

Sabooj Sathi: A Way towards Women Empowerment in West Bengal

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I. INTRODUCTION

Hon'ble Finance Minister Dr. Amit Mitra during his Budget speech of 2015-2016, declared a scheme for dispensation of bicycles to an approximated 40 lakh students studying in classes IX to XII in Government and Government Aided Schools and Madrasahs in the State of West Bengal. He further stated that around 25 lakh students would be covered in 2015-16 and the remaining 15 lakh in the next fiscal.

At present this scheme is well-known as Sabooj Sathi as propounded by Hon'ble Chief Minister Miss Mamata Banerjee herself and it mirrors her inclination to look at young students licensed to attain new feats in the future through the bicycles provided under the scheme. She also devised the logo of the scheme which is firmly adhered in the basket in front of the bicycle & she flagged off the dispensation in October 2015 from the district-Paschim Medinipur.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

The principal objectives of this scheme are as follows-

- To expand retention in schools,
- To motivate or cheer students to take up higher studies,
- To instil sense of confidence among the girl students by encouraging mobility,
- To foster environment-friendly and healthy means of transportation.

The objectives are lined up with four Sustainable Goals of agenda 2030, these are as follows-

SDG3: Good Health & Well-being,

SDG4: Quality Education,

SDG5: Gender Equality and

SDG13: Climate actions.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

An administrative structure has been set up for implementation of the scheme. The Backward Classes Welfare Department and the West Bengal SC, ST and OBC Development & Finance Corporation (formerly WB SC & ST Dev & Fin Corporation) have been announced "Nodal" Department and "Implementing Agency" respectively. A Steering Committee comprising of the Secretaries of the Departments of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, School Education, Minority Affairs & Madrasah Education

& Sundarban Affairs was added up to guide the implementation process. An inter-departmental Tender Committee was constituted for noticing the procurement process. At the District level, Nodal officers were recognized for propelling the responsibility of the scheme and SDOs, BDOs and Executive officers of Municipalities were further ranged for deriving implementation in a time bound manner.

IV. PROCUREMENT

Procurement was done through e-Tender, as per the prevailing norms of the authorities. Specifications were concluded in discussion with the "Research & Development Centre for bicycles & sewing machines", a body formed under the joint venture of the Punjab Government and United Nations Development Programme. The scenario or status of various grades/stages was shared in the public domain through the subsequent websites-<http://wbtenders.gov.in> and <https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in>. Till now, Hero Cycles Ltd., TI Cycles Ltd and Avon cycles ltd. were picked out for this and three phases of procurement has been completed up to now.

V. FUNDING

The cost of implementation of this scheme is borne pro rata by the concerned departments of Backward Classes Welfare, Tribal Development, and School Education & Minority Affairs & Madrasah Education depending upon the number of children to be given bicycles and shielded under the scheme as per their department's directive.

VI. E-GOVERNANCE IN IMPLEMENTATION

The scheme has undergone multi-dimensional challenges viz. students' collection record, management and consignment tracking, secure places selection for dispatch, schools tagging, fitters deployment along with their logistic and security managements etc. from across the country and lastly keeping the record of distribution in public forum as a part and parcel of the scheme. For this particular reason, a website namely <https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in> has been created with the support team of NIC to operate all the modules in catering the requisitions of all the stakeholders associated with this scheme.

The shareholders of this scheme such as teachers and students of 12,235 Government & Government-aided schools and

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Madrasahs, School Inspectors, 341 Blocks, 129 Municipalities, officers of the District Administration, peoples' representatives who took part and bestowed in different ways to make the scheme a successful venture. Records of the Students' were entered through web portal by the schools. After that validation was done by Sub Inspectors of Schools, Additional District Inspectors / District Inspectors of Schools. BDOs carried out the task of forming dispatch points and tagging schools to finalise dispatch point-wise requisition of Boys & Girls bicycles. Suppliers were given the scope through portal to enter consignment details so that those can be tracked or followed by the officials of State Government. Schools are responsible for generating distribution record from their individual log-in facility. At last the schools uploaded data like distribution date, brand of bicycle, frame no. (Unique) of Bi-cycle, students' particulars etc. District-wise, Block wise and individual student wise Distribution records were made available in the public forum on real time basis.

VII. PRESENT STATUS

Since 2015, more than 82 lakh students have received bicycles under the scheme and around One Crore students are being covered. About 34.94 lakh bi-cycles had already been procured & distributed to target group students in 2 phases; in 1st phase 25.34 lakh & in 2nd phase 9.60 lakh during 2 successive fiscals i.e. 2015-16 & 2016-17. Government has already taken the decision that students can get bi-cycles as soon as they are enrolled to Class IX. Next target is to procure another 25 lakh bi-cycles for 3rd phase. This scheme has also taken up in all districts of West Bengal and the bi-cycles procured in 2nd and 3rd phase will hold up 10 special reflectors in pursuance with the advisory or recommendatory issued by the Supreme Court in India (SCI) for rider's well-being. Perhaps, West Bengal is the first to fall in with, state wide. More than One Crore students are being covered in seven phases while Phase VI is in progress out phase VII has been sanctioned.

VIII. WEB SOURCE

- <https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in/v2/>
- https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in/about_scheme.php