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## **West Bengal Gets US\$125 Million to Help Citizens Access Social Protection Services**

The World Bank's Executive Board of Directors approved a US\$125 million loan to the Government of West Bengal to support the state's efforts to help poor and vulnerable groups access social protection services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to focus on building capabilities of state governments to deliver inclusive and equitable social protection in times of crisis. India's eastern state of West Bengal runs more than 400 programs that provide social assistance, care services, and jobs. Most of these services are offered through an umbrella platform called *Jai Bangla*. The West Bengal Building State Capability for Inclusive Social Protection Operation will support these interventions at the state level, with particular focus on vulnerable groups such as women, tribal and scheduled caste households and the elderly, as well as households in the state's disaster-prone coastal regions.

A recent survey found that while food and in-kind transfers reach most poor and vulnerable households in West Bengal, the coverage of cash transfers is weak. Access to social pensions by elderly, widows and disabled persons, in particular, is also weak due to cumbersome application processes and lack of automated systems for application and eligibility verification.

Over the next four years, the operation will help strengthen the state's capability to expand coverage and access to social assistance and to deliver cash transfers for the poor and vulnerable through a consolidated social registry.

West Bengal faces challenges related to manual data entry, inconsistent beneficiary data across departments, and lack of data storage and data exchange protocols. The operation will help digitize the state's unified delivery system, the *Jai Bangla* platform, to help consolidate disparate social assistance programs and speed the delivery of social pensions to vulnerable and poor households.

The project will also support the creation of a tele-consultation network for social care services, complemented by a cadre of case management workers who can help households with advice on eldercare and links to health services and facilities.

It will also create an institutional platform to improve coordination and effectiveness of government interventions to address the state's low participation of women in the labor

force.

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Warm Regards,

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