

Improving Delivery by Strengthening Organisation and Augmenting Own Source Revenue

A Case Study of Howrah Zilla Parishad, West Bengal



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Cover photo: Zilla Parishad functionaries interacting with the community

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District Profile

Howrah is a relatively small district in West Bengal, located near the city of Kolkata. The total area of the district is 1467 square kilometres. Administratively the district is divided into 2 Sub-divisions, 14 CD Blocks, 2 Municipalities, 1 Municipal Corporation and 157 Gram Panchayats.



Map of West Bengal showing district Howrah in red stripes

The population of the district as per Census 2011 is 4841638, which is roughly equal to the population of Singapore. The population density is 3300 persons per square kilometre. Its population growth rate over 2001-2011 was 13.31%. Sex ratio is 935 females per 1000 males. Child Sex Ratio is 956 girls for 1000 boys. Literacy rate as per Census 2011 is 83.85 % of which Male literacy rate is 87.69% and Female literacy 79.73%. In 2001 the literacy rate of the district was 77.01% with Male literacy being 83.22% and Female literacy 70.11%. Infant mortality rate is 39 per 1000, MMR is 260 per 100,000 pregnant mothers and institutional delivery is 80%.

An important feature of Howrah district is that it is highly urbanized. As many as 30.64 lakh Persons who constitute 63% of the total population of the district live in urban areas. Nearly 52% of them live within the boundaries of Howrah Municipal Corporation and two other

municipalities. The rest constituting about 48% of urban population live within the areas covered by the Panchayat system. This factor has a bearing upon the kind of activities undertaken by the Zilla Parishad. Firstly the non-municipal urban areas and some villages which are still not declared as urban area are included within the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) under the West Bengal Town and Country Planning Act, as a result of which the HZP has to pass the building plans of the non-municipal KMA area of Howrah district. This is a special task of HZP. Secondly, because of the district's significant urban character, the ZP undertakes certain types of development schemes, such as market complex, Bus station etc which are not generally undertaken by the predominantly rural ZPs.

Profile of the Zilla Parishad

Howrah Zilla Parishad consists of 36 directly elected members, 14 Panchayat Samiti Sabhapatris (President of the Intermediate Panchayats at the Block Level), 11 MLAs and 2 MPs. Therefore in all there are 63 members in the Zilla Parishad. Sabhadhipati is Smt. Mina Mukherjee Ghosh and Sahakari Sabhadhipati is Smt. Nasima Mondal. There are 10 Standing Committees or Sthayee Samities. The District Council consists of 11 members of which Shri Ajay Bhattacharya, leader of the opposition, is the Adhyakshya. At the time when the award was given Left Front was in power with 25 seats, Trinamool Congress was the main opposition party with 10 seats and Congress had 1 seat. Their 5-year term expired in June 2013. In the Panchayat elections held in July 2013, Trinamool Congress captured the Zilla Parishad with overwhelming majority.

Efficient Functioning

Howrah Zila Parishad employees and representatives take pride in their efficient functioning. The Secretary, Manabendra Das, pointed out that Howrah ZP performs every activity that a Zilla Parishad is supposed to do under the West Bengal Panchayat Act. He pointed out that all the Committees are functional and hold their meetings on time and as per prescribed norms.

Similarly, all the schemes that a Zilla Parishad is supposed to implement are implemented. The Self Evaluation format for the Zilla Parishad, an annual assessment tool developed by the Government of West Bengal for the Panchayats, also provides sufficient evidence that the Zilla Parishad performs its functions in an efficient manner.¹ The Report shows the following key points about efficient functioning of the Zilla Parishad:

- Howrah Zilla Parishad maintains proper record of all the roads in the Zilla Parishad area in the Road Register. Almost all the roads are all-weather roads and as of 2011-12, 10-15% roads were in need of maintenance. The roads are also devoid of illegal encroachments.
- All households have a source of drinking water within 100 metres of the household. Water is available almost throughout the year.
- The Zilla Parishad maintains records of its own assets and maintains those assets.
- In 92.32% of the schools of various categories there are separate toilets for boys and girls.
- Building construction plans coming to the ZP for approval are sanctioned within 30 days.
- General Body of the Zilla Parishad meets regularly. In 2011-12 they held 7 meetings. All these meetings had quorum. Average attendance of these meetings was 57.14%. Attendance of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes members was 50%. Attendance of women members was 68.42%. Minutes of the meeting are regularly kept.
- The Sthayee Samitis (Standing Committees) of the Zilla Parishad meet regularly and during 2011-12 in all 128 meetings were held. This means that all the Sthayee Samitis of the ZP met at least once every month and some Samitis met even more than once in

¹ The Self-Evaluation Report is an annual report that every GP, PS and ZP has to prepare in prescribed formats. The data provided in the reports have been cross-checked by the Department as well by a third-party in the case of award winning PRIs and hence can be considered a reliable source of data.

some months. All these show that in this Zilla Parishad all the units created for taking collective decisions are working properly.

- Zilla Sansad² meetings are held regularly. In 2011-12 average attendance was 39.16%.
- All Standing Committees have submitted their budget within the prescribed date of 30th September.
- Howrah ZP holds a meeting every month to review progress related to scheme implementation by Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats. Based on the meetings reports are regularly sent to the state.
- Accounts are fully computerized and Cash-book is regularly updated.
- All queries placed by the Examiner of Local Accounts (ELA) have been duly replied and necessary actions have been taken. The ELA report has been shared among members of the Zilla Parishad.

While we were interviewing the Zilla Parishad staff and members, we were provided every bit of information that we had asked for. The staff not only had the necessary data but also could furnish them from different sources within minutes. This also indicates that as an institution the Zilla Parishad is an efficient body.

Resource Mobilization

Along with efficient functioning, Howrah Zilla Parishad has emphasized on self-reliance through Resource Mobilization. In the Self Evaluation Report, which is a score based report, HZP has

² Zilla Sansad is a statutory forum of Pradhans of all GPs of the district, Sabhapati, Saha Sabhapati and Standing Committee chairpersons of all Panchayat Samitis of the district, and all members of Zilla Parishad, including MLAs and MPs of the district. The Sansad meets twice a year to discuss various development issues and functioning of the PRIs of the district. There are at present 359 members in Howrah Zilla Sansad.

received 10 out of 10. The data show the following key features of their resource mobilization efforts:

- In comparison to 2010-11 there was a 46.83% increase in collection of rates and fees.
- All possible channels of increasing collecting rates and fees are utilized.
- Per capita resource mobilization during 2011-12 was Rs. 30.67, which is among the highest in the state.



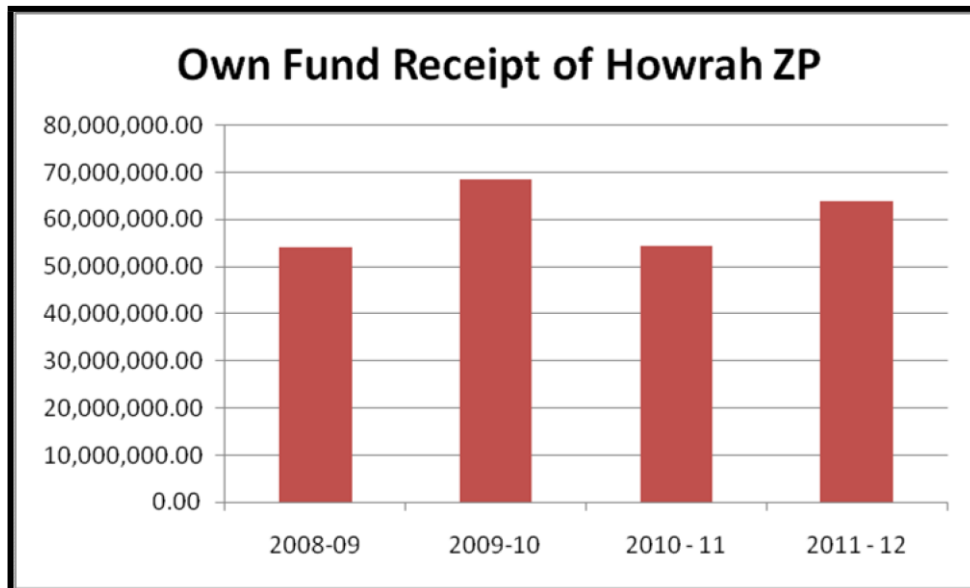
Discussion in Zilla Parishad office

Table 1: Howrah Zilla Parishad: Own Fund 2008 - 2012

Own Fund	2008-09	2009-10	2010 - 11	2011 - 12
Opening Balance	24,645,445.24	39,593,865.74	30,468,860.99	34,442,848.24
Receipt	54,185,152.50	68,459,557.25	54,328,385.25	63,838,351.00
Payment	39,236,732.00	77,584,562.00	41,011,638.00	75,670,596.00
Balance	39,593,865.74	30,468,860.99	43,785,608.24	22,610,603.24

Source: Receipts-Payments Group wise Cash Analysis Report, Howrah ZP

Figure 1: Resource Mobilization of Howrah Zilla Parishad



Transparency

The Zila Parishad has taken following steps to ensure transparency.

- The annual report and the annual statement of accounts of the Parishad are placed at the meeting of the Zilla Sansad. Copies of the same are sent to the district library to make them

accessible to the public. Besides, whoever wants to study them is free to do so, if they put up a request to the ZP office.

- In every place of ZP work, notice board is set up to convey essential information about the project, such as description of the project, estimated cost, expected date of completion etc.
- Necessary official arrangements are in place to supply information asked for by a petitioner making petition under RTI Act.

Innovations

One of the key features of Howrah Zilla Parishad is that it not only raises resources, but also finds innovative ways of spending resources. We investigated one such innovation in detail. In a place called Domjur, which is a semi-urban congested area, Howrah Zilla Parishad has created a bus-stand cum market complex. The land for the project was bought at Rs 3 Crores from Own Fund. A proposal was sent under RIDF XIII for Rs. 1.62 Crores for the first phase of the project. The first phase consisted of a Bus Stand, a market complex, an auditorium and a multi-facility hall. For the second phase Rs 1.23 Crores was sanctioned from Own Fund. Under the second phase was sanctioned a Taxi Stand, an Auto Stand, a Trekker Stand and shops for rehabilitating 45 Hawkers who originally had shops in the land which was bought. For the third phase of the project, Rs 18 lakhs was sanctioned from Own Fund for toilet blocks and parking space.

What makes the project innovative is that it is at the same time meant for the welfare of the people of the area as well a source of income for the Zilla Parishad. The bus stand was a long felt need of the people of the locality and the shops that have been created would also help generate income for small businessmen. The second floor of the building complex is being leased to the Life Insurance Corporation of India. This will again help generate local business. We asked the Chairman of Standing Committee for Public Works, Shri Ananada Chatterjee, whether there was a business plan of the project or not. He explained that there certainly was a business plan and the total investment of Rs 6.5 Crore would be recovered within two years.

After this there will be yearly resource mobilization of Rs 1 Crore. This income can again be used for further investment in other projects.



A bus stand cum shopping centre built with ZP's own resources

Howrah Zilla Parishad has already taken up several other such remunerative projects. The Chairman of the Public Works Standing Committee pointed out proudly that three more such projects were coming up at Bagnan, Udaynarayanpur and Tulsiberia. The project in Tulsiberia is a big one with 93 shops plus halls for SHGs, space for Banks and a multi-purpose hall. He explained that the HZP is emphasizing on resource mobilization and judicious investment of such resources as this is what the 73rd amendment envisaged, that the Panchayati Raj Institutions will one day manage to raise their own funds and do innovative works with such

funds. Since Zilla Parishads' own sources for resource mobilization are very limited³, HZP is taking the route of creating remunerative public assets that, apart from delivering services to the citizens, generate resource for it.

Some innovative welfare projects

Not all projects of course can generate surplus. There are some welfare needs that cannot be met from any schematic funds but are extremely important. For example, for a long time there was a problem of Local Police Stations not having any space to keep dead bodies which come to them when there is a disputed death (murder, suicide, etc). As a result, the bodies had to be left to rot in front of the Thana. Howrah Zilla Parishad used its Own Fund to build rooms where such dead bodies can be kept in a more dignified way. This is a humanitarian project that seeks to give respect to those unfortunate people who had to die anonymously and under abnormal circumstances. Rs 2 Crores were spent for this purpose.

Similarly, HZP uses its own resources to buy hearing-aid, tri-cycles and wheel chairs for the disabled. These wheel-chairs can be used for mobility in the streets also. The day we visited Howrah ZP we saw several needy persons receiving these wheel-chairs.

Howrah ZP also funds 10 beds in a local Tuberculosis hospital. Every month Rs 25,000 is spent for each bed. Own funds have been used for digging wells in High Schools and Sishu Sikhsya Kendras (low cost schools run by the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development).

Another interesting innovation done by HZP is to build Eco-Tourism Centre at Garchumuk at the confluence of Hooghly and Damodar River. It has a mini-zoo and several guest houses. The Zilla Parishad is also developing other tourist spots. This is also a good source of income for the ZP.

³ ZPs do not have taxation power. They can however levy certain fees, tolls etc. and realize rents from its property.



A disabled person receives a wheel chair

Sanitation

Howrah District has achieved 98.86% coverage in sanitation at the household level. Apart from households, ICDS centres and various levels of schools have been covered under the sanitation programme. 156 Gram Panchayats out of 157 Gram Panchayats of the district have received the Nirmal Gram Purashkar. We visited Balijogacha Panchayat Samiti to see the work done under the Total Sanitation Campaign. There are 46,000 households in the Panchayat Samiti. Apart from households there are 64 primary schools, 13 Sishu Siksha Kendras 18 High Schools, 2 Upper Primary schools, 2 Madrasas and 225 ICDS centres. There is a high demand for toilets in the block as there is very little open space available for defecation.

Since 2000, when the Total Sanitation Campaign started in the block, 8490 households who did not have own toilets have been covered and currently all households have their own toilets. Apart from the households, all educational institutions and ICDS centres now have separate toilets for boys and girls. Discussion at the district level as well as at the Block level revealed that an intensive campaign was launched in the district to educate the people regarding the need for building toilets. The campaign was helped by the existing demand for toilets but there were many misconceptions regarding the type of toilet to be used, whether it would smell or not, how to keep the toilets clean etc. The motivators were able to successfully convince the people regarding these issues and all 8490 households of the Block now have toilets.



A tube-well built to provide clean drinking water under Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan

We visited some of the households who are using the toilets. While usage of toilets has become a common practice, keeping the toilets clean is still a problem, as there is need for greater awareness regarding the cleaning of the toilet pans. The in-charge of the Sanitary Mart in the block, Anil Kumar Giri, told us that the poor but technically APL families who do not get any subsidy find it difficult to build the superstructure and therefore sometimes find it difficult to build and maintain the toilets.



A toilet built under the Total Sanitation Campaign with wall-writing promoting behaviour change

Decentralised Planning

One of the important achievements of the Howrah Zilla Parishad is the fact that they have successfully installed a decentralized planning process. The process has been helped by the appointment of a Decentralised Planning Facilitation Coordinator. The Planning Coordinator, Smt. Anindita Mukherjee, explained to us the process by which the annual plan is arrived at. The timeline and the steps are as follows:

By end of November all Standing Committees submit their respective sectoral draft budgets. There are 9 Standing Committees, each in charge of a sector such as health or education, apart from the Finance Standing Committee. All these sectors make their initial draft budgets and submit the same for consideration of the Finance standing committee.

- During December and January the Standing Committees submit their final plans.
- Simultaneously these draft plans are scrutinized and corrections are made where applicable.
- During January-February next year the Standing Committee's plan are finalized by the respective Standing Committees. They are also shared with the Development and Planning Department of Government of West Bengal for their suggestions.
- During February copies of the plans are sent to the Members of the Zilla Parishad for their suggestions.
- Towards the end of February the Zilla Parishad plan is finalized in a General Meeting.
- The Zilla Parishad plan is then sent to the Development and Planning Department and the District Planning Committee.
- During March the Zilla Parishad Plan is integrated with the District Plan. Following this the District Plan is sent to the state.

The sector wise Annual Plan of the Howrah Zilla Parishad for the year 2011-12 may be summarized as follows:

Table 2: Sector wise Annual Plan of Howrah ZP 2011-12

Name of the Sector	Amount (in Rs. Lakhs)
Transportation	2309.10
Agriculture and Allied	490.00
Social Service Sector	5610.00
Industry	350.00
Energy	200.00
General Economic Service	1300.00
Science, Technology and Environment	70.00
Special Area Programme	250.00
Irrigation and Flood Control	1315.50
Rural Development	6832.50
TOTAL	18727.10

Source: Howrah Zilla Parishad

If we analyze the content of the plan, then the major activities taken up are as follows:

- **Public works and transportation Standing Committee:** improvement of roads, construction and improvement of bridges, construction of guard wall between roads, construction of drainage system, construction of Market complex.
- **Agriculture, Irrigation and Cooperative Standing Committee:** Construction of Sluice Gate, Construction of Bridges, repair works, agriculture fair.
- **Fisheries Standing Committee:** improvement of road in fish farmer area, arrangement of drinking water in Fish Farmer Area, construction of fish market, construction of

buildings for poor APL fishing families, distribution of nets to poor fishermen, improvement of mobile fish vending scheme, distribution of newly born fish and lime, re-excavation of water logged areas, installation of Fish Markets in different markets.

- **Education, Culture, Information and Sports Standing Committee:** repairing, maintenance and development of school buildings repair of libraries, improvement of school play ground, financial assistance for sports and cultural programmes in schools.
- **Public Health and Environment Standing Committee:** drinking water supply, construction of water testing laboratories, construction and maintenance of tube wells, community sanitary complex, solid and liquid waste management.
- **Women and Child Development Standing Committee:** construction of ICDS centres, purchase of materials for ICDS centres.
- **Relief and Rehabilitation Standing Committee:** Purchase of hearing aid for Handicapped.
- **Small and Cottage Industries, Unconventional Energy and Power Standing Committee:** Training programmes on mobile repairing, tailoring, food processing, computer repairing, and installation of solar street light.
- **Forest and Land Reform Standing Committee:** tourism development schemes in various sites.
- Apart from these, a budget has been earmarked for 'Backward Villages' of the District. In 2004 the state government identified 4612 villages in the state as vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition and they were designated as Backward Villages. A portion of the state budget is earmarked for the improvement of these villages. This grant to the districts can be used by the district for meeting demands of the Backward Villages in the district. Total sanctioned amount for Howrah is Rs 250 Crores.

Inter-sectoral allocations in the development plan of the ZP

An analysis of outlays of the plan against specific services indicates certain interesting features. Total investment envisaged in the plan of the Zilla Parishad for the year 2011-12 was to the tune of Rupees 18727.10 lakhs. Out of this, allocations made for construction/improvement/maintenance of roads and bridges amount to Rupees 8077.98 lakhs or 43.14% of the total outlays. For water supply and sanitation, a sum of Rupees 4345 lakhs was allocated. This sum represents 23.2% of the total plan size. Thus as much as 66% of the total plan allocations go to these two services, namely roads/ bridges and water supply/sanitation. Out of the rest, 3% of the total allocations go for maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure of the ICDS centres and 4% for schools including informal schools known as Sishu Siksha Kendra (SSK) or Madhyamik Siksha Kendra (MSK). About 8% is allocated for irrigation and flood control and 7% for improving tourist spots. Clearly the most acute felt needs of the district are roads and water supply/sanitation.

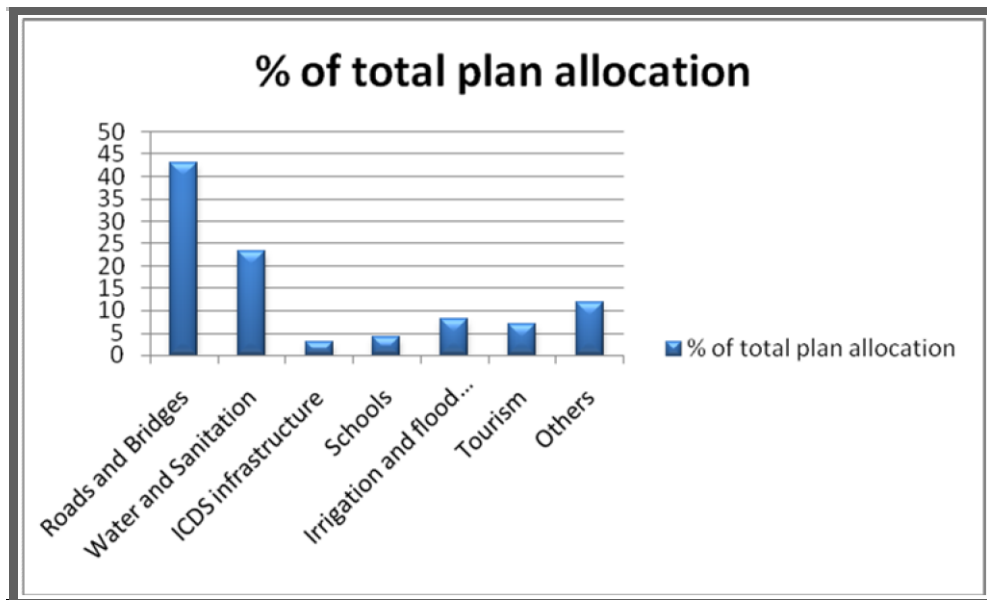


Figure 2: Break-up of Plan allocation

Challenges

The most important challenges that Howrah Zilla Parishad are facing are related to improving the quality of the plans. While a system of sectoral plan formulation by different Standing Committees has been installed, there is much scope to improve the quality of such plans. The demands of the grass roots can be better reflected in the planning process. Because of mismatch between demand and plans, supplementary plans have to be drawn up after the approval of the annual plan. Also it seems that there is need for expert planners to complement the efforts of elected representatives who are in charge of the various Standing Committees. The District Planning Facilitation Coordinator is only responsible for coordination and compilation and therefore cannot intervene for improving the quality of the planning process. Apart from the lack of proper technical input in the preparation of plan, there are other problems. District planning is unlikely to create much impact if it is not backed up by Block level and village level planning. Real problems of the grassroots can be assessed better if a simultaneous planning process is carried out at the lower levels. Introducing a multi-level (GP, PS and ZP) planning process within the district appears to be another challenge of district planning to which adequate attention has to be given in future.

Functional District Council

Howrah Zilla Parishad is a good example of cooperation between the ruling party and the opposition party in the matter of development of the district. During the period under our review, the Zilla Parishad was being ruled by Left Front, which had 25 seats. The Trinamool Congress with 10 seats was the main opposition party. In spite of having fierce rivalry at the state level between the two parties, much cooperation between them in respect of planning and implementation of development projects was visible at the Howrah Zilla Parishad. A direct evidence of this is that the District Council⁴ of the district is a functional entity. The leader of

⁴ District Council is an innovative body created under the West Bengal Panchayat Act. Its main purpose is to monitor as to whether the Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats of the district are following financial discipline.

the opposition is the head of the District Council and in many districts of West Bengal political rivalry results in a dysfunctional District Council. Howrah Zilla Parishad is an exception. District Council regularly visits Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats for monitoring as to whether these bodies are observing the norms of financial propriety. The Council meets at least once a month. We have seen two monitoring reports which are signed by the leader of the opposition, Shri Ajay Bhattacharya, who is the Adhyaksha (Chairman) of the District Council and a member of Trinamool Congress. The Zilla Parishad involves the District Council president in its major activities.

Functional Zilla Sansad

As mentioned, Zilla Sansad is a forum of the representatives of all the Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Zilla Parishad and all MLAs and MPs of the district⁵. In Howrah Zilla Sansad, there are 359 members. They include Pradhans of the district's 157 GPs, President, vice president and heads of standing committees of all the Panchayat Samitis of the district and all the members of the ZP. Besides all MLAs and MPs within the district are members. The Sansad has to meet twice a year.

Zilla Sansad is, like District Council, another innovative institution of the West Bengal Panchayat system. It fills the gap of a deliberative body that could establish linkage between all the PRIs as well as MLAs/MPs and the Zilla Parishad. Such a body provides a broad-based representative forum. It can critically assess the functioning of the Zilla Parishad and at the same draw attention of the Parishad and other institutions to the urgent problems of people. It can also

For this purpose, it examines the audit reports of PRIs. It also visits the PRIs to make assessment of their functioning. Its role is somewhat analogous to that of Public Accounts Committee of the legislature. That is why its chairperson is the leader of the opposition in the Zilla Parishad. Other members are elected from Zilla Parishad. Besides, some state government officials also serve on the council.

⁵ See footnote 2

provide valuable inputs on the formulation of policy of the ZP. It goes to the credit of the Howrah ZP that it tried to make this unique institution functional.

We studied one meeting of the Sansad held on 28 February 2011. Even though minimum requirement of quorum (10%) is 36, in the February 2011 meeting 136 members (39%) out of a total of 360 members were present. The printed proceedings of the meeting indicate that there was active participation in discussion among those members who attended. 8 Pradhans of different Gram Panchayats of the district raised many grassroots issues, such as, problems of execution of MGNREGS in urban areas, drinking water supply problem in certain villages, delay in giving sanction to schemes etc. Many parts of the district are flood-prone areas. Hence the needs for taking up MGNREG schemes for re-excavation of canals to improve the drainage system were voiced forcefully by at least 4 Pradhans. Similarly representatives from 10 Panchayat Samitis discussed about their problems. Others who participated in the discussion were ZP members, some MLAs, chairperson of the District Council, Sabhadhipati and other officials of ZP and the District Magistrate. Needless to say, this kind of forum provides opportunity for exchange of views in a wide scale. It also enhances the transparency of the functioning of Zilla Parishad.

Some unique features of Howrah Zilla Parishad

From the foregoing description of the functioning of HZP, certain distinctive features emerge that deserve to be highlighted.

Firstly, all the democratic decision making bodies created for the functioning of Zilla Parishads under the West Bengal Panchayat Act, namely the Standing Committees, general body of the Zilla Parishad, Zilla Sansad, district council etc, are active and functional. Regular meetings of these bodies are held and each of them contributes in the decision making of Zilla Parishad. In 2011-12, the 10 Standing Committees held between themselves as many as 127 meetings. Each

of these committees held discussions on various development subjects. The development schemes they suggested for inclusion in the ZP plan evolved out of such discussions. As noted earlier, the standing committees play an important part in preparing development plan of ZP.

Secondly, in the politically surcharged state where the ruling party and the opposition parties engage in fierce rivalry with each other, Howrah Zilla parishad is a rare example of democratic functioning where both the ruling party (which happens to be the opposition at the state level) and the opposition party (which is the ruling party at the state level) could work together at the grassroots level for planning and implementing development programmes. We were told by the Karmadhyaksha of a Standing Committee that in the meetings heated discussion takes place between ruling party and opposition party matters. But development decisions do not get stalled because of such debates. The opposition party of the previous term, namely Trinamul Congress, has become ruling party with overwhelming majority in 2013 election. The ruling party of the previous term, namely the Left Front, has become opposition with much reduced strength. It is for the future to tell whether the same kind of relationship between the ruling party and the opposition would continue.

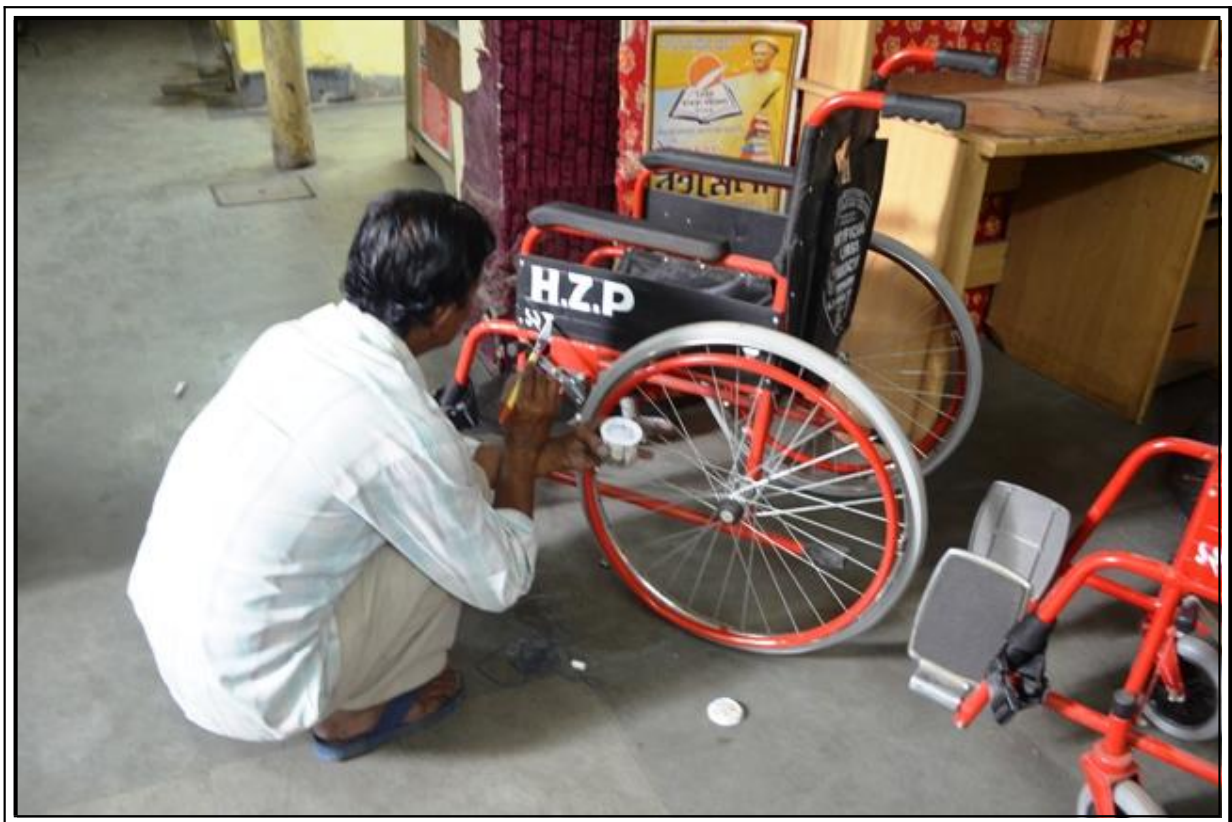
Third, Howrah is one of those rare ZPs where the Committee system works and makes positive contribution in the decision-making process. As has been noted in this study, the entire planning of Zilla Parishad is based on the plans prepared by the respective standing committees. They are not only time wasting debating clubs. They utilize their meetings productively and contributes both in planning and execution of planned projects.

Fourthly, the management system of the Zilla Parishad office appears to be smart and efficient where sloth in day-to-day functioning is not allowed. Accounts are computerized and updated, reports are prepared timely, meetings are planned, so that work does not suffer unnecessarily and a system of coordination between the Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samitis has been developed. It seems that a different kind of work culture has developed here.

Fifthly, the Zilla Parishad has not reduced itself to being only implementing agency of the state government. It has a mind of its own and that is reflected in many of the innovative

development projects undertaken by them to meet urgent felt needs of people of the district. Howrah is more urban than rural. What is more, nearly 50% of the urban population of the district lives under the Panchayat system. Accordingly the Howrah Zilla Parishad had to take up a lot of development works, such as market complex, bus station, rehabilitation of pavement hawkers etc, which are urban in character.

Sixth, it is one of those rare Panchayati Raj bodies which consider generation of revenue from own sources as one of its major tasks. Since it does not have taxing powers, it has to augment revenue by realizing various kinds of fees, such as, fee for giving approval to building plan, license fee, fees from leasing ferry Ghat, etc. It also collects user charges from its remunerative projects. The ZP could take up various innovative projects, because it had sizeable fund created largely from own source revenue.



A wheel chair being prepared for distribution

Lastly, it is necessary to mention that the USP of Howrah ZP is that it does its routine functions religiously and by doing so, it has been able to create a strong organization. From this solid base, it becomes possible for them to conceive and then execute innovative development projects.

Replicability

Howrah Zilla Parishad's success is not based on any single charismatic individual and is therefore replicable. The Zilla Parishad has demonstrated what is possible if the elected representatives, civil servants and other staffs work together. The achievements of the Howrah Zilla Parishad is in building a Panchayati Raj Institution that works efficiently as an institution rather than relying on an extra-ordinary charismatic individual. They have focused on doing the work that a Zilla Parishad is supposed to do and has emphasized on efficient administration and generation of own resources which have been in turn used for welfare activities. None of these actions are based on any extraordinary individual's charisma. Hence the achievements of the Zilla Parishad are replicable if there is political and administrative will.

Persons Interviewed:

1. Manabendranath Das, Secretary, Zilla Parishad
2. Ananda Chatterjee, Karmadhyaksha (Purta) , Howrah Zilla Parishad
3. Chaitali Chakrabarti, AEO, Howrah Zilla Parishad
4. Anindita Mukherjee, Decentralisation Planning Facilitation Coordinator
5. Anil Kumar Giri, Secretary, Akshaynagar Palli Sangha, (Sanitary Mart)
6. Members of the local community at Balijogacha Panchayat Samiti
7. Officials at Domjur Bus Stand cum shopping complex
8. Officials at Howrah Zilla Parishad