

## *The Marxist*

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WEST BENGAL STATE CONFERENCE

*Document: Left Front Government, Panchayats, Municipalities and Our Tasks*

1.1 In two successive State conferences held in 2002 (20<sup>th</sup>) and 2005 (21<sup>st</sup>), two documents on 'Left Front Government and Our Tasks' were adopted. The sixth and the seventh (since 2006) Left Front governments have tried to run the Government on the basis of the guidelines provided in these documents.

1.2 In the context of the policies of economic liberalization pursued by the Centre and the experience of running three Left led State governments in that backdrop, the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress unanimously adopted a document on some policy issues after detailed discussions, providing broad guidelines for the policy direction of the present Left Front governments. This has helped to unify the entire Party. Discussions and political classes on these documents have been organized at all levels of the Party.

1.3 The massive success of the Left Front in the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly elections held in June 2006 vindicated the policy direction of the Left Front government and the positive impact it had in eliciting mass support. The fact that the masses repose deep faith in this programme of the Left Front government, even after being in office for 29 years, was undoubtedly proven by the victory of the Left Front in 235 seats by securing 50.18% of the votes, with the CPI (M) winning absolute majority.

1.4 Therefore there is no reason to change the policy direction laid down in the above-mentioned documents. Neither is there any need to reiterate the content of those documents. What is required is an evaluation of the experience of running the LEFT FRONT government over the past three years.

1.5 The 20<sup>th</sup> state conference had expressed deep concern about the financial health of the state government. Due to the financial crunch faced by the state government, public expenditure had to be curtailed, which adversely affected some welfare programmes. There have been some positive changes in this regard. Plan expenditure, which had fallen to Rs. 2500 crore in 2003-04, increased to Rs. 6877 crore in 2005-06 and further to over Rs. 8000 crore in the current financial year. But there is no room for complacency. The basic issue of a skewed distribution of revenues between the Centre and the States remains unresolved. Huge investments are required in social sectors such as education, health and safe drinking water and infrastructure areas like power, roads and irrigation. In the context of economic liberalization policies being pursued by the Central Government, it has

become even more important to increase expenditure on social sectors in order to protect the weaker sections of the population. The Centre has not accepted the proposal of the West Bengal government to reduce the debt burden of the state. Consequently, huge debt and interest burden continue to be important problems. The Centre is also trying to impose conditionalities through various schemes in areas, which fall under the purview of the states, which is against the principles of federalism. Economic liberalization is leading to the erosion of the autonomy of the state government in newer ways. The issue of Centre-state relations therefore deserves serious attention.

1.6 The average growth of State Domestic Product for the period 2001 to 2006 was 7.3%, which was well above the national average of 6.71% for the same period. While the entire country is suffering from an agrarian crisis, agricultural growth in West Bengal was 3.2%, which was also above the national average. In West Bengal, the share of agriculture in SDP is 24%. Despite several natural calamities, the production of rice has reached 144 lakh metric tonnes, potato 77 lakh metric tonnes and vegetables 117 lakh metric tonnes. The production of mango, litchi, pineapple, flowers, etc. has also increased significantly during the recent period. There is marked progress in fish production and animal husbandry. Faced with a deep crisis in agriculture and due to the consistent pressure of the Left Parties, the Centre has been forced to increase Plan allocations for agriculture and allied activities in the Eleventh Five-year Plan. In order to reap its benefits, Planning for agriculture at the district levels is necessary. Overall development of agriculture is an important task for the future. It is evident that land reforms and *panchayati raj* have contributed immensely to the development of agriculture in the state. Besides consolidating the success, importance was laid on increasing agricultural production, crop diversification and expansion of the market. While there has been some progress in this regard, much remains to be done. We have not been able to remove the weakness in supplying seeds of improved quality by using seed farms. Noteworthy weaknesses continue to remain in storage and marketing of agricultural commodities, especially the perishable commodities. Keeping in mind the interest of the peasantry, it would not be correct to deny the role of private capital and new technology in warehousing and agricultural marketing. There is a need to move in this direction, without losing sight of the possible adverse consequences on employment and sustaining government control as much as possible. A Commission on Agriculture has been constituted in order to come out with specific proposals for the future, which is yet to submit its report.

1.7 The last two state conferences emphasized the need to increase industrial investments in order to generate employment. With the objective of increasing employment opportunities, greater initiatives towards industrialization were called for on the basis of the industrial policy document of the Left Front government adopted in 1994. West Bengal has always had a significant share of small and tiny enterprises in the country. According to latest data (July 05-June 06), the number of unorganized small manufacturing

units in the state is 27,50,000, which is the highest in the country and accounts for 15.08% of the total number of such units nationwide. The share of workers in this sector is 15%. However, the state had been lagging behind in terms of large and medium enterprises. After consistent efforts, there has been significant progress in this regard. At present the share of industry in SDP is 21% and the annual rate of growth of this sector is around 12-12.5%. The growth in manufacturing, services and construction is 9%, 12% and 20% respectively. During the period 1991-2006, the state ranked third in terms of total investments. According to ASSOCHAM, around Rs. 1,84,000 crores would be invested in the state in various sectors. West Bengal has emerged as a front ranking state in terms of large and medium enterprises. Besides the IT sector, the state government had laid emphasis on manufacturing and agro-based industries. There have been noteworthy successes in this regard, which has helped generate new employment opportunities. While new industries are coming up, crisis persists in the traditional labour-intensive industries. Many of the large industries continue to remain sick or closed. Jute industry continues to face crisis and many of the tea gardens in North Bengal continue to remain closed. The state government has taken some initiatives to reopen some of the tea gardens. In recent times, revival of IISCO in Burnpur-Kulti, and reopening of Dunlop were noteworthy events. Efforts are on to restart MAMC and the fertilizer factory in Durgapur.

1.8 New proposals for establishing large industries have naturally increased the demand for land and infrastructure. Because of the high population density in West Bengal, per capita endowment of land happens to be low. Most of the land is under agricultural use and as a result of the progress in agriculture intensity of cultivation is also relatively high. Since small, marginal and middle peasants in the state own 84% of the land, the process of acquisition of land for industry and infrastructure is a complex as well as sensitive issue. In the recent past, the opposition has consistently tried to isolate the Left Front government, especially the CPI (M), from the peasantry, using this sensitive issue. Land acquisition for building industry, infrastructure etc. has taken place in the past. But we never faced such resistance to development on the question of land. In order to carry forward the programme of development, this issue should be satisfactorily resolved. The fear among the peasantry of losing their land has to be addressed in a serious manner. Although the amount of land required for industries and infrastructure is meager compared to the total amount of land and cultivated area in the state, the matter needs to be considered with seriousness. Besides ensuring adequate compensation, specific planning is required for alternative sources of income for families whose land is being acquired. The local people need to be involved in the process of land acquisition and fixing the compensation amount. Confidence has to be generated among the local people regarding the positive economic and social benefits of the projects for which land is being acquired. These tasks are not only administrative but also political.

1.9 Caution is also required in changing land use for the purpose of industry. Priority should be given to setting up of industries on relatively less fertile land. The Left Front government has already taken steps in this regard. Large industries are mainly being set up on relatively less fertile land not suitable for agriculture, in the regions of West Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Asansol, Durgapur and Birbhum. However, all types of industries cannot be set up in these regions. The Haldia industrial region needs to be expanded in order to take advantage of the port facility. Similarly, there are possibilities to build a large industrial region in and around Siliguri and Jalpaiguri in North-Bengal. Large areas in and around Kolkata, North and South 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hoogly are traditional industrial belts. These areas are most suitable for technology intensive manufacturing and IT industries. Urbanization is also high in these areas. Large-scale transfer of agricultural land is taking place in these areas in response to market forces. The government has to take planned measures in this regard. Besides, initiatives are underway to develop industries centering around Kalyani in the Nadia district. Overall, besides the development of 6 large industrial regions in the state, initiatives need to be taken in order to develop at least one industrial zone in every district, which will provide all facilities for setting up small and medium enterprises.

1.10 There is debate regarding the setting up of SEZs. We have opposed the unbridled proliferation of SEZs across the country resulting from the en masse approvals granted by the Central government. The Party has categorically conveyed its opposition to the current SEZ policy to the Central government, with regard to the total number of SEZs, minimum and maximum area under SEZs, land-use within SEZs and the huge tax concessions that have been granted. However, no change in Central policy has occurred so far. In this backdrop, if we are not able to set up SEZs in our state, not only would we lose out in the cut-throat competition to attract investments in export-oriented industries, but also suffer in terms of the eventual sickness and closure of the existing export-oriented industries in the state. This cannot be allowed to happen. Therefore, within the compulsions arising out of the present situation, we have to set up some sector-specific SEZs that will not require much land, and some multi-product SEZs keeping in mind the need for balanced development in the state. However, at least 50% of the land must be used for industrial purposes in these SEZs.

1.11 A lot of debate has recently been generated in the state, centering on the implementation of the decisions adopted in the last two conferences. Since the adoption of the industrial policy of 1994, the state government has been making efforts to attract both domestic and foreign investments over the past decade. In the initial stage, although new investments started flowing in under the changed circumstances at the international, national and state level, the quantum of that inflow was quite low. Barring a few exceptions, most of the new investments took place in the small and medium sectors. Over the last few years the situation has changed fast. Huge amounts of new investments

have started coming in industrial and infrastructural sectors. The possibility of becoming an industry-driven economy from an agriculture-driven one emerged in the state. Naturally, the status quoist forces were hit hard in the process. A dilemma is being faced across the society between uncertainties and apprehensions on the one hand and newer possibilities on the other. While not directly opposing industrialization, the arguments and facts that are being presented by a section, reflects a status-quoist mindset. The CPI (M), as a party of the working class, has to face the situation courageously. In the present situation, while continuing to ceaselessly struggle against the negative aspects of capitalism with the goal of eventually ending it, we have to use all the opportunities of industrial development for the interest of the working people and the future generation.

1.12 The aim of development, be it in agriculture or in industry, is to enhance the income and living standards of the poor working people. While economic-social-regional inequalities cannot be eliminated within the present social system, more improvement can be brought about in human development. If adequate attention is not paid to the spheres of education, health, provision of drinking water and nutrition, the class orientation of our work is bound to get disrupted. The documents of the past two conferences had categorically mentioned this aspect. It was stated that highest priority should be given to the formation of Self-Help Groups, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Sanitation Campaign, expansion of preventive healthcare system and improvement in the quality of education. There is some progress in this regard during this period. Presently, the total number of SHGs in the state is around 6 lakhs, involving 60 lakh persons, 90% of whom are women. Enrollment of children in the 5-8 years age group in primary schools has increased from 88% in the year 2001-02 to about 99%. The share of girl students is about 50%. Mid-day meals are provided in most of the schools located in the rural areas. The drop out rate has also declined from 33% to 20% during this period. However, despite the increase in the number of students, weakness in providing proper infrastructure and improved quality of education is quite evident. Importance of vocational-education has increased in the context of industrialization. While the state is doing well in terms of life expectancy, child mortality and birth rate compared to the overall situation in the country, one or two States are doing even better than us in this regard. Despite development of infrastructure in the health sector, weaknesses remain in the quality of health services. Malnutrition among women and children remains a matter of great concern. Besides poverty, backward consciousness, gender discrimination, child marriage etc. are also creating hindrances. The NSS report shows that as against the national trend, the number of unemployed decreased in the state by 6.5 lakhs during the period 1999-2000 to 2003-04. Wages for agricultural labourers and unorganized industrial workers have increased to some extent. While the government has taken some important steps to provide social security to these workers, weaknesses still remain in its planned implementation.

According to the Planning Commission, the percentage of people living below the poverty line has declined in the state from 27.02% (2004-05) to 20.5%. However, the poverty estimates of the Central government are flawed and there cannot be any room for complacency with regard to the spread and intensity of poverty in the state. The importance of considering the fight against poverty as a political struggle in order to achieve human development is not being appreciated at every level. Our negligence or weaknesses in this regard will only help the reactionary conspiracy of alienating the poorer sections in urban and rural areas from us. In today's circumstances and given the nature of the political attacks we are facing, this task has assumed immense importance.

1.13 The CPI (M) has all along demanded the strengthening of the PDS and supplying 14 essential commodities at uniform prices across the country. The PDS has been gradually weakened following the adoption of policies of economic liberalization by the Central government. The allotment of foodgrains in the PDS has declined and the prices have been increased. The faulty parameters adopted to estimate poverty have only intensified the division within the rural poor. Although we have opposed this, the state government has to continue to abide by the directives laid down by the Central government in this regard. In the recent period, some political forces have tried take advantage of the genuine grievances of the people regarding the weaknesses in the PDS to channelise it into undemocratic and violent directions. The reasons behind the unrest over the PDS were: curtailment of allocation of rice and wheat for the APL category, rise in wheat prices in the open market and the consequent shortage in the PDS which arose when those who usually do not opt for the PDS went to purchase wheat in the ration shops. Several incidents of violence against the ration dealers and looting occurred in different parts of the state. The weaknesses in the PDS in the state have also been revealed through such incidents. Rather than ignoring the matter, effective steps have to be taken to identify and remove the weaknesses in the PDS, to the extent possible in the present situation. Political initiative has to be undertaken to activate the PDS monitoring committees in the rural areas. The PDS has to be run as transparently as possible.

1.14 The demand for electricity has increased immensely in the rural areas in recent times. The government had set a target of providing electricity in every *mouza* by 2007 and to every household by 2011. However, the extent to which this target would be fulfilled remains doubtful. According to current data, electricity is at present available to 87% of the *mouzas*. But people want electricity to reach every household, which has not been met so far. We can recall that in the first phase of the Rajiv Gandhi Electrification Project (a Central government project), out of 37910 *mouzas* in the state, 6656 *mouzas* were not electrified. If we consider electrification of 10% of the household as a benchmark, then till now 1200 *mouzas*, i.e. 3.14% are not electrified. It is expected that this work would be completed within the next 2-3 months. For the second phase, the fund allocation by the Central government is meager

compared to the requirement. The Central government's promise and announcement in this regard has not been met in terms of actual fund allocation. The state government had submitted a proposal of 80,000 projects in order to carry forward intensive electrification in 33,000 *mouzas* to the Central government a year ago. But the Central government has not sanctioned it yet. If the state government has to undertake this project out of its own limited resources, it is better to undertake a limited number of projects in order to electrify entire *mouzas*. The Central government would not provide any funds for these in future. In this situation, the government is considering the implementation of some projects on a priority basis in the most backward regions, as identified by the Zilla Parishads. It should be kept in mind that implementing 10 such projects requires a sum of about Rs. 1 crore. The present Central government has not kept its promise of reviewing the harmful Electricity Act enacted during the NDA rule. Neither have they taken any effective step towards rural electrification. People have to be made aware of the true picture since anti-Left forces are trying to raise this issue against us by twisting the real facts. The state government also needs to be more careful in this regard.

1.15 Administrative weaknesses impede the implementation of pro-people policies of the state government. A section at all levels of the administration displays a serious lack of accountability. The last election manifesto of the Left Front promised to undertake administrative reforms in order to impart greater transparency and efficiency in administrative functioning in keeping with the changing times. The first cabinet meeting of the seventh Left Front government decided to constitute a committee on administrative reforms headed by the Chief Secretary. There has not been any noteworthy progress in this regard. Problems related to the appointment of appropriate staff/officers in important posts remain. The administrative infrastructure at the panchayat level has not kept pace with the increased responsibility on the panchayats. As a result, in many cases project implementation is impeded, not due to lack of funds but administrative weakness. Administration is especially weak in the relatively backward regions of the state and as a result government intervention is not yielding desired results. On the basis of our basic understanding of the *state*, it can be said that it is very difficult to fully implement the pro-people policies and priorities of the state government and translate the political will of the party through such an administration. It is for this reason that we have laid emphasis on raising mass consciousness and undertaking mass initiatives while running the government over the last thirty years. Both inside the Party and as well as within the administration, there is serious lack of consciousness against bureaucratization. A status quoist mindset is creating serious hindrances in the initiatives for administrative reforms. Lack of inter-departmental coordination is another serious problem, which affects the functioning of the government. If these issues remain unresolved, it would be difficult to implement the programmes, which are meant to benefit the working people.

1.16 An important task before us today is to bring about a multi-faceted development and establish proper coordination within the cooperative movement in the state. In the context of globalization, the cooperative institutions are trying their best to utilize the capital mobilized from our state in the development process within the state. Institutional credit needs to be provided in the rural areas. The public sector banks are increasingly becoming averse to lend in the rural areas. The cooperative institutions are providing credit for agriculture and crop diversification. However, that has not fully relieved the peasantry from the clutches of moneylenders. West Bengal has achieved significant success in terms of Kisan Credit Cards. However, consistent efforts need to continue in order to make the peasants aware and interested in this. Cooperative institutions are also supervising lakhs of SHGs. Coordinated efforts need to be undertaken so that the goods produced by these SHGs can be marketed through cooperative organizations. Credit needs to be expanded for small enterprises, handicrafts and traditional rural industries because they have huge employment potential. Many of the Central government's policies are going against the development of cooperative organizations. Problem arises when the social responsibilities of cooperative banks are lost sight of and they are treated on par with other commercial banks. We have to initiate struggle against this anti-people policy from our state. From the state to the village level, cooperatives have to be run democratically involving all sections of the people.

#### PANCHAYAT AND OUR PARTY

2.1 It is now very clear that the forthcoming Panchayat Elections in West Bengal will witness the sharpest class conflict in the history of Left Front government. Apart from the beginning of 1970, this kind of large-scale preparation for targeting and then violently attacking CPI (M) has been unprecedented. After analyzing the background, the context and active dialectics of the present struggle along with identifying our successes and failures, the direction for immediate tasks has been given in the Party State Committee letter 6/2007. After exchanging the experiences in implementing these tasks, there is a need to discuss about the framework of the next tasks in the state conference.

2.2 In four meetings of State Panchayat Sub-Committee and seven meetings of the Extended Sub-Committee, in addition to discussion on contemporary problems, the role of the Party in providing political and organizational leadership in conducting the operations of three-tier Panchayat system had also been discussed thoroughly in the light of Panchayat Directive Guidelines. The success and failure of different District Committees are varied in fulfilling this role. Initiatives taken by different Ministries related to Panchayats also varied. It also applies for people's initiative through mass and people's organizations. The main challenge today is to find different ways to eradicate this variation and inequality in performances through exchange of experiences.



2.3 In five years of the Sixth Panchayat, work and financial allocation both have increased, along with an increase in spending and speed in target implementation. Per head revenue collection in the three-tier Panchayats has increased from Rs. 7.13 in 2002-03 to Rs. 17.36 in 2006-07. Many new posts have been created in the entire Panchayat structure from district to village level to increase the productivity of the system, but not enough initiative has been taken to fill them up. Notable progress has been made in using advanced information technology and satellite communication in order to develop more speed, skill, transparency and honesty in the system through modernization of the operating system. In spite of all these, this conference admits that infrastructure in Panchayats has not developed at par with the growing need of work in Panchayats at different levels. Widespread differences in taking political and organizational initiative within districts has also to be noted. For example, a few important issues are mentioned below.

2.4 Funds allocated to Panchayats have increased from Rs. 831 crore in 2002-03 to Rs. 2023 crore in 2006-07, out of which, the increase in expenses for salary payment has gone up from Rs. 147 crore to Rs. 210 crore. This shows that there has been significant increase in both allocation and expenditure on developmental work, but the spending pattern in different districts out of the total allocated funds in 2006-07 will show the disparities. In percentage terms, Hooghly has spent the most (83.8%) and Murshidabad the least (59.9%). The districts that are spending lower than the average percentage spending of the state (70.5%) are Maldah (62%), Bardhaman (64%), North 24 Parganas (67%), Bankura and Jalpaiguri (68%), and Birbhum (61%). It is not possible to attribute any single reason to explain this district-wise variation. This is also significant that except Siliguri Mahokuma Parishad, North and South Dinajpur and East Medinipur no other district could spend 70% of the unconditional fund provided under the recommendations of Central and State Finance Commissions.

2.5 In the period under discussion, the income of the panchayats have crossed Rs. 100 crore. In the last State Conference Report under section "Panchayat and Our Party" it was mentioned, "The required importance of focusing on increasing self generated income of Panchayats is not coming out in discussions everywhere." In spite of an increase in total income, same criticism is still valid for per head revenue collection. In 2006-07 the highest per head revenue collection was Rs. 32.42 in Bardhaman and the lowest Rs. 4.65 was in Purulia. The districts where per head revenue collection is above the overall state average includes relatively developed districts like Hooghly and Howrah, and relatively underdeveloped districts like West Medinipur, Jalpaiguri and Bankura.

2.6 The points mentioned in the 21<sup>st</sup> State Conference for implementation of projects related to important class concepts of land, employment, wages etc. are still applicable in the present context. The ten thousand acre target for annual distribution of vested land is yet to be achieved. The number of labour-days created has increased from 4.16 crore in 2002-03 to 7.47 crore in

2006-07. However, this could not have been possible without the introduction of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme under which 100 days work has to be guaranteed. In 2006-07 financial year, the number of registered families (51.4 lakh) and among these families the number of families requisitioned to work (32.35 lakh) were the highest among all the states in the country. Around 30.83 Lakh families have been provided with work, but in terms of labour-days created per family on an average (14 days) the performance of the state is not up to the mark. Here also the variation among the districts is notable – highest in Bankura (24 days) and lowest in Murshidabad (8 days). In the last financial year, in terms of expenditure per Gram Panchayat on this scheme, Birbhum was the highest (Rs. 54 Lakh) and the lowest was South 24 Parganas (Rs. 7 Lakh). Siyanmuluk Gram Panchayat in Birbhum has completed 33 water conservation projects during this year, spending Rs. 184 Lakh and creating 57 labour-days per family in the process. Around 47% of the people in this Panchayat are SCs and STs. The experience and achievement of this Panchayat had been publicized and CDs on it have been distributed to all districts.

2.7 It was said in the report of the 21<sup>st</sup> State Conference that “The struggles for health and education are class struggles just like the struggles for land and wages.” Even before Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched, the state Government, on its own, allocated funds to Panchayats to open Shishu Shiksha Kendras in villages. Later, the fund was allocated from the budget of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, though, not on a regular basis. Unfortunately due to non-allotment of fund for this purpose in the central budget now the State Government has to once again spend on this count. In 2002-03, there were 4.43 Lakh students in Standard I and only 34,000 students in Standard IV in a total of 14,699 such Shishu Shiksha Kendras. The number of such education centres has increased to 16,054 in 2006-07 and the number of students in Standard I and IV have increased to 6.36 Lakh and 2.19 Lakh respectively. Among the students, 50.1% are girls, 29.8% are SCs and 12% are STs. There was no Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra in the state in 2002-03, but the number of such centres in 2006-07 was 1752 and the average number of students per centre has increased from 76 in 2003-04 to 162 in 2006-07. Unless the uncertainty around the future of such centres is cleared the success achieved by these centres will be very difficult to maintain. To make education universal up to Standard VIII, the Panchayats have to play a very decisive role. Same argument is applicable for the Literacy Mission. This Conference reaches the same conclusion from the experience of integrating the Panchayats in the Sarva Swasthya Abhiyan. The number of rural families with toilets has increased from 22.94 lakh to 61.12 lakh during the period 2002-03 to 2006-07. Now 65% of rural families have toilets. Last year 464 Gram Panchayats and 16 Panchayat Samitis were awarded the “Nirmal Village” prize. East Medinipur and Howrah districts applied for eligibility to be “Nirmal Districts.” Districts like Bardhaman, Nadia and West Medinipur are also near achieving this target. Except for five districts, this operation has

been conducted everywhere in the state. West Bengal is at the top of all States in this regard. Other than Sarvik Swasthyabidhan Programmes, the overall role of the Panchayats in implementing all healthcare projects has increased significantly. Though equal initiatives could not be created in implementing new responsibilities, there is no doubt that the Panchayats will play a pivotal role in this in the near future. All the districts have to proceed forward, while keeping in mind the difficulty and complexity of the task.

2.8 In forming self-help group through panchayats, West Bengal stood second in the country. In November 2007, total number of self-help groups was 2,10,622 (58,708 in 2002-03) and their total savings stood at Rs. 165.6 crore (Rs. 13.47 crore in 2002-03); and till November 2007, the groups availed total cash credit of Rs. 285 crore (Rs. 28 crore in 2002-03). Taking into account all kinds of self-help groups the number has crossed 6 Lakhs. With the increase in their number, their problems are also increasing manifold. If they are not organized within Gram Sangsad based sub-organizations, Gram Panchayat based organizations, and Panchayat based bigger organizations then their problems cannot be solved in the long run. In this regard, Murshidabad, Maldah, South 24 Parganas, Purulia, Bankura and North 24 Parganas districts (in this order) are lagging behind. There is also lack of equal initiatives in this matter across the region on Women's Front.

2.9 In projects related to roads and electrification, in spite of increased speed, certain problems are persisting. In the financial year 2002-03, 582 km concrete roads were built with an expenditure of Rs. 149.5 crore. In 2006-07, 1501 km of new roads were added with an expenditure of Rs. 476 crore. In current year, the Central Government has fixed a expenditure target of Rs. 700 crore. Though, operating with much less developed infrastructure than the PWD, comparatively more roads have been built. But in the framework of these projects there is no provision for land acquisition. There is a need to check the tendency of unnecessarily inflating the list of habitats without proper road connections throughout the year. Failing to do so will result in building more roads than actually required and will also affect the maintenance of existing damaged roads. Since this kind of projects are 100% funded by Central Government and Central Government directives have to be followed, the districts have to take special initiative to correct and modify the planning of core network. In rural electrification, state initiative, Central grant and working skill of implementing organizations are more decisive factors than initiatives at panchayat or district level. As a result, the problems of overshooting deadlines are coming in rural electrification, though the areas of operations are only in a few districts. Many times, the difference between rural electrification and electricity connection for each household (for which the deadline is 2011) is not well understood leading to confusion and discontent among the people. The complexities of these issues need to be explained in detail at the district level.

2.10 The biggest challenge in front of us is to finalize the so-called BPL list. Since, finalization of this list is directly related to important issues like

finalization of lists for ration card, Anna Yojna, Indira Awas Yojna, Old Age Allowances, there is a need to have an interim working list, at least for the time being. Along with campaigning and carrying on movements to change and alter current Central policies and directives, if the lists for the above mentioned schemes are not prepared, then poor people, SCs and STs, minorities and women from the villages will always be at the receiving end. However, there has been substantial progress in preparing the lists. Among 3354 Gram Panchayats in the state, except 918, all other Gram Panchayats finalized the list of Indira Awas Yojna on the basis of new family based economic survey. By the month of November, all villages of Bardhaman, Jalpaiguri and North Dinajpur have submitted this list and Central allocations have also been received. On the other hand, no reports have been submitted from East Medinipur, Howrah and Darjeeling Hill Council. From the rest of the districts, varied responses have arrived in this matter. Until now, pro-forma reports for Old Age allowances recipients has been received from Bardhaman, South Dinajpur, Howrah, Hooghly, Maldah, Nadia and North 24 Parganas. Currently 4.46 Lakh people are getting Rs. 400 per month under this scheme. Approximately, almost the same amount of people have to be enlisted, otherwise many poor people will be deprived.

2.11 To implement all the above-mentioned tasks, involving people, the role of Gram Sangsad (Village Council) and Gram Unnoyon Samiti (Village Development Committee) is of utmost importance. Last State Conference announced that “Now our aim is not only to take decisions, but to develop Gram Unnoyon Samiti as an effective delivering agency for implementation of such decisions at grass root level.” According to latest available data, among 45,154 Gram Sangsads, 40,965 Sangsads Samitis have been formed and from among them 12,056 Gram Unnoyon Samitis opened their own savings bank accounts where unconditional funds from the government can be transferred. Here, it should be specifically noted that in spite of special focus on formation of Village Councils, Village Development Committees and self-help groups in identified underdeveloped 4,612 villages, equal initiative have not been taken in this direction everywhere. Though, these villages were given priority in last year’s work plan, they received only Rs. 11.97 crore from the unconditional fund. The target for current financial year must be four times of that amount.

2.12 To implement these tasks successfully there is an urgent need to create an able operating system, which will be capable of providing political and organizational leadership. In the 21<sup>st</sup> State Conference report, it was stated, “Individual responsibility distribution on the basis of collective decision and following the policy of collective check-up are needed to increase the speed and skill in implementation of various works.” To follow up this policy, routinely holding review meetings or programmes is not enough. We know from the experience of a particular district that after showing the target achievement of different Panchayats and then showing variations across them on a big screen in a meeting of panchayat officials and local party leadership

using Power Point presentation form in Bengali and then distributing those data in printed booklets, the speed in implementation has increased. After two such meetings within six months, all related individuals could understand their weaknesses, which was not possible, in their own words – “through routine meetings in the past.” If everybody is not updated, then following the policy of collective decision and making collective check-ups on the basis of exact comparative information is not possible. Modernization of operation and supervision and utilizing information technology can play a big supportive role for any such political and organizational initiative. District Party leadership should discuss the reports of the just concluded review meetings at the administrative level with district panchayat officials and organize these kind of Party meetings using modern technology, as soon as possible.

2.13 The topics and issues quoted in State Committee letter no. 6 in year 2007 need not be repeated here. At this moment, the most important duty is to implement the immediate tasks mentioned in that letter on a priority basis in the run-up to the forthcoming Panchayat Elections. We also have to keep in mind the adverse changes that occurred after the publication of the letter. Unless, we can decisively attract the rural working and democratic population on the basis of the balance of class forces, it will be difficult to face the current situation. Our enemies will desperately try to weaken our social and class base, and this attempt will become sharper and sharper as elections approach. The new State Committee has the urgent task of finalizing a detailed electoral plan analyzing the latest political trends. But the tasks mentioned in letter no. 6 cannot wait till the time of finalization. Implementing unfinished works of Panchayats, specifically giving priority to the projects which will benefit the majority comprising the poor, tribals, dalits, minorities and women, repairing even slightly probable fissures between organizations and following masses wherever it is required, ensuring that all meetings at Gram Sangsad, village and local level are converted into mass participative meetings, neutralizing and solving all legitimate grievances voiced in such meetings, explaining patiently our constraints and weaknesses, building mass resistance against any probable political attack on us, resolving all local conflicts with local Left Front partners, and lastly finding new allies and friends – these are the most important tasks at this moment. This can be made possible only by organizing the entire party on the basis of unity of thought, desire and work. Even a slight slackness in this regard can prove very harmful to the Party.

## MUNICIPALITY AND PARTY

3.1 Presently, West Bengal has six corporations and 126 municipalities along with 250 urban areas outside municipalities. West Bengal is among those States whose rate of urbanization is higher than the national rate. Land reform, increase in agricultural production and strong panchayat system are responsible for the fast growth in the non-agricultural sector. As a result, many villages are turning into small towns and the areas surrounding cities

are being urbanized. In many cases, this is happening in an unplanned way. Because of the growth of the service sector or trading sector and industrialization, the pace of urbanization is increasing. Again, the urban population density is higher in this state in comparison to many other States in the country. Land scarcity is increasing and consequently urban land price is also escalating. Urban poor are forced to live in congested slums, which are not suitable for habitation. In cities, economic activities are increasing very rapidly resulting in an increase in the number of unorganized sector workers who have very limited social security. Within the city population, the number of middle, upper-middle and upper-income class people is increasing very fast. Simultaneously, the number of poor people living in the cities is also increasing. It is true that urban infrastructure and utility services have improved in the cities. The state's allocation of funds for cities and towns has increased to a great extent. The resource mobilization by the municipalities has also increased. The Left Front government in the state has given significant emphasis on improving the standard of living, particularly various aspects of human development of the urban poor and the lower-middle class. Along with improvement in urban infrastructure and utility services, importance has been given to improvement of education, health, income growth, clean drinking water, better residence for slum dwellers and provision of toilets. Along with these, many other developmental works have been undertaken to improve overall situation in drinking-water supply, drainage and sewage, communication system, etc.

3.2 In some situations the state government has taken help from private investment or formed Private-Public joint venture. A transparent policy has been undertaken. There are nine developmental authorities in the state. Apart from these, HIDCO has been constituted. This organization has built the Rajarhat Satellite Township. There are many townships being developed with initiatives from the state, private or Public-Private partnership. For many basic urban infrastructural projects, permission has been given under JNNURM scheme. The Central government has given permission to construct 89,000 houses for the urban poor. The negative aspect of these projects is that more than half of the costs have to be borne by the state government or urban local bodies. Another weakness of this scheme is that the development of small and medium-sized towns get lesser importance. Despite these weaknesses, the state government is trying to use this project properly. For the eleventh five-year plan period, the Municipality and Urban Development department has prepared a document on the direction of development. In the development of some areas, targets have also been fixed. Target has been fixed to make municipalities more dynamic, environment friendly and for improvement in the quality of life of the urban poor.

Emphasis has been given to participation of residents in the functioning of the municipalities. There is a need to improve and regularize the activities of ward committees. Efforts are being made to increase participation of the urban poor and women in development planning. It has been made

mandatory to take the opinion of common citizens in the preparation of ward based and town based draft development plans, which are under process.

3.3 The CPI (M) has made suggestions to give importance to some aspects of running the municipalities. First is ensuring more democratization, transparency, honesty and efficiency in running the municipalities. Second is improvement in the life of the urban poor. Third is more emphasis on development of slums. Fourth is construction and strengthening of ward committees. To ensure that the fruits of development reach all sections of the society and opinions of socio-economically weaker sections of the people and women are taken into consideration for the development planning and implementation, emphasis has been given to constitute ward committees in all urban local government bodies of West Bengal. It has also become mandatory to have at least two general body meetings in a year for each ward committee and submission of development planning and financial accounts in these meetings. The total number of wards in the state is 2819. Ward committees have been constituted in a majority of the wards. In many of the urban local government bodies, either ward committees have not been constituted or are not active regularly. Our party runs some of these urban local government bodies. In some wards of Kolkata Corporation, ward committees have been constituted. Even where committees have been formed, they function irregularly. The activities of many ward committees are limited to formalities. The Party directed that the ward committees should not consist of Party members and sympathizers alone but people with opposing views should also be included. However, this has not been followed in many wards. In many municipalities and corporations, ward committees are run like local party units or like party run mass organizations.

3.4 It had been decided to constitute Municipal subcommittees in each district. In many districts these teams are functioning. These subcommittees are actively helping or advising municipal administration in many districts. In some cases over-activism of these subcommittees obstructs the democratic functioning of the municipalities and corporations. The Party should be equally careful about both these sides. Community Development Societies have been constituted in each municipality and corporation. They have been constituted with the urban poor, specially the women of poor urban families. Around 23,000 self-help groups have been constituted. Its membership is around 2.5 lakhs. Local party and mass organization play an important role in providing the required co-operation and help in functioning these groups. In many areas this activity of the Party and mass organization is absent. Again in many areas there has been a tendency to use these groups only for Party work.

3.5 Development authorities are giving special emphasis to planned urbanization. An attempt is being made to prevent misuse of land in cities and its suburbs. Land utilization map and future land use map are being prepared. Initiatives are being undertaken to formulate a rehabilitation policy for those displaced due to various development projects in the urban areas. The urban

development strategy will be reformulated. Long-term development plans keeping the future in mind are being prepared. Along with this, preparations for slum development plan and minority development sub-plan are underway. Already around 23,000 self-help groups have been constituted. In the eleventh five-year plan the target is to include at least seventy-five per cent of the women belonging to poor urban families in these self help groups. Each municipality is being told to allocate at least twenty five percent of their budget for the urban poor. Each municipality has been included in the public health project. Specific targets have been fixed for universal education, vaccination, and childbirth in hospitals. The state government wants to build a Municipal system that is accountable, responsible to the people and participatory in nature. For this we need to strengthen the functioning of ward committees.

3.6 In West Bengal, out of 126 elected municipalities, 80 are run by the Left Front and 46 by the opposition. Where we are in opposition, the responsibilities are not less. Serious allegations of corruption, illegal recruitment, deficiency in public utility services exists in these municipalities. We need to organize residents and agitate against these. We need to play the role of a proper opposition party and expose the failures of these municipalities. Despite non-discriminatory allocation of funds by the state government, public utility services are neglected in these municipalities. The ward committees or other democratic processes are practically absent. Public opinion has to be built up for this.

#### FUTURE TASKS

1. Speed up administrative reforms to increase accountability, transparency, speed and efficiency in administration.
2. Keeping class orientation intact at the panchayat level, we need to complete the rural developmental work speedily through the creation of public initiatives and activation of rural developmental societies. Priority has to be given to make the hundred days work under NREG Act successful.
3. We need to modernize seed-farms, use soil-testing laboratories at district and block-levels and information-technology based consultancy-centres to increase agricultural production and speed up the process of crop diversification to develop agriculture. Initiatives need to be taken to integrate self-help groups in the development of poultry and live-stock sector.
4. To expand and modernize the agro-market, preservation and marketing facilities of agro-products needs to be built up.
5. To speed up administrative initiatives for proper implementation of social security schemes for agricultural labourers and unorganized sector workers.
6. On the question of land acquisition for industrialization, the local people/communities need to be involved. Specific plans for compensation, training, economic rehabilitation needs to be placed before the people. Sustained efforts have to be made at the local level to build consensus among all parties on these issues.



7. Universal education and health programmes need to be further strengthened. There is a need to lay emphasis on quality of education and technical education. People belonging to SCs, STs, Minorities and women have to be consciously integrated into these programmes. Effective steps need to be taken to reduce the number of school drop-outs.

8. Self-help groups need to be strengthened. The scope for institutional credit has to be extended and marketing of the products of these groups need to be given importance.

9. In the activities of Municipalities, Corporations and developmental authorities, the interests of the urban poor, workers and slum-dwellers should be given importance. Importance has to be given to drinking-water supply, development of drainage and sewerage system, environment, expansion of self-help groups, mother and child care schemes. For carrying out these tasks, ward committees, have to be made democratically representative and activated.

10. We need to build a strong social movement for the spread of education among women, against dowry system, gender discrimination, child marriage, superstition and unscientific and backward thinking. A socio-political initiative alongwith government's initiative is needed to achieve the objective of human development.