

Poverty Alleviation through Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme and Public Distribution System: A Study from Howrah District of West Bengal

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Abstract: In West Bengal the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme was introduced in February, 2021 aiming with empowerment of unemployed women in the age group of 25-60 years and also to alleviate poverty. The present study examines how far the scheme has achieved the objective of poverty alleviation by conducting a field survey from Howrah District of West Bengal. It also examines the contribution of Public Distribution System in alleviating poverty. The study finds that both Lakshmir Bhandar scheme and Public Distribution System help in alleviating poverty. It is estimated that the scheme, alone, reduces poverty by 5.39% and PDS, alone, reduces poverty by 2.14%. Therefore, both Lakshmir Bhandar scheme and Public Distribution System are very much successful in alleviating poverty.

Keywords: Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme, Public Distribution System, Poverty Line, Poverty Alleviation, Regional Variation.

JEL Code: I3, O1, I320, I380, I310

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Government of West Bengal in February, 2021 introduced a flagship program “Lakshmir Bhandar (LB)” scheme to provide financial assistance to unemployed women residents of West Bengal (<https://wbxpress.com/files/2022/01/3399-WCD.pdf>). Under this scheme, the government of West Bengal provides¹ ₹ 1,200/- every month to women belongs to SC/ST households and ₹ 1,000/- per month to other beneficiaries for the empowerment of unemployed women in the age group of 25-60 years and who are enrolled in ‘Swasthya Sathi’ scheme (enrolment in the Swasthya Sathi scheme was initially tied with the scheme but waived latter on)(https://socialsecurity.wb.gov.in/lokkiBhandar/storage/app/public_doc/Guidelines%20of%20Lakshmir%20Bhandar%2031.03.2023.pdf). Though the scheme was introduced in February 2021 but its disbursement started from September (<https://socialsecurity.wb.gov.in>), 2021. Lakshmir Bhandar (LB) scheme is a multi-purpose scheme, it helps to overcome financial constraints faced by the women, improves their overall quality of life, reduce poverty, improves gender equality (Das, P., 2023, Chatterjee, S. 2023, Rakshit, U. 2023). This scheme provides a holistic support system that addresses multiple dimensions of women’s empowerment and upliftment in West Bengal. The scheme aims to make women financially independent by providing them with a one-time grant on monthly basis to buy essential

¹ Initially, financial assistance was Rs. 1000.00 per month for ST/SC and Rs. 500.00 per month for others however since April, 2024 it was Rs. 1200.00 per month for SC/ST and Rs. 1000.00 per month for others.

goods and services. This grant helps to alleviate poverty (those are lying close to poverty line) or make an upliftment of the people below poverty line (those are sufficiently below poverty line) at one hand and enhance financial autonomy of the unemployed women by providing a pocket money to them on the other hand.

The LB scheme was introduced aiming with two main objectives- “women empowerment” and “poverty eradication”. Through this scheme the West Bengal government directly transfer some purchasing power to the bank account of beneficiaries which increases personal disposable income of the beneficiaries. Increase in disposable income of the family of the beneficiaries uplift some of the families from BPL to APL and reduces depth of poverty of other BPL families (those who are not uplifted to APL). The APL families also strengthen their economic base through this scheme. There is a lesser chance of misutilization of benefit as it directly credited in the account of the female members of the family. So, entire amount has been utilized for affording basic necessities for the BPL families and helps to eradicate poverty.

In India.

Poverty eradication can be done in two ways. The first is by enhancing entitlement set of the citizens either through enhancement of their endowment set or by reducing the chance of production failure or by reducing the chance of exchange failure. The second way is by enhancing entitlement through transfer. In this case the government of West Bengal is trying to eradicate poverty using the second way. Poverty eradication through the first way is relatively difficult and it takes relatively more time and more financial resources. On the other hand, poverty eradication through the second way is relatively easy and takes lesser time and financial resources but poverty eradication through this way is a temporary solution because when these types of schemes end up the poverty level almost comes to the same position as it was in earlier. Income from this source can be considered as a vulnerable source of income. If government changes this source of income may be dried up. So, to get easy popularity within a short period of time the government of West Bengal follows the second way of poverty eradication. It has another advantage for the ruling government because government knows that through this way permanent and real development of their entitlement set is never possible so, the citizens (at least those are economically weaker) will bound to re-elect the same ruling party in the government just to get such temporary entitlement transfer to survive themselves.

Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), were officially launched in June, 1997. Since then, the total families were divided into two categories- Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. This categorization was done mainly to provide foodgrains to the BPL families at a subsidized rate. APL families also receive the foodgrains but at a higher rate compared to the BPL families. In India, the State/UT governments are responsible for issuing APL, BPL, and Antyodaya (introduced in 2000) ration cards under the Public Distribution System (PDS). These cards were mainly issued to identify households based on their economic status and eligibility for subsidized food grains given by the PDS of government of India. The issuance process involved identification of eligible families which was done by the state/ UT government, typically based on poverty criteria. The state/ UT government send the list of identified families to the PDS of government of India and they issued the appropriate ration card to the individual families. As these ration cards was issued on the basis of poverty criteria, the poverty status of the individual family be identified according to the type of ration card issued to the family.

The Ministry of Rural Development, government of India, in partnership with state governments and UT administrations, conducted the BPL (Below Poverty Line) Census in 2002 which scored households on 13 different parameters covering assets, occupation, land ownership etc. and identified BPL households as those falling below a certain cut-off. In 2004–05, it was found that in total only 34% of households possessed a BPL or Antyodaya Anna Yojan (AAY) card. The BPL census in 2002 made a significant error in inclusion and exclusion. Another comprehensive BPL census was the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, which collected data on various socio-economic aspects of households. The SECC 2011, was intended to replace the earlier BPL censuses, it still serves as a key tool for identifying beneficiaries of government schemes. The National Food Security Act (NAFSA), 2013, was signed into law on September 12, 2013, and was retroactive to July 5, 2013. The primary goal of this Act was to ensure food and nutritional security for people by guaranteeing access to adequate quantities of quality food at affordable prices, providing a subsidy by the Government of India. Thus, NAFSA 2013, was the last updated records of BPL, Antyodaya and APL ration card in India. This record has been continuing till date. According to NAFSA-2013, BPL and Antyodaya (extreme poor) card holders were being treated as poor peoples or officially poor and APLs were being treated as non-poor peoples or officially non-poor. Presently in India, under the NFSA and TPDS, there are five different types of ration cards- these are PHH, AAY, APL, BPL and AY.

According to Sengupta and Ghose (2010) poverty is a static concept whereas poverty-vulnerability or simply vulnerability is dynamic concept. The economic status of a family is changing over time. Thus, a family is once identified as either APL or BPL will not continue as APL or BPL for ever. A family is identified as APL today may be BPL tomorrow through an external shocks like drought, flood, climate change, some accidents, recession, food inflation, civil war, etc. Similarly, a family is identified as BPL today may be APL tomorrow if the potential of the family would be flourish. Though vulnerability is a good proxy of economic status of a family than poverty but vulnerability is difficult to measure because of insufficient data. However, disproportionate distribution of subsidy and benefits of the social welfare schemes to the common people on the basis of APL, BPL and Antyodaya ration cards once identified by any survey should not be continued for a long time because of upward and downward movement of families from the poverty line over time. The PDS also not eradicate poverty permanently through a permanent development of their entitlement set rather it helps to survive themselves (poor peoples) by providing them minimum necessary quantity of food items or lingering the poverty of the poor. The present study tries to address the role of the LB scheme and PDS in poverty alleviation of the beneficiaries using a field survey data from Howrah District of West Bengal.

The paper is divided as follows. A brief introduction is given in this section, data and methodology is given in section-II, data analysis and results are given in section-III and finally we conclude in section-IV.

II. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Howrah district has two Sub-Divisions viz, Howrah Sadar and Uluberia. Howrah Sadar Sub-Division has only one urban area which is Howrah Municipal Corporation and rural part has five blocks these are Bally Jagacha, Domjur, Panchla, Sankrail and Jagatballavpur. Uluberia sub-division has only one urban area which is Uluberia Municipality and rural part has nine blocks these are Amta-I, Amta-II, Bagnan-I, Bagnan-II, Shyampur-I, Shyampur-II, Uluberia-I, Uluberia-II and Udaynarayanpur.

Table-1: Information regarding Sampling Design

Village/ Ward (%)	Block (%)	Subdivision(%)	District(%)
Akubhag (10) and Patinan (17)	Bagnan-1 (27)	Uluberia (312)	Howrah (1106)
Joyrampur (45), Pirpur (2), Rampur (2), Nona (1), Bahira (1) and Borgachia (1)	Uluberia-1 (52)		
Kalinagar (2), Fuleswar (182), Kushberia (17), Seijberia (26), Jagatpur (1), Gatripur (1), Gourpur (1), Khalisani (1) and Tantiberia (2)	Uluberia-II (233)		
Ward No.-2 (5), Ward No.-3 (184), Ward No.-4 (38), Ward No.-6 (14), Ward No.-7 (19), Ward No.-8 (8), Ward No.-9 (426), Ward No.-10 (4), Ward No.-15 (1), Ward No.-22 (1), Ward No.-25 (1), Ward No.-30 (1), Ward No.-32 (2), Ward No.-35 (14), Ward No.-36 (28), Ward No.-37 (5), Ward No.-38 (5), Ward No.-47 (12), Ward No.-48 (14) and Ward No.-49 (8)	Howrah Municipal Corporation (790)	Howrah Sadar (794)	
Beldubi (4)	Panchla (4)		

* Sample units are shown in parenthesis.

Table-1 shows the sampling design for the primary survey. We have collected primary data on 1106 women from Howrah district. Out of these 1106, 312 are from Uluberia sub-division and 794 are from Howrah Sadar sub-division. We have selected three blocks namely, Bagnan-I, Uluberia-I and Uluberia-II from Uluberia sub division. We have collected data on 27 women from Bagnan-I block from the two villages namely, Akubhag and Patinan. From Uluberia-I block we have collected data on 52 women from six villages namely, Joyrampur, Pirpur, Rampur, Nona, Bahira and Borgachia. Similarly, from Uluberia-II blocks we have collected data on 233 women from nine villages namely, Kalinagar, Fuleswar, Kushberia, Seijberia, Jagatpur, Gatripur, Gourpur, Khalisani and Tantiberia. On the other hand, we have collected data on 790 women from twenty wards namely, Ward No-2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 22, 25, 30, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 47, 48 and 49 from Howrah Municipal Corporation. Lastly, we have collected data on 4 women from Beldubi village of Panchla block of Howrah Sadar sub-division. We have purposively selected all these sample units.

Table-2. Distribution of Sampled Women by Regions and Status of Benefit Received

Status of Sampled Women	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Total (%)
Total Sampled Women Received LB Benefit	310 (31.71)	674 (68.29)	984 (100)
Total Sampled Women who did not Apply for the LB Benefit	0 (0.00)	48 (100.00)	48 (100)
Total Sampled Women who applied but not Approved for the LB Benefit	4 (5.41)	70 (94.59)	74 (100)
Total Sampled Women	314 (28.57)	792 (61.43)	1106 (100)

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

Table-2 shows the distribution of sampled women by regions and status of benefit received. In this primary survey we have collected data on 1106 women. Out of these 984 (88.97%) women are receiving LB benefit and rest 122 women do not receive the LB benefit. Out of these 122 women who do not receive the LB benefit, 48 women did not apply for the scheme and rest 74 women who applied for the benefit but the government did not approve their application in any reason. On the other hand, out of 1106 surveyed women, 314 women are surveyed from rural areas and 792 women from urban areas. Out of 314 rural women surveyed from rural areas, 310 women receive LB benefit and out of 792 urban women surveyed, 675 women receive LB benefit.

Table-3: Region wise Distribution of LB Beneficiaries by the Poverty Status (Official)

Poverty Status (Official)	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Total (%)
APL	113 (36.86)	610 (90.48)	723 (73.47)
BPL	171 (54.81)	61 (9.08)	232 (23.58)
Antodaya	26 (8.33)	3 (0.44)	29 (2.95)
Total LB Beneficiaries	310 (100)	674 (100)	984 (100)

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

Table-3 shows the region wise distribution of LB beneficiaries by their official poverty status². From this table it is seen that within the rural areas only 36.86% beneficiaries are APL and rest 63.14% are BPL (a part of the BPL families who are extremely poor termed as Antyodaya). On the other hand, in the urban areas 90.48% beneficiaries come from APL families and only 9.52% beneficiaries come from BPL families. Combining rural and urban 73.47% beneficiaries come from APL families and 26.53% beneficiaries come from BPL families.

A family is actually poor if family's Per Capita Monthly Consumption Expenditure (PCMCE) is below Rs. 1860.00 because, the World Bank recently estimated poverty line as \$3.00 per day (2021 PPP) (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news>). At the 2025 PPP rate, this translates to roughly Rs. 62.00 per day or Rs. 1860.00 per month for India. Thus, a family can be treated as BPL if its per capita monthly consumption expenditure is less than Rs. 1860.

Estimation of Poverty

Symbolically, a family is BPL (in presence of PDS and LB scheme) if its PCPMCE \leq Rs. 1860.00, and APL if PCPMCE $>$ Rs. 1860.00, where PCPMCE is per capita per month consumption expenditure. This is because data of household's consumption expenditure includes financial benefit of LB scheme as well as food grains received through PDS.

Again, a family is BPL (in absence of PDS but in Presence of LB Scheme) if its PCPMCE - PCPMOCFGPDS \leq Rs. 1860.00, and APL if PCPMCE - PCPMOCFGPDS $>$ Rs. 1860.00, where PCPMOCFGPDS is per capita per month opportunity cost of food grains received through PDS.

Similarly, a family is BPL (in absence of LB scheme but in Presence of PDS) if its PCPMCE - PCPMCLB \leq Rs. 1860.00, and APL if PCPMCE - PCPMCLB $>$ Rs. 1860.00, where PCPMCLB is per capita per month contribution of LB scheme.

Lastly, a family is BPL (in absence of PDS and LB scheme) if its PCPMCE - PCPMCLB - PCPMOCFGPDS \leq Rs. 1860.00, and APL if PCPMCE - PCPMCLB - PCPMOCFGPDS $>$ Rs. 1860.00.

² Official poverty status means the type of ration card issued to the family by the PDS, government of West Bengal https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/PDS_page.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Here we have estimated the poverty percentage, and contribution of LB scheme and PDS on poverty alleviation which is shown in table-IV.

Table-4: Effect of LB Scheme and PDS on Poverty Status (Estimated)

Poverty Status	Percentage of Beneficiaries
Officially Poor (Antyodaya + BPL)	26.52
(Estimated) Actual Poor (PCMCE < Rs. 1860) in Presence of PDS and LB Scheme	7.11
(Estimated) Would have been Poor in Absence of PDS but in Presence of LB Scheme (PCMCE < Rs 1860)	9.25
(Estimated) Would have been Poor in Absence of LB Scheme but in Presence of PDS (PCMCE < Rs 1860)	12.5
(Estimated) Would have been Poor in Absence of both PDS and LB Scheme (PCMCE < Rs 1860)	39.63

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

Table-4 shows poverty status and effect of LB scheme and PDS on poverty status. From this table it is seen that 26.52% families are officially poor. Officially poor means those families which have either Antyodaya or BPL types of ration card that was issued by PDS, Government of India. We have estimated that 7.11% families are actually poor³ in presence of both LB scheme and PDS. A family is actually poor if family's Per Capita Monthly Consumption Expenditure (PCMCE) is below Rs. 1860.00 because, the World Bank recently estimated poverty line as \$3.00 per day (2021 PPP) (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news>). At the 2025 PPP rate, this translates to roughly Rs. 62.00 per day or Rs. 1860.00 per month for India. This table also shows that 12.50% families would have been poor if there is no LB scheme (in presence of PDS) using the same poverty line consumption figure. The difference between these two percentages is 5.39%. That implies if the government stops LB scheme, then the percentage of poor families would be 12.50 or in otherwards 7.11% families presently lives in below poverty line utilising their permanent as well as vulnerable source of income but if this (LB scheme) vulnerable source (it is vulnerable in the sense that the West Bengal Government may stop this at any time as it is a one kind of transfer payment) of income drops by any reason then additional 5.39% families will become poor. Thus, it can be said that LB scheme has a significant contribution in poverty alleviation and it alone uplifted 5.39% families from BPL to APL. It should be noted that Public Distribution System (PDS) in India has also a significant contribution⁴ in reducing poverty. We have estimated that 9.25% families would have been poor if there is no PDS (but in presence of LB Scheme) using the same poverty line consumption figure. Thus, PDS reduces poverty by $(9.25 - 7.11) = 2.14\%$. If government of India stops PDS then additional 2.14% families, who are presently APL will become BPL. If both LB scheme and PDS will be stopped then the poverty percentage would become 39.63. Thus, PDS and LB scheme jointly reduces poverty by $(39.63 - 7.11) = 32.52\%$ in Howrah District of West Bengal.

Now we will examine regional variation of official poverty percentage, estimated poverty percentage using new international poverty line consumption expenditure and contribution of LB scheme and PDS in poverty alleviation, shown in table V and Chart-I.

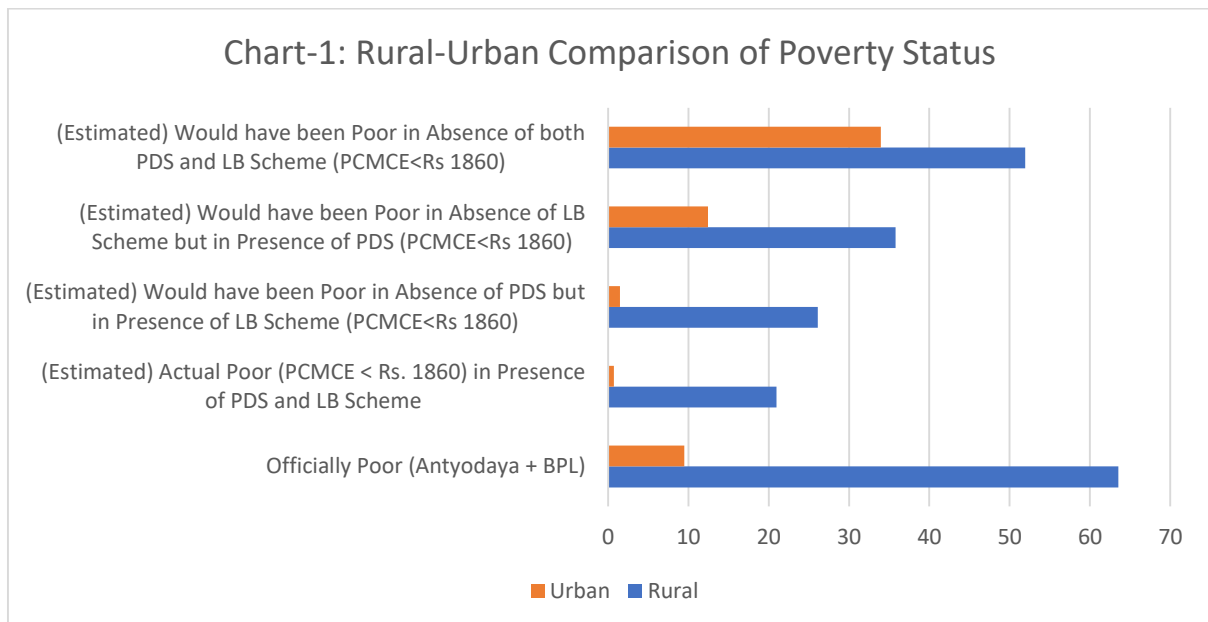
³ Using the World Bank's updated poverty line, about 5.75% of Indians live in extreme poverty as of 2025, a sharp decline from 27% in 2011–12.

⁴ Contribution of PDS in poverty alleviation is calculated by taking the opportunity cost of the foodgrains given to the individual through the PDS.

Table-5: Rural Urban Comparison of Effect of LB Scheme and PDS on Poverty Status (Estimated)

Poverty Status	Percentage of Beneficiaries	
	Rural	Urban
Officially Poor (Antyodaya + BPL)	63.55	9.50
(Estimated) Actual Poor (PCMCE < Rs. 1860) in Presence of PDS and LB Scheme	20.97	0.74
(Estimated) Would have been Poor in Absence of PDS but in Presence of LB Scheme (PCMCE<Rs 1860)	26.13	1.48
(Estimated) Would have been Poor in Absence of LB Scheme but in Presence of PDS (PCMCE<Rs 1860)	35.81	12.46
(Estimated) Would have been Poor in Absence of both PDS and LB Scheme (PCMCE<Rs 1860)	51.94	33.98

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.



*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

Table-5 and Chart-1 show rural-urban comparison of poverty status and effect of LB scheme and PDS on poverty status. From this table it is seen that 63.55% families are officially poor in rural areas whereas it is 9.50% in urban areas. Thus, we have found a huge rural-urban gap with respect to official poverty percentage. We have estimated that 20.97% rural families and 0.74% urban families are actually poor in presence of both LB scheme and PDS using the World Bank recently estimated poverty line as \$3.00 per day (2021 PPP) (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news>). Here also we have found a huge rural-urban gap. This table also shows that 26.13% rural families and 1.48% urban families would have been poor if there is no LB scheme (in presence of PDS). The difference between these two percentages indicates (26.13% - 20.97% = 5.16% for rural areas and 1.48% - 0.74% = 0.74% for urban areas) the sole contribution of LB scheme in poverty eradication. That implies if the government stops LB scheme, then the percentage of poor families would be 26.13 for rural areas and 1.48 for urban areas. Thus, it can be said that LB scheme has a significant contribution in poverty alleviation mainly in rural areas and it alone uplifted 5.16% families from BPL to APL but it has little impact (0.74%) in poverty alleviation in urban areas. Impact of the LB scheme is lower in urban areas compare to rural areas because in the urban areas number of poor families was lower compare to rural areas before introducing LB scheme. If there were no poor families the LB scheme will have nothing to do in poverty alleviation. It should be noted that Public Distribution System (PDS) in India has also a significant contribution in reducing poverty. We have estimated that 35.81% rural families and 12.46% urban families would have been poor if there is no PDS (but in presence of LB Scheme) using the same poverty line consumption figure. The PDS reduces poverty by (35.81% - 20.97% =) 14.84% in rural areas and (12.46% - 0.74% =) 11.72%. Thus, PDS solely

eradicate poverty by 14.84% in rural areas and 11.72% in urban areas. Here also we have found that impact of PDS in poverty eradication is higher in rural areas compare to urban areas. If both LB scheme and PDS will be stopped then the poverty percentage would become 51.94 in rural areas and 33.98 in urban areas. Thus, PDS and LB scheme jointly reduces poverty by $(51.94\% - 20.97\% =) 30.97\%$ in rural areas and $(33.98\% - 0.74\% =) 33.24\%$ in urban areas. Here it is found that the joint impact of LB scheme and PDS on poverty eradication is higher in urban areas compare to rural areas of Howrah District of West Bengal.

Now we are also examining the contribution of LB scheme in uplifting economic status in terms of absolute amount and in percentage terms (percentage of poverty line consumption expenditure). This is shown in table-6.

Table-6: Contribution of LB Scheme in Uplifting Economic Status

Contribution of LB Scheme in Uplifting Economic Status	Amount/Percentage
Average Per Capita Per Month Income Addition through LB Scheme	Rs. 350.68
Average Percentage of Upliftment through LB scheme with Respect to Poverty Line Consumption Expenditure	18.85
Average Opportunity Cost of Per Capita Per Month Foodgrains Received through PDS	Rs. 200.00
Average Percentage of Upliftment through PDS with Respect to Poverty Line Consumption Expenditure	10.75

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

From table- 6 it is seen that the LB scheme has enhanced per capita monthly income of the family members of the beneficiaries by Rs. 350.68, on an average. So, it is the absolute amount of contribution of the scheme, on an average, which helps to uplift some of the families from BPL to APL. If monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 1860.00 (=100%) is the poverty line consumption expenditure then 18.85% (Rs. 350.68 = 18.85%) is the percentage contribution of the LB scheme to meet poverty level consumption expenditure for a person. Thus, on an average LB scheme support 18.85% of basic minimum necessities of life. Similarly, it is also seen that the PDS has enhanced per capita monthly income of the family members of the beneficiaries by Rs. 200.00, on an average. So, it is the absolute amount of contribution of the PDS, on an average, which helps to uplift some of the families from BPL to APL. If monthly per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 1860.00 (=100%) is the poverty line consumption expenditure then 10.75% (Rs. 200 = 10.75%) is the percentage contribution of the PDS to meet poverty level consumption expenditure for a person. Thus, on an average PDS support 10.75% of basic minimum necessities of life.

All the Indian families are classified into three categories viz, Antyodaya, BPL and APL by the PDS, Government of India. Using the recent international poverty line consumption figure updated by World Bank, we have estimated that presently 7.11% families are living below poverty line in our study area. But our study area already had 26.52% officially poor people. That implies all the families which are officially poor are not actually poor in our estimate using World Bank's recent poverty line consumption figure. The table-VII shows estimated poverty percentage within the respective officially poor and non-poor categories.

Table-7: Estimated Actual Poverty from Different Categories of Officially Poor and Non-Poor

Officially Poor and Non-Poor Categories	Estimated Poverty (%) within the Category
Antyodaya	17.24
BPL	26.29
APL	0.55
Total	

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

Table-7 shows total estimated poverty from different categories of officially poor and non-poor. Targeted PDS (TPDS) system of India (with the recommendation of State and Union Territory government) divided Indian families into three different categories- these are Antyodaya (extreme poor), BPL and APL (latest update in this regard was done in 2013).

The type of Ration Card a person holds is his/her poverty status. Thus, we can say Ration Card bears the poverty status of a person or a family, officially, and it is called official poverty status. The poverty status of a family changes overtime, a family belongs to BPL today may be uplifted to APL tomorrow and the opposite is also true. The government of India as well as the State government provide subsidies and benefits of different types of social welfare schemes mainly aiming to alleviate poverty. However, if the present poverty status (actual) is different from the poverty status once determined in the long past by issuing a Ration Card, then all the effort of the government for provision of subsidies and benefits of different welfare schemes spoils down completely. Use of poverty status determined in the long past may increase inequality in income distribution by giving a punishment to a BPL family who was APL in the past. So, use of official poverty status should be recent past or official poverty status should be updated in each two or three years duration or less. Otherwise, official poverty status can not be used as criteria for receiving subsidy and benefits of the social welfare schemes.

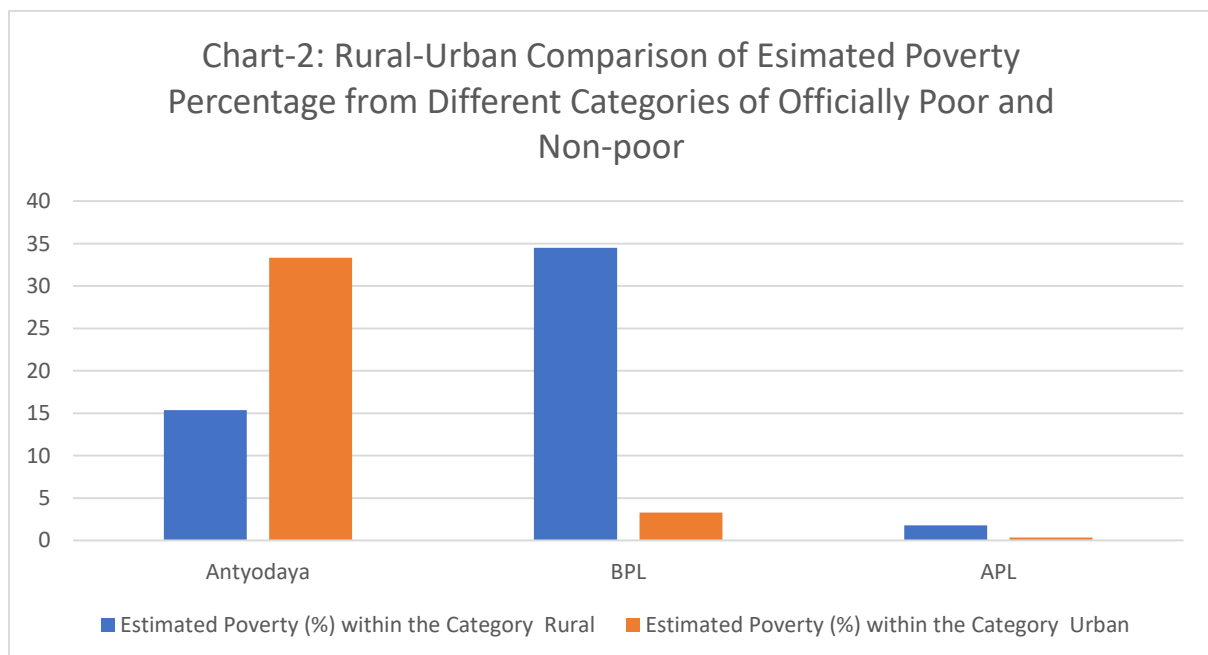
From this table it is seen that among the Antyodaya families, only 17.24% are living under the poverty line. Though, officially, a label of 'extreme poor' was pasted on all of them. Thus, 82.76% Antyodaya families are presently living above poverty line. Similarly, among the BPL families, 26.29% are living under the poverty line. Thus, 73.71% BPL families are presently living above poverty line. The table also shows that 0.55% of APL families are living below poverty line in spite of the fact that officially a label of "Above Poverty Line" was pasted on all of them. Thus, from above analysis we can say that majority of the BPLs are really living as BPL after availing all the subsidies and benefit of the governments. They are extremely deprived among the three categories. This result pin points that TPDS/PDS should revise poverty status (Official) as early as possible.

Now we are making a rural urban comparison of estimated poverty from different categories of officially poor and non-poor as well as contribution of each category of officially poor and non-poor in total estimated poverty percentage. This is shown in table-8.

Table-8: Rural- Urban Comparison of Estimated Poverty from Different Categories of Officially Poor and Non-Poor

Officially Poor and Non-Poor Categories	Estimated Poverty (%) within the Category	
	Rural	Urban
Antyodaya	15.38	33.33
BPL	34.50	3.28
APL	1.77	0.33
Total		

*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.



*Source: Authors' own collected data from field survey.

Table-8 and chart-2 help to make a rural urban comparison of estimated poverty percentage from each of the three officially poor and non-poor categories. We have found that estimated poverty percentage from among the Antyodaya families are 15.38 in rural areas and 33.33 in urban areas. The estimated poverty percentage from the BPL families are 34.50 in rural areas and 3.28 in urban areas. The estimated poverty percentage from the APL families are 1.77 in rural areas and 0.33 in urban areas. Thus, one interesting point is found here that some of the officially APL families are actually BPL and a majority of Antyodaya families and BPL families are actually APL in both rural and urban areas. If majority of Antyodaya families and BPL families are actually APL then that is the success of different types poverty eradication policies of the government. But 'some APL families are actually BPL' this conclusion is the flipside of the continuation of ration card which was issued in the long past. Real deprivation will be double to those APL families which are actually BPL, if distribution of benefits of social welfare schemes and poverty eradication policies of the government are disproportionate (generally it is) according to the types of ration card the family actually holds. Therefore, status of ration card should be updated in a regular interval otherwise welfare schemes and poverty eradication policies fail to achieve their objectives.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the aforesaid analysis it can be concluded that in our survey area 26.52% families are officially poor but we have estimated that 7.11% families are actually poor in presence of both LB scheme and PDS. It is also estimated that 12.50% families would have been poor if there is no LB scheme (in presence of PDS). Thus, LB scheme solely reduces poverty by $(12.50\% - 7.11\%) = 5.39\%$. Public Distribution System (PDS) in India has also a significant contribution in reducing poverty. We have estimated that 9.25% families would have been poor if there is no PDS (but in presence of LB Scheme). Thus, PDS reduces poverty by $(9.25\% - 7.11\%) = 2.14\%$. If both LB scheme and PDS will be stopped then the poverty percentage would become 39.63. Thus, PDS and LB scheme jointly reduces poverty by 32.52% in Howrah District of West Bengal.

A high degree of regional variation with respect to official poverty and estimated poverty is found in our study area. It is found that 63.55% families are officially poor in rural areas whereas it is 9.50% in urban areas. We have estimated that 20.97% rural families and 0.74% urban families are poor in presence of both LB scheme and PDS. Here also we have found a huge rural-urban gap. It is also found that 26.13% rural families and 1.48% urban families would have been poor if there is no LB scheme (in presence of PDS). Thus, the sole contribution of LB scheme in poverty eradication is 5.16% for rural areas and 0.74% for urban areas. It can be said that LB scheme has a significant contribution in poverty alleviation mainly in rural areas and it has alone uplifted 5.16% families from BPL to APL but it has little impact (0.74%) in poverty alleviation in urban areas. Impact of the LB scheme is lower in urban areas compare to rural areas because in the urban areas number of poor families was lower compare to rural areas before introducing LB scheme. If there were no poor families the LB scheme will have nothing to do in poverty alleviation. Public Distribution System (PDS) in India solely eradicate poverty by 14.84% in rural areas and 11.72% in urban areas. Here also we have found that impact of PDS in poverty eradication is higher in rural areas compare to urban areas due to same reasoning as earlier. Similarly, PDS and LB scheme jointly reduces poverty by 30.97% in rural areas and 33.24% in urban areas. Here it is found that the joint impact of LB scheme and PDS on poverty eradication is higher in urban areas compare to rural areas of Howrah District of West Bengal. This is due to the fact that in presence of both LB scheme and PDS there are larger number of marginally APL families in urban areas compare to rural areas.

Absolute amount of per capita per month contribution of the LB scheme is Rs. 350.68, on an average, which helps to uplift some of the families from BPL to APL. On an average LB scheme, alone, has 18.85% contribution to meet the basic necessities stipulated by poverty line consumption expenditure. Similarly, the PDS has enhanced per capita monthly income of the family members of the beneficiaries by Rs. 200.00, on an average which helps to uplift some of the families from BPL to APL. On an average PDS support 10.75% of basic minimum necessities of life.

There exists very small regional variation with respect to contribution of LB scheme in poverty alleviation both in absolute amount and in percentage terms.

The government of India as well as all the State governments provide subsidies and benefits of different types of social welfare schemes mainly aiming to alleviate poverty. However, if the present poverty status (actual) is different from the poverty status once determined in the long past by issuing a Ration Card, then all the effort of the government for provision of subsidies and benefits of different welfare schemes spoils down completely. Use of poverty status determined in the long past may increase inequality in income distribution by giving a punishment to a BPL (actually) family who was APL in the past (officially). So, use of official poverty status should be recent past or official poverty status should be updated in each five years duration or less. Otherwise, official poverty status can not be used as criteria for receiving subsidy and benefits of the social welfare schemes.

It is found that all the officially BPL are not BPL presently and all the officially APL are not APL presently. It is found that within the Antyodaya families, only 17.24% are living under the poverty line. Similarly, among the BPL families, 26.29% are living under the poverty line. It is also found that 0.55% of APL families are living below poverty line. This result pin points that TPDS/PDS should revise poverty status (Official) as early as possible otherwise disproportionate distribution of subsidies and benefits of the government schemes according to the types of ration card the family hold leads a misleading result.

There exists sufficient regional variation in estimated poverty from among the officially poor and non-poor categories. It is found that estimated poverty percentage from among the Antyodaya families are 15.38 in rural areas and 33.33 in urban areas. The estimated poverty percentage from the BPL families are 34.50 in rural areas and 3.28 in urban areas. The estimated poverty percentage from the APL families are 1.77 in rural areas and 0.33 in urban areas. Thus, one interesting point is found here that some of the officially APL families are actually BPL and a majority of Antyodaya families and BPL families are actually APL in both rural and urban areas. If majority of Antyodaya families and BPL families are actually APL then that is the success of different types poverty eradication policies of the government. But 'some APL families are actually BPL' this conclusion is the flipside of the continuation of ration card which was issued in the long past. Real deprivation will be double to those APL families which are actually BPL, if the government disproportionately distributes subsidies and benefits of social welfare schemes according to the types of ration card the family actually holds. Therefore, status of ration card should be updated in a regular interval otherwise welfare schemes and poverty eradication policies fail to achieve their objectives.

Policy Suggestions:

- We can suggest that PDS, Government of India should update the status of ration card according to present poverty status of the population. Otherwise, disproportionate distribution of subsidy and benefit of the welfare schemes on the basis of such ration card, issued in the long past, punishes really needy and support those who have no real necessity.

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