

IMPACT OF KANYASHREE AND SABOOJ SATHI SCHEMES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN SOUTHERN PART OF WEST BENGAL, EASTERN INDIA

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Abstract

Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi schemes are two noteworthy welfare schemes sponsored by the West Bengal government to develop the rural areas in the state. Kanyashree scheme was launched to check the early marriage of girls whereas the Sabooj Sathi scheme was aimed at empowering the students among the weaker sections of society. The present paper attempts to study the scenario of Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi schemes, and their role in the development of rural areas in the southern parts of West Bengal in eastern India. The entire work is based on primary data and samples have been selected from three districts, i.e. Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, and Howrah. Ten sample villages were selected among the three districts and 150 samples were chosen through the purposive sampling method. Average and percentage methods and applied cartographic techniques have been considered for analysis and drawing inferences. Kanyashree remarkably controls the early marriage of girls, reduces the different social barriers that promote the marriage of teenage girls, and broadens the scope of their education. The funds generated for Kanyashree scheme are directly transferred to the beneficiaries' accounts to meet their private coaching fees, and purchase of educational equipment. Bicycles are provided to the beneficiaries of the Sabooj Sathi scheme to make commuting to school, private coaching centres and playgrounds easy. Family members of the beneficiaries are also using bicycles to reach various places, thereby availing the scope of using it for non-academic purposes associated with numerous important domestic matters. The study found that both the schemes, i.e. Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi contribute to empowering girl students in the study area.

Keywords: Kanyashree, Sabooj Sathi, Rural Development, Early Marriage of Girls, Student's Empowerment.

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Introduction

In India, most of the people (68.84 per cent) live in rural areas. In West Bengal, 68.1 per cent of the population lives in the countryside. Out of the total population in the state of West Bengal, the percentage of shared population in the 10-19 age group is 19.55 per cent. Females and males constitute 48.72 per cent and 51.28 per cent of the population, respectively.

The Government of West Bengal has launched many schemes for improving the socio-economic status of the people, and the two most important as well as beneficial among them are Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi schemes. The Kanyashree scheme has two forms - K1 and K2. Unmarried girl students aged in the age group of 13-18 years, who intend to continue their studies are eligible to apply for the scheme. The fund is directly credited to the bank account of the Kanyashree girls. The state government directly transfers Rs.1000 per year for the K1 beneficiaries and a one-time benefit of Rs.25000 to beneficiaries belonging to the K2 category. Kanyashree Prakalpa won the UNPSA (United Nations Public Service Awards) Awards, 2017 for supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda.

Kanyashree is an important social security scheme that controls child marriage and reduces dropouts in school by the members of the Kanyashree club (Satyarthi, 2022). Kanyashree Prakalpa, 2013 is a welfare scheme constituted to materialise the goals of the Department of Women Development and Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal. The modus operandi is transferring the government funds directly to the accounts of girl beneficiaries with the primary aim of developing their overall social status by controlling early marriage, motivating their overall development, reducing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), and preventing trafficking and exploitation. This conditional cash transfer scheme promotes girls belonging to the socio-economically weaker section of society (Sau et al., 2019). Since the introduction of the Kanyashree Scheme, it has been observed that the incidence of

early marriage and the dropout rate of girls have significantly reduced. This scheme also enhances the empowerment of adolescent girls in the state (Sen & Dutta, 2018; Halder, 2018). Most of the beneficiaries are keen to avail the scholarship amount, but they are hardly interested in bettering the quality of education, which is attributed to the typical social condition that defines the lacuna of the upbringing of the girl child. This has resulted in creating a crisis in the job market (Ghosh, 2019). Jamal and Hoque (2021) pointed out that Kanyashree scheme has a significant impact on reducing the early marriage of girls, continuance of their education in monetary terms, and improving the social status of their families. Biswas (2021) and Kanrar (2018) pointed out that Kanyashree Prakalpa is a blessing to the girls, who their families consider a burden on them. They can postpone their marriages till they reach 18 years and pursue their education. Bhattacharya and Deb (2020) pointed out that Kanyashree scheme is helping girls to achieve their dreams. This scheme has brought a change in the narrow mindset of girls as well as their parents. Sen and Dutta (2018), and Mondal (2020) pointed out that Kanyashree empowered adolescent girls to take decisions regarding their marriage and its timing.

In the Sabooj Sathi Scheme, 2015 green-coloured bicycles are given to the students of classes IX, X, XI, and XII in West Bengal. These cycles are given to both the boys and girls for their smooth and safe conveyance to school and the return journey. Sau et al. (2019) observed that this scheme has remarkably improved attendance in schools, besides empowering students. Sabooj Sathi scheme produced equal opportunities for all categories of students and reduced inaccessibility (Pratichi Institute, 2017). Biswas (2018) explains that the Sabooj Sathi scheme has played a major role in reducing the dropout rate for girls pursuing higher education. Jamal and Hoque (2021) explain that the scheme has promoted eco-friendly means of transportation, mobility and a sense of confidence in girls to go for higher studies, apart from enhancing the capacity of the schools to keep the students at the secondary level.

Research Questions

What are the scenarios of Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi schemes and their impact on rural development in the southern parts of West Bengal?

Objectives:

1. To highlight the scenario of Kanyashree scheme and its impact on rural development.
2. To highlight the scenario of Sabooj Sathi scheme and its impact on rural development.

Study Area

West Bengal is the eastern state of India, covering an area of 88752 sq.km. with 23 districts and 341 community development blocks. The study area - Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, and Howrah districts - is situated in the southern part of the state and covers a total area of 15,548 sq. km.

The three districts have a total population of 1,58,59,361 of which 1,14,69,817 constitute rural population. These three districts have 68 Development Blocks out of a total of 341 blocks in the state. Both Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur are rural-dominated districts and the percentage share of rural population in Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Howrah districts, is 88.35 per cent, 87.97 per cent and

36.70 per cent, respectively. The average percentage of population in the 10-19 age group in the study districts is 20.05 per cent for males and 20.04 per cent for females, which is higher than the state average (19.55 per cent) (Census of India, 2011). Students in the three districts depend on the government and government-aided schools for their education.

Database and Methodology

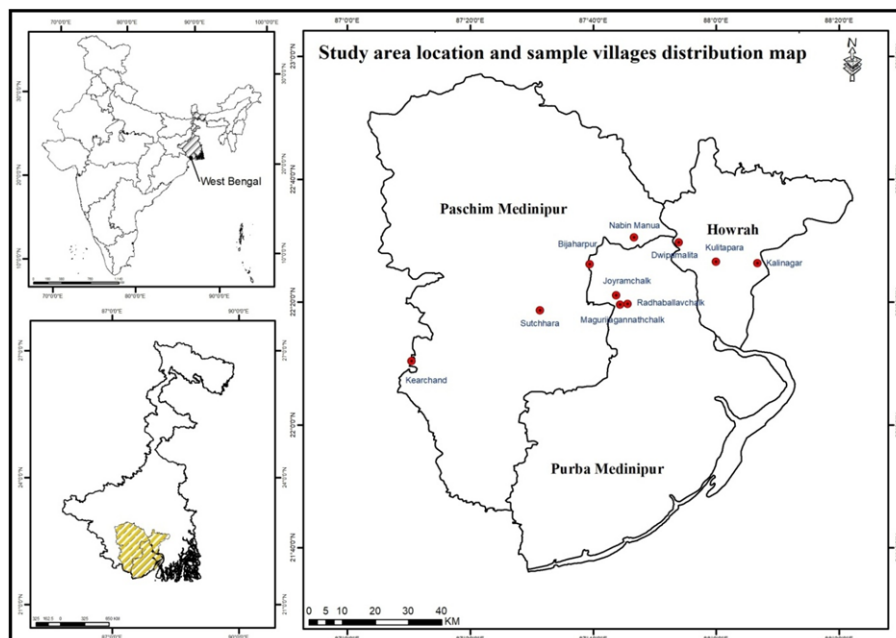
The research depends on primary data collected in May 2022. Data has been collected from sample villages of all three districts. Ten sample villages were selected through a purposive sampling method (Figure 1), and 15 samples were considered from each village. Out of the 150 respondents, 108 (72 per cent) respondents are Kanyashree girls and the remaining respondents, i.e. 42 (28 per cent) are their parents. It may be noted that all Kanyashree girls are also the beneficiaries of Sabooj Sathi scheme. The average age of the Kanyashree girls was found to be 19 years, and the average age of the remaining respondents was 38 years. All the respondents are considered as the key informatics sample. Average and percentage methods and applied cartographic techniques have been considered for analysis and drawing inferences. Table 1 shows the district-wise distributions of samples.

Table 1

Distribution of Samples

District	Village	Number of samples	Kanyashree girls			Others (Parents of Kanyashree girls)		
			Number	Per cent	Average age	Number	Per cent	Average age
Paschim Medinipur	Nabin Manua	15	15	100	16	00	00	00
	Kearchand	15	02	13.33	23	13	86.67	40
	Sutchhara	15	5	33.33	21	10	66.67	45
Purba Medinipur	Bijaharpur	15	11	73	17	4	26	47
	Magurijagannathchalk	15	15	100	21	00	00	00
	Radhaballavchalk	15	12	80	18	03	20	20
	Joyramchalk	15	12	80	18	03	20	39
Howrah	Kulitapara	15	14	93.33	18	01	6.67	37
	Kalinagar	15	09	60	19	06	40	38
	Dwipamalita	15	15	100	19	00	00	00

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

Figure 1*Map of Study Area and Sample Villages***Result and Discussions**

A majority of beneficiaries of the Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi schemes belong to the marginal section of society. Their family members are engaged in agricultural and daily labour work for livelihood (Table 2). In Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Howrah districts, 29.77 per cent of benefitted families are engaged in daily labour work and 24.85 per cent are engaged in agricultural activities, and the figures indicate that people, especially students belonging to the weaker section of society, are benefitted from both schemes.

Table 3 demonstrates that the beneficiaries of the Kanyashree scheme (K1) fell in the age group of 14-15 years, who studied in classes VII and IX. In the entire study area, 49.97 per cent of the girls were in the ninth standard and 48.50 per cent were in the eighth standard. Therefore, it is evident that since the beginning of their teenage years, girls from financially struggling families are inspired to pursue their studies as they recognise the support of the state government. Most of the girls spend the money in the Kanyashree account for private tuition, purchasing educational equipment, etc.

Table 4 shows that, on average, 35.36 per cent of respondents spend the money to meet the private tuition fees, and 44.59 per cent to purchase educational equipment. This situation depicts the applicability of K1 form of Kanyashree scheme for the development of girl's education in the rural areas of West Bengal. The beneficiaries of K2 form of Kanyashree scheme belong to the 18-19 years age group, who were pursuing classes XI and XII and were at the threshold of entering college (Table 5). Most of the girls, i.e. 72.07 per cent in Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Howrah districts, benefitted from K2 scheme in 12th standard and 34.48 per cent benefitted during their collegiate education. Most of the beneficiaries spend their money to pay private tuition fees (27.45 per cent) and purchase education equipment (37.02 per cent), while 17.07 per cent of the girls spend the money from Kanyashree fund towards educational excursion purpose (Table 6).

The foremost positive impact of Kanyashree scheme, launched in 2013, is the decline in number early marriages among weaker sections in rural West Bengal. Table 7 indicates that before five years, girls used to get married in their early teens

in the rural sides of West Bengal. The early teens refer to an average age of 17 years old. Recent figures show that their age at marriage has gone up to 21 years. It is evident that before five years, most often, girls were married off at the age of 16 in Purba Medinipur and Howrah districts, indicating the prevalence of the customs of early marriage in rural sects of Bengal. Most of the respondents (95.83 per cent) said that the Kanyashree scheme is effective in encouraging the education of girls (Table 8). The implementation of the Kanyashree scheme has also controlled many unexpected social barriers that tend to enhance the chances of early marriage in the southern countryside of West Bengal. Therefore, the Kanyashree scheme plays a pivotal role directly and indirectly in empowering the girls and controlling the social problems that marred their lives. The K2 form of Kanyashree scheme is efficacious in this aspect as unmarried

girls are entitled to a one-time grant of Rs.25000 for pursuing their studies. Since the illiterate guardians show little interest in marrying off their daughters before getting the funds, it tactfully reduces the instances of teenage marriage in the countryside of Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Howrah districts. Thus, the scheme directly and indirectly controls the fertility behaviour in society, and enhances the literacy rate of girls among the weaker sects. The following table shows the long-term impact of Kanyashree scheme on the development of human resources in the rustic sides of study districts. Kanyashree scheme is found to have facilitated proper human development, especially the progress of girls, and betterment of human beings in the study area, and positively impacted the characteristics of the population i.e., fertility, mortality, sex ratio, and marital status.

Long-term Impact of Kanyashree Scheme	Percentage of respondents
Increase female literacy rate in future	10.44
Helpful for women empowerment	10.68
Changes the attitude of elders towards girls child in the family	6.6
Increase sex ratio	10.05
Reduce maternal mortality rate	10.40
Reduce infant mortality rate	10.26
Reduce early marriage of girls	10.76
Reduction in school dropout rate, especially girls from poor families	10.41
Eradication of undernutrition and malnutrition of girls	8.73
Preventing trafficking and exploitation of girl child	7.67

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

The Kanyashree Club, constituted by the beneficiaries of the scheme, plays a very important role in achieving the goals of social development. The members participate in numerous social awareness programmes of the government. Local administration engages the Kanyashree club members in awareness programmes on plastic pollution, afforestation, superstitions, waterborne diseases, thalassemia, cybercrime, etc., and social

awareness through drama. The members also get training on self-defence. Besides distributing chess, ludo, and carrom boards to clubs, the government organises handicraft training programmes for members. This way, the scheme enhances the participation of girls in different social development programmes, thereby bettering the implementation of social development programmes. In many areas of the state, Kanyashree soldiers take a proactive

role in preventing child marriages with the help of local police and block administration (Chakraborty et al., 2022).

Both boys and girls benefit from the Sabooj Sathi scheme, and they are entitled to receive green-coloured bicycles from the state government free of cost. Students aged 14-15 years and studying at 9th and 10th standard are eligible for benefit, as per the scheme guidelines. Table 9 shows that, on average, the percentage of girls beneficiaries is higher than boys in Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Howrah districts. Students use the bicycles to go to the private coaching centre, school and playground. In the entire geographical area, the students use the cycles to reach private coaching or tuition (39.02 per cent), school (40.24 per cent), and playground (21.87 per cent) (Table 10). The bicycles are also used for miscellaneous non-academic purposes which positively impact the economy and livelihood of the rural people. Beneficiaries and their family members use the cycles to go to the nearest market (32.68 per cent), bus stop (25.44 per cent), hospital or health centre (23.76 per cent), and workplace (20.31 per cent). (Table 11). Hence, it is observed that a significant number of elders and family members of the students enjoy the benefit of using the cycle to earn their livelihood and meet other requirements, which indirectly adds to the empowerment of the rural economy.

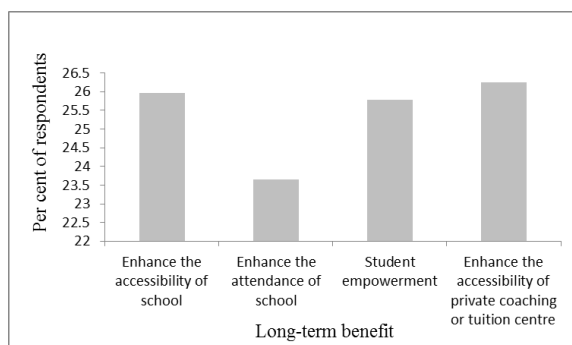
In the entire geographical area, the average distance between different service centres from the

living places is not too short. The average distance from school to home in the area is 2.41 km, but the average distance of the same in Paschim Medinipur district is 2.60 km. Therefore, the bicycle serves as an important medium of transportation from school to home. Table 12 shows that the average distance from private coaching centre to home is 2.61 km in the three districts, but the average distance from home to private coaching centre in Howrah district is 3.84 km. Students use cycles for to-and-fro journeys to private coaching centres and home; so the scheme plays a pivotal role in educational development in the interior parts of southern West Bengal. In the three districts, the average distance from different service centres to living places is 1.95 km, bus stop is 5.19 km, and the health centre is 4.90 km. Therefore, the impact of Sabooj Sathi scheme on the development of the countryside in southern West Bengal is extensive.

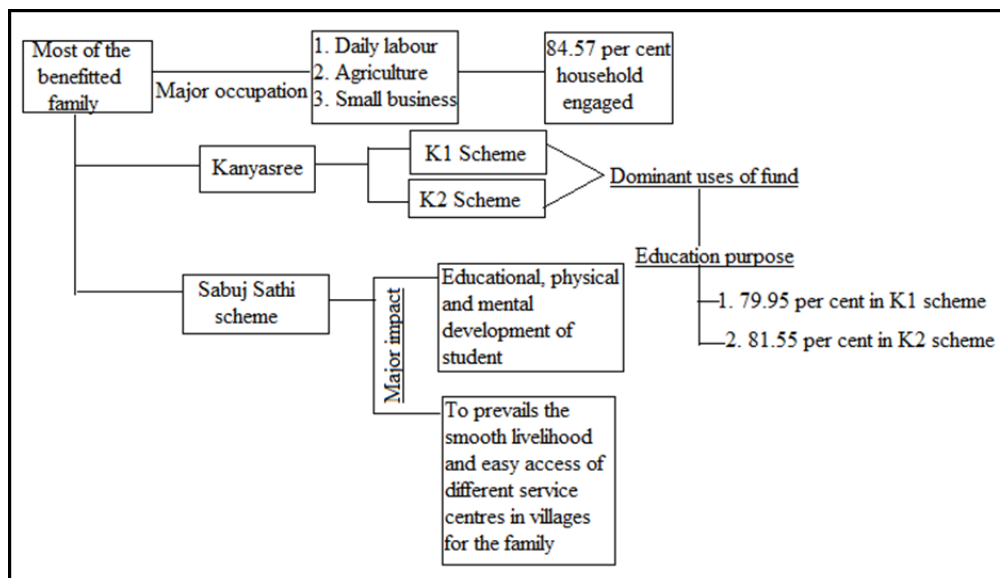
The Sabooj Sathi scheme has a substantial long-term impact on educational development in the entire geographical area (Figure 2). While 25.97 per cent of respondents said that the scheme enhances the accessibility of school to the students (Table 13), 23.66 per cent agree that it enhances attendance in school. Student empowerment is positively impacted by the scheme as 25.79 per cent of respondents testify about it whereas 26.25 per cent think that private coaching centres are now easily accessible for students in rural areas. Accordingly, the scheme directly and indirectly impacts human development and welfare.

Figure 2

Long-term Benefit of Sabooj Sathi Scheme in the Educational Development of Villages



Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

Figure 3*Major Occupation of Benefitted Families and Impact of Kanyashree and Sabooj Sathi Scheme*

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

Conclusion

Kanyashree launched by the West Bengal government has shown a strong impact on rural development in the form of reducing the marriage of teenage girls, promoting their education, and empowerment in rural areas of southern West Bengal. In rural areas, the girls use the aided funds to meet various requirements related to their educational enterprises (Figure 3).

It addressed the social problem of early marriages and the results from Purba Medinipur and Howrah districts show that the girls, who were earlier married off in their early teens, are now getting married in their twenties on average. The same positive result is also noticeable in Paschim Medinipur. The scheme helps girls to engage in studies, and control various unexpected social

barriers that resulted in their early marriages. Kanyashree scheme indirectly changed the socio-economic status of girls and paved the path for their welfare.

Sabooj Sathi plays a key role in the development of rural areas in the southern parts of West Bengal. The male and female student beneficiaries use the bicycles which they receive under the scheme for their daily commute to schools, tuition centres, playgrounds, etc. The scheme contributes to rural livelihood and development as the family members of beneficiaries use the bicycles for different purposes, such as visiting market, health centre, bus stop, workplace, etc. The scheme also has a positive effect on long-term educational development by bettering attendance in schools.

Author's Contribution:

Balai Adhikary: Conceptualisation, manuscript writing, revision, literature review, data compilation, analysis and interpretation

Sandipa Mukherjee: Data collection and data compilation

Sumi Makal: Data collection and data compilation

Table 2*Occupation of Family of Respondents*

District	Percentage of Respondents				
	Daily labour	Agriculture	Service	Business	Others
Paschim Medinipur	19.31	35.38	3.08	44.27	00
Purba Medinipur	32.14	15.67	12.94	20.37	3.94
Howrah	37.87	23.50	15.05	25.22	10.14
Average	29.77	24.85	10.36	29.95	4.69

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 3***Benefits of the K1 Scheme*

District	The average age of beneficiaries in years	The average age of beneficiaries in years	Percentage	Percentage
	VIII	IX	VIII	IX
Paschim Medinipur	13.74	14.46	51.51	48.48
Purba Medinipur	13.5	15	66.5	19.75
Howrah	14	15	27.5	81.67
Average	13.74	14.82	50.50	49.97

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 4***Uses of Money in the K1 Scheme*

District	Uses in per cent			
	Private coaching fees	Educational equipment purchase	Do not use it yet	Shopping/Marketing
Paschim Medinipur	35	48.21	00	25.22
Purba Medinipur	36.82	40.54	24.49	19.98
Howrah	34.27	45.02	3.45	17.30
Average	35.36	44.59	9.31	20.83

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

Table 5*Benefits of the K2 Scheme*

District	The average age of benefit in years			Percentage		
	XI	XII	During college study	XI	XII	During college study
Paschim Medinipur	18	19	19	6.25	81.03	25.33
Purba Medinipur	18	18	19	9.17	81.84	18.11
Howrah	18	18	19	20	53.33	60
Average	18	18.33	19	11.81	72.07	34.55

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 6***Uses of Money in the K2 Scheme*

District	Uses in percentage					
	Private coaching fees	Educational equipment purchase	Ornaments making	Educational excursion	Homemaking	Marketing or shopping
Paschim Medinipur	29.63	45.43	29.63	15.38	00	00
Purba Medinipur	28.28	32.86	16.62	21.67	10	22.95
Howrah	24.45	32.76	9.01	14.18	11.11	25.3
Average	27.45	37.02	18.42	17.08	7.04	16.08

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 7***Comparison of Average Age of Marriage for Girls*

District	The average age at marriage of girls (in years)	
	Before five years ago	Recent time
Paschim Medinipur	18	24
Purba Medinipur	16	20
Howrah	16	20
Average	16.67	21.33

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

Table 8*Impact of Kanyashree on Engaging Girl Children in Education and Avoiding Unexpected Social Barriers*

District	Percentage of respondents	
	Engagement of girls in education	Avoid unexpected social barriers
Paschim Medinipur	100	100
Purba Medinipur	87.5	85
Howrah	100	86.67
Average	95.83	90.56

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 9***Average Age & Gender of Beneficiaries of Sabooj Sathi Scheme*

District	Average age in years		Gender			
			Boys (Per cent)		Girls (Per cent)	
	IX	X	IX	X	IX	X
Paschim Medinipur	14.33	15.66	30.42	39.48	36.34	55
Purba Medinipur	15	12	23.03	11.58	57.71	63.42
Howrah	14.33	15.66	50.69	66.67	64.34	62.74
Average	14.55	14.44	34.71	39.24	52.80	60.39

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 10***Uses of the Bicycle of Sabooj Sathi Scheme*

District	Uses (per cent of respondents)			
	Go to private tuition or coaching	Go to school	Go to playground	Others
Paschim Medinipur	35.35	35.35	34.47	26.92
Purba Medinipur	36.42	39.14	24.43	00
Howrah	45.29	46.21	6.72	00
Average	39.02	40.24	21.87	

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

Table 11*Non-academic Uses of Bicycles by the Beneficiaries and Their Family Members*

District	Uses in percent				
	Go to nearest market	Go to bus stop	Go to hospital or health centre	Go to workplace by elders or other family members	Others
Paschim Medinipur	27.29	24.85	20.79	24.04	00
Purba Medinipur	37.56	30.21	21.32	20.48	12.48
Howrah	33.14	21.25	29.18	16.41	00
Average	32.68	25.44	23.76	20.31	

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 12***Average Distance of Household from Service Centre*

District	Distance to service centres (in km)				
	School	Market	Bus stop	Health centre	Private tuition or coaching centre
Paschim Medinipur	2.60	1.98	5.61	4.21	2.08
Purba Medinipur	2.33	2.22	5.07	8.45	1.91
Howrah	2.29	1.65	4.88	2.05	3.84
Average	2.41	1.95	5.19	4.90	2.61

*Source: Primary Survey, 2022.***Table 13***Long-term Benefits of Sabooj Sathi Scheme in Educational Development of Villages*

District	Long-term benefits (per cent)			
	Enhance the accessibility of school	Enhance attendance at school	Student empowerment	Enhance the accessibility of private coaching or tuition centre
Paschim Medinipur	25.83	21.67	24.17	28.33
Purba Medinipur	27.08	24.31	23.2	25.42
Howrah	25	25	25	25
Average	25.97	23.66	25.79	26.25

Source: Primary Survey, 2022.

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