

# Bringing Governance to the Doorstep: An Empirical Study of Duare Sarkar in West Bengal

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates impact of the Duare Sarkar programme, a flagship governance initiative, launched by the Government of West Bengal (India) in December 2020, to ensure doorstep delivery of public services in West Bengal. Conducted in a single block of Bankura district, the research adopts basically qualitative interviews to evaluate citizens' experiences with selected services, including Lakshmir Bhandar, Swasthya Sathi, ration card services, caste certificates, old age pensions, and land-related services. Findings reveal a high level of citizen satisfaction, particularly with the LakshmirBhandar scheme, which was successfully accessed by all surveyed beneficiaries. Health, ration, and pension services were also widely appreciated for their efficiency. However, significant dissatisfaction was observed in land-related services, attributed to bureaucratic delays and uncooperative departmental staff. Although the localized scope of the study limits its generalizability, it offers critical insights into both the successes and service delivery gaps within the Duare Sarkar framework. The paper concludes by recommending targeted administrative reforms, digital inclusion strategies, and expanded research to build a more equitable and effective public service delivery model.*

**Keywords:** Doorstep Government, Public Service Delivery, Inclusive Governance

## INTRODUCTION

Delivering public services to the citizens is a key of good governance (Denhart & Denhart, 2001) and also at the same time pivotal factor for the social and economic prosperity of people. Public administration makes this possible by focusing on people's participation, satisfaction, and inclusion. These are important for providing good services and showing the real benefits of governance. When people are involved, they can also hold public officials accountable. This shows that effective public administration comes from a government that includes and listens to its citizens. It is mainly about managing government systems to create a better and more organized society. For good governance, it is important to have efficient public administration and services that are accountable to the people (Essien, 2015). In India, a large number of initiatives have been taken by the Government of at the Centre as well as by the regional governments to bridge the gap between government schemes and their beneficiaries. However, it is found by research studies that citizens are often facing challenges of accessibility, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of awareness (Mokta, 2013; Sing, 2008). Recognizing these persistent issues, the Government of West Bengal launched the **Duare Sarkar** (Government at Your Doorstep) programme in December 2020, a flagship initiative designed to decentralize service delivery and bring welfare schemes directly to the citizens. Through a series of service camps organized across rural and urban areas, Duare Sarkar seeks to ensure that eligible individuals can access entitlements such as health benefits, ration cards, pensions, and other welfare provisions without the burden of navigating complex bureaucratic processes (Government of West Bengal, 2020).

Despite its ambitious vision, the effectiveness of Duare Sarkar in achieving its goals warrants critical examination. While the programme has garnered significant attention for its widespread reach and innovative approach, questions remain regarding its actual impact on beneficiaries, the inclusiveness of its design, and the challenges encountered during its implementation. This study aims to empirically investigate the impact, challenges, and perceptions associated with the Duare Sarkar programme in West Bengal. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research seeks to answer critical questions about the programme's effectiveness, accessibility, and inclusivity. The study will assess how effectively the initiative addresses the needs of diverse socio-economic groups, examine beneficiaries' levels of satisfaction, and identify the operational bottlenecks that hinder the programme's success. Additionally, it will explore how government officials and frontline workers perceive the programme's design and implementation.

Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on decentralized service delivery in India. The findings will provide evidence-based insights into the efficacy of innovative governance models such as Duare Sarkar and offer actionable recommendations to enhance the programme's acceptability, viability, sustainability and efficiency. Furthermore, the research will shed light on the implications of such initiatives for improving the accountability and responsiveness of public service delivery systems, with potential lessons for similar contexts both within and beyond India. So, the aim of the research problem under our consideration is to demonstrate how effective the Duare Sarkar programme is, which has been launched by the Government of West Bengal in 2020, in delivering public services and addressing beneficiaries' needs.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hartley (2005) analyzes three approaches among existing different approaches in regard to the innovation in governance and public services to in the public sector and highlights their impact on policymakers, managers, and citizens. He is critical about the excessive reliance on private sector models, pointing out that public service innovation involves unique challenges and contexts. Hartley emphasizes the need to understand innovation not as a linear process but as a complex, non-linear journey shaped by top-down policies, bottom-up initiatives, and the lateral adoption of successful practices from other organizations or countries. The study stresses the importance of context-specific research to overcome barriers to innovation and enhance public value.

Lee, Min, and Yoon (2023) assess the impact of home visiting programs on community health in South Korea (2017–2020) using a DID model. Their findings reveal improved health, fewer hospital visits, and lower medical costs, highlighting the program's role in mitigating COVID-19 effects. The study underscores doorstep services as vital for public service delivery, especially in health crises.

The case study "Doorstep Delivery Mechanism of Public Services: Success Story of Delhi" by Maheshwari, Mohan, and Mishra (2024) examines the success of the Doorstep Delivery Scheme in New Delhi. It highlights how the initiative enhanced public service accessibility, accountability, and transparency. The study also explores challenges in data management and the behavioral aspects of stakeholders. Using the Technology Adoption Model, it offers valuable insights for policymakers on implementing effective e-governance systems.

Sharma and Kumar (2023) evaluate citizen perceptions and satisfaction with Delhi's Doorstep Delivery Scheme. The findings indicate high satisfaction due to convenience, timely delivery, and reduced corruption. While internet awareness is strong, the study suggests improving the IVRS system and increasing mobile assistants for better service accessibility.

While initiatives like Duare Sarkar in West Bengal aim to bring governance to the doorstep, there is a lack of comprehensive empirical research evaluating their long-term impact on citizen satisfaction and administrative efficiency. Existing studies primarily highlight short-term achievements of this developmental initiative without assessing its sustainability, scalability, and at the same time challenges faced by the government and the beneficiaries during its implementation. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding

how such initiatives included marginalized communities' in accessing the services provided by the programme and which hurdles they are facing in getting these services. Another vital focus of this research is to enquire how far this grass-roots based development programme reduce the systematic lacunas in regard to delivery of public service to the people of West Bengal. A deeper examination of the comparative effectiveness of doorstep governance models across regions is also needed to establish best practices.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

- To measure the impact of Duare Sarkar on public service delivery system in West Bengal.
- To evaluate the satisfaction level of beneficiaries.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the extent of public awareness about the Duare Sarkar Programme?
- How has the Duare Sarkar Programme improved the accessibility to government services (e.g., ration cards, pensions, health benefits, land records, etc.)?
- What are the barriers encountered by the citizens in accessing the services under this programme?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To comprehensively evaluate assess the impact of the *Duare Sarkar* programme, this study adopts a basically qualitative research techniques. This methodological synergy allows for a more nuanced understanding of the programme's effectiveness, challenges, and socio-political implications. A total of 120 citizens from the Indas Block of Bankura District were interviewed using a combination of some objective-type quantitative questions and explanatory qualitative questions. Their experiences with the *Duare Sarkar* initiative in West Bengal are presented below as part of the key findings.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a) The study revealed a significant level of awareness about the Duare Sarkar programme among the citizens. Around 85% of the respondents reported familiarity with the initiative, often citing local government outreach efforts and word-of-mouth communication as primary sources of information for this programme. Media campaigns through television, radio, and social media also played a crucial role in spreading awareness.

b) A key success of the Duare Sarkar programme has been its ability to bring government services to the doorstep of the beneficiaries. **92%** of the respondents acknowledged that, the initiative reduced the need for multiple visits to government offices. The camp-based model allowed citizens to apply for schemes like **Lakshmir Bhandar** (a financial assistance scheme for women) and **Swasthya Sathi** (a health insurance scheme) in a single location.

c) Approximately **80%** of the beneficiaries reported satisfaction with the services received, particularly regarding the timely resolution of applications. The availability of grievance redressal desks at the camps further contributed to satisfaction levels. Beneficiaries of the welfare schemes such as **Khadya Sathi** (food security) and Old Age Pension schemes, particularly appreciate this schemes for their easy enrolment process. However, **20%** of the respondents raised concerns over delayed service delivery and lack of clear communication network to track the status of their applications. Apart from these lacunas, in regard to delivery of public services, instances of perceived favoritism

or corruption were reported in isolated cases, especially in regions with weak administrative oversight.

d) The findings of this study indicate that, the Duare Sarkar programme has made significant contributions in improving service accessibility and citizen satisfaction. However, addressing logistical challenges, strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms, and promoting equitable access are essential for its sustained success.

e) The responses highlight both the success stories of the programme and at the same time pointed out the serious flaws in delivering of essential public services, particularly in the land-related domain. A unanimous response across all surveyed beneficiaries confirmed that they had received the benefit of the **LakshmirBhandar scheme** through the Duare Sarkar camp. Women praised the scheme for providing monthly financial support, which has helped them enormously to mitigate day-to-day family expenses. It is crystal clear from the responses received, that the schemes is very useful in the sense that, through the scheme direct financial support has been provided by the Government of West Bengal to the all women of the West Bengal stipulating minimum eligibility criteria. From the feedback it is also clear that the service is easy, accessible, transparent and free from bureaucratic complexities.

f) This overwhelming success points to effective planning and implementation by the government, particularly in women-centric schemes. The transparency and simplicity of the application process for LakshmirBhandar point out to the fact that the State government is more conscious and much focused on gender sensitive welfare scheme. Respondents also expressed broad satisfaction with the delivery of services such as: **Swasthya Sathi Card (Health Insurance)**, Ration Card-related Services, Caste Certificate Issuance, Old Age Pension Applications. These services were appreciated for their streamlined procedures, on spot document verification, lucidity of the communication network and sympathetic behavior provided by staff and the campus. Aged beneficiaries concerned with the Old Age Pension scheme noted that application process is much more easier today through Duare Sarkar programme compared to previous bureaucratic methods. The relatively high satisfaction across these services demonstrates the programme's operational efficiency in handling mass public service delivery. It also underscores the value of decentralized governance models where government services are brought directly to the citizens. The only area where significant dissatisfaction is noted in land-related services. Majority of respondents reported that, due to the delays in processing, ambiguous instructions, non-cooperation or uncooperative behavior of the staff, lack of follow-up or transparency regarding land related public service delivery system like land mutation, or verification of ownership of land makes the Duare Sarkar Programme an unhappy utopia in some sense. Several citizens mentioned that, land department officials were often absent from camps or lacked clarity on service protocols. These complaints were consistent across multiple districts. This dissatisfaction reflects deeper institutional bottlenecks and structural issues within the land administration system in West Bengal. The plausible answer behind this gloomy picture of the land related public delivery system is that land issues often involve complex legal histories and inter-departmental coordination. To overcome this situation, concrete land reform policy of the Government, organized infrastructural network,

systematic training facility of the concerned staff, strong mechanisms to implement the principle of accountability and comprehensive land grievance cell at the camp level should be established.

## LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIMENSIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into the implementation and effectiveness of the Duare Sarkar programme, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may affect the broader applicability of the findings. The research was conducted exclusively in a single block within Bankura District of West Bengal. As a result, the study's scope is geographically limited and may not fully represent the diverse socio-economic, cultural, and administrative realities across other districts of the state. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings to the entire state of West Bengal is constrained. Furthermore, the study focuses specifically on evaluating the programme during its initial phase since its launch in December 2020. It does not account for subsequent developments, modifications, or long-term impacts of the initiative. Given these limitations, the study should be viewed as a localized exploratory analysis, offering a foundational perspective rather than a comprehensive assessment. The study is also limited in another sense that it does not include any quantitative data or statistical analysis, as it primarily relies on qualitative interviews for data collection and interpretation. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the geographical scope, increase the sample size along with statistical data, and include additional evaluative dimensions to build a more representative and holistic understanding of the Duare Sarkar programme across West Bengal.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study present a nuanced narrative: while the *Duare Sarkar* initiative has markedly simplified access to key welfare schemes and fostered trust in state governance, certain services-particularly those entangled in complex bureaucratic systems such as land records-continue to face implementation hurdles. The *Duare Sarkar* programme represents a transformative attempt by the Government of West Bengal to bring governance to the doorstep of its citizens. This study, conducted in Indas Block of Bankura District, underscores both the successes and shortcomings of this ambitious initiative. On one hand, the programme has significantly improved access facility to welfare schemes such as LakshmirBhandar, Swasthya Sathi, and ration card services, strengthening citizen trust towards the government and enabling smoother public service delivery. On the other hand, the persistent issues surrounding land-related services-including bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of responsiveness, and procedural opacity-highlight critical institutional gaps that need urgent reform.

The research emphasizes that while structural innovations in governance are commendable, their success ultimately depends on administrative efficiency, inclusive access, and citizen-centric design. Digitalization and at the same time decentralization in the sphere of public service system have been introduced by the Government of West Bengal to inculcate the principle of empowerment and inclusion. These aims can only be achieved by re-galvanizing the capacity building mechanism of the Government, by solidifying accountability mechanism and by propagating the social and economic awareness among the different layers of the society especially for the marginalized groups.

In conclusion, **Duare Sarkar** has laid the groundwork for a more responsive and participatory governance model in West Bengal. However, for it to evolve into a sustainable and equitable public service architecture, continued efforts are needed to streamline inter-departmental coordination, empower local actors, and institutionalize feedback systems. This study, thus, serves not as an end, but as a starting point for deeper inquiry into the subject concerned, urging scholars and administrators to dig into the matter with a holistic approach to build up a more equitable society based on the effective governing system.

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