

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Major Welfare Schemes of West Bengal: A Geographical Appraisal

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Abstract

The present study aims to critically appraise the existing major welfare schemes of West Bengal from the period of 2011 to 2021. West Bengal, being the fourth most populous state of India, launched many welfare schemes for women empowerment and encourages them to higher education, scholarship for students, child nutrition, shelter provided to the homeless, pension scheme for old age people etc. in the notion of sustainable development. The current effort evaluating seven prime development schemes (Kanyashree Prakalpa, Sabooj Sathi Prakalpa, Sikhashree, Shishu Sathi, Khadya Sathi, Fair Price Medicine Shops, Gitanjali Housing Scheme) by highlighting their objectives, target groups, implementation and effectiveness. The selected schemes cover the multi-layered section of the society, like homeless people, children and women, unemployed, old age people, physically disabled people, backward sections etc. by which they get benefitted, raised their capabilities and improved their standard of living. It is to be noted that the state received the prestigious 'United Nations Public Service Award' in 2017 for the Kanyashree Prakalpa for financial support of girl students to encourage them in the field of education and empowerment. At this juncture, the evaluation of the prime schemes operated from 2011 to 2021 is designed to be addressed using the secondary database. After completing the document-based logical analysis, necessary calculation and SWOC analysis have been carried out and the results have been represented by spatial mapping and cartograms. It reveals from the results that the schemes are very imperative and effective, especially in the backward and weaker section of the state as these cover food grain services to fight against poverty, child development, improvement in gross school enrollment, educational development, providing housing facilities etc. As discussed the progressive welfare schemes have been found very imperative and effective, especially in the backward and weaker section of the society of the state.

Keywords: Development, evaluation, effectiveness, multi-layered society, progress, welfare scheme, West Bengal.

INTRODUCTION

The welfare schemes of any region are designed to protect the poor and disadvantaged group of

people and it also equips the labour force in the process of accelerating economic growth (Jha, 2013). The term “Welfare” is standing for well being of a region and the integration of human beings for development. It desirably involves the mental, physical, moral and emotional factors of a person and consequently constitutes the structure of the welfare of the society (Patro, 2016). In India, the government had restored planned development for minimizing inequality in income, eradicating the poverty scenario and improving the people’s living standards. The improvement in the quality of life and reduction of poverty by bringing opportunities for self-development and employment continued to be the basic approach since 1951 (Planning Commission, 2010). In this context, social welfare is such a function which was performed by a few individuals or groups motivated by compassion and concern for the poor, the needy and the destitute (Kumar, 2018). The central and state government provided security to disadvantaged citizens by initiating welfare schemes. The welfare scheme’s facilities are not only limited to providing housing facilities, free medical facilities, pension benefits, children and adult education, and benefits for the employee’s family but also provided benefits to all needy people in the backward section of the society to uplift the societal status.

The present study is concentrated in West Bengal, which is the fourth most populous state in India and according to the census (2011), about 68.13% population of the state live in rural areas. A good number of schemes are being implemented in West Bengal to eradicate rural poverty, tackle the employment problems in rural areas, and create opportunities for livelihood development (Roy et al., 2018). Rural development has depended on economic growth and the development of funds and schemes through the central government and state government (West Bengal Development Report, 2010). From 2011 to 2021, the government of West Bengal introduced many progressive welfare schemes for the economically backward segment, physically weaker section, homeless people, old age people, girls, youths etc. of the society. These progressive development schemes have empowered and encouraged the weaker people to survive against poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, physical and mental barriers, creating job opportunities, providing health facilities, giving shelter for the poor people, etc. The advent of the state largely depends on the development of the socio-economic condition and the standard of living of the inhabitants, especially the rural poor who are occupying the larger section of the society. In this context, the government of West Bengal had introduced some welfare schemes for the beneficiaries of SC, ST, minorities, women, adults, unemployed, disabled, homeless, old age and poor people. These schemes, introduced from 2011 to 2021, are designed to provide benefits for the weaker segment and vulnerable people of society. The development of the poor and vulnerable sections of the society seeks the overall development; henceforth, any welfare scheme needs to be evaluated in terms of its, objectives, effectiveness, and progress so that the development can be assured. The development of the state is facing some social problems and sometimes it is due to the absence of deliberate social planning. The welfare scheme is considered the remedy for the suffering people as it helps the needy people who are suffering physically, socially and mentally. By evaluating the welfare schemes and we are getting a trend of social justice and economic development of the state as such schemes often played a vital role in reducing violence on the girl child and women, poverty, unemployment, overcrowding of urban settlements, slum dwellings etc. Moreover, the beneficiaries are taking the healthcare facilities, educational improvement, housing facilities, and development of children and women of the state can be identified and what are the challenges to implementing these programs could be understood. The current effort has been highlighting seven prime development schemes and their basic objectives, target groups, implementation and effectiveness. Thus, the present study is very relevant so far as the development of the state is concerned and to the planning and development of further schemes in future.

STUDY AREA

The current study has been focused on West Bengal, which is located in the eastern part of India (Fig. 1). The state lies between 85°50’ E to 89°50’ E longitude and 21°25’ N to 27°13’ N latitude

and it is stretching from the Himalayas in north part and Bay of Bengal in the south part. There are 23 districts distributed into five divisions in West Bengal, which were considered for the current study. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Alipurduar and Kalimpong are located in the northern part of the state. While Bankura, Paschim Bardhaman, Purba Bardhaman, Birbhum, Purulia, Murshidabad, Nadia, West Midnapore, Jhargram, East Midnapore, Hooghly, Howrah, Kolkata, North 24 and South 24 Parganas are located in the south part of the state. Kolkata is the capital and the largest mega city of West Bengal. There are a huge number of subdivisions, blocks, and gram panchayats present in each district of the state; and due to the high concentration of rural population, the state is suffering from poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, poor health care, unemployment, etc. socio-economic issues.

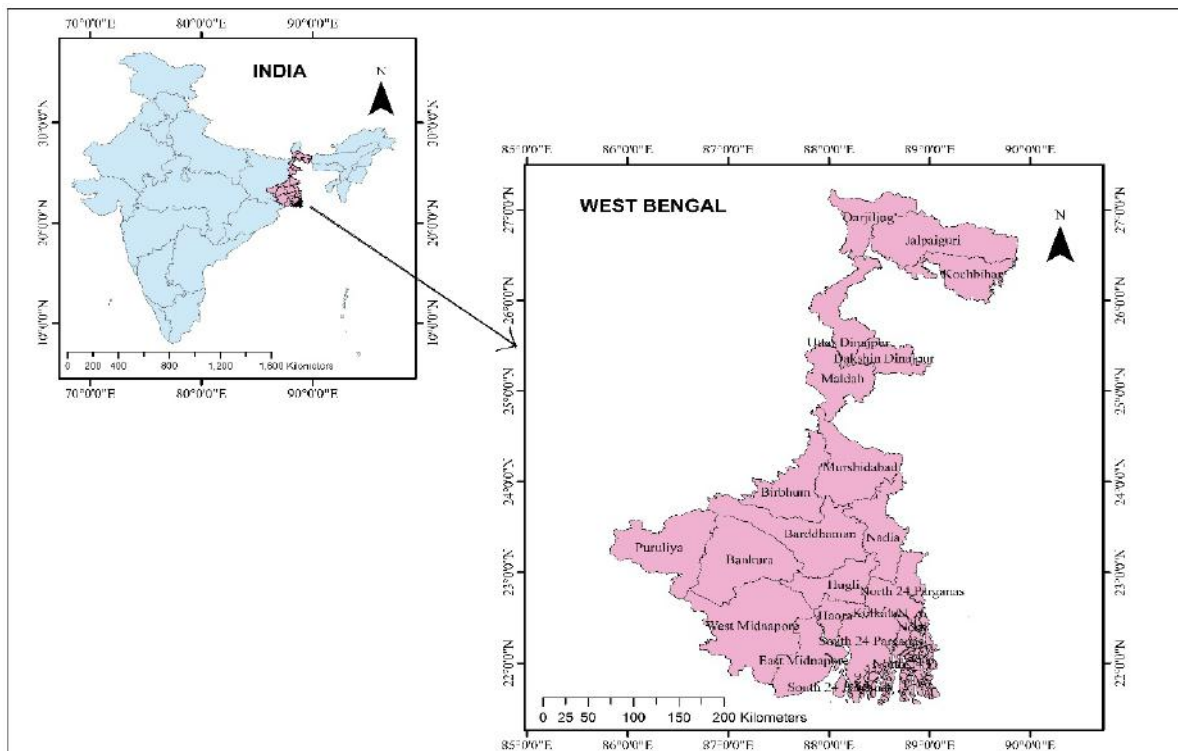


Fig. 1: Location map

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The current study is focused on seven selected welfare schemes of West Bengal, introduced from 2011 to 2021. The entire research has been done using secondary data related to the selected schemes concentrating on the progressive schemes of SC, ST, minorities, unemployment, adult, child and women's development, old age people, homeless people, workers, people of below poverty level etc. For this purpose, the available papers were reviewed and the secondary data were collected from various government reports and documents, such as Census of India, District Census Handbook, State Development Report, Bureau of Statistical Abstract, Economic Review, National Family Health Survey-4; data and information available in the public domain, and official websites of the governments. After completing the data collection, logical analysis, and necessary calculations have been carried out and all the results have been represented by spatial mapping and cartograms. Thereafter, the present study attempts testimony mapping and analysis of the regional variations to tease out the nature, effectiveness and impacts of the schemes in West Bengal.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Welfare scheme introduced in West Bengal from 2011-2021:

A brief outline of the schemes introduced from 2011 to 2021 in West Bengal, which are significant in terms of the improvement of the backward and poor section of the society and focusing on the overall development of the state has been tabulated (Table 1).

Table 1: Welfare schemes of West Bengal from 2011 to 2021

Year of launched	Name of the scheme	Remark
2011	Gitanjali Housing Scheme	It provides free shelter for poor people.
	Sabala	Training of adolescent girls with age group between 11 to 18 years about health and nutrition.
2012	Fair Price Medicine Shops	Discounting on the rate of medicine over MRP for poor people.
	Shishu Aloy	Distributing food and health assistance for a child under age under 6 years.
	Anandadhara	Anti-poverty program for rural poor by organizing the women into self-help groups.
2013	Kanyashree Prakalpa	Financial support for unmarried girl students to continue their higher studies.
	Shishu Sathi	Provide free health treatment for children who need heart surgery.
	Yuvashree	Financial support to unemployed young people.
2014	Sikhashree	Financial support to students who are reading in classes V to VII belongs to SC and ST categories.
	Gatidhara	It gives loans to buy small cars, trucks etc.
	Lok Prasar Prakalpa	It provides financial support for a folk artists.
2015	Sabooj Sathi Prakalpa	Distributing bicycles to students reading in classes IX-XII.
2016	Khadya Sathi	Distributing food grain at the cost of Rs. 2 per Kg. for the poor people.
	Sabujshree	Distributing free plants to the mother of a newborn girl.
	Swasthya Sathi	It provides cashless free health treatment.
2017	Khelashree	Encourage sporting activities through financial support.
2018	Rupashree	A one-time grant of Rs. 25,000 is paid to girls who are married before 18 years old.
2019	Aikyashree	Financial support for students who belong to minority categories.
	Krishak Bandhu	Financial support to the farmer to assure income and death benefit.
2020	Joy Bangla Pension Scheme	Financial support for old age people belongs SC and ST categories.
	Karma Sathi Prakalpa	Financial support for the young generation who are starting their own business.
	Prachesta	To provide financial support for labour, daily earner, worker, etc. who have lost their work due to COVID- the 19 situation.
2021	Student Credit Card	Gives loans at 4% interest for students who are reading in class X or above to encourage them in continuing their higher studies.

Source: Compiled by the authors using Welfare Departments of West Bengal, 2021

Description of the selected Schemes:

Since 2011, the government of West Bengal had launched many development schemes for SC, ST, minorities, homeless people, old aged people, unemployed, below poverty level people for poverty alleviation, women empowerment, child development, health facilities, etc. It has been recognised that the schemes introduced in the period 2011 to 2021 are covering the diverse segments, which

are essential for the all-around growth and development of the state. Keeping this in mind, seven schemes, which cover child development, improvement in gross school enrollment, educational development, development of health, food grain services to fight against poverty, housing facilities, etc. were selected for the study. The selected schemes, which are analyzed in the current study are tabulated (Table 2) with a direct link to the government websites.

Table 2: Selected schemes for the study

Scheme	Remark	Direct link
<i>Kanyashree Prakalpa</i>	It provides financial support to the girl students, who are unmarried and continue their higher education from reading class VII to postgraduate.	https://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/index.php
<i>Sabooj Sathi Prakalpa</i>	Through the scheme, bicycles are distributed to the students who are reading for classes IX to XII.	https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in/v2/
<i>Sikhashree</i>	It provides financial support for the students who belong to SC and ST categories, reading in classes V to VII.	https://wb.gov.in/government-schemes-details-shikshashree.aspx
<i>Khadya Sathi</i>	Through the scheme distributed food grain at the cost of Rs. 2 per Kg. for poor people.	https://wbpds.gov.in/
<i>Fair Price Medicine Shops</i>	The scheme provides discount rates on medicine over MRP for poor people.	https://wbexpress.com/fair-price-medicine-shops-offering-highest-discount/
<i>Shishu Sathi</i>	It provides free health treatment for children up to 18 years of age who have needed any heart surgery.	https://wb.gov.in/government-schemes-details-sishusaathi.aspx
<i>Gitanjali Housing Scheme</i>	The scheme provides free shelter for poor people.	https://wb.gov.in/government-schemes-details-geetanjali.aspx

Source: Compiled by the authors (links taken from Welfare Departments of West Bengal), 2021

Kanyashree Prakalpa:

The Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP) has been launched on 1st October 2013 by the government of West Bengal under the Department of Women Development and Social Welfare (DWD & SW). It is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) scheme that incentivizes the schooling of all teenage girls between the ages of 13 and 18 preventing their marriage at an early age. This scheme is available for unmarried girl students with an annual family income below Rs.1,20,000. The girls with special needs reading below class VIII can also apply for this scholarship.

Objectives: The objectives of the scheme are:

- To provide financial support to girls of economically disadvantaged families by conditional cash transfer (CCT) to complete their secondary and higher secondary education.
- To prevent girls' marriage before 18 years, reducing the jeopardy of pregnancy, and associated risks, like infant mortality, malnutrition of children and many more.
- To increase the rate of higher education by delaying the early marriage of the girl child. KP helps in girls' upgradation and establishing social power and self-esteem in society which is very essential. To strengthen a girl's empowerment, this scheme also includes the organization of events, competitions and Kanyashree clubs.

Effectiveness:

It has three components, names K1, K2 and K3 for those in school, after school and post-graduation respectively. The three CCT components of the scheme are:

- **K1:** Annually paid Rs. 750 for unmarried girl students studying in class VIII equivalent or above is called K1. During the year 2013-2014 amount of this scholarship was Rs. 500. The age groups of 13-10 year girls every year, who remain unmarried and continue their studies are eligible for this scholarship. The focal aim of the scheme is to stop early marriage.
- **K2:** The girl the age of 18 years are eligible to fill up the K2 form. A one-time grant payment of Rs. 25,000 will be provided to those unmarried girls, engaged in academic or occupational pursuits. This scheme benefits the girl family with an annual income below Rs. 1,20,0000. It prevents the marriage of a girl just after 18 years of age.
- **K3:** K3 is for the girl student who has freshly completed graduation and been admitted into the university for higher studies. It provides Rs. 2000 monthly, paid for arts and commerce students and paid Rs. 2500 for science students. As the higher education of girl students is the goal of the scheme, it provides benefits to both married and unmarried girls.

Impacts and Progress:

According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) 2006, 18 years is the legal age of marriage for girls and 21 for boys in India. West Bengal ranked fifth highest for early child marriage in India, according to DLHS-3, 2007-08. In rural and slum areas, more girls are married before they reached adulthood. Child marriage is higher among girls than boys. It has a negative effect on their and their children's health. As, in India, primary elementary education is free and universal, but secondary school education is not free and this hampers secondary education throughout the country and West Bengal is not an exception. Therefore, many impoverished parents are not interested to invest in higher education for their girl child and are engaged in giving marriage to their girl child after securing primary education. Thus, to impeditment the early marriage of the girl child, the government of West Bengal had ched the KP.

The KP is especially for girl students to prevent early marriage and financial encouragement of higher education. About 17,854 registered institutions, 2,15,04,517 sanctioned applications, and 70,67,936 unique beneficiaries are found engaged in the KP up to June 2021 (Fig. 2). Each year *Kanyashree Day* is celebrated on 14 August to promote the scheme throughout the state. Moreover, the government had announced the establishment of a Kanyashree University (functioning from 2021) in the Nadia district to empower girls. Thus, KP has founded a very beneficial project for the girl of rural and suburban areas, especially from poor families who are not able to complete their education due to economic and social conditions. This scheme was implemented through 16,000 institutions and schools across West Bengal. In 2017, the "Kanyashree" scheme ranked as the best amongst the 552 such social schemes operating across 62 countries and has been awarded by the United Nations.

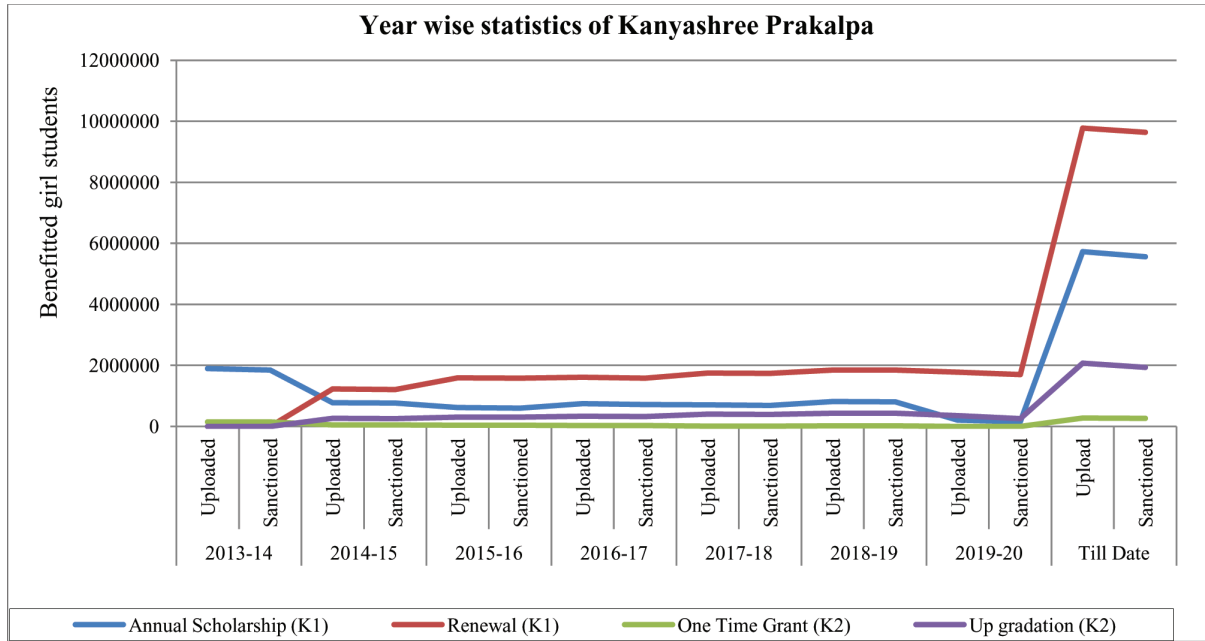


Fig. 2: Data Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanyashree_Prakalpa, 2021

According to the district-level household survey, a higher proportion (41%) of girls in West Bengal are getting married before the legal age of marriage (i.e. 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys). Moreover, about 54% of girls in the state are married (according to National Family Health Survey-3, 2011) at their adolescent age (20-24 years), which is greater than the national average (47.40%). It is resulting in school dropout and early pregnancies and severe problems regarding health issues for women, like anaemia, malnutrition, iron deficit, etc. The situation is more acute in rural areas (63%) than the urban part (32%); but after implementing the KP, the overall scenario of women was improved as we have found that the urban, rural and total proportion of the marriage of the adolescence girls are reduced to about 28%, 47% and 41% respectively (Fig. 3). The rate of change of female enrollment ratio in education in West Bengal has also been improved from its previous scenario, i.e. from the base year 2010-11 (Fig. 4). The ratio was started to increase at a slower rate (0.9%) from 2011-12, and hiked at a proportionately very high rate (5.3%) in the year 2015-16. The female enrollment ratio of the SC and ST category are also significantly increased and that has a very positive impact on society as they received an enhanced appreciation.

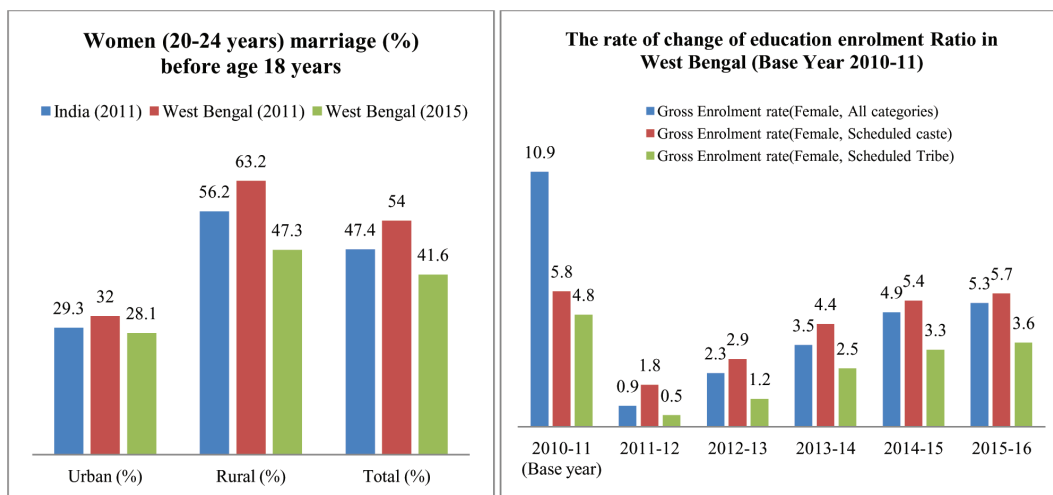


Fig. 3 & 4: Data Source: Census of India, 2011 and National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16)

The districts of the state belong to three categories in terms of the percentage of ever-married girls (15-19 years) according to the 2011 census (Fig. 5); where only three districts (Kolkata, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri) belong to less than 20% category; and rest sixteen districts are equally falling into the moderate (20-30%) and high (> 30%) category. The figures are alarming because the districts surrounding Kolkata have mostly 30 to 40% of ever-married girls.

The situation has quite improved so far as the NFHS-4 (2015-16) is concerned; where the completion rate of secondary school education of girls who remains unmarried was studied (Fig. 6). It reveals that most of the districts have more or less 90%, only Puruliya has the lowest (78%) and Uttar Dinajpur has below 80% unmarried girls who have completed their school education. From the statistics, we have recognized the success of the KP as it reduces early marriage of a girl and the girl students are encouraged to complete their higher studies with the financial support of the scheme; also they are motivated to progress a self-earning process, like employment or business. Thus, the scheme empowered the girl students to promote higher studies by reducing the dropout rates from 3.3% (2011) to 1.5% and occupies the top position in the decline of the dropout rate in India (2020).

The child marriage rate was quite higher than the national average in 2011 (Ghara and Roy, 2017) and the premature marriage of girls conveys high school dropouts, ill health, and women trafficking which inhibits the empowerment of women (Adhikary, 2017). This prosperous scheme had a broad road map which can help to achieve sustainable development goals (Ghara, 2018; Adhikary, 2017; Mir, 2018). Some researchers have already studied the various aspects of KPs, like their achievements, efficacy, and drawbacks using secondary databases and primary surveys in the rural and urban areas at even district, block and ward levels (Das, 2014; Saha, 2015; Ghara, 2018; Ghara and Roy, 2017; Adhikary, 2017; Mir, 2018; Sen 2016; Roy, 2017; Sen and Dutta, 2018; Ali and Jha, 2017; Samaujjaman and Halder, 2019; Bandopadhyay, 2019; Mondal and Guha, 2019; Karim et al, 2021). All the previous works have uncovered the success of the schemes, achieving its goal and their effective consequences in social development in various ways, like improving school enrollment, reducing school dropouts and reducing early marriages.

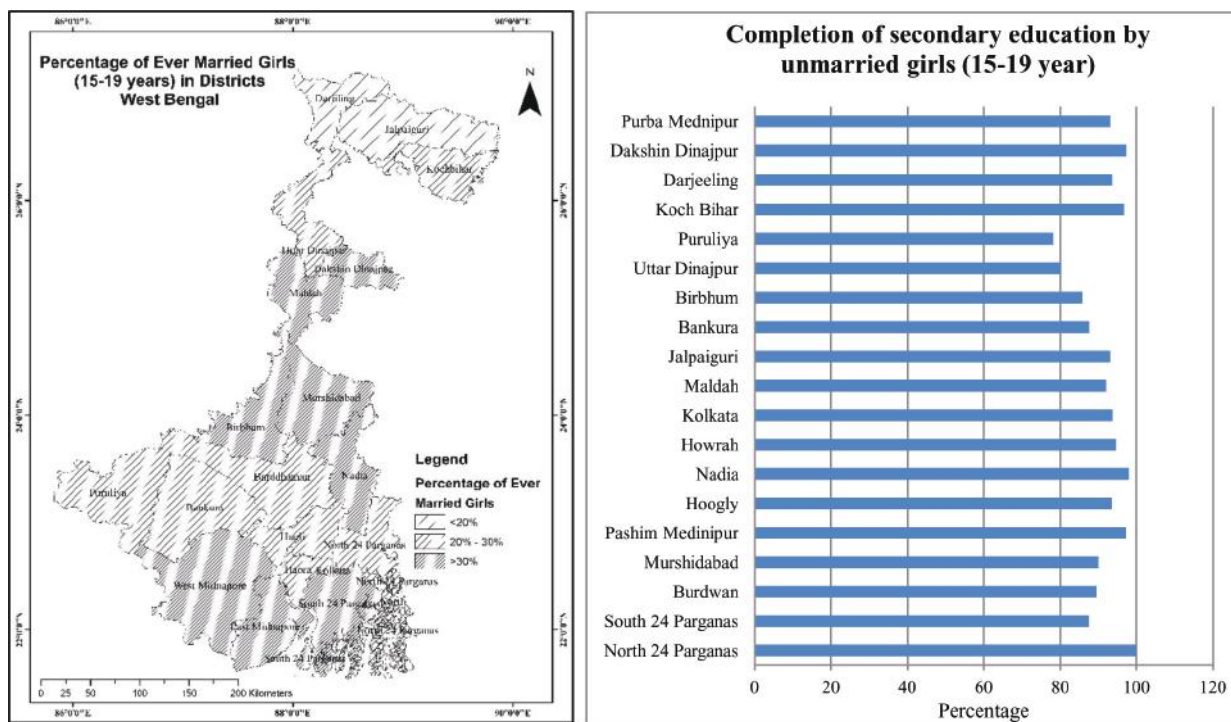


Fig. 5 & 6: Data Source: Census of India, 2011 and National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16)

Sabooj Sathi Prakalpa:

The Sabooj Sathi Prakalpa (SSP) was launched in 2015 and under this scheme, bicycles are distributed among the students who are studying in classes IX-XII in government, government-aided schools and madrasahs spread all over the state. The government had distributed bicycles among 25 lakh students who are studying in class IX-XII in 2015-2016 and declared that about 15 lakh students to be next year. In the year 2015, an estimated 91.88 lakh students have already received bicycles through the Sabooj Sathi scheme.

Objectives: The objectives of the scheme are:

- To encourage the students to go to school. This scheme aims to encourage students both girls and boys in higher education by reducing the school dropout rates.
- To build confidence in the girls' students by promoting mobility so that they can continue their higher studies.

Effectiveness: In rural and suburban areas of West Bengal, students have to go to their school travelling a long distance, where no suitable transport system is available for the students. In a large area, students are going to school by walk or cycle. But poor families are not able to afford cycles for their children and this has impacted their higher studies. To break down these barriers the government has launched this scheme and decided to distribute bicycles to encourage students in higher education. If we look at the average distance of school in the rural areas of West Bengal (Table 3), it will be easily understood that only 23% of secondary and 16% of higher secondary schools are within the village, but comparatively 55% and 45.5% respective schools belong to about 5 km distance. The distance beyond 5 km (15% for secondary and 30% for higher secondary and no the availability of schools (almost 10%) in nearby areas are holding a high proportion and there lies the significance of the use of the bicycle, which is provided by the scheme. Thus, it can be stated that the distribution of bicycles acts as a game-changing issue for the gross enrolment ratio and greater engagement in school education especially in the rural areas of the state.

Table 3: Distribution (%) of villages by their distance from schools in rural West Bengal

	Within Village	Below 5 km	5 km or more	Not available
Secondary	23	54.1	14.9	8
Higher Secondary	16.2	45.5	28.8	9.5

Source: Census of India, 2011

Impacts and Progress: The scheme helps to increase the attendance and concentration of girl students in the schools. It also promotes an environmentally friendly transport system to reduce pollution. The scheme is gifted to the environment with a smoke-free transport system. The SSP belongs to the department of Backward Classes Welfare for SC & OBC students, tribal development for ST students, school education for general category students, and Madrasah for minority category students. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) awarded SSP in 2020 and among 800 projects across the globe, this scheme becomes a winner under the e-government category.

Through SSP bicycles are distributed to the students of classes IX-XII. It is found that in the 1st phase of the scheme about 24, 97,645 cycles, and about 9, 35,148 cycles in the 2nd phase were circulated. In the 3rd phase 23, 91, 327 cycles, about 11, 83, 002 cycles in the 4th phase and 11, 80, 163 cycles in the 5th phase and about 1, 000, 000 cycles were distributed in the 6th phase of the scheme (Fig. 7). Moreover, the government had declared to distribute 12 lakh cycles up to November 2021 for the class IX-X. The scheme is becoming very popular among the students and helpful for continuing their higher studies. The government had already released a number of costs of Rs. 22.56 crore as a part of the procurement and distribution of bicycles up to the financial year 2020-21. In 2020, the "Sabooj Sathi Online 3.0" scheme has been awarded in the "World Summit on the Information

Society (WSIS) Forum-2020”. It is imperative to note from the graph (Fig. 8) that girls’ recipient of bicycles is more than boys (girls 51 and boys 49), which indicates high participation of girls at the high school level; but at the higher secondary level, boys number is more than the girls. A total of 3,423,004 recipients were recorded in the first two phases of SSP.

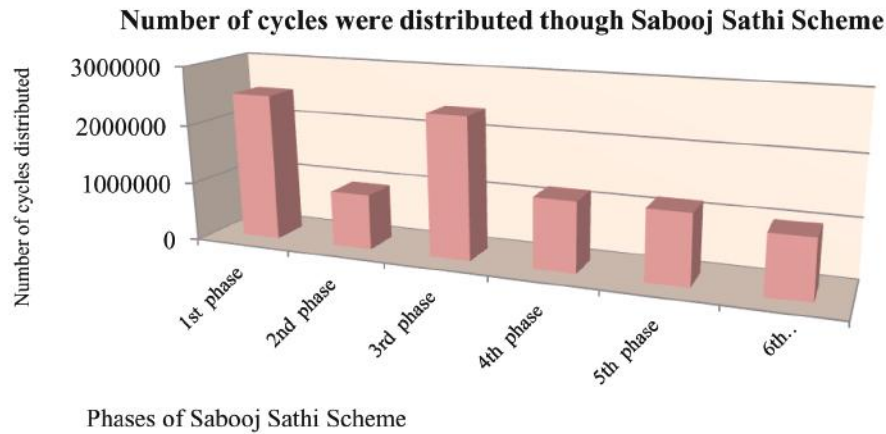


Fig. 7: Data Source: <https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in/v2/>, 2020

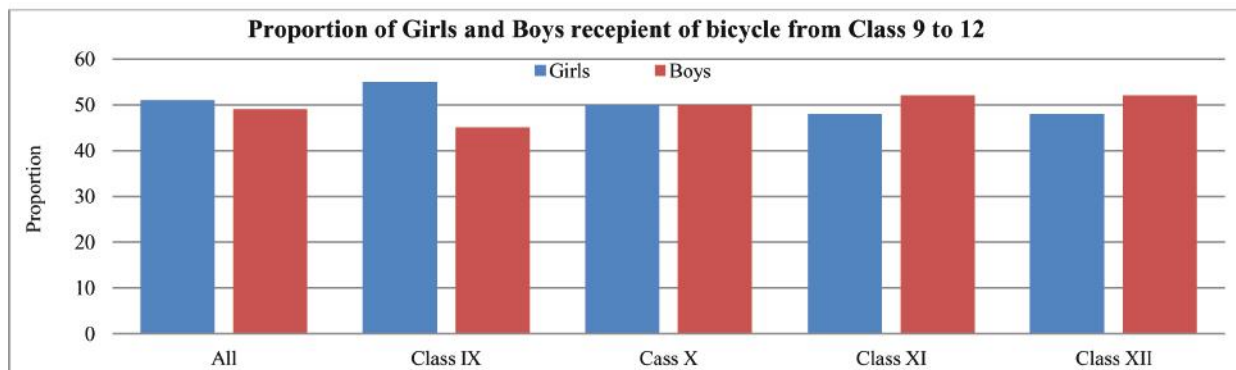


Fig. 8: Data Source: Department of Backward Classes Welfare, West Bengal, 2017

The district-wise spatial and graphical variation of the recipient of the bicycle is observed (Fig. 9 & 10), where girl recipients are either outnumber or equal to the number of boy recipients. Moreover, only four districts, namely Bankura, Purulia, Purba and Paschim Medinipur have a lower girl recipient percentage, which indicates the existence of certain barriers to the girls’ participation at the high school level. It has sought the interest of the researcher to find out the reason why mostly the western districts of West Bengal are lagging in pursuing higher education, especially the girls. The recipient of bicycles of the SC, ST and Muslim students was spatially mapped and graphed (Fig. 11 & 12) and the district-wise notations are observed. It indicates that in most of the districts, the proportion of SC is greater than ST and Muslim students and therefore they received the maximum number of bicycles. Moreover, Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts are ahead in terms of SC studrecipientsient; while Murshidabad and Uttar Dinajpurdistrictst are higher in terms of Muslim student recipients and Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur, Puruliya, Paschim Medinipur districts is the maximum ST student recipients of bicycles by the SSP. Thus, the scheme is creating an opportunity, literally breaking many boundaries, removing the difficulties in accessing the schools, especially y the poor and disadvantaged students of the state.

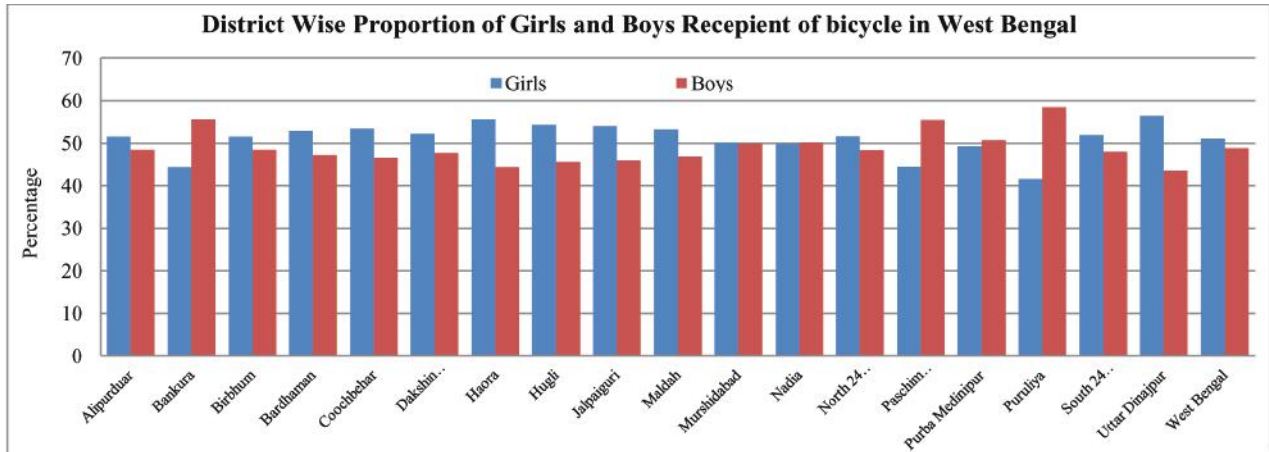


Fig. 9: Data Source: Department of Backward Classes Welfare, West Bengal, 2017

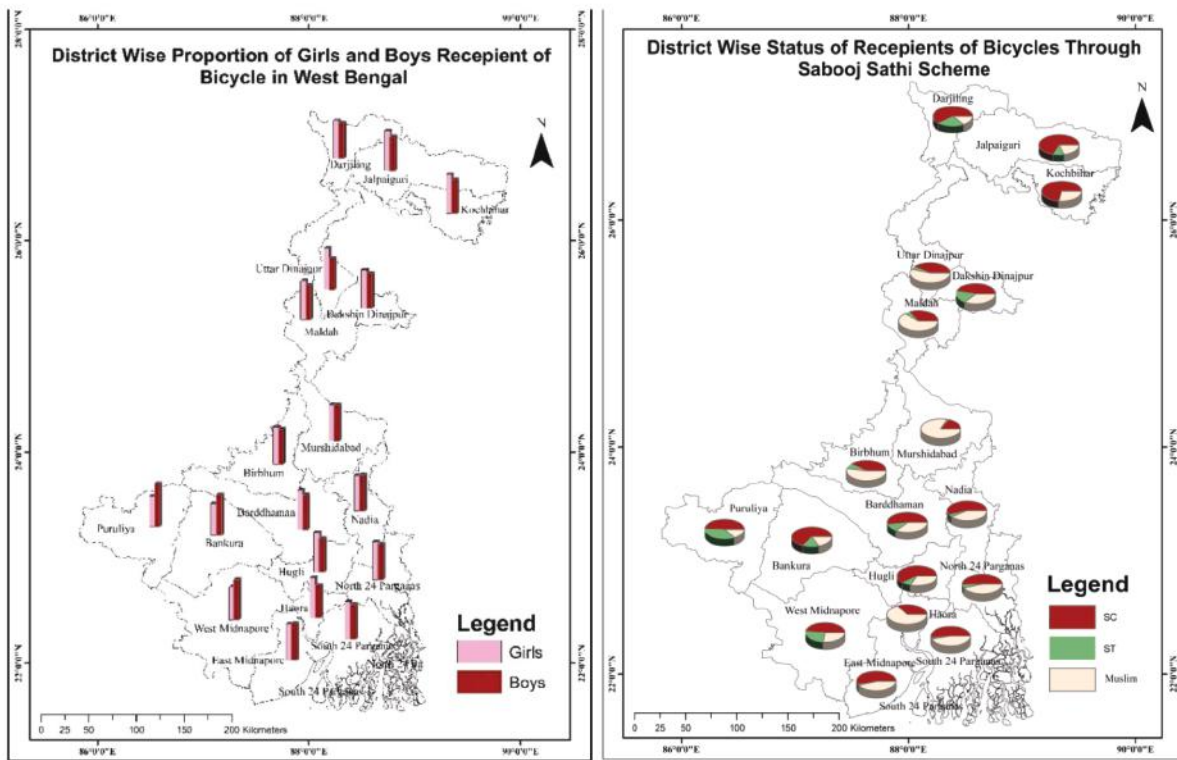


Fig. 10 & 11: Data Source: Department of Backward Classes Welfare, West Bengal, 2017

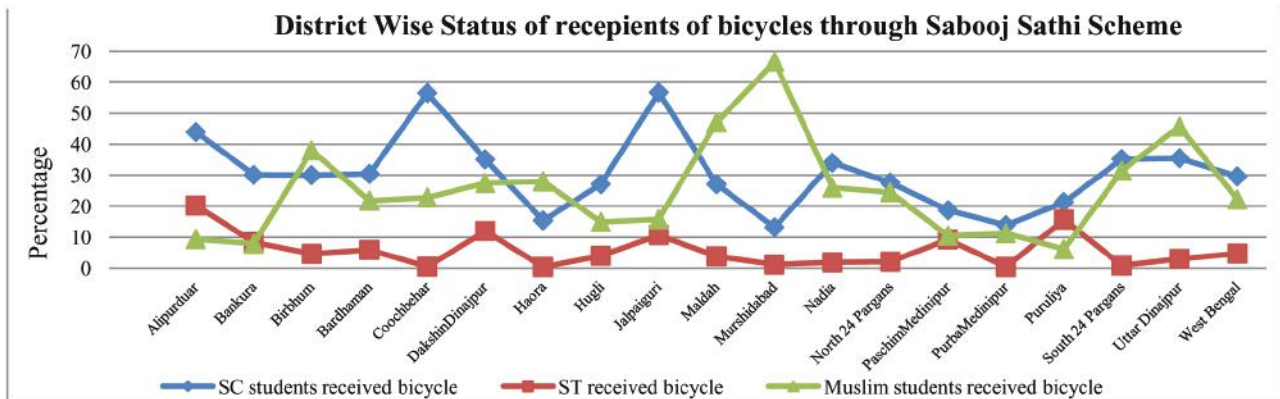


Fig. 12: Data Source: Department of Backward Class Welfare, West Bengal, 2017

Sikhashree:

The Sikhashree scheme has been launched in 2014 to encourage Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) students. It is applicable for all SC and ST students studying in class V-VIII in any government, government aided and government-recognized school in West Bengal. SC and ST families with an annual income of below 2.5 lakh are eligible for this application. The scheme had paid Rs. 500 for students of class V, Rs. 650 for students of class VI, Rs. 700 for students of class VII and Rs. 800 for students of class VIII belonging to the SC category. Also, the scheme had paid Rs. 800 for ST students, who are reading in classes V-VIII. The process of payment under the scheme is a one-time grant paid through the bank accounts of the students. During the financial year 2014-2017, about 38 lakh students were covered by the scheme.

Objectives: The objective of the scheme is to financially encourage the SC and ST students of class V-VIII in the secondary and higher secondary level to continue their studies. Due to the poor economic condition of the students, especially in the backward section, they are unable to complete their secondary and further studies and drop out of school. To diminish the dropout rates in the upper primary stage and to ensure that students are in school education, this scheme played an imperative role in providing financial support. Especially this scheme had succeeded in preventing the high dropout rates of girl students in school education.

Effectiveness: The Sikhashree scheme had been introduced to provide financial support for SC and ST students who are studying in classes V-VII to decrease school drops. Almost 38 lakh students were covered under the scheme during the financial years 2014-2017. According to the current statistics, more than 8,90,841 SC students of class V-VII have been covered under the scheme with an expenditure of around Rs. 71.44 crores. Further, 4,25,178 SC students have applied for pre and post-metric scholarship, which caters for an amount of Rs. 157.47 crore expenditure. Up to 2020, about 3,59,323 OBC students have applied for the pre-metric scholarship and 51,542 students have applied for the post-metric scholarship.

Impacts and Progress: This scheme has a strong positive impact on the involvement of SC, and ST students in school education. The financial help received from the scheme has influenced enough to the poor and backward students, who have had higher dropout rates previously. The mean age of marriage in rural and urban from 1995 to 2017 were considered (Fig. 13) and it was found that before the implementation of the schemes the mean age of marriage ranged from 19 to 19.7 in rural areas and from 20 to 22 in urban areas. Both the age figures improved to 20.8 and 22.2 in rural and urban areas respectively, and the combined rate improved from 19 to more than 21. Moreover, the schooling rate is also largely improved after the Kanyashree and Sikhashree schemes as it reveals an impressive picture (Fig. 14). The overall scenario has improved in the year 2015-16 from 2005-06; like, the percentage of females of 6 years and above who ever attended school was increased to 74 from 64%; the percentage literate female (15-49 years) was increased to 71 from 69%; the percentage of females with 10 years or more of schooling was improved to 27 from 16%, and the percentage of females (15-19 years) married before 18 years was reduced to 41 from 54%. The girls' attendance in school; female literacy rate (15-49 years); females having 10 years or more of schooling; and the low percentage of females (15-19 years) married before 18 years are strengthening the society and the urban section is ahead but the rural part of the state has improved greatly in this regard.

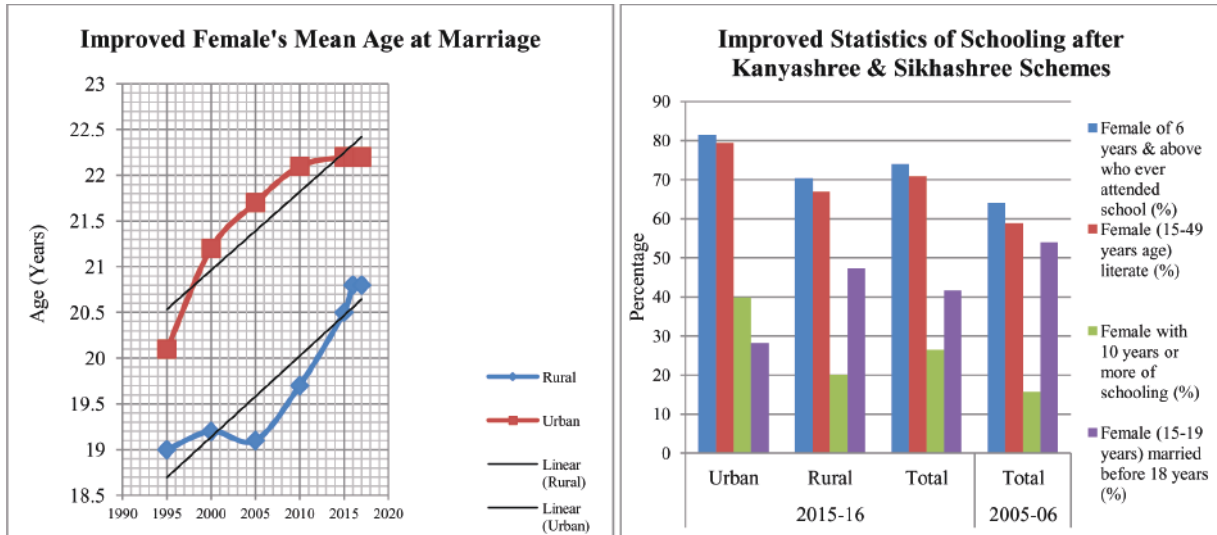


Fig. 13 & 14: Data Source: Social Statistics Division, Office of the Registrar General of India, 2017 and National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16)

Khadya Sathi:

The Khadya Sathi (KS) is a food security scheme under the Food and Supply Department of West Bengal launched in 2016. The people of the state are getting the food grain at Rs. 2 per Kg, which covers the primitive tribal groups, workers close to the tea garden, pavement dwellers of Kolkata, Aila affected people, draught affected people of Puruliya, residents of Darjeeling hill area and the inhabitants of Jangalmahal. About 90.6 % population of the state is benefiting from the scheme. Moreover, about 50 lakh people, who filled up the ‘white form’, will get the food grain at the cost of half of the market price. The Food and Supplies Department has introduced a special coupon to all mothers and babies in Rehabilitation Centers, in which 5 Kg rice, 2.5 Kg wheat, 1 Kg pulses and 1 Kg grams will be providing them against the coupon. Furthermore, the government digitized all the ration cards to initiate benefits properly.

Objectives: The poor people are not able to buy sufficient food grain from the market due to high prices, thus the objective of the scheme is to provide food grains at a minimal rate. Through the scheme, food gain at Rs. 2 per Kg. has been distributed to ensure the re-availability of food and nutrition to poor and below poverty level people.

Effectiveness: The government had introduced schemes to fight against poverty and malnutrition and this is a poverty alleviation program under Food and Supply Department. About 7 crores 49 lakh people of the state had received rice and wheat at the cost of Rs. 2 per Kg and about 50 lakh beneficiaries had received rice and wheat at half the price of the market through the scheme (Fig. 15).

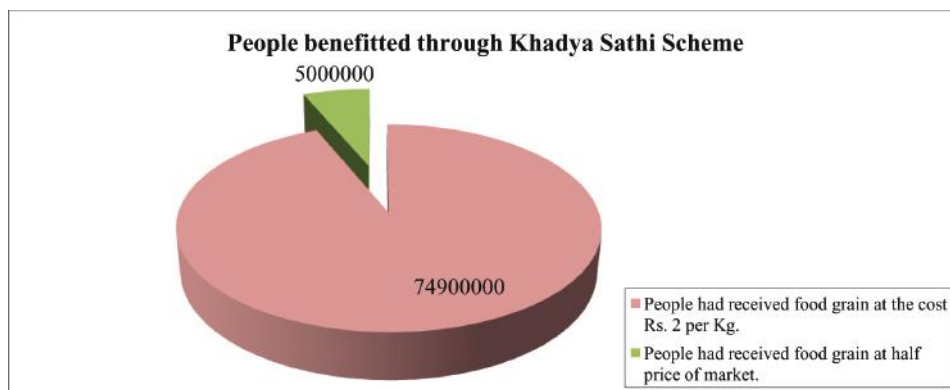


Fig. 15: Data Source: <https://wbxpress.com/khadya-sathi-food-security-scheme/>, 2020

Impacts and Progress: About 33 lakh people in the Jangalmahal area, 12 lakh drought-affected people of Puruliya, people of Singur who have lost their land, homeless and food insecure people of Kolkata, people living in Darjeeling hill area, people associated with the tea garden, cyclone affected people, has been involved in this scheme. The scheme provides food to 4600 malnutrition survivors free of cost and tackles malnutrition conditions. The government has provided food grains free of cost during the COVID-19 pandemic situation from April 2020 and it is continued up to June 2021, it covers about 9.91 crore beneficiaries. This is a very good initiative and proved very helpful, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it helps poor families by providing them with food grains free of cost. Thus, about 8.5 crore people in the state benefited through the scheme and therefore, it played an important role to survive poverty and malnutrition.

Fair Price Medicine Shops:

The Fair Price Medicine Shop (FPMS) ensures the availability of quality medicines, consumables and surgical items, implants, etc. at a pre-approved discounted rate over the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) for economically backward people. This type of medical shop was first established in 2012 and is mostly located in government hospitals and medical college cum hospitals. The FPMS had retailed outlet in the regional language as “*Najyamuller Aushadher Dokan*”.

Objectives: The chief objective is to establishing the FPMS is to ensure the availability of medicines, medical items, etc. at discounted rates to benefit the patients. The services (24 hours x 7 days) of the FPMSs have reduced the average price of medical expenses. The medicine shops are bound to sell any product with the prescription of a doctor and provide billing with every detail of medicine etc. The government had decided to establish one FPMS on averagely in 14 hospitals in a district depending on the number of hospitals and patients.

Effectiveness: The health facility under the welfare scheme has proved as an important venture for the suffering people. The people were suffering from illness and affected by the poor economic condition and spending high prices to purchase medicines. The generic medicines are provided in the FPMS through a scheme with a discount rate, which breaks down the barriers to treatment due to high spending on illness. In the 1st phase, 35 fair price medicine shops were established with discounts ranging from 48%-67% on MRP. Moreover, about 94 fair price medicine shops out of 116 have been established in 2014. Further, 112 FPMS have been set up with discounts ranging from 48%-78% still in 2017. Thus, the total sales are Rs. 1,331 core and about 96.44 lakh patients availed of this service since 2016. In current statistics, 152 Fair Price Diagnosis and Dialysis Centers had been established in the Medical Colleges and hospitals (secondary- tier); and 110 such units and 42 Dialysis Centre is currently functioning in the state.

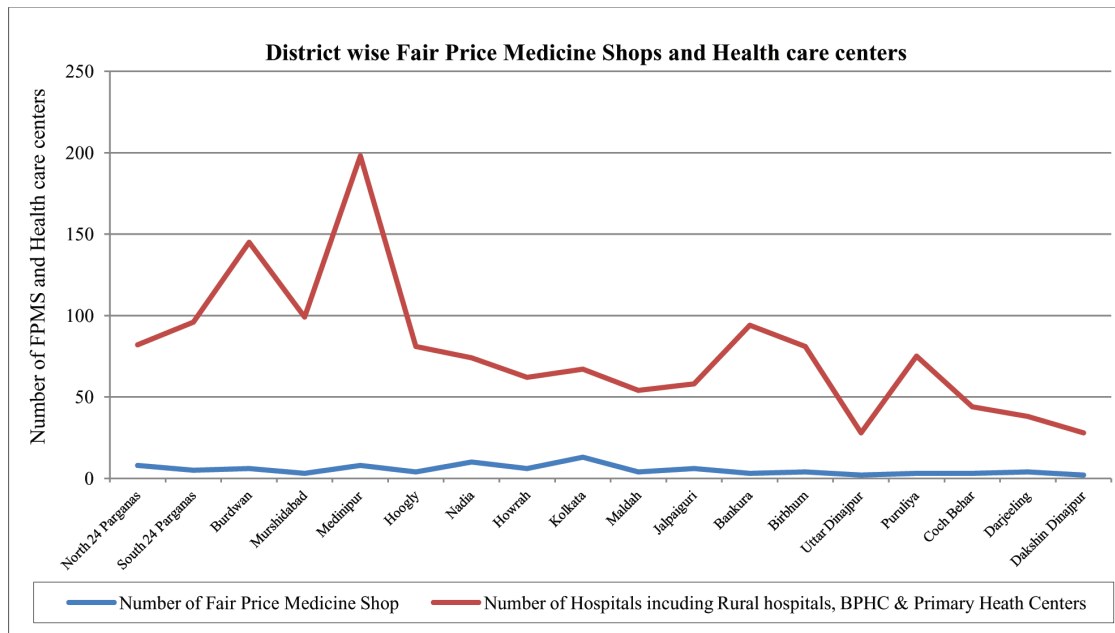


Fig. 16: State Bureau of Health Intelligence, 2017

The comparison between the district-wise number of FPMS and hospitals, including BPHC and primary health centres was graphed (Fig. 16). The highest FPMS (13) was founded in Kolkata covering 67 health care centres; while only two FPMSs in Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur was noticed, catering 28 health care centres. The Medinipur district belongs to horrific circumstances where only eight FPMS had been established covering 198 health care centres. Kolkata, as the state capital, is belonging high facilitates conditions in the scheme against other districts.

Impacts and Progress: The government has planned to increase the supply of free medicines to the hospital pharmacy, and instructed the doctors to prescribe generic medicines to ensure better health care. In the first phase, about 35 FPMS were established in the major hospitals with discounts ranging from 48% to 67% on MRP. Moreover, about 94 FPMS have become functional since November 2014 with discounts ranging from 48% to 77%. The gross sales and trade discount amount of the major hospitals were graphed (Fig. 17), and it was found that the hospitals cum medical college of Kolkata and some of the sub-divisional hospitals of the west and south districts of West Bengal have the highest sales services while facing a tremendous pressure for providing the facilities to the patient. It was also revealed that the average monthly sales discount ranges from Rs 4.59 crores in SSKM to Rs 5 Lakhs in Contai SDH.

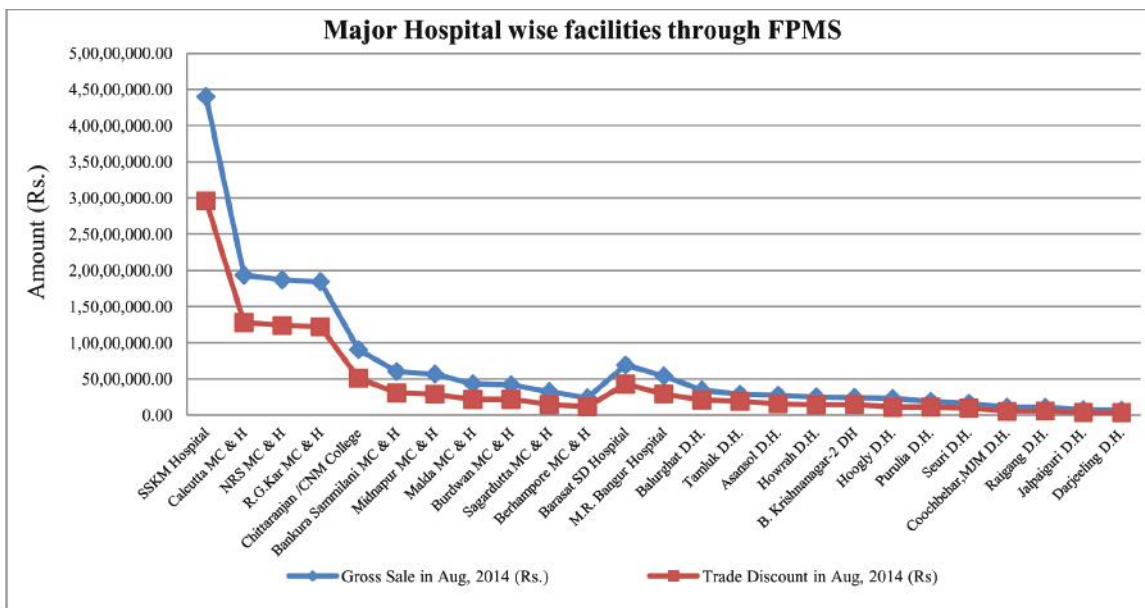


Fig. 17: Data Source: www.wbhealth.gov.in and Dutta & Bandopadhyay, 2017

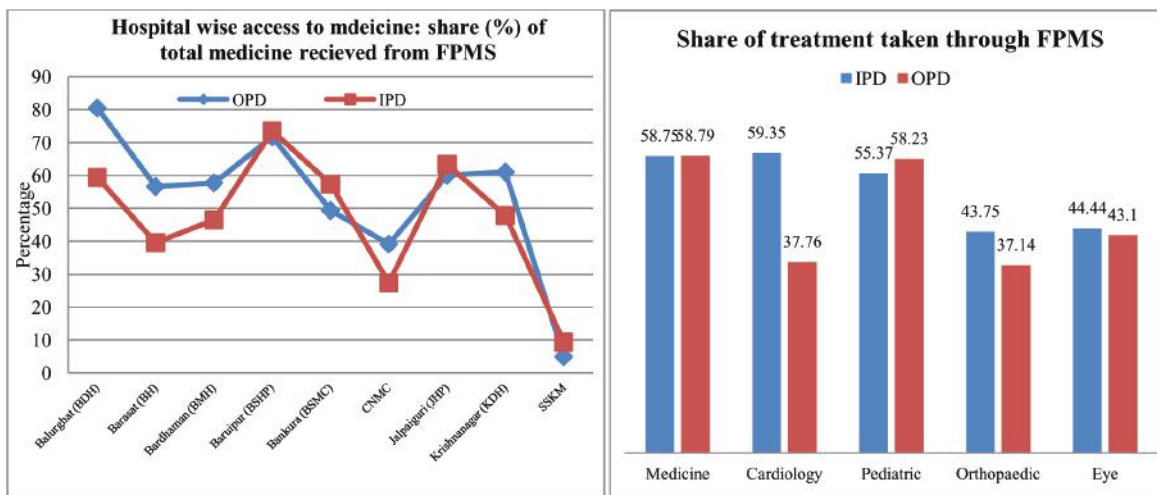


Fig. 18 & 19: Data Source: www.wbhealth.gov.in and Dutta, Bandopadhyay, 2017

The access to medicine was observed in terms of the percentage share of total medicine received from FPMS, located in the major hospitals throughout the state and it was noted that both indoor and outdoor (IPD and OPD) patients were quite high in the hospitals located in the districts (Balurghat, Baruipur, Jalpaiguri, Krishnanagar); that is mostly because of the low price and huge discount rate of the medicines (Fig. 18). Moreover, the patients of cardiology, pediatric, orthopaedic, eye and general medicines, all of these are taken the treatment with a huge share from the FPMS. But the IPD and OPD patients are high (above 55%) in the case of pediatric and general medicines; while the IPD is high (59%) only in cardiology (Fig. 19). Thus, the overall picture gives a valuable input that the FPMS can provide good access to health care for the poor throughout the state and more campaign and awareness is required to increase the benefits.

Shishu Sathi Scheme:

The Shishu Sathi Scheme (SSS) was launched in 2013 for providing free heart treatment to children. All the children of the state irrespective of their economic and social status are eligible for the scheme. It provides free cardiac surgery for children up to 18 years suffering from heart ailments and surgeries for ailments like cataracts, cleft lips, and cleft palates are covered. With the help of this scheme, the

infant mortality rate, and high morbidity among children have been reduced.

Objectives: The objective of the scheme is to provide free heart treatment to children irrespective of economic status. After screening various schools in the 341 blocks of the state, about 8000 cases were detected that required surgery.

Effectiveness: The scheme focused the child health covering heart surgeries and three private hospitals, viz. BM Birla Heart Research Centre, RN Tagore Institute of Cardiac Centre, Kolkata and Mission Hospital, Durgapur have been included. Moreover, Seth Suklal Karnani Memorial Hospitals, B.C. Roy Memorial Hospital for Children and R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospitals are providing pediatric child care.

Impacts and Progress: The scheme provided heart surgery to 3000 children every year and during the 2019-20 financial year, 2503 Congenital Health Disease (CHD) patients, 393 Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate patients, 242 Club Foot cases and 66 Neural Tube Defect cases have been treated. In 2020-21, about 248 Congenital Health Disease (CHD), 41 Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate patients, 39 Club Foot cases and seven Neural Tube Defect cases have been treated (Fig. 20).

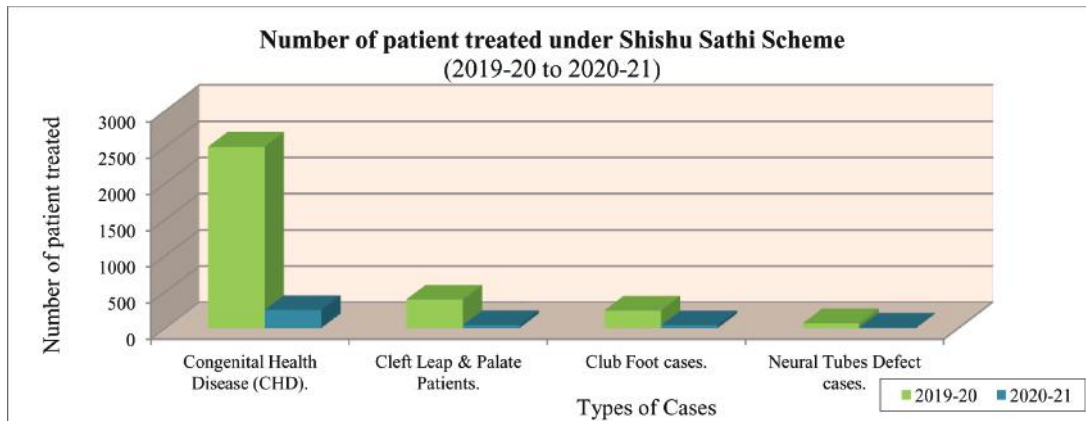


Fig. 20: Data Source: Economic Review of West Bengal, 2020-21

The fertility and mortality rates after the implementation of the SSS was observed (Fig. 21) and it reveals that the overall scenario was improved largely in the year 2015-16 than 2005-06; the total fertility rate was reduced to 1.8 from 2.3; the infant mortality rate was reduced to 28 from its previous value (48/1000 live births) and the under 5-year mortality rate also reduced to 32 from 60/1000 live births. In that way, the scheme had been able to reduce the infant mortality and post-natal mortality rate and brings health benefits to the children of the state.

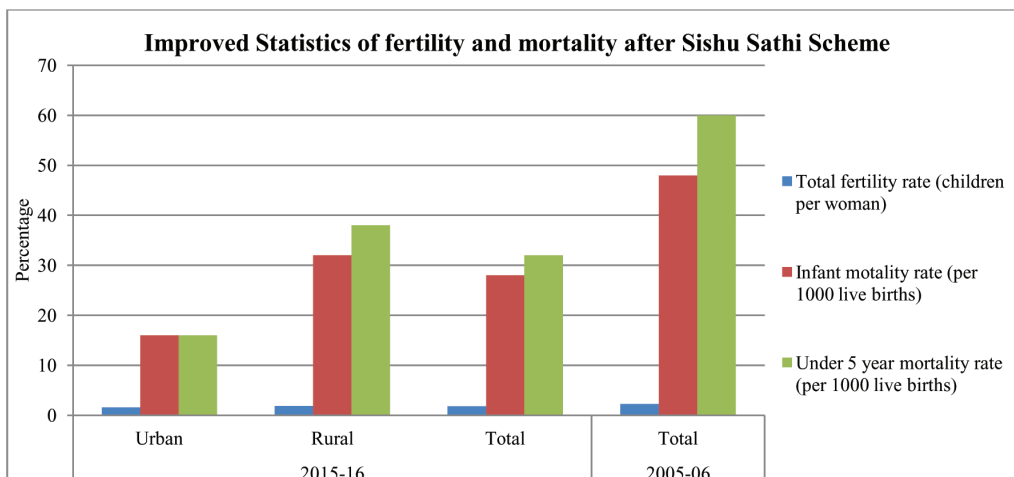


Fig. 21: Data Source: National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16)

Gitanjali Housing Scheme:

This Gitanjali Housing Scheme (GHS) was launched in 2011 by the Housing Department of the state to provide free shelter for the poor. The homeless people, but owners of land with a monthly family income of Rs. 6000 are benefiting under the scheme. The scheme provides Rs. 70,000 per house in plain areas and Rs. 75,000 per house in a hilly areas. The Sundarban region is also availing of the housing scheme. At the first instalment, 70% will be paid directly to the beneficiary's account and the next 30% will be paid at the second instalment. This scheme benefits the economically weaker section to build up their shelter and create employment opportunities for the construction workers.

Objectives: The main objective of the GHS is to provide apposite shelter to the poor section of society. This scheme is introduced in rural areas by concerned six departments, viz. i) Minority Affairs & Madrasah Education Department, ii) Backward Classes Welfare Department, iii) Forest Department, iv) Sundarban Affairs Department, v) Paschimanchal Unnayan Affairs Department and vi) Non Municipal urban areas statutory organization. The motto of the scheme is to construct fully subsidized residential houses for the poor, distressed and deprived people.

Effectiveness: In the economically weaker section, homeless people are benefiting from financial support, free shelter, etc. through the scheme. The beneficiaries have received Rs. 70,000 per house in plain areas and Rs. 75,000 per house in the hilly area through the scheme. The cost of new construction in rural areas is i) Rs.1.67 lakh beneficiaries in plains, ii) Rs.1.94 lakh beneficiaries in Sundarban, iii) Rs.2.51 lakh beneficiaries in Darjeeling and iv) Rs.3.00 lakh in the Jalpaiguri. The cost of new construction in urban area are i) Rs.1.67 lakh for single-storied building and ii) Rs.3.30 lakh for multi-storied building. In the non-municipal, semi-urban areas, about three lakh (2, 98,745) families have been covered through the scheme up to 2017.

Impacts and Progress: Up to 2014, district-wise 91871 houses were sanctioned and 61483 houses were completed through the scheme. During that time, the highest number of houses had been improved in South 24 Parganas district, where 18413 units were sanctioned and 9491 units were completed, while Nadia district had been found the lowest completed values (Fig. 22). The district-wise targeted, sanctioned, completed units of the scheme were graphed (Fig. 23). In 2015, in the whole state, about 42000 units had been targeted, where 42532 units had been sanctioned, but only 9834 units had been completed by the scheme. While, South 24 Parganas district showed the highest in sanctioned (3852) units, but a very less number of units (507) had been completed; while the Howrah district showed the highest 2307 units had been completed out of 2346 sanctioned units. Moreover, Alipurduar, Birbhum, North 24 Parganas, Purulia and Uttar Dinajpur districts have a good number of sanctioned units in the year 2015.

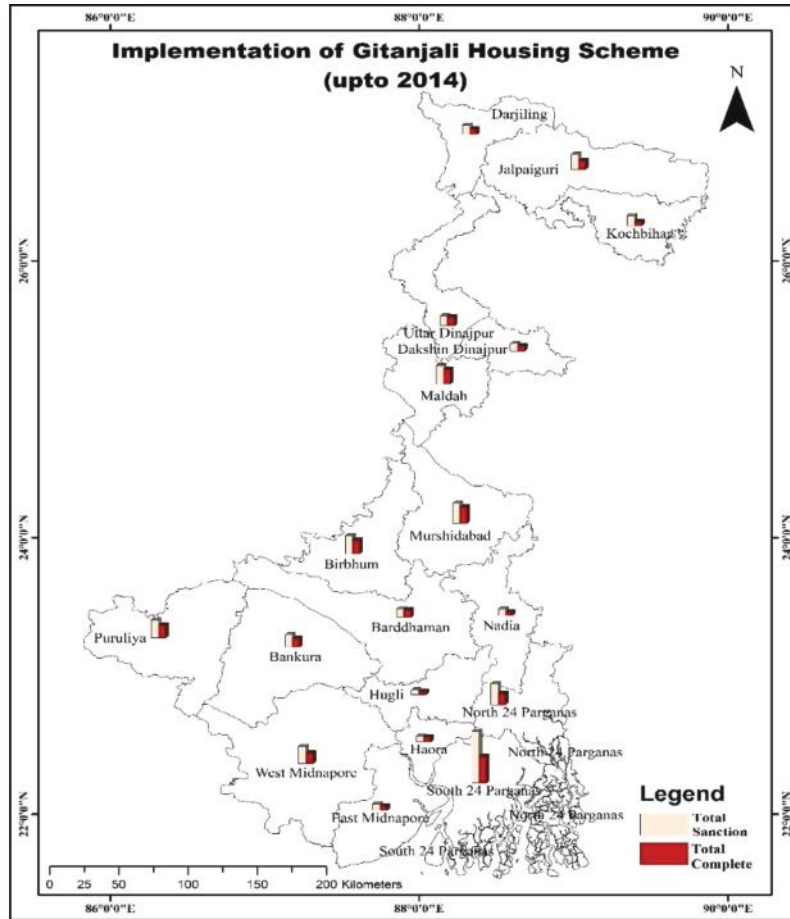


Fig. 22: Data Source: Housing Department, Government of West Bengal, 2016

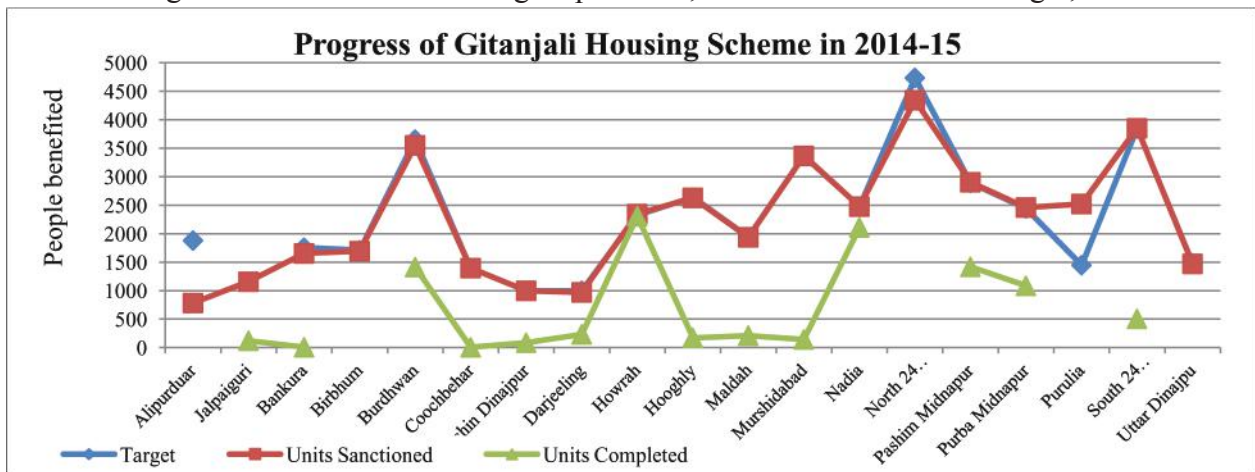


Fig. 23: Data Source: Housing Department, Government of West Bengal, 2016

SWOC Analysis of schemes:

A general SWOC [Strength (S), Opportunities (O), Weakness (W) and Challenges (C)] analysis of the formerly analyzed schemes in terms of observation and discussion with the experts and beneficiaries about the schemes was tabulated which is self-explanatory.

Table 4: SWOC analysis of the selected schemes

Scheme	Strength (S) and Opportunities (O)	Weakness (W) and Challenges (C)
<i>Kanyashree Prakalpa</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial support - Continued higher education - Lessening dropouts - Encouraging higher studies - Delay early marriage - Increasing girls' capacity, confidence - Kanyashree girls spreading awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to implementation • Difficulties in the selection of beneficiaries • Can't afford self-employment • Can't alleviate poverty • Challenging to collect students' information • Difficult to manage the records
<i>Sabooj Sathi Prakalpa</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get bicycles - Encouraging higher studies - Helpful for transport issue - Helpful for distance school - Very popular & effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to implementation • Challenging to collect students' information • Difficult to manage the records • Distribution of bicycles is challenging
<i>Sikhashree</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial support - Designed for SC and ST categories - Encouraging higher studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to implementation • Challenging to collect students' information • Difficult to manage the records
<i>Khadya Sathi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food grain at a very low cost - Helpful for poor - Very effective during the pandemic - Free cost food grains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to implementation • Challenging to manage people's information • Can't afford self-employment • Distribution of food grain is challenging
<i>Fair Price Medicine Shops</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low price for the medicine - High discount rate - Located in major hospitals - Very helpful & useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people are not aware • Leakage in fair services • Quality of medicines was questioned • Non-availability of medicines
<i>Shishu Sathi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free health treatment for children - Heart surgery facility - Helpful for needy people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to implementation • Challenging to collect students' information • Difficult to manage the records
<i>Gitanjali Housing Scheme</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free shelter for poor people - Housing facility - Covering rural & urban areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in the selection of beneficiaries • Difficult to implementation • Challenging to manage people's information

Source: Authors

In the current study, the inadequacy of relevant data in most of the schemes was felt by the authors. The data have not been found properly through any schemes related to public wished government progressive and annual report format and did not avail properly in the web portals of the government websites. Due to lack of awareness and proper educational knowledge many people don't even know about what they deserve from the government. Despite facing some restrictions, it is imperative

that most of the schemes had a significant role in its admit as it covers a wide range of needy people and are found beneficial, especially for the vulnerable segment the society.

CONCLUSION

This current study has concentrated on the welfare schemes of West Bengal introduced from 2011 to 2021 by highlighting their objectives, effectiveness, and progress using involvement with needy people. As discussed, most of the schemes have been found very imperative, progressive and effective, especially in the backward and weaker section of the society of the state. These also help people to fight against poverty, backwardness and make them capable of surviving natural disaster, flood, storm surges etc. It also reduced the dropout rates in school education by getting financial support, bicycle mid-day meals, etc. Now the students belonging to the economically weak families have been able to continue their higher education. Thus, these schemes are concentrating on women, encouraging the development of women's skills, empowering women, building their capacity and self-confidence girl with the financial inclusion; and this also ensures the development of SC, ST people, reducing school dropout rates, protecting the child from child labour, decreasing the rate of child marriage. The scheme had created a positive impact on the women and they have been encouraged in higher education it is known to everyone that women play a very significant role in the family, educating their children and making society powerful and stable, thus it diversely empowered the society.

These schemes not to only provide benefits to needy people, but also ensure their progress, and development, and there is success of the scheme. Moreover, it provides benefits for the economical, physical, and mental weaker group; provides homes for homeless, food for hunger, and health facilities for illness people. The government had faced many challenges in terms of financial, social, political, etc. to implement such schemes as many villages are located in the vulnerable, backward and hazard-prone segment and therefore suffering due to poor communication systems. Still, the relevant data and reports must be published by the concerned section/department of the government to uphold the progress of such schemes and this will also be helpful to the scholars who are working to portray the developmental status of the state with respect to the implementation of such schemes. Finally, it may be concluded from the study that most of the schemes are wonderful unified policy and ideological commitment and proper and systematic implementation mechanism makes them unique and more popular. Most of the schemes are created equal opportunities irrespective of their class, caste, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the societal impact of these schemes is notable and further time to-time inspection, observation and evaluation may be inculcated to improve the delivery mechanism and freed from any kind of problems and discrepancies. Therefore, we are hoping for a better future and self-reliant society, improved status of the girl's power and thus West Bengal can secure a better position in India in diverse perspectives.

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