

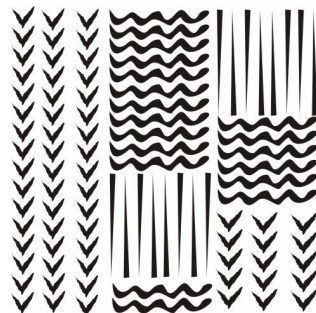
**DRAFT PAPER**

**PANCHAYAT LEVEL DATA BASES:  
A WEST BENGAL CASE STUDY**

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**STUDYING VILLAGE ECONOMIES IN INDIA  
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## PANCHAYAT LEVEL DATA BASES: A WEST BENGAL CASE STUDY

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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 success of the panchayat system in decentralised planning in West Bengal and subsequently the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of the High Level Expert Committee has not been quite the same as that of the National Statistical Commission. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> National Statistical Commission (2001), para 9.2.22 and 2.7.8.

<sup>2</sup> Government of India (2006).

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).

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

## *2. 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'.<sup>3</sup> As part of the study, census type surveys were undertaken in seven villages in different agro-climatic regions of the State in May-June

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<sup>3</sup> The study was directed by V. K. Ramachandran and Vikas Rawal.

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 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.

### *2.1 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 mouzas<sup>4</sup> 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.

Barddhaman 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

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

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.



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.

### *2.2 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 Barddhaman 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

### *3. DATA BASES AVAILABLE AT THE GRAM PANCHAYAT*

Prior to our field investigation, we collected some information from the Strengthening Rural Decentralisation (SRD) Cell of the Panchayats and Rural Development Department on the type of data that are generally available at the gram panchayats. We obtained the following list:

1. Census of India village-level data, in electronic form and in hard copy.
2. Household-wise data from the Rural Household Survey (RHS), in electronic form and in hard copy. Data were collected for each household on 12 out of the 13 indicators suggested by the Government of India.
3. Data available in the Self-Evaluation Format. 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)

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<sup>5</sup> The command area under the deep tubewell is 35.6 hectares.

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.

4. Village-level development profile (*Gram panchayater unnayan byabasthar chitra*). The SRD cell is preparing Block level booklets 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. This booklet is under preparation and was not available at the Raina gram panchayat at the time of our visit.

5. Data collected under the SRD (Strengthening Rural Decentralisation) scheme. The formal coverage of the SRD extends over 821 gram panchayats in 12 districts. However, in some districts some gram panchayats not covered formally by the scheme voluntarily have implemented similar programmes of *sansad*-wise community-generated data. Raina gram panchayat is not covered under this scheme and hence this data base was not available at the gram panchayat.

6. Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF), formerly RSVY, (Rashtriya Sama Vikas Yojana) baseline data. The BRGF scheme covers all gram panchayats in 11 backward districts of the State. Data on 170 indicators are compiled from secondary sources in this data base. Raina is not in a backward district; hence the data was not available at the gram panchayat.



Our visit to Raina gram panchayat revealed that the village-level data on population and amenities from the Census of India 2001, household level data from the RHS and the Self Evaluation Format were available at the panchayat office. The panchayat also maintains various other records and registers and have access to village level data from other departments, which provide useful information for local-level planning. We identified the most important sources of data at the gram panchayat as the ICDS records, the rural household survey and some other registers maintained by the panchayat and other departments.

### *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. When a new

survey is conducted the households that have divided are recorded separately and households that have migrated permanently 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 is of the view 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), according to the panchayat officials at Raina the registers maintained by Anganwadi workers were most reliable among the other sources.

*3.1.1 An assessment of the quality of ICDS records at Bidyanidhi village.* 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 survey<sup>7</sup>. 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.

### *3.2 Rural Household Survey*

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

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<sup>6</sup> The 2005 child register was not readily available because the present ICDS worker at the centre had joined in the year 2006.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

organizations to select beneficiaries for Central government sponsored schemes. 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 is already specified by the Central government based on the Planning Commission estimates of the incidence of poverty in the region. The BPL census grades the relative deprivation of households on 13 indicators in a scale of 1 to 5.<sup>8</sup> 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 (Government of West Bengal 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

*3.2.1 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.

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> The household level data collected in this alternate survey was available at the gram panchayat.

*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.

### 3.3 Records maintained by the gram panchayat and other departments

The gram panchayat maintains various records for administrative and other purposes and a considerable amount of information is available from such records. In most cases, the registers maintained by the gram Panchayats and other departments 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. 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 by 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	
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
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

The gram panchayats sometimes conduct independent household surveys for evaluation of various development programmes. 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.

Gram panchayats have access to registers at the village primary school and primary health centre. 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 in the village 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. 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.

The block primary health centres and sub-centres prepare a monthly report on a prescribed format to be sent to the Block office every month. This report contains information on births and deaths, treated cases of different diseases, vaccinations and birth control methods. The monthly report, however, cannot be obtained from the primary health centre on demand.

The Block primary health centre, ICDS centre and the panchayat form an interlinked health and childcare 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.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

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). The information available at the Raina gram panchayat on each of the nine categories is summarized in Table 3.

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. Administrative records of some departments around the gram panchayat are closely interlinked and there is considerable data sharing between the departments. Though this is true for the village we studied it might not be true for all of India. According to the pilot study conducted by the High Level Committee, there is no such formal data sharing mechanisms between different agencies working at gram panchayats in Maharashtra and Haryana (Government of India 2006, p.25-26).

According to us, the ICDS records forms a very important and reliable data base at the village-level and have the potential to assist or partly substitute for the functions performed 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 High Level Committee also mentions the high potential of the registers maintained by Anganwadi workers (Government of India 2006, p.17). However, it must be understood that 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 data was not so good).

A major disadvantage of panchayat-level data bases is that there is no uniformity in the types of registers maintained at the different panchayats across the country. 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).

West Bengal does not have an integrated system of land records and agricultural statistics as there is no village level plot-wise data on land ownership, tenancy, land use, cropping pattern and agricultural production.<sup>10</sup> In the absence of such data, one major lacuna in village-level data base in West Bengal is the inability to integrate household level data on demographic and human development indicators available from village sources with the economic indicators on land ownership, tenure and crop production. 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.

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 village level agencies that we visited, they were very forthcoming in sharing information with us. However, one has to be cautious of the fact that the quality of the data may vary across panchayats.

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<sup>10</sup> 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 (see the paper titled "Land use and crop area statistics in West Bengal – a discussion on village record based statistics and sample survey based statistics" presented in this colloquium).

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.
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	Yes	Census of India	The information is known to panchayat officials. Census data are often outdated.
Population	Yes	Yes	Census of India, ICDS household survey register	ICDS registers provide more up to date data than Census.
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

## REFERENCES

Government of India (2001), *Report of National Statistical Commission*, available at <<http://mospi.gov.in/nscr/hp.htm>>

Government of India (2006), *Report of High Level Expert Committee on Basic Statistics for Local Level Development*, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Social Statistics Division Central Statistical Organisation.

Government of West Bengal (2007), *Annual Administrative Report 2006-2007*, Panchayats and Rural Development Department

**Appendix: Description of parameters used in Rural Household Survey**

Sl.	Parameters	Scores				
		1	2	3	4	5
1 (P1)	Effective landholding of the family (together with land cultivated as registered Barga holder)	No land	Irrigated land <1 acre or Non-irrigated land <2 acres	Irrigated land 1<>2 acre or Non-irrigated land 2<>4 acres	Irrigated land 2<>4 acres or Non-irrigated land 3<>6 acres	Irrigated land >3 acres or Non-irrigated land >6 acres
2 (P2)	Nature of Dwelling house	Houseless	Hut with only 1 room	Hut with >= 2 rooms	Partially Pucca house	Pucca house
3 (P3)	Number of garments per member	No. of garments <2	Greater than 2, Less than 4, but no winter garment	Greater than 2, Less than 4, with winter garments	>4, with winter garments, but <6	>6
4 (P4)	Food security	Can manage< 1 square meal a day during the major part of a year	Can manage< 1 square meal a day during the major part of a year	Can generally manage 2 square meals a day but sometimes fails	Can manage at least 2 square meals during all seasons	no shortage of food security
5 (P5)	Ownership of consumer items - Cycle, Radio, TV, Electric Fan, Pressure Cooker	no ownership	owns at least 1	owns at least 2	owns at least 3	owns all or any of the following items - computer, refrigerator, colour television, electrical cooking utensil, costly furnitures, Light motor vehicle or commercial vehicle, tractor, two or three wheeled mechanized vehicle, power tiller, grinding machine, cooking gas connection
6 (P6)	Educational status (of the most educated member of the family)	illiterate	Primary <= class V	Greater than class V upto graduate level/ but less than ClassX	upto graduate level/ professional diploma	Masters' degree/professional degree others
7 (P7)	Earning capability status	all members are infirm/old/children , no regular earner	women & child labourers	only adult male & women labourers, no child labour	only adult male labourers	
8 (P8)	Means of livelihood	daily/agricultural/ot her physical labour	agriculture and provides own labour at field	self employed rural artisan/hawker, those who do not employ others	labour oriented regular job in the unorganized sector	others viz., job in the organized sector, medical practitioner, advocate, own business, production agency
9 (P9)	Educational status of children of 9-14 years (Highest to be considered for more than 1 child)	never goes to school	school dropout and work outside with others	school dropout and work at home	school dropout and not employed	no school dropout
10 (P10)	Type of loan	loans from familiar persons for everyday needs	loans from familiar persons for production needs	loans from an agency for some particular purpose	loans from a recognized agency	no loan
11 (P11)	Reason for going out of the village for employment of the principal earner of the family	temporary employment	seasonal employment	any other means of livelihood	reasons other than income	does not have to go out to earn
12 (P12)	Special kind of disability	permanently disabled and without any social or Government assistance	Aged without assistance	women head of the family	expenses more than family income due to treatment of one of the family members from an incurable disease	none of the above

