

**HOW THE WORKERS OF UNORGANIZED SECTORS IN
INDIA ARE BEING KNEADED BY POVERTY TRAP: A
STUDY OF BEEDI-WORKERS OF MURSHIDABAD
DISTRICT IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA**

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ABSTRACT:

Poverty, house hold food security and women's contribution to food and economic security have received attention for the last two decades. The contribution of the Muslim married women beedi-workers in Murshidabad district of West Bengal to the monthly total family income is significant. But, the beedi industry is unorganized in nature and the wage rate is very low. Therefore, the women beedi-workers have to sacrifice their lives to ensure the economic security for their families. As the per capita daily incomes of the families are low, they consider their children as extra helping hands. Therefore, the families are suffered from the incidents of higher fertility rate, higher cases of school drop-outs, lower standard of living and involvement of their children in unorganized sectors again and again. So, the generations are chased by the obstinate trap of poverty. The present social security schemes of Government of India can rend the trap of poverty ensuring better future for the next generation of the families of the beedi-workers.

Key Words: Beedi, Beedi-Workers, Minimum Wage Rate, Trap of Poverty, Standard of Living and Per Capita Income.

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INTRODUCTION:

Beedi rolling is a traditional agro-forest based industry, spread over almost all major states in India (Giriappa, 1987). A beedi is a thin Indian indigenous cigarette made of 0.2 – 0.3 gram of tobacco flake wrapped in a tendu leaf and secured with coloured thread at lower end. It is cheap form of tobacco smoking especially for rural people. Murshidabad district in West Bengal is famous for beedi industry. The economy of the district is based on beedi industry, after agriculture. The home based beedi-workers are provided with 250-300 grams of tobacco flakes and 500-600 grams of tendu leaves to roll 1000 beedies by the contractors appointed through the beedi merchants. The industry is purely unorganized. It is extremely labour intensive task. The task of beedi rolling is mainly done by the women and children. In Murshidabad, efficiency in beedi rolling is considered as major criteria for marriage of rural women. The workers are exploited by the contractors. As the wage rate is very low and it takes about 10 hours to roll 1000 beedies, the fertility rate among the women beedi workers is very high. Because the parents treat their children, especially the girl children as extra income generating tools (Shome, 2004). Besides, it is also responsible for higher rate of drop-outs from schools, higher incidents of child labour and higher incidents of under-aged marriages in the rural area. As the fertility rate and dependency ratio are very high, the per capita daily income also remains very low. Their standard of living is degraded. Therefore, all the family members cannot get freedom from the obstinate trap of poverty.

STUDY AREA:

Murshidabad is one of the most underdeveloped districts in India. According to District wise Human Development Index in West Bengal, 2004 the HDI and GDI Rank of Murshidabad district were 15th and 16th respectively among the seventeen districts of then West Bengal. On the basis of Provisional Census Report of West Bengal, 2011 the male and female literacy rate of Murshidabad district are 71.02% and 63.88% respectively. The district occupies Muslim population of 63.67 percent of the total population of the district i.e. highest in the state and occupies a prominent figure in the country. Various governmental as well as non-governmental reports identify Muslim community as the most socio-economically backward minority groups in India. Sachar Committee Report (2006) placed Murshidabad as one of the backward district out

of 604 districts in India in terms of literacy, opportunities and awareness levels of specifically Muslim Women.

Two villages and two municipal wards in Jangipur Sub-division of Murshidabad district have been selected for the study. The study areas are situated at Raghunathganj-1 and Raghunathganj-2 Blocks in Jangipur Sub-division. Jangipur Sub-division has been selected for the study because the concentration of beedi-workers is maximum in this Sub-division (see table-2). All the study areas are adjacent to the Sub-divisional Headquarters. Therefore, all the infrastructural facilities are easily available. Job opportunities are also high in the study area. Besides, villages as well as municipal wards are included in this study to secure greater variability. Only the Muslim beedi-workers are considered because the Muslim community is the most deprived section and their concentration is maximum than any other groups in this Sub-division. The agrarian based economy of the Sub-division has no heavy industry. Beedi rolling is the most important household industry in this area.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Find out the present socio-economic status of the families of the Muslim beedi-workers.
2. Examine the causes behind the poverty trap faced by the family members of the Muslim beedi-workers and the possible measures to rend the trap of the poverty.

METHODOLOGY

Ninety two households having main occupation of beedi-rolling were contracted from different areas of Jangipur sub-division in Murshidabad district. All the members are belonging to Muslim community. Relevant information was collected by visiting the house of each beedi-worker during the month of November, 2012. The study subjects were interviewed and a questionnaire was followed for each subject; that included details about their age, education, length of service, amount of beedi production, monthly family income, possession of different household amenities, size of the family and occupational types of the male members. Dichotomous scaling technique had been incorporated for this study.

Figure-1: Location of Study Areas for Beedi-Workers' House Hold Survey in Murshidabad District

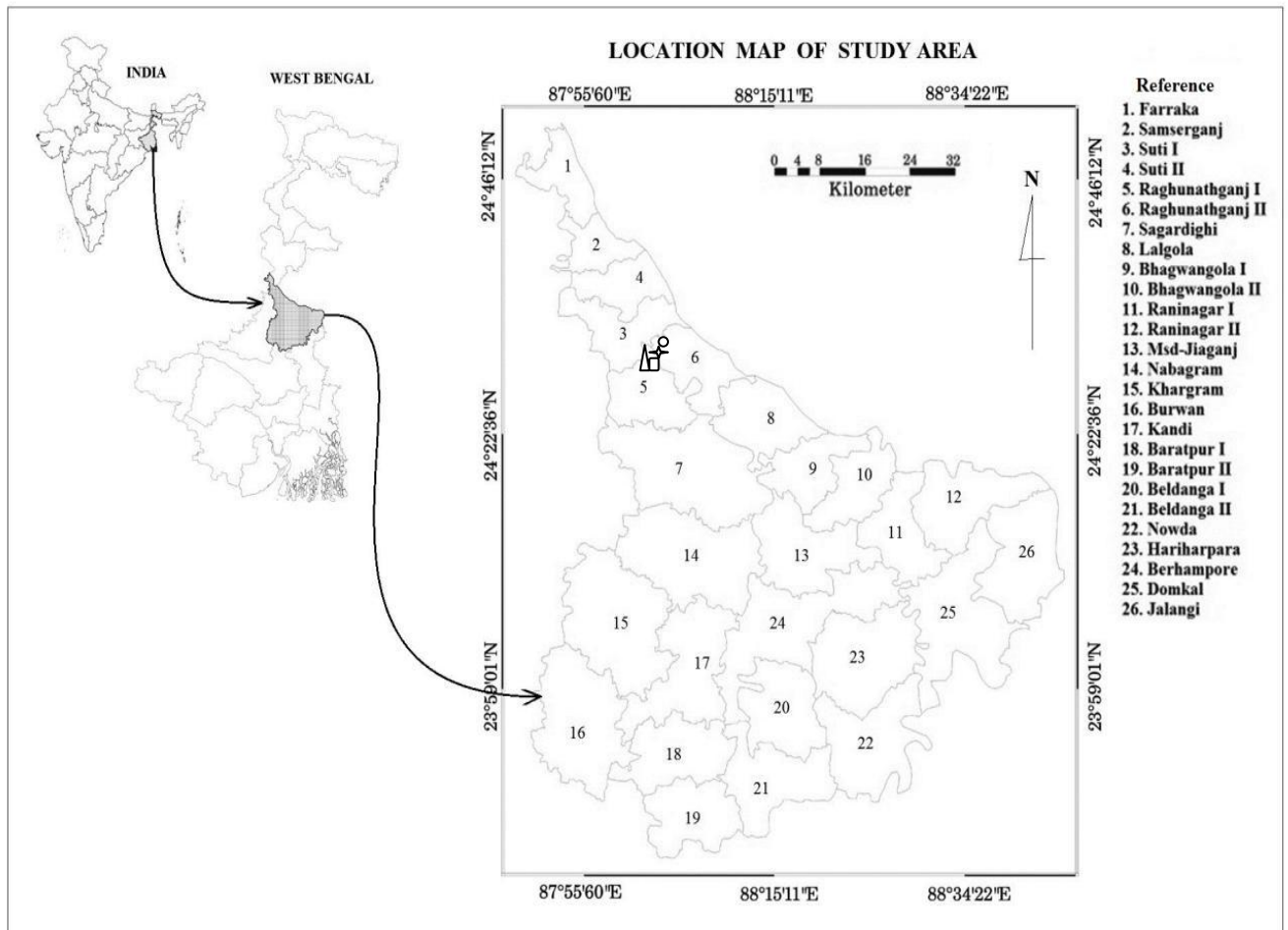


Figure - 1

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- Rahamanpur, Ward No. 3, Jangipur Municipality (Raghunathganj-II Block).
- ✦ Balighata, Ward No. 13, Jangipur Municipality (Raghunathganj-I Block).
- Khidirpur Village (Raghunathganj-I Block).
- △ Kanupur Village (Raghunathganj-I Block).

Table-1: Selection of the Sample.

Name of the Areas	Nature	Block	Distance from Sub-divisional Headquarter	No. of Sampled House Holds
Kanupur	Village of Kanupur Gram Panchayat	Raghunathganj-1	5Kms.	26
Khidirpur	Village of Kanupur Gram Panchayat	Raghunathganj-1	4Kms.	30
Rahamanpur	Municipal Ward-3 of Jangipur Municipality	Raghunathganj-2	3Kms.	22
Balighata	Municipal Ward-13 of Jangipur Municipality	Raghunathganj-1	1Km.	14

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

BEEDI INDUSTRY IN MURSHIDABAD:

The organization of production process of beedi in Murshidabad district could be of two types. In Factory System there is a direct relationship in between the beedi merchants and the workers who roll beedi at the factory shed. In Contractor System there is no direct relationship in between the workers and the beedi merchants. The contractors act as middleman in between them. The beedi merchants appoint some contractors who provide raw materials to the home based beedi workers who roll beedi at their home and return the rolled beedies to the merchants' factory via the contractors. The Factory system is almost abolished whereas the Contractor System gets flourished to get rid of the rigid Industrial and Labour Laws. Maximum concentration of beedi-workers in Murshidabad district can be found in Jangipur sub-division. The daily average production of beedi sticks in Jangipur sub-division is about fifty crores, produced through eighty two beedi factories (the Anandabazar Patrika, leading Bengali Newspaper in West Bengal, 01/12/2010). Most of the beedi-workers are women and children who can roll beedi very effectively due to flexible and slender structure of fingers. Auangabad, Dhuliyon, Omarpur are the major beedi producing centers in the sub-division.

Table-2: Sub-division Wise Registered Beedi-Workers in Murshidabad.

Sub-Divisions	Total Number of Registered Beedi-Workers by the State Labour Department	
	Total Number	% of total

Jangipur	241295	65
Berhampur	66412	18
Lalbag	25778	7
Domkol	21649	6
Kandi	15631	4
All Total	370765	100

Source: Deputy Labour Commissioner, Berhampur, Murshidabad.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

Table-3: Salient Social and Demographic Features of the Married Women Beedi-Workers Who are the Female Heads of the Families (N=92).

Category	Current Age(Year)		Age at Marriage (Year)		Educational Qualification		No. of Children				Incident of Institutional Delivery	
	<30	>30	<18	>18	Illiterate	Literate	≤2	3-4	5-6	>6	Yes	NO
Number of Respondent	46	46	62	30	60	32	32	38	20	2	24	68

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

Table-4: Low Standard of Living of the Families of Beedi-Workers (N=92).

Indicator	House-Types			Latrine Facility		Mobile		TV		No of Rooms			
	Un-concrete	Semi-concrete	Concrete	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	1	2	3	4
No. of Family	10	52	30	20	72	68	24	44	48	40	36	12	4

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

NB: Y=Yes, N=No.

The social and demographic scenario of the sampled married women beedi-workers, who are the female heads of the families, is very pathetic. Mass illiteracy, under aged marriage, low rate of institutional delivery (Mitra, 2010), higher fertility rate are highly pertinent to the society. As they work in unorganized sector, they are unskilled and deprived from the Govt. sanctioned minimum wage rate. On the other hand their fertility rate is high. They work harder, but the per capita income of the family remains low. Therefore, they and all of their family members are being kneaded by poverty trap. The remarkable fact is that due to lack of educational and health awareness they are much eager for television or mobile phone, rather for own latrine facility.

Table-5: Salient Economic Features of the Married Women Beedi-Workers who are the Female Heads of the Families (N =92).

Category	Avg. Daily Beedi Production (Sticks)			Duration of Rolling (Year)			Her Contribution(%) to Family's Total Monthly Income		
	≤300	300-600	600-800	≤10	10-20	>20	≤20	20-30	>30
No. of Respondents	24	62	6	20	58	14	40	34	18

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

Women beedi-workers' individual contribution to the total monthly income of the family is very low because the Contractors deprived the workers by following illegal processes –

1. The state government has sanctioned Rs. 165 for 1000 rolled beedies as the minimum wage. The beedi-workers now get only Rs. 75 for 1000 rolled beedies. Even, for every 1000 rolled beedies the contractor rejects 100-125 beedies as excuse of poor quality of rolling and for the rejected beedies, the workers are not paid any wages. Therefore, the actual wage for 1000 rolled beedies reduces to Rs. 67.50 or Rs. 65.50.
2. Due to sub-standard and under-weighted raw materials, the workers have to buy a significant amount of raw materials from the contractors.
3. The contractor does not maintain the workers' Log Book properly and the workers are illiterate simultaneously. So, there are definite chances of shrewdness against the workers by the contractors about the calculation of daily beedi production.
4. Employee Provident Fund is implemented by the Employees Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) of India. An establishment with 20 or more workers working in any one of the 180+ industries should register with EPFO. It is one of the largest social security organizations in the world in terms of members and volume of financial transactions undertaken. In EPF scheme the worker contributes a definite percentage of his or her monthly wages as an employee. Simultaneously the Merchant also contributes a definite additional amount to the worker's EPF Pass Book as an employer. The Central Government paid a definite amount of interest credit on the total fund throughout the years for the retirement benefits of the worker. All the official procedure to carry on the Pass Book is done by the Merchants via the Contractors. The Contractors prepare false EPF Pass Books and filch the deposits of the workers.

For the women beedi-workers, the job of beedi rolling is multitasking. They roll beedies and at the same time do the houses hold works also. In spite of having all these unfavorable tasks, they sacrifice their lives to flourish their family as much as possible. Here raises the question of higher risk of tobacco related occupational health hazards (Yashmin et al, 2012). It takes near about ten hours to roll thousand beedies. Due to excessive work pressure, the women beedi-workers cannot take food timely, sleep and rest properly. The male heads of the families also attached with various unorganized sectors. So the total monthly income of the family remains low. On the other hands, the female heads do not roll much beedies as they have to do the household works simultaneously. Therefore, the female school going members are compelled to roll beedies to help their families through increasing the amount of beedi production (see Table-6). The male school going members are compelled to join in various unorganized sectors (see Table-7). Both the male and female family heads cannot bear the extra burden of child education. As a result, those children in the middle stage of schooling get drop-out (Bagchi and Mukhopadhyay, 1996).

Table-6: Contribution of the Female Child Members to Hike the Total Beedi Production of the Families (N=92).

Average Daily Beedi Production (Sticks) of the Families	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	1200	1500	>1500
No. of Families	6	4	22	12	10	6	4	12	4	10	2

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

From the Table-6 it is vivid that when the female family head acts as the only or single beedi-workers, only six families ensure the average daily beedi production more than 600 sticks. Whereas, when the child members act as extra helping hands regarding beedi-rolling, forty eight families reach the target of average daily beedi production more than 600 sticks.

Table-7: Occupational Types of all the Male Members Including Drop-out Male Children of the Beedi-Workers' Families.

Occupation	CW	CL	Beedi Worker	Driver	Bus-Conductor	Small Business	Rickshaw Puller	Mechanic	Tailor
Respondent	112	6	12	2	4	12	6	2	2

Source: House Hold Survey-2012. NB: CW= Construction Worker, CL= Casual Labourer.

In spite of all these efforts, their per capita daily income remains low (see Table-8 & 9). Because, all of them are illiterate or less educated, unskilled and engaged in different unorganized sectors and total number of family members are high. As a result of low income they fall in the obstinate poverty trap generation by generation (see Figure-2).

Table-8: Daily Per Capita Income of the Beedi-workers' Families (N=92) When Income is Generated from the source of Beedi-rolling only.

Daily Per Capita Income in ₹.	<4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	>10
No. of Families	6	4	8	18	4	12	12	28

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

Table-9: Daily Per Capita Income of the Beedi-workers' Families (N=92) When Income is Generated from all the Sources Including Beedi-rolling.

Daily Per Capita Income in ₹.	<10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	>60
No. of Families	4	14	26	24	10	12	2

Source: House Hold Survey-2012.

When the beedi-rolling is considered as the single and only source of family income, the per capita daily income is much despondent. When all the sources of income including beedi-rolling are taken into consideration, the per capita daily income is relatively better. But, as the number of family members is high, it is impossible to maintain even the normal standard of living in this period of inflation.

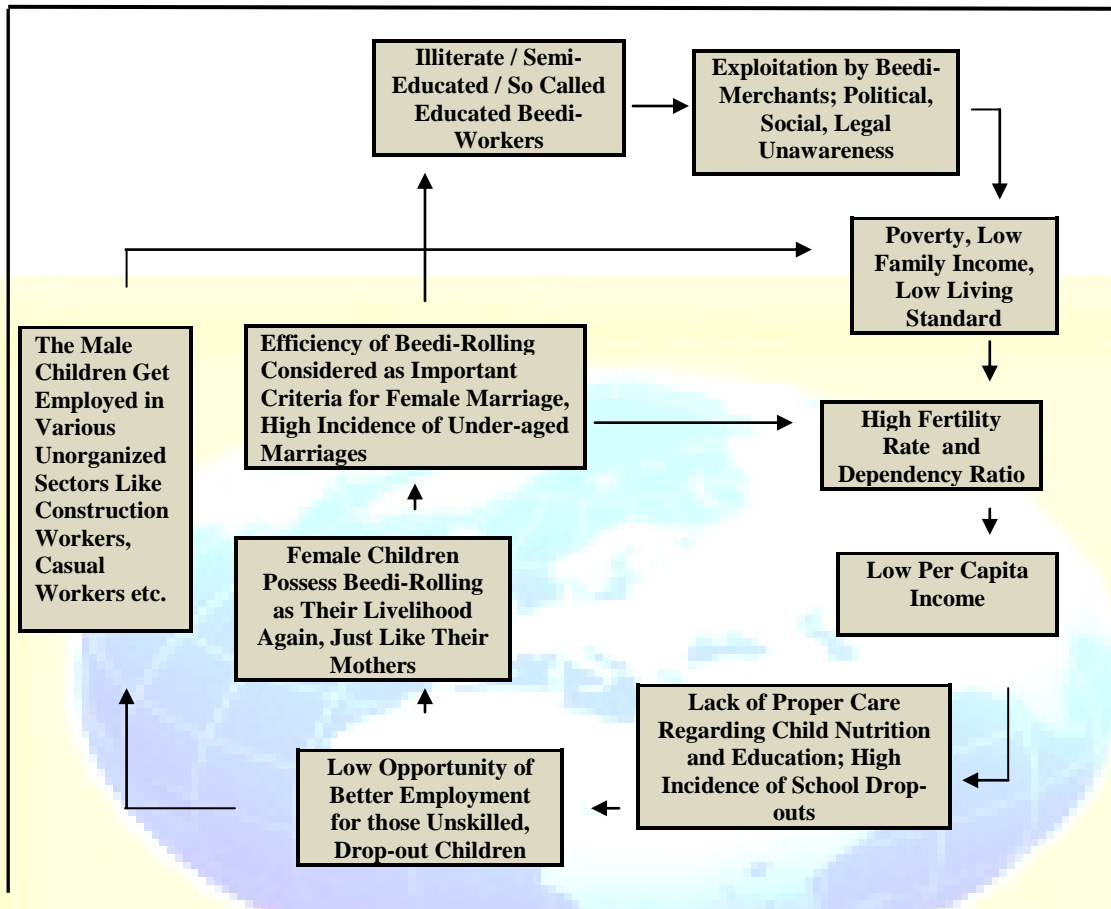


Figure-2: The Families of Beedi-Workers and the Poverty Trap.

RECCOMENDATIONS:

The measures that can eradicate the poverty faced by the families of Muslim beedi-workers in Murshidabad district, all are present in the current Social Security Schemes sanctioned by the Central as well as the State Government.

1. The beedi-workers now get only Rs. 75 for 1000 rolled beedies. On the basis of Minimum Wages Act, 1948 the state government calculate the wage rate for the beedi-workers after every six months. The current wage rate is Rs. 165 for 1000 beedies. Therefore, the state Labour Department, Trade Unions and Beedi Merchant Association should jointly take necessary actions to implement the minimum wage rate. If the present wage rate gets a hike, the monthly income

of the families will be increased automatically. But, the chance of increase of current wage rate to the minimum ones is negligible, because the beedi industry is typical unorganized sector in nature.

2. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) is a rural development programme of the Government of India launched in Financial Year 1978. It is a self-employment program intended to raise the income-generation capacity of target groups among the poor. The objective of IRDP is to provide suitable income generating assets through a mix of subsidy and credit to Below Poverty Line families. The Scheme is merged with another Scheme named Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) since 01.04.1999.

3. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a Rural Indian job guarantee scheme, enacted by Legislation on August 25, 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage of ₹120 per day in 2009 prices. If they fail to do so the Govt. has to pay the salary at their homes.

4. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Government of India sponsored programme, is India's primary social welfare scheme to tackle malnutrition and health problems in children below 6 years of age and their mothers. The main beneficiaries of the programme were aimed to be the girl child up to her adolescence, all children below 6 years of age, pregnant and lactating mothers. The gender promotion of the girl child by trying to bring her at par with the male child is a key component of the scheme.

5. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a programme aimed at the universalization of Elementary Education as mandated by the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free education to children aged 6–14 a fundamental right.

6. The Scheme 'National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education' commonly known as Mid-Day Meal Scheme was launched on the 15th August, 1995 on nationwide scale by the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. At present students up to class VIII has been feeding cooked meal throughout whole India under the scheme.

7. It is estimated that there are more than three and a half lakh SHGs in the West Bengal, out of which little more than 1.5 lakh SHGs have been formed under the Swarnajayanti Gram

Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) alone. The two major programmes which had been supporting the movement are 1) the SGSY and 2) the NABARD supported SHG-Bank Linkage Programme. Besides, there are some reputed micro-finance institutions like BANDHAN, to build up economic assets in the poverty stricken families.

If all these above mentioned schemes are properly implemented with the help of the Local Governments and the aims and objectives of these schemes are minutely understood by the heads of the families of the beedi-workers, the trap of the poverty will be vanished.

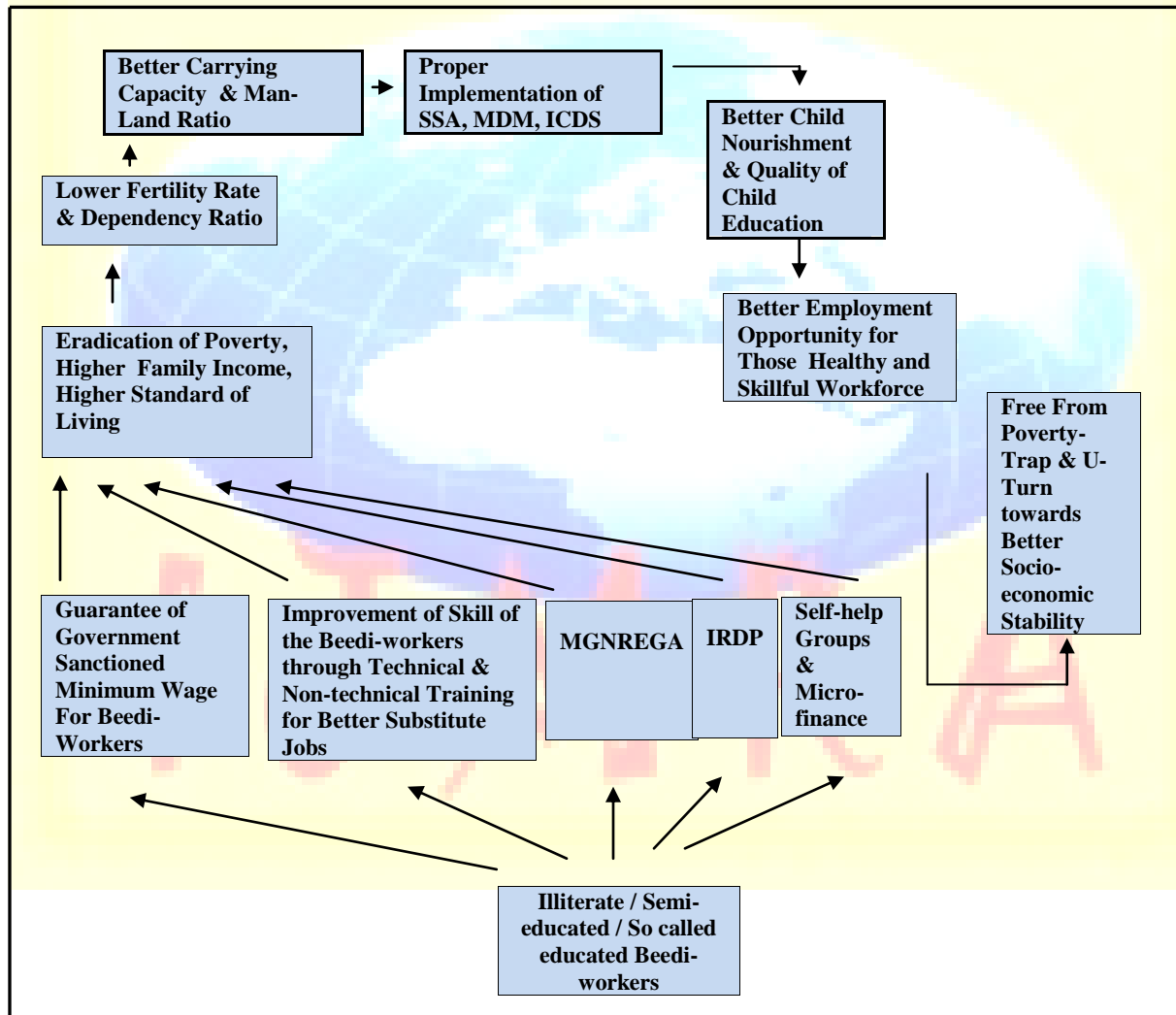


Figure-3: How to Eradicate the Trap of Poverty.

CONCLUSION:

In the male dominated social structure (Kundu and Chakraborty, 2012) all the married Muslim women beedi-workers play a vital role regarding food security for their families. They perform as home makers as well as active beedi-workers. In spite of having all the barriers related to unorganized nature of beedi industry, tobacco related occupational health hazards and the trap of poverty their efforts to survive their families, are really palatable. The Central as well as the State Government have huge responsibility to get them free from the trap of poverty so that the future generations can enjoy the better socio-economic stability.

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