

Sabooj Sathi : More than a Bicycle Distribution Scheme

Introduction

Hon'ble Finance Minister, in his Budget Speech of 2015-2016, announced a scheme for distribution of bicycles to an estimated 40 lakh students studying in classes IX to XII in Government and Government Aided Schools and Madrasahs of the State. He announced that around 25 lakh students would be covered in 2015-16 and the remaining 15 lakh in the next fiscal.

By now, this scheme is well-known as "Sabooj Sathi" as coined by Hon'ble Chief Minister herself and it reflects her desire to see young students empowered to achieve new feats in the future through the bicycles provided under the scheme. She also created the scheme logo which is firmly attached in the basket in front of the bicycle. Hon'ble CM flagged off the distribution in October 2015 from Paschim Medinipur.

Objective

The scheme was conceived with the primary objective of enhancing student access to Secondary Education. The scheme is further expected-

- To increase retention in schools,
- To encourage students to take up higher studies,
- To inculcate sense of confidence among the girl students by promoting mobility,
- To promote environment-friendly and healthy means of transportation.

The objectives are aligned with four Sustainable Goals of agenda 2030. These are SDG3: Good Health & Well-being, SDG4: Quality Education, SDG5: Gender Equality and SDG13: Climate actions.

Administrative Structure

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 declared "Nodal" Department and "Implementing Agency" respectively. A Steering Committee consisting of the Secretaries of the Departments of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, School Education, Minority Affairs & Madrasah Education & Sundarban Affairs was constituted to guide the implementation process. An inter-departmental Tender Committee was formed for observing the procurement process. At the District level, Nodal officers were identified for shouldering the responsibility of the scheme and SDOs, BDOs and Executive officers of Municipalities were further aligned for ensuing implementation in a time bound manner.

Procurement

Procurement was through done e-Tender, as per the existing norms of the State Government. Specifications were finalized in consultation with the “Research & Development Centre for bicycles & sewing machines”, an entity created under the joint effort of the Punjab Government and UNDP. To maintain transparency, the status at different stages was shared in the public domain through <http://wbtenders.gov.in> and <https://wbsaboojsathi.gov.in>. So far, three phases of procurement has been done where leading Indian manufacturers – Hero Cycles Ltd., TI Cycles Ltd and Avon cycles Ltd. were selected.

Funding

The cost of implementation of the Sabooj Sathi Scheme is borne pro rata by the relevant departments of Backward Classes Welfare, Tribal Development, School Education & Minority Affairs & Madrasah Education depending upon the number of children to be provided bicycles and covered under the scheme as per their department’s mandate.

E-Governance in Implementation

Implementation of the scheme has multi-dimensional challenges like collection of students’ record, consignment tracking and management, selection of secure places for delivery, tagging of schools, deployment of a huge number of fitters from across the country, their logistic arrangements, security etc. and finally keeping distribution records in the public domain as a part of our proactive disclosure policy. <https://www.wbsaboojsathi.gov.in> was developed with the dedicated support team of NIC to handle all the modules and to cater to the requirements of all the stakeholders of this mammoth scheme.

Our scheme stakeholders include teachers and students of 12,235 Government & Government-aided schools and Madrasahs, School Inspectors, 341 Blocks, 129 Municipalities, officers of the District Administration, peoples’ representatives who participated and contributed in different ways to make the scheme a grand success. Students’ records were entered on-line through portal by the schools, validated thereafter by Sub Inspectors of Schools, Additional District Inspectors / District Inspectors of Schools. BDOs performed the task of creating delivery points and tagging schools to finalise delivery point-wise requirement of Boys & Girls bicycles. Suppliers were given opportunity through portal to enter consignment details so that those can be tracked by the officials of State Government. Schools generated Distribution record from their individual log-in facility. Finally, the schools uploaded data like date of distribution, bi-cycle brand, Bi-cycle frame No. (Unique), particulars of student etc. District-wise Block wise and individual student wise Distribution records were made available in the public domain on real time basis.

Present Status

Since 2015, more than 73 lakh students have received bicycles under the scheme. Around One Crore students are being covered.