds can only be spent on the implementation of specific schemes, MP/MLA area development funds are disbursed for specific projects, the State Government departmental funds and the Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad funds specify the amounts to be spent in different sectors.

4.4 Generation and use of data by the gram panchayats

The data generated and used by the gram Panchayats are by-products of the administrative requirements of the Panchayats. The registers maintained by the gram Panchayats and other satellite State Government agencies relate to the different development programmes implemented at the village level. These registers and records are maintained to track the allocation and expenditure of funds and assess the progress of different schemes.

The data requirements of the gram panchayats are also specific to the type of development activity. The panchayats generally rely on information available at the village to draw up their Action Plans, implement projects and identify beneficiaries for poverty-alleviation programmes. Projects on the construction and repair of village amenities and infrastructure are planned on the basis of local demands and the common knowledge of panchayat members. When the panchayat receives funds for building new ICDS centres or schools, the location of the new centre/school is determined by examining the data on population served by the existing centres/school available from ICDS/school registers and distance of existing ICDS centres from population hamlets. Beneficiaries for some schemes like BPL and AAY ration cards, Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) are identified by State government officials through household surveys like the BPL census (rural household survey). For certain other schemes (such as the rural sanitation scheme, NOAPS, PROFLAL) the Panchayats directly identify beneficiaries through their own surveys (such as the surveys conducted for sanitation scheme) or with the help of the GUS.

5. MAIN DATA SOURCES AVAILABLE AT AND UNDER THE GRAM PANCHAYAT LEVEL FOR LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

We found that main statistical data sources available at the gram panchayat level and below were administrative records and census type surveys. The sources of data at the panchayat and below are as follows;

1. Registers and Records collected and maintained by the gram panchayat

2. Census type surveys independently conducted by panchayati raj institutions:
 - a. Household surveys conducted in 2007 and 2008 on instruction from the Zilla Parishad to evaluate the rural sanitation scheme.
 - b. An independent alternative rural household survey in 2005 to verify discrepancies of the rural household survey (RHS).
3. Village registers and records collected and maintained by other departments such as:
 - a. Village ICDS records
 - b. Village school registers
 - c. Records and statistics at the Primary Health Centre
 - d. Others
4. Census and census type survey organised by Central or State governments
 - a. Census of India
 - b. Rural Household Survey (RHS)
 - c. Others

5.1 Registers and records collected and maintained by the gram panchayat

We found that the gram panchayat maintains various records for administrative and other purposes and a considerable amount of information is available from such records. A brief description of the registers maintained at the Raina gram panchayat office is in Table 2. The High Level Expert Committee on Basic Statistics for Local Level Development emphasized that the village level registers should be standardised and provide serial data at the village level (Government of India 2006, p.31).

Table 2 *Description of registers maintained at Raina gram panchayat*

Name of register	Type of information available	If available at the GP* office	Comments
Works register	Public works done by panchayat under various schemes/allocations (SGRY, MP fund), description of work, date of proposal, commencement and completion, proposed and actual expenditure, benefit accrued	Yes	
Birth and death register	Cases of birth and death	Yes	
ICDS registers, PHC registers	Population, birth and death, morbidity, migration, educational status of villagers,	No	Register maintained at ICDS centre and PHC
panchayat land and property tax register	Name of head of household, size of household ownership holding, market value of land and building, tax assessment	Yes	All households in the village are taxed. Even a landless household has to pay a minimum annual tax of Rs. 3 per annum.
Tubewell register	Number, type and location of all tubewells constructed by GP	Yes	
Lease of water bodies register	Water bodies leased out to SHG, periodic earnings	Yes	
Toll tax register	Vehicle number and toll tax collected	No	The register is maintained by the Collector
School register	School infrastructure, student enrolment	No	Available at schools
Landless Agricultural Workers PF	Names of landless agricultural workers, PF account numbers, monthly contributions	Yes	At present there are 1500 PF account holders in the GP.
NREGA** register	Register maintained in prescribed NREGA format	Yes	The register is computerized

*gram panchayat

**National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

5.2 Census Type Surveys independently conducted by the gram panchayat

The Raina gram panchayat recently conducted two household surveys recently on instruction from the Zilla Parishad to evaluate the rural sanitation scheme. The surveys were conducted in 2007 and 2008. In the 2007 survey, information was collected on sanitation and on the type of ration card (APL/BPL/AAY) owned by the household. In the 2008 survey, information was collected on access to toilets and some socio-economic features of the households, such as social group (SC, ST, Others), number of literate members and the educational attainment of the most educated member of the household. These survey forms, which provide information on each household, are available at the gram panchayat office.

In 2005 the Rural Household Survey (or the BPL Census) was conducted in Raina gram panchayat to identify households below the poverty line. There was discontent among the panchayat officials regarding the quality of data collected in this survey and the list of households identified as being below the poverty line. The panchayat officials conducted an independent census-type survey of all households in the gram panchayat and collected information on the same parameters as the Rural Household Survey. The survey data was available at the gram panchayat office.

5.3 Village Registers and Records collected and maintained other departments

Certain types of records (for example the ICDS registers, the school registers, health records at the Primary Health Centre) are collected and maintained at the village or Block level by official agencies other than the gram panchayats. The panchayat officials have access to such records but the records were not available at the panchayat office. Therefore we visited Bidyanidhi village to assess the ICDS registers and the village school registers. We also visited the Block Primary Health Centre to conduct an interview with the medical officer.

5.3.1 Village ICDS Records

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was initiated in India in 1975 with financial and technical assistance from the UNICEF and the World Bank. The ICDS programme offers supplementary feeding facilities for children below the age of six, pregnant women and lactating mothers, pre-school facilities for children aged three to six, maternal and child health care services such as immunization and vitamin supplements and nutrition and health education for mothers.

The ICDS was initiated in Raina I panchayat in 1984. The ICDS centre at Bidyanidhi was set up in 1999. Prior to that, there was a single ICDS centre for Bidyanidhi and Birampur villages. At present, there are 18 ICDS centres in Raina gram panchayat and 236 centres in Raina I Block. The ICDS workers are also known as Anganwadi workers.

The ICDS or Anganwadi worker maintains several registers. Some of the registers are described below.

- i) *Child register.* All children in the village in the age group 0 to 6 years are recorded in this register. The date of birth, age, sex, school enrolment and monthly weight of each child is also recorded.
- ii) *Food register for children.* All children in the village in the age group 7 months to 6 years are recorded in this register. A daily attendance of children who take food from the Centre is also maintained.
- iii) *Food register for pregnant women.* A register similar to item (ii) above is maintained for all pregnant women in the village
- iv) *Pre-school student's register.* The names and daily attendance of children in the age group 3 to 6 enrolled for pre-school education at the ICDS centre are recorded in this register. This register does not include children in the village enrolled in other schools.
- v) *Register for pregnant women.* This register records the names, month of conception, probable date of delivery, immunization details, and other details of pregnant women in the village. The date and place of birth and sex of the child is also registered after delivery.
- vi) *Growth chart of children.* A growth chart with monthly recordings of height and weight of children in the age group of 3 to 6 is maintained by the ICDS worker.
- vii) *Immunization register.* The ICDS worker and ANM maintain an immunization register for new born children in the village recording the dates of vaccination and where the vaccination was taken. In case the vaccination was taken at a private facility, the ICDS worker records the date after verifying the papers.
- viii) The ICDS centre also maintains registers for stocks, accounts and expenses
- ix) *Village survey register.* The ICDS worker conducts a village household survey every five years. The register found at the Bidyanidhi Centre was made in 2005. The register allots a page to each household in the village. The following information on each member of the household can be obtained from the register
 - a) Name
 - b) Relationship with the head of the household
 - c) Age
 - d) Sex
 - e) Educational attainment
 - f) If SC/ST
 - g) If landless/marginal cultivator
 - h) Occupation

- i) Date of Birth (of children)
- j) Comments: In this column information on deaths, marriages or migrations are recorded, though exact dates of the event are not always available

although the village survey register is updated every five years, information on births, deaths, marriages and migrations are updated regularly. In case of births and marriages, the names and details of the new members are recorded in the register. At the monthly meetings at the panchayats, data on institutional births are collected from health officials and the number of children born at home are collected from the ICDS worker and compiled at the panchayat to prepare their monthly chart. When a new survey is conducted the households that have divided are recorded separately and households that have migrated temporarily are deleted from the register. However, in cases where a part of the household have migrated (for example, a son and his family while the parents stayed behind), details of all members of the undivided household are recorded even when the migration is permanent in nature.

The High Level Expert Committee on Basic Statistics for Local Level Development has already found that registers maintained by the Anganwadi workers have the potential to provide a basis for a village-level database (Government of India 2006, p.17). That is the most significant finding in the pilot studies of the Committee, particularly since no attention was given to the registers of Anganwadi workers when the National Statistical Commission of India examined the basic statistics for local level development.

The village survey register of Anganwadi workers contains most of the core information collected in the Census of India. In addition, information on births, deaths, marriages and migrations are updated regularly and the register itself is updated every five years, while the Census data are available decennially.

Moreover, the village survey register and child register have the potential to provide information to assist or substitute for the Civil Registration System. Although the National Statistical Commission stated that the Civil Registration System has the potential to provide estimates of vital events at the local level (National Statistical Commission (2001), Para 2.7.8), panchayat officials say that the registers maintained by Anganwadi workers were most reliable among the other sources.

An assessment of the quality of ICDS records at Bidyanidhi gram panchayat

A census type household survey was conducted in Bidyanidhi village, Raina gram panchayat as part of a study on 'Landlessness and Debt in Rural West Bengal' in June 2005. The household level data collected in this survey was available to us. We attempted an assessment of the quality of ICDS records available at the Bidyanidhi ICDS centre through a comparison of the ICDS records with the survey data.

The ICDS centre maintains a register of the names, age and other details of all children in the village below the age of six. We were able to get the child register for the year 2006 from the ICDS centre.⁷ From this register we obtained the names of all children born in the village between January 2000 and June 2005. We compared this list with the list of children aged five years and below from the survey data.

According to the ICDS register, 59 children were born in the village between January 2000 and June 2005. According to the survey data the number of children in the age group 0 to 5 years in June 2005 was 61. The names of 54 children were found in both the lists.

We looked into the discrepancy in detail and allowed for some divergences on account of due to temporary or permanent migrations and misreported age during the survey⁸. As a result of this analysis we were able to conclude that the coverage of the ICDS in Bidyanidhi village is complete and the quality of the ICDS records is excellent.

⁷ The 2005 child register was not readily available because the present ICDS worker at the centre had joined in the year 2006.

⁸ There were five names in the ICDS list which were not found in the survey list. In three of the five cases, the households in which the children belonged (identified by the name of the child's father) were not found in the survey database. It could be that the households were not present in the village at the time of the survey or were not covered in the survey for some other reason. There is also a possibility that the household had settled in the village after June 2005 (but before January 2006). In the remaining two cases, the children's names were not recorded during the survey (Both the children belonged to the same household and the error was corrected during a later survey conducted in the same household in 2006).

There were seven children in the survey list who were not found in the ICDS list. All these children were reported to be five years old. Hence there is a very high possibility that their age was under-reported during the survey and hence their names were not registered in the ICDS centre. There are reasons to believe that the ICDS data on age are more accurate than the survey data. First, data on the date of birth of the children were not collected in the household survey, but the ICDS register records the date of birth of each child. Secondly, in four of the eight cases, other children from the same households were recorded in the ICDS register.

5.3.2 Village School Registers

There is one village primary school at Bidyanidhi. The school has four classes (Standards I to IV), two class rooms and two teachers. Total enrolment in the school in the current academic year is 40.

The school maintains regular registers on attendance and performances of each student and registers for accounts and stocks (inventories like chairs, tables etc.). The school also maintains a register of all children in the age group of 0 to 13 years based on an annual survey of all households in the village conducted by the school teachers. The survey is generally conducted between November and December.

A separate sheet is allotted for each household in the village with children aged 13 years and below in the child register. If there is more than one child in the household they are recorded in the same sheet. Each year the child's age and enrolment status is updated, even when the child is not enrolled in the village primary school or ICDS Centre. When a child attains the age of five, a green card is sent to the parents to notify them that the child can be admitted to school. The parents can then admit the child to school in the next academic session. The teacher at Bidyanidhi Primary School informed us that though they prepare this register independently, the ICDS workers help them in preparation of the register.

Apart from the village primary school, there are three private primary schools (Classes Nursery to IV) in this area of the Raina gram panchayat. According to panchayat officials some children from well off families are sent to the private schools only because these schools teach English better than the village schools. However, they do not collect any data that the panchayats know of.

5.3.3 Records available at the Primary Health Centre

The administrative jurisdictions of the Block Health Centres and Sub-centres are different from the Panchayats. There are 26 Primary Health Sub-centres in Raina I Block, and two in Raina gram panchayat. Each sub-centre caters to a population of 5,000 to 10,000. There is one Auxilliary Nurse and Midwife per sub-centre and one health supervisor (who is also the liaison officer) per gram panchayat.

Each sub-centre has to send details of various activities of the sub-centre, details of births and deaths, treated cases of different diseases, vaccinations, birth control etc on a prescribed format to the Block Office every month. The monthly report cannot be obtained from the PHC on demand.

The Block Health Centre, ICDS centre and the panchayat form an interlinked health and child care system. Every fourth Saturday of the month a meeting is conducted at the gram panchayat office with the ICDS supervisor, the ANM and health supervisor and panchayat officials. A monthly data sheet is prepared recording the number of births and deaths, cases of morbidity, status of sanitation and drinking water supply for the gram panchayat. This monthly data sheet is on public display at the panchayat Office. On the first Saturday of the month the liaison officers submit the data sheet to their respective departments.

5.3.4 Others

Gram panchayats have access to data on land at the Block Land and Land Reforms Office and data on livestock and fisheries from the respective departments. It was found that though panchayati raj institutions have authority over khadi and cottage industries but the gram panchayats do not have any authority over such industries other than collection of certain taxes and fees. The licenses are granted by panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad. Data from the Industrial Development Office (IDO) are also not available with the gram panchayat.

5.4 Census and Census Type Survey organised by Central or State governments

5.4.1 *Census of India*

5.4.1.1 *The Non-Census village level amenities data in the village directory.* Census of India provides the panchayat with the village level data on population, workforce, land use, and basic amenities and infrastructure such as location of educational institutions, medical centres, drinking water, post and telegraph, commercial and co-operative banks, agricultural non-agricultural and other credit societies, recreational and cultural facilities, communication, approach to village, distance from nearest town, power supply, availability of newspaper and magazines etc. The data on amenities and infrastructure are not collected by the Census independently but are compiled from the Block level offices. According to the High Level Expert Committee, it is actually collected by Census Officers from the records of the villages maintained by the various village functionaries e.g. health worker, ANM, Anganwadi, Chowkidar, Village Pradhan, Patwari etc. The committee states this information contains most of the critical indicators required for local level planning. But, as the Committee points out, these data on amenities and land use are available for use after a time lag (Government of India 2006, p.19). In fact, the panchayat officials said that the Census data are fairly reliable, though the data becomes outdated by the time it reaches the panchayat.

5.4.1.2 *The village level Population Census data.* The village level Population Census data are also available at the panchayat with some time lag. However, unit-level records made by Population Census on the village are not available at the panchayat.

5.4.2 *Rural Household Survey (RHS) or the BPL Census*

The Ministry of Panchayats and Rural Development has been conducting a Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census (also referred to as Rural Household Survey) through the State Governments since the Eighth Plan period (1992-1997). The survey was initiated with the ideology of narrow targeting of development schemes in post-liberalisation India. The objective of this Census is to identify households below the official income poverty line in villages at the beginning of the plan period for identification of beneficiaries for various poverty alleviation schemes. The survey was imposed by the Central government on the State governments leaving no room for local-level organizations to select beneficiaries for Central government development programmes.

Though the RHS can be used to provide serial data on certain indicators, the purpose of the survey is to exclude certain people from the development schemes. The number of poor households are already specified by the Central government based on the Planning Commission estimates of the incidence of poverty in the region. The BPL census sought to grade the relative deprivation of households on 13 indicators in a scale of 1 to 5.⁹ In West Bengal 12 of these 13 indicators were used for the survey. Households obtaining the lowest scores in the twelve indicators in the survey are identified as being below poverty line such that the total number of BPL households in the village corresponds with the number estimated by the Planning Commission. Beneficiaries for specific centrally sponsored schemes on housing and sanitation are also identified on the basis of scores obtained by households on some specific indicators on condition of housing and access to sanitation (GoWB 2007).

The RHS was conducted in Raina gram panchayat in 2005, prior to our ‘Survey on Landlessness and Debt.’ There was widespread discontent among the panchayat officials regarding this survey, as it was felt that the data collected in the survey was inaccurate and consequently the list of beneficiaries selected was also inaccurate. The panchayat conducted another survey of a similar nature in the same year and reported the cases of discrepancies to the Block Officials. Some of the discrepancies were amended later but a large part of the discrepancies were not attended.

The list of BPL households and the scores obtained by the households on each of the twelve parameters were available from the Raina gram panchayat Office. The complete data of all households from the RHS were not available at the gram panchayat.

An evaluation of the RHS data

We tried to assess the quality of the data collected in RHS by matching the data on some of the parameters with our survey data. The two data sets would be roughly comparable since both the surveys were conducted in the same year. There were 36 households in the BPL list of which 32 households could be found in our survey list. Our analysis is restricted to these 32 households.

⁹ This methodology used in the BPL Census for the Tenth Plan period (2002-2007) was suggested by an Expert Group. The list of parameters and the scores used are in Annexure 1.

Female headed households – A household being headed by a woman was considered as a “Special Kind of Disability” (P12) in the BPL Census. Of the 32 households, 12 were female headed households according to the BPL Census. We found that seven of these households were effectively not female headed households. In case of two households the wives were reported as the head of the household even when the husband was present and economically active. In five cases, the widowed mother was reported as the head of the household when the effective head of the household was the working adult son.

Land ownership – Of the 32 households only one was reported to own land in the BPL Census. According to our survey 12 households owned land, though the sizes of land holdings were very small and in all cases less than 1 acre.

Education status of the most educated member of the family – in 13 cases the education status of the most educated member of the family in the two data sets did not match.

Earning capability status – there were some discrepancies in the two data sets. In many households adult women members were not reported to be working thus gaining higher scores for households.

Means of livelihood – in six cases, the means of livelihood was reported as daily/agricultural/other physical labour in the RHS whereas according to our survey the household was self employed in agriculture or in some other occupation or held labour oriented regular job in unorganized sector. In two cases agricultural labour households were classified as ‘organized sector’ worker and ‘regular worker in unorganized sector’ respectively.

Educational status of children of 9 to 14 years – only in six out of the 32 households the score assigned in RHS matched with our survey data.

Thus the RHS records seem to be inaccurate and the discontent about this survey among panchayat officials was justified.

5.4.3 Others

The panchayat officials informed us that they have access to the unit-level data of the Livestock Census. The panchayat officials were not aware of the Economic Census.

In order to evaluate the functioning of the gram Panchayats and also to provide incentives to the gram panchayats to improve their administration, the West Bengal Panchayats and Rural Development Department have started providing a “Self-Evaluation Format” to each gram panchayat since 2006-07. In this format the panchayats have to evaluate and assign scores for the different indicators specified in the format. Panchayats receive financial incentives from the State government based on this evaluation. The format deals with two sets of indicators, a) improved institutional functioning and good governance and b) better mobilisation of revenue and utilisation of resources (GoWB 2007). Most of these indicators are compiled from the panchayat registers or other village registers, or from the Census and census-type surveys. The panchayat does not need to generate any additional data for completing this format. However, the format has the merit of bringing together a number of information on the panchayats and could also enable cross-sectional and year to year comparisons.

The West Bengal panchayat and Rural Development Department is also preparing Block level booklets on village-level development profile (Gram Unnayan Byabosthar Chitro) for 3354 gram Panchayats in 341 Blocks in the State. The Booklet will map the position of each gram panchayat in the Blocks with respect to 17 socio-economic indicators like health, education, food security, nutritional status, household sanitation, performance in rural development schemes, resource mobilisation and utilisation. The gram panchayat level data on the 17 indicators are compiled from the administrative reports of the Panchayats and the secondary data sources. The booklets will enable the gram Panchayats to evaluate their relative performance on the selected indicators and plan their activities along those lines. However, this effort is still under process and the booklets have not been distributed to the gram Panchayats. The Raina gram panchayat had not received the booklet nor were they aware of it.

*6. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EXTENT OF DATA AVAILABLE OR
ACCESSIBLE WITH THE PANCHAYAT*

The High Level Committee report suggested that nine categories of information be made available at the panchayat office for local level planning and administration (Government of India 2006, pp.1-2). Thus, in order to assess the extent of data available or accessible with the gram panchayat, we conducted an interview to the gram panchayat officials whether or not those nine categories of information are actually available or accessible with them. The status of each kind of information at the Raina gram panchayat is summarized in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3 many types of information are available with the panchayat through various records maintained by the Panchayats and other official sources. Some types of information are common knowledge to most villagers.

Table 3 *Status of information available at the Raina gram panchayat*

Type of information	If records available at GP	If accessible to GP from other source	Source of information	Comments
Basic Facilities	No	No		Facilities that are present are of common knowledge. GP maintains registers of the current facilities being constructed. The information is available but not recorded
Number of factories	No	No		Common knowledge
Commercial establishments	Yes		GP tax register	
Bridges, roads	No	No		Location of such facilities are common knowledge, other information may not be available unless constructed by GP. If constructed by GP, details can be obtained from Works Register
Forest area, orchards	No	Yes	Block Land and Land Reforms Office	
Distance from nearest facilities	No	No		Common knowledge
Population	Yes	Yes	Census of India, ICDS household survey register	
Birth and death	Yes	Yes	GP registers, ICDS registers, PHC registers, Monthly reports	
Morbidity	Yes		Monthly report of ICDS, ANM and Health supervisor	
Marriages	No	No		ICDS worker records in her register but date not recorded
Migration	No	No		Some information on permanent out-migration can be obtained from ICDS records
Educational status of villagers	Yes	Yes	Panchayat sanitation survey 2008, ICDS household survey	
Land utilization statistics	No	Yes	Block Land and Land Reforms Office	
Livestock and Poultry	No	Yes	Livestock Census	Household level record available
Number of market outlets	No	Yes	Common knowledge and GP tax register	
Employment Status of villagers	No	No		Village survey register has occupation data

7. CONCLUSION

In order to assess the potential of the data available with the gram panchayat for use in local level planning and policy implementation we have studied a relatively advanced gram panchayat, the Raina gram panchayat and Bidyanidhi village within this gram

panchayat to review the overall sources of the statistical system there. Our study suggests that the gram panchayat has substantial potential to generate and maintain statistical data at the level of the gram panchayat and below. The major findings of our investigation are as follows.

- a. The gram panchayat maintains its own administrative registers at the village and gram panchayat level.
- b. Administrative records of some departments around the gram panchayat are closely interlinked. We have observed in our study that the monthly health chart at the panchayat is prepared in a collaborative effort by the ICDS workers, health department officials and panchayat officials. Data on births at home are collected and compiled by the ICDS supervisor from the ICDS workers and data on institutional births are collected from the health officials. The two types of data are compiled at the same monthly meeting of the panchayat. These data sharing are possible on the basis of an interlinked health and child care system among the gram panchayat, ICDS centre and Block Health Centre. Though the teachers at Bidyanidhi Primary School maintain their register independently, the ICDS workers maintain the village survey register based on their own village household survey register and sometime help the teachers with their registers. According to the pilot study conducted by the High Level Committee points out that, there is no such formal data sharing mechanisms between different agencies working at gram panchayat in Maharashtra and Haryana (Government of India 2006, p.25-26).
- c. The quality of some village level administrative records is rather good, based on the data sharing mechanisms that make it possible to check the reliability of each data from different sources. Our assessment of the IDCS register in Bidyanidhi village shows how high quality data are generated and maintained in the village.
- d. The gram panchayat has the ability to organize and conduct census type surveys. The surveys conducted by the Raina gram panchayat on implementation of the sanitation programme and the alternate Rural Household Survey supports this fact. The experience of the Rural Household Survey in Raina also shows that the Panchayats have the ability and expertise to identify the discrepancies in data from surveys conducted by other organisations. Such argument between the gram panchayat and other organizations about the accuracy of village data suggests that

quality of village data is really a matter of their concern. According to our evaluation of the Rural Household Survey in Bidyanidhi village, the RHS data seemed to be inaccurate and hence the discontent about this survey among panchayat officials was not misplaced. The panchayat seems to have micro-level knowledge on the economic situation and capabilities of each household in the village.

- e. ICDS registers have the potential to assist or partly substitute for the functions performed at the village by the Population Census and the Civil Registration System. The ICDS registers have the advantage over Population Census data in at least two ways. First, the ICDS records provide the most up to date records at the village level. Secondly, unit-level household data are available from the ICDS. Panchayats do not have access to unit-level household level from the Population Census. The National Statistical Commission pointed out that ‘over the years, the Administrative Statistical System has been deteriorating and has now almost collapsed in certain sectors. The deterioration had taken place at its very roots namely, at the very first stage of collection and recording of data’ [National Statistical Commission (2001), Para 14.3.10]. However, the Report of the National Statistical Commission did not mention anything about some village-level data with high potential such as the IDCS register. Therefore it is significant that the High Level Committee found out high potential of the registers maintained by Anganwadi workers (Government of India 2006, p.17).
- f. Certain micro-level information which is commonly known to the residents of the village but not documented in any statistical database is adequate for some types of developmental and planning works of the gram panchayat. The High Level Committee is of opinion that with regard to upward movement of village level data for aggregation and computerisation, there is no need to move all village level data upward at various levels like panchayat, block, district etc. Only those data will be moved upward which are required for planning at different levels (Government of India 2006, p.31).

In summary, the Raina gram panchayat has a rather good database for people and their public policies at the village level, on the basis of a more people-oriented panchayat system than elsewhere. However, we have also identified some problems in the panchayat database.

- a. In the absence of an integrated system of land records and agricultural statistics in West Bengal, there is no village level plot-wise data on land ownership, tenancy, land use, cropping pattern and agricultural production.¹⁰ Data on land ownership and tenancy are maintained at the Block Land and Land Reform Offices and panchayats have access to this data. But the data are not updated periodically, which limits the use of this data for local-level planning.
- b. There is no uniformity in the types of registers maintained at the different panchayats across the State. Probably the situation we found at the Raina gram panchayat does not apply to other areas in West Bengal. The High Level Committee recommends that the Directorate of Economics and Statistics in respective States should play an important role in ensuring statistical quality and standards by providing the necessary guidelines and training to panchayat staff in the consolidation and maintenance of local level database (Government of India 2006, p.31).
- c. Our case study focuses on a well running gram panchayat. In other parts of West Bengal or in other States in India where the Panchayati Raj Institutions are weak, the quality of village administrative records may not be so good. (According to our study at a village in Maharashtra, for example, the quality of ICDS registers was not so good).

Village records available at the gram panchayat and other departments may prove to be very useful for village studies. The panchayat administrative records will be useful if the village studies are concerned with the aspects that the panchayat administration has been formally recording. Furthermore, household level data on many parameters are available at the panchayats and villages from multiple sources (ICDS registers, village school registers, household surveys conducted by the gram panchayat), which can be used for village studies if we are allowed to access such data. In the case of Raina gram panchayat and other agencies that we visited, they were very forthcoming in sharing information with us. The Right to Information Act, 2005 also secures certain rights to access administrative records at the gram panchayats, if the larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information (Article 8). However, a critical examination of the

¹⁰ The erstwhile ryotwari States in India have village level agencies to collect seasonal data on land ownership, tenancy, land use, cropping pattern and crop production for each plot in the village. The permanently settled States Kerala, West Bengal and Orissa do not have such a system.

statistical system at the corresponding panchayats like this study will be required to assess the quality of the data.

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