

Local Democracy in Praxis: The Success of Duare Sarkar Programme in Connecting Local Peoples with the Government in West Bengal.

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Abstract:

Local democracy motivates and impels citizens into decision-making at grassroots levels, ensuring accountability, inclusivity and responsiveness in governance. These are means through which people affect decisions, policies, distribution of resources, and the development of the locality in their everyday life. Duare Sarkar is a recently government-launched initiative in West Bengal, bringing this government closer to the people since these services would reach those disappointed, lower class, and rural people. The program induced by the state government is between citizens and the administration, with local resourcing and being a community exercise, and through technology, an efficient service delivery system put in place. Through holding camps and digital podiums, the initiative has created services around health, education, financial assistance, and social security to be availed by all citizens without leaving any out. Therefore, the initiative not only increased accessibility but also further strengthened the trust between citizens and government. By inclusivity, above all, of course, by transparency and citizen involvement, Duare Sarkar became a transformative model of participatory governance-shaped inculcating local democratic practices in West Bengal.

Keywords: Local Democracy, Praxis, Duare Sarkar, Local Peoples, Government

Introduction:

The democracy of a local area works as the foundational element of democratic systems because it creates a governing system which operates nearest to the people who require its service. The system enables citizens to participate in decision-making while holding their local leadership accountable, which results in increased civic activity and government response to community needs. Local democracy functions as a system through which citizens can participate in the decision-making process of policies and programs which affect their everyday existence, thus enabling fair access to development opportunities. The system establishes democratic values through its requirement that governance needs to show both representation and availability to all citizens through transparent methods of governing which enable people to see how their government operates at the local level.

The effectiveness of local democracy in grassroots governance depends on how well communities maintain their relationship with governmental authorities. The state of West Bengal introduced a transformative model through its implementation of the Dooare Sarkar government initiative which connects local communities with state services. The program

Dooare Sarkar which started in 2020, provides government services to citizens who live in remote and underdeveloped regions by delivering those services to their home locations. The initiative grants citizens power through its process, which delivers public welfare programs accessible to all people while providing transparency and enabling direct contact with government authorities. The article investigates how Dooare Sarkar expands its impact through its outreach to people while improving administrative processes and strengthening local democratic systems which enable West Bengal residents to connect with their government. The analysis of successes and challenges teaches us about how local democracy actually functions and its impact on creating governance systems which include all citizens.

The article examines local democracy operations through their successful achievements and ongoing struggles while measuring their impact on government services delivery and citizen transparency through their efforts to achieve citizen involvement. The Dooare Sarkar program shows how local democracy can work better by establishing a connection between government officials and citizens which makes government services more available.

Objectives of the Study

1. The research will study how the Duare Sarkar programme helps improve democratic governance in West Bengal by establishing connections between local citizens and government entities.
2. The study will examine how doorstep service delivery systems operate to enhance welfare scheme accessibility for different social and economic groups.
3. To evaluate participation of local people in *Duare Sarkar* camps as a mechanism of local democratic praxis.
4. To suggest policy recommendations for strengthening local democracy through similar participatory outreach initiatives.

Research Questions

1. The Duare Sarkar programme has changed how citizens in West Bengal access government services and welfare programs.
2. What is the level of citizen participation in *Duare Sarkar* camps and what factors influence their engagement?
3. The program has strengthened local democracy through which specific mechanisms that operate at the local government level.
4. The Duare Sarkar camps face which particular challenges and operational restrictions that affect their organizational structure and operational processes.

Methodology:

The research uses a qualitative and analytical research design which depends entirely on secondary data to investigate how the Duare Sarkar programme has affected local democracy practices in West Bengal. The data has been collected from official reports and policy documents and administrative records which the Government of West Bengal has published.

The study uses content and thematic analysis to identify key dimensions which include public service accessibility and inclusiveness and citizen participation and transparency while comparative and trend analysis assesses changes in governance outcomes during the study period. The study assesses how effectively the programme strengthens citizen–government interface and grassroots democracy across the state while its limitations arise from using only secondary data which exists and not conducting primary field verification.

The need for Connection between Citizens and Government

The democratic system needs citizens to develop strong ties with their government because this connection works as a basic requirement for maintaining democratic health and system sustainability. Democracy requires ongoing citizen participation together with trust development and accountable relationships between citizens and their governing bodies according to Norris 2011. People who build strong connections with their government gain better knowledge about their rights and they gain greater power to shape government decisions and they will become more involved in community activities according to Putnam 2000.

The Indian governance system which has multiple levels of government and complex administrative procedures requires this relationship to become more essential. The public services that essential health facilities provide face constraints from physical and social and economic barriers which restrict access to these vital services for disadvantaged populations. The government needs to establish local service points and create participatory channels to establish strategic connections with citizens which will decrease the existing gap between government and public (Bhattacharya, 2022).

The citizen body links with government bodies serve to improve transparency which increases public trust in democratic processes. Governments need to maintain public access, so citizens can obtain information and report their concerns, which allow them to inspect how government programs are being executed (Fox, 2015). The feedback loop system enables agencies to enhance their service delivery systems while it helps people develop greater confidence in the organization. Trust acts as a foundation for political stability through its role in establishing governmental legitimacy according to (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

The Duare Sarkar programme in West Bengal exemplifies such an approach, which operationalises the idea that governance should be "brought to the doorstep" to eliminate barriers of distance information and procedure. The program provides direct access between citizens and service providers, which shows that democracy, must be lived through daily actions instead of only during elections. Strengthening the bond between citizens and their government operates as the essential process which enables democracy to accomplish its core principles.

Welfare Schemes provided through the Duare Sarkar Programme

The Government of West Bengal established the Duare Sarkar Programme as its primary citizen service initiative to provide public services directly to residents at their homes. The program establishes designated sites where government personnel process applications while

verifying documents and providing immediate assistance to applicants. The platform implements various schemes which include Lakshmir Bhandar, Swasthya Sathi, Kanyashree, Rupashree, Krishak Bandhu, and Khadyasathi. The program aims to decrease government office visits by citizens while delivering services through a transparent and efficient process. The program provides essential advantages to rural and remote area residents who require direct access to pension applications, health insurance, educational assistance, ration services, and necessary certificate services. The program strengthens administrative ties with citizens while serving as a fundamental element that supports good governance.

A list of various schemes of the Government of West Bengal implemented under the Duare Sarkar Programme is given below.

Sl. No.	Schemes Name	Purpose
1	Lakshmir Bhandar	Monthly financial assistance
2	Swasthya Sathi	Free health insurance
3	Kanyashree	Financial support for girls education
4	Rupashree	One-time grant for marriage of poor girls
5	Krishak Bandhu	Financial and insurance for farmers
6	Jay Bangla Pension Scheme	Pension for elderly, widows and disabled persons
7	Student Credit Card	Education loan support for students
8	Khadyasathi	Ration and food security service
9	Caste Certificate	Issuance of SC/ST/OBC Certificates
10	Land Record Services	Land record correction and information
11	Income/Birth Certificate	Proof of income and address proof certificate

The camps established through the Duare Sarkar Programme provide a better method for people to access government schemes than regional or BDO office services. People can visit a nearby camp to submit their applications and complete document verification instead of needing to visit offices multiple times to complete lengthy procedures. The solution helps remote and rural residents by decreasing their need to travel and wait for administrative processes to finish. The process achieves greater transparency and efficiency while becoming more accessible to citizens, which helps different schemes deliver their benefits to target recipients in a timely manner.

The Success of Duare Sarkar Programme in Connecting Local Peoples with the Government in West Bengal

The West Bengal government launched the Duare Sarkar program in December 2020 as a major initiative to improve citizen governmental interaction through its decentralized service delivery system. The program operates as an outreach system which establishes temporary camps throughout rural and urban regions to give citizens direct access to government welfare programs without needing to deal with complicated bureaucratic procedures (Government of West Bengal, 2021). Duare Sarkar receives recognition since it established permanent links between citizens and state authorities with its public services. The program has established multiple camp locations which are within walking distance of villages to provide health insurance (Swasthya Sathi) and social security pensions and scholarships and land-related

documents to citizens from economically weaker and socially marginalised groups (Swasthya Sathi). The government reports show that more than 25 million applications were processed during the first phase of the program which led to high participation rates because citizens were able to access the program. The program achieves success through its ability to coordinate multiple departments and reach out to the community while creating an environment which welcomes all people. Citizen mobilization and information distribution and camp organization responsibilities belong to local governance institutions which include Panchayati Raj bodies and municipal administrations. The participatory model guarantees that governance exists as an active force which maintains presence in all aspects of citizens' daily existence (Chakraborty, 2022). The Duare Sarkar program delivers services while also strengthening democratic connections through its operational activities. The program enables citizens to meet government officials and file complaints while obtaining information about government programs which boosts both accountability and transparent operations (Fox, 2015). State institutions have gained public trust through responsive services which serve as the fundamental element that enables local democratic institutions to function (Levi & Stoker, 2000). The initiative has also demonstrated adaptability. The government has improved operational processes through each phase by using citizen feedback to solve infrastructural issues and add new services to their operations. Participatory governance principles require iterative improvement to happen because policy implementation must change according to what people experience (Norris, 2011). The program can only succeed when political leaders maintain their commitment while administrators operate with complete effectiveness. The combination of available resources and trained personnel and grassroots mobilization has enabled Duare Sarkar to function efficiently. The program serves as a model for other states and countries which want to establish better communication with citizens through community outreach programs that actively engage people. The Duare Sarkar program uses targeted decentralized interventions to create participatory governance systems which enable people to access local democratic processes. The program will maintain its success by creating links which will help it address new issues that emerge in service delivery and inclusivity.

Suggestions to Strengthen Local Democracy

1. Institutionalize Doorstep Service Delivery: The Duare Sarkar outreach program should transform its periodic campaigns into a continuous system of local governance which enables citizens to access services at all times without waiting for designated service periods.
2. Enhance Citizen Awareness and Civic Education: The community meetings and local cable TV and social media platforms will serve as pre-camp awareness drives to educate citizens about the eligibility requirements and rights associated with existing schemes. Civic education helps people understand their democratic rights which enable them to participate in democracy more effectively.
3. Promote Inclusive Participation: The organization needs to implement outreach programs which will target women and elderly people and persons with disabilities and communities who

experience marginalization. The process requires self-help groups and Anganwadi workers and local NGOs to conduct outreach activities for targeted community involvement.

4. Strengthen Local Institutions' Autonomy: The panchayats and ward committees and municipal bodies should receive expanded decision-making authority to control camp operations and budget distribution and complaint resolution which will enhance grassroots democratic practices.

5. Integrate Digital and Physical Platforms: The online Duare Sarkar portal will function as an application tracking system while its offline help desks will assist citizens who lack digital access to remain included in the process.

6. Capacity Building for Local Officials: The training program will provide panchayat functionaries and municipal staff members with skills in citizen engagement and grievance handling and e-governance tools which will improve their professional service delivery and response capabilities.

7. Ensure Political Neutrality: The service delivery system needs to maintain a non-partisan environment which enables citizens from all political backgrounds to receive equal treatment. The democratic institutions gain greater credibility when this system operates effectively.

Conclusion

The Duare Sarkar programme stands as a tangible manifestation of local democracy in action, effectively bridging the gap between citizens and the state in West Bengal. The government service delivery system has created a new system of governance which allows active citizen participation through direct service delivery to their homes. The distributed system design of this project supports local democratic systems through its three principles which include accessibility and inclusivity and transparency and participation. The initiative achieves its success through two aspects which include processing a high volume of applications and providing services to numerous beneficiaries and transforming the way governance operations. Citizens from rural and marginalized communities can now obtain their rights through the process without facing bureaucratic barriers or needing to visit government offices. The programme has developed a feeling of ownership in the community which enables people to view governance as an available and responsible presence instead of a distant entity. The programme officials used participating methods to establish community engagement between their work with Panchayati Raj Institutions and municipal bodies and local volunteers. The public institutions have gained trust through grassroots involvement which has improved their administrative accountability and created a feedback system that enhances service delivery performance from start to finish. The Duare Sarkar program enables democratic systems by using decentralization and outreach work to implement participatory governance principles. The state demonstrates its ability to provide local services through its public service delivery system which maintains operational efficiency and fair treatment of citizens. The programme serves as a mechanism for delivering welfare services while establishing a democratic system that requires governance to operate together with citizens. The state of West Bengal can

maintain its status as a leader in local democracy through its ongoing development of these programs which enable better local democratic practices in India.

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