

# Evaluation of DFID Country Programmes: West Bengal, 2000-2006

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## Introduction

This is the summary of an evaluation of the Department for International Development (DFID) programme in West Bengal state in India, from 2000 to 2006. The evaluation had two main objectives: to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the programme over this period, and to derive lessons for DFID in West Bengal and elsewhere, including other state programmes in India. India is DFID's largest bilateral programme, with a planned commitment for 2005/06 of £248 million, of this, £29.9 million (12%) was committed to the West Bengal Programme.

## Context

West Bengal is India's most densely populated state, with a population of 80 million. 72% of people live in rural areas, although West Bengal is also India's third-most urbanised state. The slum population is in excess of 6.5 million; more than half this number lack access to basic amenities. The Government of West Bengal (GoWB) has been successful in reducing poverty, primarily through agrarian reforms in the 1980s, which have now stagnated. In 1983, 55% of the population was below the poverty line; it was 36% in 1993/94, 27% in 1999/2000, and 26% in 2004/05.

During the evaluation period West Bengal continued to be led by the world's longest-running democratically-elected communist government, who have been in power since 1977. In 2001, a new Chief Minister was elected, signalling the start of a period of reform. Reforms were particularly needed in the public sector due to a growing fiscal crisis in the state, which by 2002/03 was running a budget deficit of 7.8% of State Gross Domestic Product.

## Programme relevance

The evaluation period spans two DFID state strategies, and DFID deserves credit for a sound initial strategy and for maintaining consistency across the two strategies. However, the more recent State Assistance Plan (SAP) would benefit from a better analysis of the causes of poverty, and a better articulation of how the aggregate effect of the programme will achieve positive poverty outcomes. This is important in the absence of a GoWB Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Nonetheless, the SAP is well aligned to the GoWB 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.

The West Bengal programme has been effective in attaining a compact portfolio, with

a relatively small number of programmes, each with a reasonably large budget. Two major programmes have budgets in excess of £100m.

### Programme effectiveness

Most of the significant programmes in the state programme have not been running for long enough for major results to be evident. The main exceptions are support to education (District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) 1 and 2) and the support to the Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) restructuring programme. PSE was very successful in achieving its objective of supporting policy reforms that promote pro-poor growth through fiscal stabilization and good governance. A number of DPEP 1 and 2 outcomes were successfully achieved: enrolment increased to 95%, and virtual equity with respect to gender reached.

The Health Sector Development Initiative (HSDI) is a highly relevant health sector budget support. Though still early, positive signs are evident – increased acceptance of a performance-based approach in the Department of Family Health and Welfare (DFHW), and the first draft of the Annual Plan formulated for 2006/7. The DFHW budget has increased by 19%, another positive sign of sector partnership.

DFID's urban programmes in West Bengal (Kolkata Environment Improvement Programme (KEIP), Kolkata Urban Services Programme (KUSP)), have made considerable progress against designed objectives. This has included activities such as training, computerisation of local government functions, development of citizens' charters, and creation of in-slum infrastructure.

Both the Supporting Rural Decentralisation (SRD) programme and Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP) only commenced in 2006, after lengthy design phases.

Overall, DFID is a valued partner to GoWB - both for the funds it can mobilise and its intellectual engagement. Given the sound relationship DFID enjoys with GoWB, there is scope to incrementally develop a more robust engagement around harder to achieve reforms. GoWB respondents stated that they would like to be more involved in allocation decisions. There could be more coordinated approach to strategic dialogue and informing GoWB policy processes.

Gender and social inclusion were considered as part of programme design and implementation phases, but DFID did not develop or implement a clear strategy for mainstreaming gender and social inclusion within the West Bengal state programme.

### Efficiency

The evaluation found that the West Bengal team is the right-size for the programmes it has to manage and advise on, with a balance of skills and expertise is appropriate to the programme. The programme could utilise its cross-cutting advisers more effectively. The State Office in Kolkata is a valuable resource, that could be used for other functions, such as an increased role in monitoring and evaluation.

### Lessons

Major lessons drawn from the West Bengal programme include:

- The programme scaled up rapidly (£7m in 2002/03; £45m planned in 2006/07). This may be attributed to: the increasing reform-orientation of GoWB, partly driven by its fiscal crisis; a suite of well-conceived and ambitious programmes (especially in health and decentralisation) designed early in the period; recognition of the opportunity presented by the change in Chief Minister; and responding flexibly and quickly to new opportunities, such as PSE.
- The state is a successful unit of operation for DFID; it should also be used as a unit for performance management. The lack of aggregate results reporting against the SAP is a gap, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) needs to confirm aggregate effect the programme is having on poverty in the state.
- DFID is a valued development partner for GoWB, in an environment where there are few donors operating. However communications could be better coordinated, and GoWB involved differently in decision making about programmes.
- There are positive signs of progress towards poverty reduction through support to reforms. However DFID should now place greater emphasis to progress with core institutional reforms, such as changes

in roles and responsibilities of bodies at different tiers of government and delegation of key funds and functions

## Recommendations

Recommendations to DFID include the following:

### Recommendations for DFIDI

- A combination of human resources (HR) factors, led to most of the West Bengal team changing in 2004. DFIDI should examine HR systems to minimise large simultaneous team changes, which impact on continuity and institutional memory.
- GoWB considered that programmes' design phases have been unduly long. DFIDI should re-examine its procedures for design and pre-appraisal. Areas for review could include guidance on monitorable internal design procedures, with clear timetables and milestones.
- In education, and more widely, state and national programmes would benefit from more interaction. The state programme in running lean and 'hands-off' programmes, and the national programmes in using state-level knowledge and relationships to gain traction in slow moving state-level issues. Ways of working that better facilitate synergy between state and national teams should be sought.
- Performance assessment needs to be improved across the programme. One option is to follow the new CAP Guidance, and develop a new-style CAP Performance Framework and Delivery Plan for the state.

### Recommendations for DFID-West Bengal (DFID-WB)

- Building on current monitoring reviews, more attention should be directed to M&E. The programme should also assess its aggregate impact in West Bengal at least once before the end of the SAP plan period.
- The relationship with GoWB is a healthy one and there are mechanisms, such as partnership talks, for DFID to interact strategically with GoWB. However, a better developed Communication Strategy would permit a more coordinated approach to strategic dialogue and broad policy matters, and facilitate its management.

- DFID should improve the cross-learning between the decentralisation programmes, and use the most advanced of these to give early indication of areas of both tractability and constraint in decentralisation processes.

With the end of a plan period in West Bengal approaching, and a largely new team due in 2007, a state-level Drivers of Change study would be a useful analysis to assess, explain and guide the programme as a whole, and to better articulate a theory of change of how decentralisation eliminates poverty.

## Management Response

DFID India welcomes the evaluation of the West Bengal programme covering the period 2000-2006. The report provides a comprehensive and balanced assessment of the evolution of the West Bengal programme and its contribution to development in the state. We note the positive assessment of West Bengal's contribution to the delivery of DFID's Country Assistance Plan (CAP) in India and, through that, to the achievement of DFID's targets in the Public Service Agreement (PSA) and the Asia Director's Delivery Plan (DDP).

The West Bengal programme has grown strongly over the period covered by the evaluation. We are pleased that the report recognises it as a good model of how a relatively compact portfolio with a large budget can play a strong influencing role in promoting and delivering reforms, piloting improved methods for reducing poverty, and strengthening capacity to deliver positive outcomes for the poor.

We note the positive assessment on health sector budget support, the first of its kind in India. The evaluation is also complimentary about the value of DFID support to Public Sector Enterprise reforms which has helped the state to progress its growth and fiscal stabilisation objectives. In the case of our urban programmes the report identifies that these have piloted innovations in planning, revenue generation measures, and public-private partnerships which are informing the development of similar programmes in other Indian states.

The evaluation comments that the protracted design process for the rural decentralisation programme impacted adversely on delivery and the relationship with partners was affected. Subsequent external evaluations of the

programme have noted that any early setbacks have been largely overcome. Relationships with GoWB are now strong and there has been significant progress in building capacity, incentivising reforms through the Untied Poverty Fund, and strengthening accountability of government. The next phase of this support is being developed with GoWB and is incorporating many lessons from the initial implementation phase.

Whilst recognising that progress on the education programmes has been mixed, the report does not give sufficient credit to the positive outcomes realised from the implementation of the District Primary Education Programmes (DPEP). These programmes have raised enrolment levels, brought more girl children and children from disadvantaged families into school, and promoted stronger community demand for education (see National Social Survey education rounds 1995, 2000 and 2005). In relation to the evaluation findings regarding institutional and implementation challenges for the national education programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), we are seeking to address these challenges through our support to SSA.

We are currently developing our next Country Assistance Plan (CAP) for India. This will provide the framework for our future

partnership in West Bengal. We expect to complete all our programmes of support in West Bengal over the next three years and the recommendations and findings of the evaluation will be used to enhance the development outcomes over this period. In particular, as recommended by the evaluation, we will articulate a comprehensive theory of change that will allow us to address some of the key cross-cutting issues and to develop programme synergies within the state and with our work at national level.

The evaluation identified the need to develop a more structured communications strategy. This is being taken forward through our state office as part of the enhanced role in programme delivery that they have now assumed. Of the other challenges identified in the evaluation, we now have opportunities to work on some of the more difficult reforms in the state through support to the Administrative Reforms Committee. Monitoring and evaluation is also another key area that will form part of our support to this Committee.

The evaluation has identified many of the successes of the West Bengal programme and provides insightful analysis of future challenges. As we move forward with our partnership with GoWB, these insights will help us to ensure that further development progress in the state is maximised and effective poverty reduction is secured.



## DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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One in five people in the world today, over 1 billion people, live in poverty on less than one dollar a day. In an increasingly interdependent world, many problems – like conflict, crime, pollution and diseases such as HIV and AIDS – are caused or made worse by poverty. DFID responds to emergencies, both natural and man-made. It also supports long-term programmes which aim to reduce poverty and disease and to increase the number of children in school, in support of the internationally agreed UN 'Millennium Development Goals'.

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