

Entrepreneurial Marketing and Livelihood Dynamics of Rural Homestays in West Bengal: A Comparative Study of Kalimpong and South 24 Parganas Districts

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Abstract

Homestays represent a quintessential sub-sector of tourism entrepreneurship, offering visitors a homely milieu equipped with basic amenities, authentic home-cooked cuisine and immersive cultural experiences. Catalysed by the West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy (2017 & 2022), over 95% of these ventures currently operate in the rural hinterlands. Despite extensive global literature on homestay marketing, empirical research on the marketing dynamics of registered homestays in rural West Bengal remains scarce. Addressing this gap, this study investigates homestay proprietors' socio-economic profiles, focusing on entrepreneurial marketing strategies and livelihood generation. Employing Simple Random Sampling Without Replacement (SRSWOR), primary data was elicited from 140 registered homestays (84 in *Kalimpong*; 56 in *South 24 Parganas*) across eight villages. Spatially, 45.24% of *Kalimpong* ventures operate in *Kashyong Khasmahal*, while 48.21% of southern counterparts cluster in *Jharkhali*. For business-to-business (B2B) linkages, northern entrepreneurs collaborate with travel agencies and transport operators, whereas southern proprietors partner with tourist guides and agencies. Across both districts, proprietors effectively leverage direct-to-consumer (D2C) platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Google Maps, MakeMyTrip) to sustain occupancy. Regarding socio-economic impact, homestays constitute the primary livelihood for 42.86% of *Kalimpong* proprietors, juxtaposed against only 23.21% in *South 24 Parganas*. To augment household incomes, *Kalimpong* entrepreneurs engage in secondary occupations like plantation labour, chauffeuring or horticulture. Conversely, *South 24 Parganas* proprietors rely on agriculture, pisciculture, casual labour or NGO coordination for economic sustenance.

Keywords: Homestay tourism, Rural tourism, Entrepreneurship, Livelihood and Income Generation

Introduction

Homestays represent a distinct facet of tourism entrepreneurship, drawing travellers who seek an authentic immersion into local nature, culture and traditions (Jamal, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2026). Fundamentally, it is an accommodation arrangement wherein guests lodge within a host's residence, experiencing familial hospitality in exchange for appropriate financial compensation

(Gu & Wong, 2006). The Government of West Bengal, in its *West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy* (2022), formally defines it as an establishment where the owner or a family member physically resides, offering a minimum of one and a maximum of six dedicated rooms with washroom facilities exclusively for tourists.

A striking outcome of this policy is its expansive rural footprint: over 95% of the state's registered homestays (2,215 out of 2,300) operate in the countryside. Consequently, homestay entrepreneurship has firmly established itself as a cornerstone of West Bengal's rural economy.

The core tourism products of this enterprise encompass a homely ambience, customised amenities, home-cooked meals and deep cultural integration (Wang, 2007; Gunasekaran & Anandkumar, 2012; Agyeiwaah, 2013). Beyond the traditional ethos of honouring guests, this venture empowers hosts by developing entrepreneurial growth and generating supplementary income. Simultaneously, it serves as a vibrant platform for meaningful cross-cultural exchanges between local hosts and diverse domestic and international visitors (Lanier & Berman, 1993).

Research Gap and Study-Objectives

Recent academic studies show a growing interest in the marketing side of tourism businesses (Ngo, 2018). Much of this focus is on digital marketing (Nurhayati *et al.*, 2025) and bringing tourism products online (Anismar *et al.*, 2025; Hartini *et al.*, 2024). While researchers have explored the social and financial benefits of using modern technology (Rahayu & Rahayu, 2025) and complex technical systems (Zu *et al.*, 2022), a major gap still exists in the research.

Specifically, there is very little information on how rural homestays market themselves and how running these businesses actually impacts the daily lives and incomes of the owners. This gap is even more prominent for homestays registered under the *West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy* (2017 & 2022).

This study aims to address this missing link. The primary objective is to deeply understand the current social and economic condition of registered homestay owners operating in the rural areas of the selected districts.

To achieve this main goal, the study focuses on two supporting objectives:

Marketing Strategies: To identify and explore the everyday marketing methods these rural homestay entrepreneurs use to attract guests and promote their properties.

Livelihoods: To clearly highlight the real, practical changes and financial benefits that homestay entrepreneurship brings to their rural livelihoods and overall standard of living.

Methodology

Sampling Design: The preliminary identification of registered homestays under *West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy* (2017 & 2022) across West Bengal was conducted using official data from the *West Bengal Tourism* (n.d.). These homestays were subsequently classified into rural and urban categories according to the *Census of India* (2011) definition. In alignment with the research objectives, the scope of this study was limited exclusively to rural areas.

To ensure geographical representation, the districts were purposively bifurcated into two regions: “North Bengal” and “South Bengal” (refer to Table 1). *Kalimpong* and South 24 *Parganas* districts were selected as they represent the highest concentration of rural homestays in their respective regions.

TABLE: 1

Distribution of Registered Homestays across the Districts of West Bengal

Name of the Geographical Zone	Name of the Districts	Total No. of Homestays	No. of Homestays Located in Rural Areas
North Bengal	<i>Alipurduar</i>	74	71
	<i>Cooch Behar</i>	11	11
	<i>Dakshin Dinajpur</i>	27	27
	<i>Darjeeling</i>	248	231
	<i>Jalpaiguri</i>	80	78
	<i>Kalimpong</i>	1,135	1,128
	<i>Malda</i>	138	138
	<i>Uttar Dinajpur</i>	00	00
Total (A)		1,713	1,684
South Bengal	<i>Bankura</i>	23	22
	<i>Birbhum</i>	47	19
	<i>Hooghly</i>	11	08
	<i>Howrah</i>	15	15
	<i>Jhargram</i>	104	104
	<i>Kolkata</i>	08	00
	<i>Murshidabad</i>	08	07
	<i>Nadia</i>	21	18
	North 24 <i>Parganas</i>	26	25
	<i>Paschim Bardhaman</i>	03	03
	<i>Paschim Medinipur</i>	07	07
	<i>Purba Bardhaman</i>	08	*

	<i>Purba Medinipur</i>	25	25
	<i>Purulia</i>	52	49
	South 24 Parganas	229	229
Total (B)		587	531
Grand Total (A+B)		2,300	2,215

Source: Compiled by the Authors from www.wbtourism.gov.in (as of 14 April 2025)

* Location and other details of homestays are not found in the website.

A multi-stage selection process was employed to identify specific blocks and villages based on two primary criteria:

- *Spatial Proximity:* One unit was selected near the administrative headquarter, while the other was selected from a distal location.
- *Concentration of Facilities:* Units were chosen based on the highest density of rural homestays within their respective spatial zones.

Following this criteria, two blocks from each selected district, *Kalimpong I & Pathar Pratima* and *Pedong & Basanti* were chosen from the following zones: “blocks nearer to the district headquarter” and “blocks farther from the district headquarter” respectively, depicted in Table 2. The similar criteria of block selection have again been followed for village selection; thus, total eight villages were selected from their respective zones, i.e., “villages nearer to the block headquarter” and “villages farther from the block headquarter”, see Table 2.

TABLE: 2

Distribution of Selected Sample

Name of State	Name of the District	Name of the Block	Name of the Village	Zone	Studied Homestays /Total Registered Homestays
West Bengal	<i>Kalimpong</i>	<i>Pedong</i>	<i>Kashyong Khasmahal</i>	Farther from the Block Headquarter	38/95
			<i>Sakyong Khasmahal</i>	Nearer to the Block Headquarter	26/65
		<i>Kalimpong I</i>	Dr Graham's Homes	Nearer to the Block Headquarter	10/19
			<i>Samthar</i>	Farther from the Block	10/19

			<i>Khasmahal</i>	Headquarter	
			Total (A)		84/1,135
	South 24 <i>Parganas</i>	<i>Basanti</i>	<i>Jharkhali</i>	Farther from the Block Headquarter	27/49
			<i>Nafarganj</i>	Nearer to the Block Headquarter	14/32
		<i>Pathar Pratima</i>	<i>Digambarpur</i>	Nearer to the Block Headquarter	05/10
			<i>Gobardhanpur</i>	Farther from the Block Headquarter	10/25
			Total (B)		56/229
			Grand Total (A+B)		140/2,300

Source: Compiled by the Authors

Due to time and resource constraints, the minimum sample size was pre-fixed at 5% of the state's total registered homestays. Utilising Simple Random Sampling without Replacement (SRSWOR) with proportionate allocation, 140 registered homestays (representing 6.08% of the total) were selected.

Lastly, the unit of the study is homestay at the selected destinations and the questionnaires-schedule was administered among the owner of homestay or his/her representatives (family members), the person available at the time of field visit.

Study Areas: The *Kalimpong* district is located in the northern part of West Bengal. It shares domestic border with *Darjeeling* and *Jalpaiguri* districts in the south-western and southern sides respectively. The national border of the district with the state of Sikkim is geographically found in the north and the neighbouring country namely, Bhutan situates in north-eastern side of the district.

South 24 Parganas district is located in the southern part of West Bengal, bounded by North 24 *Parganas*, *Kolkata*, *Howrah* and *Paschim Medinipur* districts from north-eastern, north, north-western and western sides respectively. The district is sharing its international border with the neighbouring country – Bangladesh in the east.

Data Collection Tools & Techniques: It was observed in the pilot survey that homestay entrepreneurs generally collaborate with tourist guide, travel agency, transport operators and non-government organisations (NGOs) for expanding their business. In addition, they use their customer network, packaged tour advertisements, release of travel magazines, and travelogues in

their personal social media accounts (especially Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube channel, Instagram, Google Maps and MakeMyTrip) as marketing tools. Thus, a set of questionnaires-schedule was prepared based on the said factors of business collaboration and marketing tools with DSM-5 point Likert scale for administering among the homestay owners.

The said questionnaires-schedule has four sections – identification of the homestay, registration details of the homestay, marketing strategy of the homestay and details of the homestay owner with resulting livelihood of the homestay entrepreneurship. Prior to final execution, the said questionnaires-schedule was rechecked via another pilot survey; subsequently, the field surveys were administered in:

- *Kalimpong* district during the period of May – June 2025,
- *Pathar Pratima* block, South 24 *Parganas* in November 2025 and
- *Basanti* block, South 24 *Parganas* during June 2026.

Data Analysis Tools & Techniques: The obtained data were initially screened for missing values and none were found. Tabulation was then applied to present an overview of the studied homestays and the livelihood outcomes of homestay entrepreneurship. Thereafter, a descriptive statistical tool – mode – was calculated to identify the preferred business collaborations and marketing tools used by the homestay entrepreneurs. The statistical program, IBM SPSS Statistics 25, was used for data compilation and analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Overview of the Homestays: It was observed in the field survey that a clear view of *Kangchenjunga* range, forest trekking, authentic local culture and moreover a peaceful natural environment are the prime factors behind tourist-footfall in *Kalimpong*. To compensate the tourists' demand for accommodation, local entrepreneurs of *Pedong* block have privately been running homestays since 2007. Thus, homestay is not a new concept in *Kalimpong*; this phenomenon may explain the highest number of registered homestays (45.24%) in *Kashyong Khasmahal* as presented in Table 3.

TABLE: 3

Details of Homestay Enterprises in the Selected Destinations

Categories		<i>Kalimpong</i>				
		<i>Kalimpong I</i>		<i>Pedong</i>		Total
		Dr Graham's Homes	<i>Samthar Khasmahal</i>	<i>Kashyong Khasmahal</i>	<i>Sakyong Khasmahal</i>	
Year of Registration	2019	1	0	18	4	23
	2021	0	0	11	4	15
	2022	4	4	7	8	23

	2023	0	2	2	2	6
	2024	5	3	0	6	14
	2025	0	1	0	2	3
Grand Total		10	10	38	26	84
Categories		South 24 Parganas				
		Pathar Pratima		Basanti		Total
		<i>Digambarpur</i>	<i>Gobardhanpur</i>	<i>Jharkhali</i>	<i>Nafargunj</i>	
Year of Registration	2019	00	00	06	01	07
	2020	01	00	02	04	07
	2021	00	00	06	01	07
	2022	01	03	06	01	11
	2023	01	04	04	03	12
	2024	02	03	03	04	12
Grand Total		05	10	27	14	56

Source: Field Survey

Conversely, in South 24 *Parganas*, the major attractions of tourists are the *Sundarban* delta and its flora & fauna including Royal Bengal Tigers, crocodiles, deers, fishing cats and several bird species. Furthermore, cruising in the estuary of Hooghly River, authentic local food – specifically Hilsha fishes, crabs & prawns in the sweet water of such rivers are some additional attractions to the visitors and food-loving persons. Furthermore, various tourist spots of southern *Sundarban*: *Dobanki*, *Sajnekhali* Tiger Rescue Centre, *Netadhopani*, *Burirdabri*, *Jingekhali* are distanced only one hour boat travel from *Basanti* block. These phenomena may be thrust the initiation of homestay entrepreneurship (48.21%, shown in Table 3) in *Jharkhali* as the first homestay was establish here in 2012, evidenced from field survey.

However, several incentives (i.e., exemptions of land conversion charges & luxury tax for initial three years on reimbursement basis, water charges & electricity bill at domestic rate and the rate of property tax as prescribed for residential purpose) under *West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy, 2017* may be thrust the initiation of homestay entrepreneurship across the other destinations in both districts.

TABLE: 4

Socio-Demographic Profile of the Homestay Entrepreneurs

Categories	Kalimpong
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		Kalimpong I		Pedong		Total
		Dr Graham’s Homes	Samthar Khasmahal	Kashyong Khasmahal	Sakyong Khasmahal	
Age (in Years)	Less than Equal 30	00	01	04	07	12
	31 to 40	05	02	20	06	33
	41 to 50	01	03	09	09	22
	51 to 60	01	02	03	04	10
	Above 60	03	02	02	00	7
Grand Total		10	10	38	26	84
Gender	Male	05	07	21	18	51
	Female	05	03	17	08	33
Grand Total		10	10	38	26	84
Involved in Homestay Business (in Years)	Less than 5	09	10	05	18	42
	5 to 10	01	00	20	07	28
	More than 10	00	00	13	01	14
Grand Total		10	10	38	26	84
Categories		South 24 Parganas				
		Pathar Pratima		Basanti		Total
		Digambarpur	Gobardhanpur	Jharkhali	Nafargunj	
Age (in Years)	Less than Equal 30	00	00	00	00	00
	31 to 40	01	00	04	02	07
	41 to 50	03	03	02	03	11
	51 to 60	01	06	17	08	32
	Above 60	00	01	04	01	06

Grand Total		05	10	27	14	56
Gender	Male	01	09	21	06	37
	Female	04	01	06	08	19
Grand Total		05	10	27	14	56
Involved in Homestay Business (in Years)	Less than 5	04	10	13	08	35
	5 to 10	01	00	13	06	21
	More than 10	00	00	01	00	01
Grand Total		05	10	27	14	56

Source: Field Survey

It is a well-known fact that patriarchal social system governs the Indian society. That custom is not contradicted in case of homestay enterprises: the largest segment of homestay entrepreneurs in both districts are male (60.71% in *Kalimpong* and 66.07% in South 24 *Parganas*), illustrated in Table 4. However, there is a stark distinction among the age groups of homestay entrepreneurs. In *Kalimpong*, mostly young adults (39.28%), belong to the 31 – 40 years age bracket, have engaged in homestay entrepreneurship, while middle-aged adults: belong to 51 – 60 years age bracket (57.14%) started homestay ventures in South 24 *Parganas*, depicted in Table 4.

Interestingly, 50% homestay owners of *Kalimpong* and 62.50% entrepreneurs of South 24 *Parganas* pursue their business for less than five years (shown in Table 4), indicating they have initiated such venture in post-COVID pandemic; this is an omnipresent phenomenon in both districts. As already stated, homestay entrepreneurship was first initiated in *Pedong* block of *Kalimpong* district since 2007; therefore, a portion of the studied homestays (15.47%, presented in Table 4) of *Kashyong Khasmahal* have been operating for more than a decade. Such phenomenon is highly infrequent in South 24 *Parganas* as only one homestay in *Jharkhali* is still running for more than a decade.

Business Collaboration Preference: The empirical data (depicted in Table 5) reveal that the homestay entrepreneurs of *Kalimpong* often show an interest in collaborating with the travel agencies and transport operators for Business-to-Business (B2B) partnerships. Conversely, entrepreneurs of South 24 *Parganas* are keen to collaborate with tourist guides and travel agencies, portraying a clear disparity between the districts. These partnerships are valued for their ability to deliver high-volume group bookings, resulting a sizeable profit within a short duration. Notably, many family members of homestay entrepreneurs located in Dr Graham's Homes serve as chauffeurs and they occasionally refer tourists to stay in their homestays. Consequently, such homestay owners rarely engage in formal collaborations with tourist guides as reflected in Table 5.

In addition, field survey revealed that a number of prominent non-government organisations

(NGOs) are actively operational in *Digambarpur*. Therefore, several field visits and excursions have also been conducted round the year, indicating a significant number of visitor-footfalls in the destination. For staying overnight, such visitors look for affordable accommodations in nearby locality. To capture this business opportunity, the homestay owners of *Digambarpur* are eagerly showing interest to collaborate with NGOs, shown in Table 5.

TABLE: 5
Partnership Preference of the Homestay Entrepreneurs

Categories		Kalimpong				
		Kalimpong I		Pedong		Usage (n=84)
		Dr Graham's Homes (n=10)	Samthar Khasmahal (n=10)	Kashyong Khasmahal (n=38)	Sakyong Khasmahal (n=26)	
Business Collaboration with	Tourist Guides	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Seldom	Seldom
	Travel Agencies	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	Transport Operators	Seldom	Occasionally	Occasionally	Occasionally	Occasionally
	Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
Categories		South 24 Parganas				
		Pathar Pratima		Basanti		Usage (n=56)
		Digambarpur (n=05)	Gobardhanpur (n=10)	Jharkhali (n=27)	Nafargunj (n=14)	
Business Collaboration with	Tourist Guides	Never	Never	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	Travel Agencies	Never	Never	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	Transport Operators	Never	Never	Certainly	Never	Never
	Non-Government Organisation	Certainly	Never	Never	Never	Never

	s (NGOs)					
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Source: Field Survey

Marketing Tools: Entrepreneurs primarily leverage informal networks of their customers and personal social media platforms through the Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) channel, depicted in Table 6. To achieve such objective, they generally use Facebook, WhatsApp and Google Maps for bypassing intermediaries. This form of marketing specifically targets solo travellers, who are seeking an authentic glimpse into local lifestyles. Such phenomenon is ubiquitous in both districts.

Additionally, a travel marketing website namely “MakeMyTrip” has also been used by *Kalimpong*-entrepreneurs to enhance tourist-footfall in their tourism venture; surprisingly, the said website remains unpopular in South 24 *Parganas*.

TABLE: 6

Marketing Dynamics of the Homestay Entrepreneurs

Categories		<i>Kalimpong</i>				
		<i>Kalimpong I</i>		<i>Pedong</i>		Usage
		Dr Graham’s Homes (n=10)	<i>Samthar Khasmahal</i> (n=10)	<i>Kashyong Khasmahal</i> (n=38)	<i>Sakyong Khasmahal</i> (n=26)	
Marketing Tools	Packaged Tour Advertisement	Never	Never	Seldom	Never	Never
	Travel Magazines	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
	Facebook	Certainly	Occasionally	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	WhatsApp	Certainly	Moderately	Moderately	Moderately	Moderately
	YouTube	Never	Never	Never	Certainly	Never
	Instagram	Never	Seldom	Seldom	Certainly	Never
	Google Maps	Certainly	Moderately	Moderately	Certainly	Moderately
	MakeMyTrip	Moderately	Occasionally	Moderately	Moderately	Moderately
Categories		South 24 Parganas				

		<i>Pathar Pratima</i>		<i>Basanti</i>		Usage
		<i>Digambarpur</i> (n=05)	<i>Gobardhanpur</i> (n=10)	<i>Jharkhali</i> (n=27)	<i>Nafargunj</i> (n=14)	
Marketing Tools	Packaged Tour Advertisement	Never	Never	Certainly	Never	Never
	Travel Magazines	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
	Facebook	Never	Never	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	WhatsApp	Never	Never	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	YouTube	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
	Instagram	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
	Google Maps	Never	Never	Certainly	Certainly	Certainly
	MakeMyTrip	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never

Source: Field Survey

Livelihood and Economic Diversification: Table 7 reflects that 42.86% of the studied entrepreneurs of *Kalimpong* district pursue homestay enterprise as their primary source of livelihood, mostly located in *Pedong* block. Interestingly, rest of the homestay entrepreneurs (57.14%) engage in diversified sources of income. 68.75% of this segment, located in *Pedong* block, involve either in cinchona plantation sites as casual labourers, transport service as chauffeurs or practise horticulture in their residential land. Conversely, in *Kalimpong* I block, the remaining (31.25%) of the diversified segment generally involve as casual labourer in the tea gardens and practise floriculture in their house as the main source of income.

On the other, only 23.21% homestay entrepreneurs of South 24 *Parganas* pursue their accommodation venture as the primary source of income, completely located in *Basanti* block. Remaining proportion of homestay entrepreneurs in *Basanti* block (68.29%, illustrated in Table 7) engage in agricultural cultivation and fishery business to secure their household expenses throughout the year.

TABLE: 7

Present Livelihood of the Homestay Entrepreneurs

Categories	Kalimpong				
	Kalimpong I		Pedong		Total
	Dr Graham's	Samthar	Kashyong	Sakyong	

		Homes	<i>Khasmahal</i>	<i>Khasmahal</i>	<i>Khasmahal</i>	
Primary Occupation	Homestay	04	01	28	03	36
	Others	06	09	10	23	48
Grand Total		10	10	38	26	84
Categories		South 24 Parganas				
		<i>Pathar Pratima</i>		<i>Basanti</i>		Total
		<i>Digambarpur</i>	<i>Gobardhanpur</i>	<i>Jharkhali</i>	<i>Nafargunj</i>	
Primary Occupation	Homestay	00	00	12	01	13
	Others	05	10	15	13	43
Grand Total		05	10	27	14	56

Source: Field Survey

In contrast, all homestay owners of *Pathar Pratima* block are facing similar economic challenges (reflected in Table 7), supplement their household consumption through casual labour work in agricultural land or engage in local NGOs as field coordinator.

Conclusion

In conclusion, homestay entrepreneurship is fast emerging as a popular tourism venture across West Bengal (as shown in Table 1). The registered rural homestays in the state share a few key characteristics:

- **Socio-Demographic Profile:** In *Kalimpong*, most homestays are owned by young adult men (31–40 years). In contrast, those in South 24 Parganas are predominantly run by middle-aged businessmen (51–60 years).
- **Marketing Strategies:** To expand their business and secure quick profits, these entrepreneurs rely on business partnerships (B2B) with travel agencies, tour guides and transport operators. Simultaneously, they directly reach out to guests (D2C) via social media platforms to attract solo travellers, ensuring steady bookings throughout the season.
- **Impact on Livelihoods:** While managing homestays is the main source of income for a significant section (42.86% in *Kalimpong* and 23.21% in South 24 Parganas), the majority treat it as an additional livelihood (57.14% and 76.79%, respectively).
 - In *Kalimpong*, these entrepreneurs juggle hosting with working as casual labourers in tea and cinchona estates, cultivating flowers and fruits or driving tourist vehicles.
 - In **South 24 Parganas**, their primary occupations vary widely, encompassing farming, fishing, agricultural labour and working as field coordinators for local NGOs.



Although this study focuses on just two districts, its findings have a much broader significance. It acts as a strategic roadmap for policymakers, showing how rural hosts successfully blend traditional business partnerships with modern digital marketing. By utilising these insights, the government and private stakeholders can introduce targeted initiatives—such as digital literacy programmes and improved infrastructure—to further strengthen West Bengal's rural economy.

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