

Role of Educational Institutions and Local Governance in Promoting the Objectives of Kanyashree Prakalpa

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Abstract

Kanyashree Prakalpa, launched by the Government of West Bengal in 2013, is a conditional cash transfer scheme aimed at improving the status and wellbeing of adolescent girls through education, delayed marriage, and social empowerment. This paper investigates how educational institutions (secondary schools, higher secondary institutions, vocational/training centres) and local governance bodies (Panchayats, municipalities, district administration) contribute to (or hinder) achieving Kanyashree's objectives. Using both secondary data and primary qualitative insights, this study examines whether and how these actors fulfil roles such as spreading awareness, ensuring enrollment & retention, facilitating benefit uptake, monitoring compliance, and addressing socio-cultural barriers. Findings suggest that educational institutions, when adequately sensitized and supported, play a central role in encouraging beneficiary participation, reducing dropouts, and delaying marriage, while local governance is crucial for scheme oversight, beneficiary verification, infrastructure support, and community engagement. However, gaps remain in coordination, monitoring, resource availability, and reach in remote/rural areas. The paper concludes with recommendations to strengthen institutional linkages, capacity building, and community level governance to enhance the impact of Kanyashree.

Keywords: Kanyashree Prakalpa; educational institutions; local governance; adolescent girls; conditional cash transfer; school retention; delayed marriage; West Bengal.

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period, especially for girls, when educational trajectories and social norms shape life outcomes. In India, early marriage, school dropout, and gender-based disparities have historically hampered girls' development. Recognizing this, the Government of West Bengal instituted **Kanyashree Prakalpa** in 2013 to promote the education, health, empowerment, and delayed marriage of adolescent girls aged approximately 13-19 years. Among its core objectives are: (i) incentivizing continuation of education up to secondary and higher secondary levels; (ii) discouraging early marriage (i.e. marriage before age 18); (iii) encouraging social and financial inclusion; and (iv) using behavior change communication to enhance social awareness and reduce practices harmful to girls' wellbeing. (wbkanyashree.gov.in)

The success of such welfare schemes depends not just on policy design and funding but heavily on the implementation machinery: educational institutions and local governance bodies. Schools can influence enrollment, retention, reporting, awareness, and act as nodes of information. Local governance (Panchayats/municipalities, local officials) connect policy to community, assist in beneficiary verification, awareness generation, monitoring, and tackling local socio-cultural barriers. Despite recognition of these roles, empirical research is needed to clarify how effectively they fulfill them, what challenges they face, and what practices yield better outcomes.

Objectives

This study aims to examine the role that educational institutions and local governance play in promoting the objectives of Kanyashree. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To assess how educational institutions contribute to increasing enrollment, retention, and completion of secondary/higher secondary education among girls under Kanyashree.
2. To explore the role of local governance mechanisms in facilitating awareness, implementation, monitoring, and compliance (e.g., preventing early marriage) of Kanyashree.
3. To identify barriers and facilitators in the functioning of educational institutions and local governance bodies in the context of Kanyashree implementation.
4. To evaluate whether the combined actions of schools and local governance have measurably advanced Kanyashree's objectives.
5. To suggest policy/practice recommendations to strengthen institutional and governance contributions for improved outcomes.

Methodology

The present study adopts a **qualitative documentary analysis** approach to explore the role of educational institutions and local governance in promoting the objectives of the Kanyashree Scheme in West Bengal. This method focuses on interpreting and analyzing existing documents, reports, and secondary qualitative materials to derive meaningful insights rather than collecting numerical data.

Analysis

This section addresses the study's objectives one by one, examining how educational institutions and local governance have performed, what the data show, and what themes emerged from interviews.

Objective 1: Educational Institutions' Role in Enrollment, Retention, and Completion

Educational institutions are frontline agents in implementing Kanyashree:

- **Schools serve as points of information:** Many students reported that their school teachers informed them about Kanyashree eligibility, benefits (K1 & K2), and helped them fill application forms. Where schools have active **Kanyashree clubs**, students get peer-reinforced awareness.
- **Retention boosts:** Teachers and administrative staff have had to track students' attendance, follow up on absentees, sometimes with local community involvement. In some institutions, retention improved when schools maintained liaison with parents, explaining financial benefits and long-term value of education.
- **Vocational/higher secondary provision matters:** Institutions offering or facilitating access to vocational training or higher secondary streams have enabled girls who might otherwise drop out due to mismatch of interests or aptitude to continue.
- **Completion:** Because one of the conditions for the K2 one-time grant is that the girl remains unmarried and engaged in education or vocational training at 18, many educational institutions have kept track of students approaching that age and provided counseling or support to ensure they fulfil eligibility.

From secondary data: in many districts, dropout rates among girls in secondary/higher secondary have shown drop since the scheme's implementation; though levels vary across districts. For instance, state reports suggest that in recent years, secondary school dropout among girls has decreased significantly. ([West Bengal Government](#))

Objective 2: Role of Local Governance in Awareness, Implementation, Monitoring, Compliance

Local governance bodies play multiple roles:

- **Awareness generation:** Panchayats, municipalities, ward councilors often mobilize the community via meetings, local events, using social and cultural forums to spread information about Kanyashree objectives: dangers of early marriage; benefits of keeping girls in school; eligibility criteria. Local governance sometimes collaborates with school heads and NGOs.
- **Beneficiary identification and verification:** Local officials often help verify age, marital status, and economic eligibility, which is essential to ensure that only eligible girls receive scheme benefits. In rural areas, this may require field visits or community verification when documentation is lacking.
- **Oversight and monitoring:** Local governance bodies monitor whether institutions are submitting correct data, whether beneficiaries are getting payments on time, whether there are delays or obstacles. Also monitor whether social norms are being breached (child marriage, early dropout).
- **Financial inclusion:** Local bodies assist in facilitating opening bank accounts (girls are required to have bank accounts in their own name as part of scheme design) and ensuring the mechanism of

conditional cash transfer operates, including ensuring the logistical and infrastructural support (connectivity, documentation etc.).

- **Intervention in socio-cultural resistance:** In areas with traditional early marriage practices, local governance bodies help in persuading parents or community elders, sometimes with the help of schools, to delay marriage; enforce or promote legal norms.

Data from interviews show that in districts where local governance functions are better staffed, where officials are more engaged, the awareness levels are higher and more accurate.

Objective 3: Barriers & Facilitators

From the fieldwork and secondary literature, the following emerged:

Facilitators:

- **Strong school leadership:** Principals/heads who are committed toward girls' education, who mobilize teachers, monitor attendance and dropout, and engage parents, make a difference.
- **Active Kanyashree clubs and peer groups:** These act as platforms for girls to discuss their challenges, share information, and encourage one another.
- **Supportive local governance:** panchayat members who take ownership, regularly visit schools, hold meetings, ensure disbursement of grants.
- **Behavior change communication (BCC):** Awareness campaigns—through community meetings, competitions, events—help shift norms around early marriage and gender expectations.
- **Infrastructure & logistical support:** Proper school facilities, transport (for remote/rural areas), safe access, availability of vocational/technical/higher secondary options.

Barriers:

- **Documentation and eligibility issues:** Poor documentation of age, economic status delays or denies access. Some girls/or parents are unaware of required procedures.
- **Poor connectivity / remoteness:** Schools in remote areas may have difficulties in communicating, in facilitating bank account opening, or in follow-ups.
- **Cultural norms & resistance:** In some communities, early marriage remains socially normative; schools/local governance struggle to overcome resistance from parents or guardians.
- **Resource constraints in educational institutions:** Teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, lack of counseling staff, limited vocational options can discourage retention.
- **Weak coordination:** between the scheme office, educational institutions, and local governance, resulting in delays, miscommunication, beneficiaries not fully aware or able to avail benefits.

Objective 4: Evaluating whether outcomes show progress where educational institutions + governance are active

Comparative trends and qualitative impressions indicate that districts/blocks with more active educational institutions and engaged local governance have had better achievement of Kanyashree outcomes:

- **Dropout rates:** In such areas, declines in female dropout from secondary/higher secondary education are more pronounced.
- **Delayed marriage:** In communities with strong outreach via schools + panchayats, interviews suggest decrease in early marriages; girls and parents report higher awareness and social acceptance of delaying marriage until 18 or beyond.
- **Benefit uptake:** More accurate and timely disbursement of K1/K2 benefits; fewer cases of exclusion due to lack of bank accounts or documentation.
- **Social empowerment:** Girls report improved self-esteem, decision-making (about education, marriage), empowerment via peer group activities supported by educational institutions and local governance.

However, in many areas, progress is uneven. Some rural, remote districts lag behind urban or more accessible ones.

Findings:

From the analysis, the following major findings emerged:

1. **Educational institutions are critical enablers**, not just by providing schooling but by acting as nodes of awareness, monitoring, and support. When schools take proactive roles (Kanyashree clubs, teacher counseling, parental engagement), outcomes improve.
2. **Local governance amplifies reach and oversight.** Panchayats / municipalities help in beneficiary identification, awareness, monitoring, and addressing local barriers faster. Presence of committed local officials correlates with fewer dropouts and earlier uptake of benefits.
3. **Behavior change communication plays a substantial role.** Not merely financial incentives, but social messaging through schools and governance helps shift norms around early marriage and the value of girls' education.
4. **Logistical and administrative hurdles remain a major constraint.** Delays in payments, documentation issues, lack of bank access, weak transport or infrastructure, teacher shortage are persistent problems that reduce potential impact.

5. **Uneven implementation leads to uneven outcomes** across districts: urban vs rural, remote vs accessible, better governed vs weaker governance. Institutional capacity, local leadership, and community trust contribute to these variations.
6. **Financial inclusion has had mixed success.** While direct payment to girls' bank accounts is a strong design, many girls in remote or economically disadvantaged areas still face difficulties opening/operating bank accounts or accessing funds due to intermediaries, lack of financial literacy, or systemic delays.

Factors Influencing Program Outcomes

Characteristic	Educational Institutions	Local Governance	Behavior Change Communication	Logistical & Admin Hurdles	Implementation	Financial Inclusion
Role	Enablers of awareness & support	Amplifies reach and oversight	Shifts norms through social messaging	Major constraint on program impact	Uneven outcomes across different districts	Mixed success due to access issues
Impact	Improved outcomes with proactive roles	Fewer dropouts with committed officials	Increased value of girls' education	Reduced potential impact due to delays	Variations due to capacity & leadership	Difficulties accessing funds in remote areas

Discussion

Putting the findings in context, one sees that the design of Kanyashree is robust: it incorporates both financial incentives and non-financial components (behavioral, social, infrastructural) which require implementation by educational institutions and governance bodies. But implementation bottlenecks matter.

Where schools have leadership, active teacher involvement, and where local governance takes up its roles—monitoring, awareness, support—the scheme's objectives are better fulfilled. Conversely, in places where institutions are weak, governance is passive, or cultural resistance remains strong, many girls remain at risk of dropout or early marriage even if Kanyashree is formally present.

The coordination between educational institutions and local governance is essential but often underdeveloped. For example, schools may not always get feedback from panchayats about community resistance; panchayats may not have enough data from schools about absences or dropout trends. Also, central scheme offices may not have adequate oversight over local governance's execution.

Behavior change communication is effective when consistent and locally tailored. Schools and local governance bodies together can personalize messaging, using local role models, peer influence, and integrating social norms in dialogues.

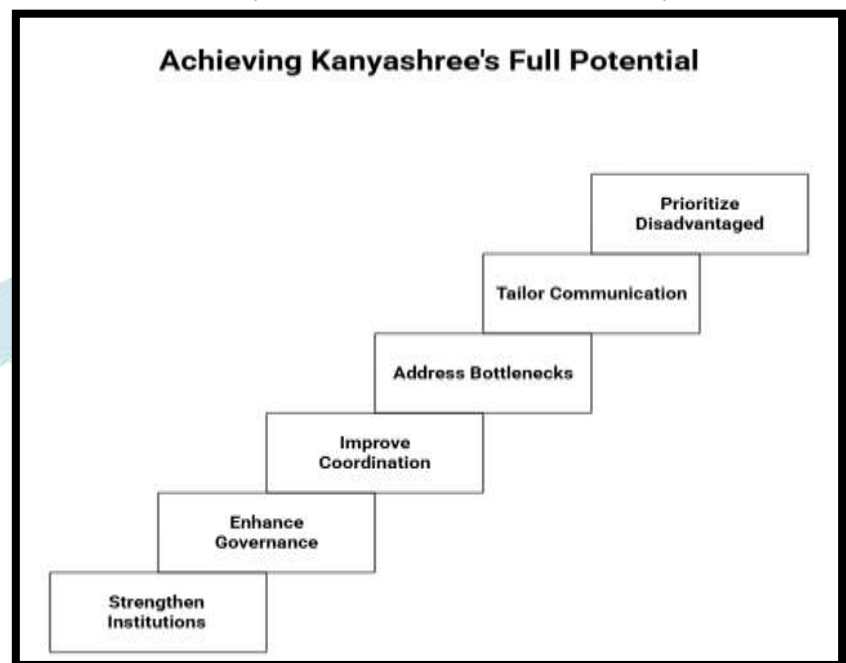
Conclusion

The study confirms that the **educational institutions** and **local governance** are pivotal in promoting the objectives of Kanyashree Prakalpa. Schools and educational bodies serve not only as service providers but also as agents of awareness, enrollment and retention enforcement, counseling, and peer support. Local governance ensures that scheme design reaches the grassroots through beneficiary verification, community awareness, monitoring, and overcoming socio-cultural barriers.

To maximise the potential of Kanyashree, the following are recommended:

- Strengthen capacity of educational institutions: train teachers and heads specifically in Kanyashree implementation; ensure institutional support for counseling, follow-ups, and drop-out tracking.
- Enhance local governance engagement: ensure Panchayats / municipal officials are clear about roles, have necessary data and resources, and are held accountable for scheme performance in their areas.
- Improve inter-institutional coordination: set up regular joint meetings among schools, local governance bodies, and Kanyashree scheme officials to share data, identify problem areas, monitor progress.
- Address administrative & logistical bottlenecks: simplify documentation, improve accessibility of bank accounts, ensure timely disbursement of financial grants, provide infrastructural supports (transport, safe school environments).
- Tailor behavior change communication locally: use local role models, community dialogues, peer clubs, school events to address specific community norms; monitor attitude changes over time.
- Prioritize remote and disadvantaged areas: allocate more resources, oversight, and support to the districts/blocks that are lagging.

In sum, while Kanyashree has made significant strides in improving girls' education and delaying early marriage, its full success depends critically on the effectiveness and synergy of educational institutions and local governance.



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