

Social Audit and Awareness Level about the MGNREGS: A Case of Nadia District, West Bengal

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to find out effect of the Participation at the Social Audit on the Awareness Level of the beneficiaries of the MGNREGS.

Methodology / Design / Approach: The paper is based on both secondary and primary data. The latter have been collected from four selected GPs of Nadia, West Bengal with the help of structured questionnaires and analyzed by simple statistical tools.

Finding: The analysis of the data has explored that despite other influential factors there is significant positive association between two variables.

Practical Implication: Awareness level of the beneficiaries is one of the preconditions for success of any flagship programmes. So there is need to study the influential factors of the same.

Originality / Value: Introduction of the mandatory social audit in the MGNREGA has widened the scope of the improvement of the awareness level of the beneficiaries by means of their active participation in same.

Keywords: MGNREGS, Social Audit, Awareness, Job Card Holders.

Paper Type: Empirical Study.

Introduction

India is a country of villages and about 70% total population lives in village. Rural Development is, therefore an absolute and urgent necessity in India now and will continue to be so in future (Singh, 2009). It is the *sine qua non* of development of India. Accordingly, the real development of India lies in the economic betterment of people lives in rural India for which government needs to make strong economic policies and better implementing strategies (Pandey, 2017). But unfortunately even after 71 years of independence, our performance in regard to eradication of poverty, unemployment and economic disparities in rural areas is not satisfactory at all. Government of India in different five year plans have spent huge fund towards this end. Since 1980 it has introduced a good number of public-work based employment generation programmes in place of land and asset based approach adopted

in the 1970s (Sannyal, 2011). Recent development in this field is the enactment of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, which is based on the flagship programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to provide 100 days work to every rural household willing to do casual manual work in a financial year. The Act itself contains provisions towards ensuring the right to rural households to actively participate in the monitoring the effectiveness and transparency of the implementation by means of biannual mandatory social audit.

Thus an attempt has been made in this paper to find out effect of the Participation at the Social Audit Meeting at Gram Sabha on the Awareness Level of Job Card Holders¹ on the basis of primary data collected from four selected Gram Panchayats of two selected Blocks of Nadia District, West Bengal.

The paper is divided in five chapters, in chapter II we have highlighted our review of literature to find out the research gap, objective and methodology of the paper has been discussed in chapter III, our findings and analysis of the same have been explored in chapter-IV and finally in chapter V we have made some concluding observations.

Review of Existing Literatures

The mandatory requirement for social audit under the MGNREGA is an innovative measure aimed at ensuring accountability from those involved in the implementation of the scheme and enhancing the awareness level of beneficiaries and people at large. There are also few studies on the issue of the social audit in general and its effect on the MGNREGS in particular. We now proceed to discuss some of those studies:

On the basis of primary data, collected from Andhra Pradesh Akella and Kidambi (2007) observed that provision of mandatory biannual social audit of the MGNREGA has potential to make delivery of the programme most effective. They also argued that implementation of social audit process in Andhra Pradesh shows the way how it is possible to ensure transparent implementation of scheme by means of social audit.

Based on secondary data Shah and Ambasta (2008) observed that implementation of institutionalized social audit in Andhra Pradesh has ensured successful implementation of the

¹ Detail objectives are given in chapter 3.

MGNREGS in the State. However, there exist some loopholes in the implementation of the same due to the fact that social audit is a post-facto exercise.

National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) (2008) on the basis of evaluation of impact of the MGNREGS in Odissa pointed out that follow up of social audit reports is one of the necessary precondition for removal of irregularities in the implementation of the scheme in the State.

Aiyar and Samji (2009) have found that effective implementation of provision of the MGNREGA relating to social audit has a positive impact in realising the basic objective of the MGNREGS. They also argued that empirical evidence on the social audits suggests that social audits in fact have a significant and lasting effect on citizen's awareness levels. The study was conducted in Andhra Pradesh.

On the basis of primary data Shankar (2010) has found that though social audit is a novel method to engender on the part of public officials, in reality it suffers from lot of pathologies. According to their opinion social audit should be viewed as a tool for yielding substantial results towards transparent implementation of the MGNREGS rather than only a simple procedural compliance.

Singh and Vutukuru (2011) on the basis of primary data collected from some selected gram panchayats in Andhra Pradesh found that social audit reports of the MGNREGS generate lot of information that can possibly be missed in quantitative performance benchmarks and therefore is an important tool to gauge the success of the programme. They also suggested that the Andhra Pradesh experiment with social audit can be replicated elsewhere in the country.

Vij (2011) on the basis of secondary data observed that the system of social audit in the MGNREGS has full potentials to ensure capacity building and empowerment of marginalized groups of the society. He also argued that effectiveness of social audit can only be achieved with strong institutional support or support of individual activities as occurred in few states like Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc.

On the basis of secondary data Reddy (2013) argued that Andhra Pradesh is the unique state where social audit process has been institutionalized through an autonomous State unit which makes a huge difference to the quality of governance of the programme.

Rajashekar, *et al.* (2013) on the basis of study on the effectiveness of the social audit of the MGNREGS in the state of Karnataka observed that the social audit process at the GP level was marked by many constraints and problems. While all the GPs conducted social audits their capacity to undertake audits effectively was compromised by the influence wielded by village elites like Mr. Engineer, the Zamindar and the 'onion king'. There was significant structural conflict of interest between cultivators who employed agricultural labour and the labourers who were seeking additional work under MGNREGS to supplement their income.

The Centre for Wage Employment and Poverty Alleviation (CWEPA) (2014) on the basis of their field visit found that social audit of the MGNREGS in West Bengal has been suffering of lot of loopholes like lack of influence of implementing agencies, lack of extra personnel, etc.

On the basis of primary data Bandyopadhyay (2016) found that effective participation at the social audit has positive impact on the awareness level of the MGNREGS in West Bengal. This improved awareness level definitely ensures improved performance of the scheme.

Fox (2015) has argued that social audit can be identified as significant tool to break the low accountability traps by triggering the virtuous circle in which the citizens can exercise their voice, which in turn trigger and empower reform resulted in more voice. He used secondary data for that purpose.

Peicheva *et al.* (2017) on the basis of primary data has argued that social audit and the standards for social and environmental responsibilities can be regarded as the effective tool to promote abolition of the crimes against humanity such as discrimination and traffic of people for sexual and labour exploitation.

From aforesaid review of literature it may be revealed that systematic implementation of the radical provision of the MGNREGA relating to mandatory biannual social audit is the necessary pre condition for ensuring transparent implementation of the scheme. Moreover, social audit of the MGNREGS is aimed at enhancement of the awareness level of the beneficiaries about their entitlements. So far as our review of literature is concerned there are very few studies about the relationship between social audit and the awareness level of the MGNREGS beneficiaries in rural West Bengal.

Objective and Methodology

Considering the research gap given in the preceding section the objective of this paper is to find out effect of the Participation at the Social Audit Meeting at *gram sabha* on the awareness level of Job Card Holders in rural West Bengal and also to find out whether there is any other factors, which may have influential effect on the awareness level.

The paper is based on secondary as well as primary data. For the purpose of secondary data we have consulted different literature available in different books, articles available in different Indian as well as International Journals and web pages. For the purpose of collection of Primary Data we have purposively selected two blocks of Nadia District West Bengal viz. Krishnanagar-II and Ranaghat-II. From Krishnanagar-II we have purposively selected two Gram Panchayats viz. Sadhanpara-I and Noapara-I. Similarly we also selected two Gram Panchayats Bahirgachhi and Debagram from Ranaghat-II. From each of the Gram Panchayats we randomly selected 25 job card holders, who actively avail the job under the scheme. So sample size of our study was 100.

For the purpose of ensuring comparison we have ranked the selected gram panchayats according two parameters viz. BPL percentage and MGNREGS fund utilization in three years from 2007-08 to 2009-10. Accordingly relative position of the gram panchayats have been shown in table 2. We grouped 1st Gram Panchayats from each of the blocks as best gram panchayats and 2nd gram panchayats from each of the blocks as worst gram panchayats.

We interviewed those selected job card holders with structured questionnaire and recorded their responses in the same. The questionnaire contained close ended questions about nine (9) different stages of implementation of the MGNREGS, which have some vulnerabilities in course of the implementation and about which awareness on the part of the job card holders are of very important for enforcing their rights as enshrined in the MGNREGA and which may be significantly affected by their active participation at the social audit meeting at *gram sabha*².

For the purpose of analysis of those collected data we used simple statistical tools viz. Arithmetic Mean, Kerl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and for the purpose of testing the significance of the result we applied student's 't' test and Fisher's 't' test.

² Our period of study was 2009-10 to 2014-15.

Findings from the Primary Survey and Analysis of Data:

In the previous section we have discussed about the methodology for collection of primary data. Now in this section we proceed to highlight our findings and analysis of the same.

1. Findings from the Survey: At the first stage we have presented the collected data from selected gram panchayats of selected blocks in table 3. 1st column of table 3 reveals the awareness level of the selected job card holders about the different aspects of the MGNREGS and their participation at social audit meeting in Sadhanpara-I Gram Panchayat under Krishnanagar-II CD block in the district of Nadia. In spite of the fact that the awareness level of the respondent job card holders in that GP in respect of some important aspects of the scheme viz. about the Act, issue of job card and application for job have been found to be satisfactory, implementation of radical provision of the MGREGA in respect of the mandatory biannual social audit is unsatisfactory.

Again, 2nd column of table 3 gives the awareness level of the selected job card holders about the different aspects of the MGNREGS and their participation at the social audit meeting in Noapara-I Gram Panchayat under Krishnanagar-II CD block in the same district. It has been revealed that participation of the respondent job card holders in that gram panchayat at the social audit meeting at *gram sabha* is very insignificant. However, their awareness level about some aspect of the scheme viz., issue of job-card, application for job and allotment of work stands at desired level as on the date of the survey. We have presented a figure showing comparison of the two GPs under Krishnanagar-II CD Block in respect of the level of awareness and participation of the job card holders in figure 1.

Similarly 3rd and 4th columns of table 3 present the data of Bahirgachhi and Debgram Gram Panchayats respectively under Ranaghat-II block of the district. From Bahirgachhi Gram Panchayat we have found that on the date of survey on an average the respondent job card holders of that gram panchayat participated at 8 social audit meetings on the MGNREGS, which is very encouraging³. It has also been found their awareness levels in respect of most of the aspects of the MGNREGS are very satisfactory while in case of implementation and supervision of work the awareness level is not satisfactory.

³ As per provisions of the MGNREGA, 2005 job card holders are expected to participate at maximum 12 social audit meetings in six years (the period of our study).

It has also been revealed that in case of Debagram Gram Panchayat on an average the respondent job card holders of the said gram panchayat participated at 7 social audit meetings which is also encouraging. Further, their awareness levels in respect of most of the aspects of the scheme are satisfactory except in respect of the development and approval of technical estimate. We have presented a figure showing comparison of the two GPs under Ranaghat-II CD Block in respect of the level of awareness and participation of the job card holders at social audit meeting in figure 2.

2. Analysis of Primary Data: At the first stage we have analyzed the data relating to participation at the social audit meetings at *Gram Sabha* of the respondent job card holders between best and worst *Gram Panchayats* within the district by applying Fisher's 't' test⁴ to ensure intra-district comparison of mean participation of the job card holders. The result obtained from the Fisher's 't' test is presented in Table 4 and it shows that average participation in best gram panchayats is marginally better in best Gram Panchayats as compared to the worst gram panchayats. By applying Fishers' 't' test it has been found that difference is not statistically significant. So, there is no significant difference between best and worst gram panchayats in terms of participation at the social audit meetings at *Gram Sabha* by the respondent job card holders in the district.

At the second stage of this analysis we have tried to analyze the data collected in terms of awareness level of the respondent job-card holders between the best and worst gram panchayats of the district with the help of Fishers' 't' test⁵ to ensure intra-district comparison of the mean awareness level. The result of the said analysis as presented in table 5 indicates that mean awareness level of the best gram panchayats is greater than that in worst gram panchayats. However, Fisher's 't' test shows that the difference is statistically insignificant. Thus, it may be argued that there has been no difference between the best and worst GPs in the district in respect of mean awareness level of the respondents.

Active participation at the social audit meetings is aimed at the enhancement of the awareness level of the job card holders. So, at the last stage we have tried to analyze that relationship with the help of Kerl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. We have also calculated Students' 't' test statistic⁶ to test the significance of the same.

⁴ It is applied to test significance of difference of mean of two groups of samples.

⁵ It is applied to test significance of difference of mean of two groups of samples.

⁶ It is used to find out significant test of the correlation coefficient value.

Table 6 reveals that correlation coefficient between two variables in best as well as worst gram panchayats in the district are positive and significant. However the same is greater in case of worst gram panchayat as compared to best gram panchayats. Thus it may be said that though gram panchayats which ranks better in terms of chosen parameters, do not hold their position at par with the same in case of effectiveness social audit meeting at *gram sabha*.

From our above analysis it may be revealed that there is clear contradiction in result. The reason for such contradiction as we found that though Sadhanpara-I GP is one of the best GPs in the district as per our chosen parameters⁷, participation of job card holders in the social audit meeting at *gram sabha* is very poor. As a result of poor participation of the respondent job-card holders, the Correlation Coefficient in best gram panchayats in the district has been found to be lower than that in worst GPs. On the other hand, higher number of participation of the respondent job-card holders in another best Gram Panchayat of the district i.e. Bahirgachhi GP, resulted in no significant difference in best and worst GPs in terms of mean participation at the social audit meeting. Again higher necessity of job due to existence of more BPL and AAY households⁸ in those GPs have resulted in no significant difference in best and worst GPs in terms of mean awareness level of the respondent job card holders in the district.

Conclusion

As the largest flagship programme of the Government of India the MGNREGS provides a major macro-economic weapon to ensure socio-economic transformation of rural India by means of alleviating rural unemployment and poverty. It is also fact that ultimate success of the scheme largely depends upon the awareness level of the beneficiaries about their entitlements in the same. In order to achieve that goal the Act contains the provision for mandatory biannual social audit. So, far our analysis of results are concerned it is evident that though participation at the social audit meeting at *gram sabha* has positive and significant association with the awareness level of the job card holders, but there are also other factors, which influence the awareness level of the beneficiaries. Thus we may arrive at the conclusion that though active participation is an important factor for ensuring awareness level of the beneficiaries, there are also some other factors e.g. necessity of having the jobs, which

⁷ Table 2.

⁸ Table 1.

also play crucial role for achieving higher awareness level at least for those gram panchayats under our study.

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Table 1: Socio-economic Profile of the Selected Gram Panchayats

(Unit: Number)

Block →	Krishnanagar-II C.D. Block		Ranaghat-II C.D. Block	
	Sadhanpara-I	Noapara-I	Bahirgachhi	Debagram
Gram Panchayat →				
Total Population	18156	22669	23085	28090
SC	4357	7223	18585	10393
ST	363	90	651	644
Others	13436	13356	3849	17052
Total Households	5938	5202	5924	6877
Landless Households	4213	3824	3130	3796
BPL Household	1994	1950	3603	1843
AAY Household	780	652	1928	381
Agricultural Labour	3263	3498	3143	3088
Marginal Farmer	1355	1152	2064	2200
Small Farmer	260	162	506	536
Woman Headed	195	257	200	205
MGNREGS Job card Holders	4379	5719#	4762	2605
Registered workers under MGNREGS	11057	14162	9804	5346
Number of active Job cards	3159	5112	2439	1111
Active Workers	5825	10151	3637	1675
Women	2225	4451	1537	709
SC	843	1437	1991	956
ST	255	10	4	130
Others	4727	8704	1642	589

Note: #- Panchayat Officials did not agree to furnish all the relevant information about the Gram Panchayat. As a result we had no alternative but to collect that information from other sources such as, West Rural Household Survey, Census of India etc. Subsequently we have found that total number of job cardholders is more than total number households, which puts question about the transparency in issue of job cards in those Gram Panchayats. This also substantiates findings of NCAER-PIF (2009), 'A Study on Evaluating Performance of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act', *National Council of Applied Economic Research*, New Delhi.

Source: GP Survey, West Bengal Rural Household Survey, 2005 and official website of the MGNREGA www.nrega.nic.in.

Table 2: Relative position of the selected Gram Panchayats according to BPL percentage and MGNREGS fund utilization during 2007-08 to 2009-10:

Name of the CD Block	Name of the Gram Panchayats	Rank
Krishnanagar-II	Sadhanpara-I	1st
	Noapara-I	2nd
Ranaghat-II	Bahirgachhi	1st
	Debagram	2nd

Source: West Bengal Rural Household Survey, 2005 and Official website of the MGNREGA www.nrega.nic.in.

Table 3: Primary Data on the Awareness Level (AL) and Participation at Social Audit Meetings (PSAM) at Gram Sabha in four selected Gram Panchayats of Nadia.

Unit: Percentage

Blocks and their Category →	Krishnanagar-II C.D. Block (Best)		Ranaghat-II C.D. Block (Worst)	
	Sadhanpara-I (Best)	Noapara-I (Worst)	Bahirgachhi (Best)	Debagram (Worst)
Regarding the Act	60	45	75	61
Issue of Jobcard	67	67	67	99
Application for Job	88	76	84	100
Selection of Projects	47	16	62	60
Development and approval of technical estimate	0	8	56	12
Allotment of work	32	52	72	75
Implementation and supervision of work	14	2	37	50
Payment of wages	47	29	69	75
Social Audit Meeting at Gram Sabha	0	2	100	100
Overall awareness level	39	28	67	72
Average number of Social Audit Meeting attended*	1	2	8	7

Note: *- In number. , CD means community development

Source: Data calculated from primary survey.

Table 4: Fishers’ ‘t’ test result for intra-district comparison of Mean Participation of the respondent job card holders

H ₀	H ₁	n	DF	Calculated ‘t’ value	Pr (T < t)	Pr (T > t)	Pr (T > t)
$B^{\text{NP}}_{\mu} = W^{\text{NP}}_{\mu}$	$B^{\text{NP}}_{\mu} \neq W^{\text{NP}}_{\mu}$	100	98	0.1246	0.5494	0.9011	0.4506

Note: B=Best, W= Worst, MP= participation at social audit meeting in Malda, NP=Participation at social audit meeting in Nadia, μ = Mean, H₀ = Null hypothesis, H₁= Alternative hypothesis, μ = Mean, n= Number of observations, DF= Degrees of freedom (n-2), Pr (T < t) = Left tail test, Pr (|T| > |t|) = Both tail test, Pr (T > t) = Right tail test. Source: Calculation based on primary survey data.

Table 5: Fishers’ ‘t’ test result for intra-district comparison of Mean Awareness Level of the respondent job card holders

H ₀	H ₁	n	DF	Calculated ‘t’ value	Pr (T < t)	Pr (T > t)	Pr (T > t)
$B^{\text{NA}}_{\mu} = W^{\text{NA}}_{\mu}$	$B^{\text{NA}}_{\mu} \neq W^{\text{NA}}_{\mu}$	100	98	0.8257	0.7944	0.4112	0.2056

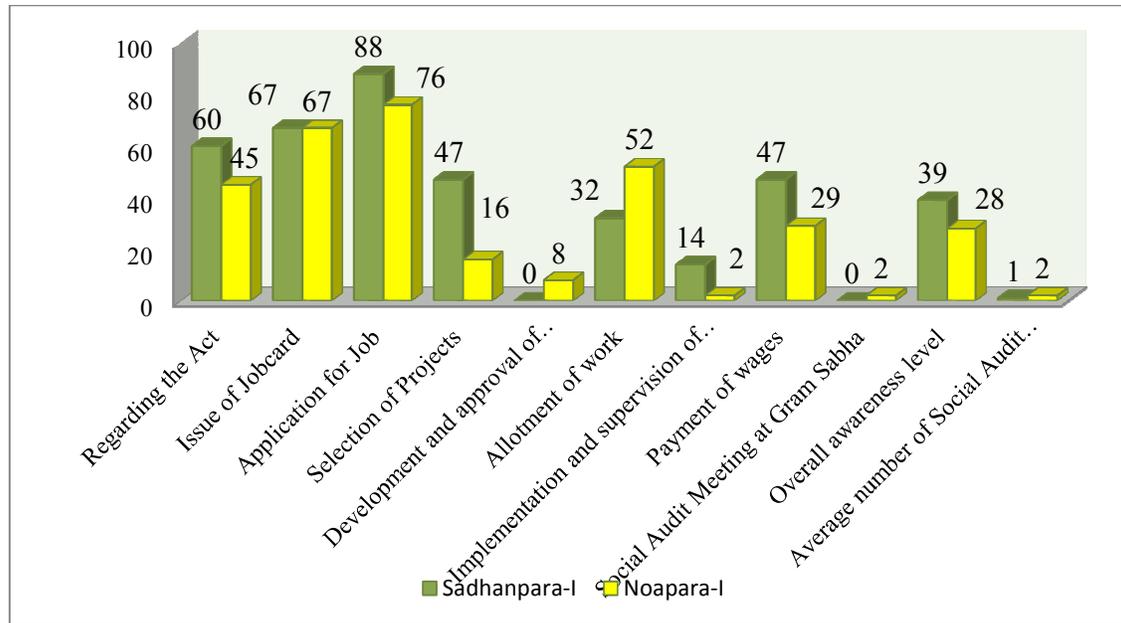
Note: NA=Awareness level of Job Card Holders of Nadia; μ = Mean, B = Best, W=Worst, N=Number of observations, DF = Degrees of freedom (n-2). Pr (t < t) = Left tail test, Pr (|t| > |t|) = Both tail test, Pr (t > t) = Right tail test. Source: Data calculated from primary survey.

Table 6: Analysis of association between Participation at Social Audit Meeting (PSAM) and Awareness level (AL)

	Correlation Coefficient value	n	DF	Significant level (Students’ ‘t’ test)
Best Gram Panchayats	0.76	50	48	1%
Worst Gram Panchayats	0.9	50	48	1%

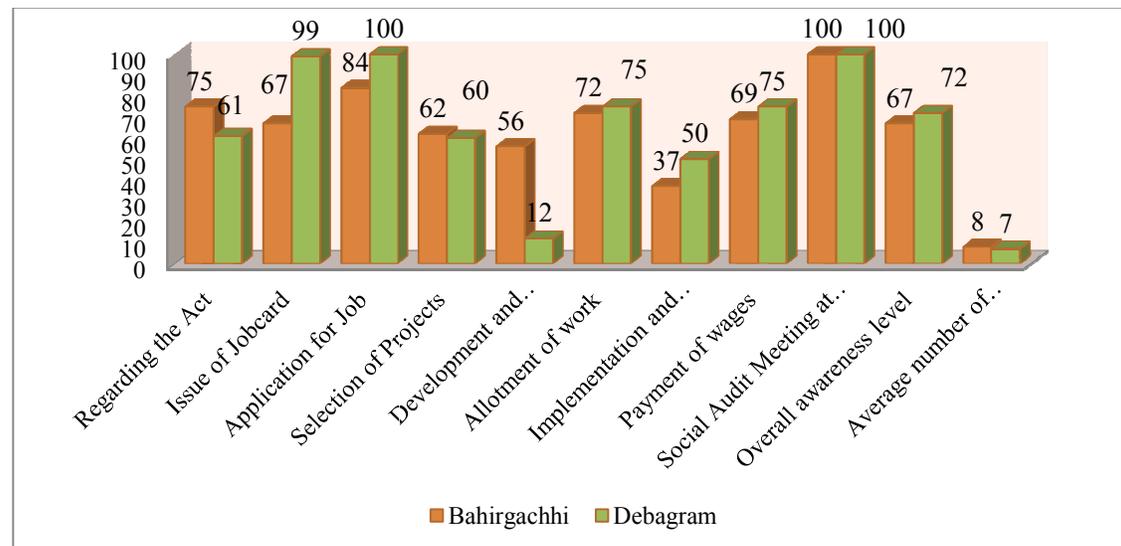
Note: DF means degrees of freedom (n-2), n means number of observations. Source: Data calculated from primary survey.

Figure 1: Comparison of the two GPs (Sadhanpara-I and Noapara-I) under Krishnanagar-II CD Block in Nadia in respect of the Level of Awareness and Participation of the job card holders



Source: Data calculated from primary survey.

Figure 2: Comparison of the two GPs (Bahirgachhi and Debagram) under Ranaghat-II CD Block in Nadia in respect of the Level of Awareness and Participation of the job card holders



Source: Data calculated from primary survey