

'MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME', **AN EFFORT TO AVOID CLASSROOM HUNGER**

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Abstract

The **Mid Day Meal Scheme** is a school meal programme of the Government of India designed to improve the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide. The programme supplies free lunches on working days for children in primary and upper primary classes in government, government aided, local body, Education Guarantee Scheme, and alternate innovative education centres, *Madarsa* and *Maqtabs* supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and National Child Labour Project schools run by the ministry of labour. Serving 120,000,000 children in over 1,265,000 schools and Education Guarantee Scheme centres, it is one of the largest food assistance programs in the world with a 2013-2014 budget of Rs 30 billion (\$490 million). It is managed by the Ministry of Education, which claims the program is in place to “enhance enrollment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improve nutritional levels among children.” The present study touches a various areas of this programme such as historical background, implementation of scheme, problems and suggestions for improvement of this scheme.

Key Words: Mid Day Meal Scheme, Effectiveness, Enrolment rate, Nutritional Support.

Introduction

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“Basic education is a foundation one should not compromise on this, mid day meal no doubt promotes enrolment, one should not compromise on education, quality education is backbone of society.”

P. C. Sikligar

Education is the root of modernization and human development. The main aim of education is to prepare and develop the child physically, mentally and spiritually to lead a quality life. Education is a process through which a child is made capable to attain the necessary competencies and skills to face the challenges in life to survive, and to make struggle for existence.

Education promotes mobilization and encourage people to participate in developmental activities. Education makes people skilled towards job and creates productive efficiency. To promote education, Government of India grants financial assistance and loan to the States and Union Territories on different issues like; organizing and developing teaching materials, providing dress and uniform to the students, Exempting schedule caste and schedule tribe candidate from tuition fees, Providing hostel facilities, making arrangement of Mid-day meals to the students.

Review:

The study of Chikarmane (1962) on wastage in primary education in India revealed that the 40% wastage is due to stagnation and only 20% is caused by domestic circumstances and poverty.

Das (1974) suggested that the better provision of physical facilities in schools help in reducing wastage in education and in increasing its educational efficiency.

Sinha (1980) observed that teacher of primary schools complained of increased workload. The community noted that improvement in teacher' morale and in teaching is required not in material resources of the school. There was significant improvement in the attendance of the students.

Shah (1983) found the incentive scheme such as playground, teaching aids and mid day meals etc. to have a positive impact on retention of children even though the dropout rate was much higher at primary as compared to the middle stage. Also it was found to be more acute among girls.

Acharyya (1984) found a number of problems in primary school. Some of the important problems were inadequacy of teaching staff, problem of physical plants, single teacher school, lack of properly qualified and trained teachers, weak supervision and administration of primary school.

Objectives:

The main objectives of the scheme are to:

- Improve the effectiveness of primary education by improving the nutritional status of children thereby reducing malnutrition.
- Attract children from disadvantaged sections, especially girls from Dalits and Adivasi tribes to school, thereby increasing attendance, reducing dropout rates & promoting women empowerment through literacy.
- Promote a feeling of oneness and secularism amongst various different religions and cultures.
- Provide nutritional support to students in drought-ridden areas throughout summer vacation.

Historical Development of Mid Day Meal Scheme

The roots of the programme can be traced back to the pre-independence era, when a mid day meal programme was introduced in 1925 in Madras Corporation by the British administration.

Initiatives by state governments to children began with their launch of a mid day meal programme in primary schools in the 1962–63 school year. Tamil Nadu is a pioneer in introducing mid day meal programmes in India to increase the number of kids coming to school; Thiru K. Kamaraj, then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, introduced it first in Chennai and later extended it to all districts of Tamil Nadu.

Gujarat was the second state to introduce an MDM scheme in 1984, but it was later discontinued. A Mid Day Meal scheme was introduced in Kerala in 1984, and was gradually expanded to include more schools and grades.

By 1990–91, twelve states were funding the scheme to all or most of the students in their area: Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh. Karnataka, Orissa, and West Bengal received

international aid to help with implementation of the programme, and in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan the programme was funded entirely using foreign aid.

Mid Day Meal Implementation in Primary Schools in India:

Mid Day Meal Scheme was first implemented for the children aged between 6-11 years to maximize enrolment and reduce school dropout rates, which were important from the viewpoint of universalisation of elementary education as well as achievement of higher literacy rates in the country.

Table:1 Mid Day Meal Implementation in India

State	Date of Implementation	Mid Day Meal Content
Andhra Pradesh	01 January 2003	Rice, sambhar, egg/banana twice a week
Assam	January 2005	Rice ,dal, vegetables
Bihar	September2004 (Pilot)January 2005	Rice with sabji, dhal, pulao, karhi or khichri
Chhattisgarh	April 2002	Rice with dhal or vegetables
Gujarat	November 1984	Wheat, rice, pulses, oil, spices
Haryana	August 2004	Mitha rice, vegetable pulao, Dalia, paushtic khichri or bakli by rotation
Himachal Pradesh	September 2004	Grains, seasonal vegetables, fruit, eggs
Karnataka	July 2002(Pilot) June 2003	Rice, pulses, oil, salt, vegetables
Madhya Pradesh	July 2004	Dal-roti/dal-sabji (in wheat predominant areas) or dal-rice/dal-rice-sabji (in rice predominant areas)
Maharashtra	January 2003	Rice, dal, vegetables, spices, oil, banana/egg at least once a week
Orissa	June 2001(Pilot) September 2004	Rice, dal, egg/soya twice a week
Rajasthan	July 2002	Ghooghari (mixture of gur/jaggery and boiled wheat), dalia
Tamil Nadu	July 1982	Rice, eggs, boiled potatoes, cooked black Bengal, vegetables with
Uttar Pradesh	September 2004	Food grains, pulses, oil, salt, spices
Uttaranchal	November 2002- July 2003	Rice, dal, kheer, fruits and eggs alternately

Sources: State Government Documents: The National programme on MDM in Schools, Annual Work Plan and Budget, 2009-10 (15).

Effectiveness of the Scheme

In India malnutrition is widely prevalent, it prevents a child from his natural growth. It is adversely affecting universalisation of elementary education (UEE) in many ways as, a malnutrition child is less likely to attend school regularly, lack of participation in school activities, feel difficulty to concentrate in school environment.

Mid day meal programme can help in UEE in following ways; by improving enrolment and regularity in attendance, by reducing dropout. It is helpful for elimination of class room hunger, filling up the gap of social distance.

The Impact on Primary School Enrolment:

Mid day meal Scheme was initiated on the basis of the philosophy that "when children have "to sit in class with empty stomachs, they cannot focus on learning".

India's mid day meal scheme is the largest school nutrition program in the world. In 2006, it provided lunch to 120 million children in government primary schools every school day .The caste wise investigation shows that the scheme has a great impact on the enrolment of backward classes and Muslim Communities than other communities.

Most of the studies revealed that there exist a positive relationship between mid-day meal program and enrolment and attendance of students in schools including education and health outcomes of students. In many studies have shown that research on primary education in rural India suggests that mid-day meals enhance school participation, especially among girls.

The national level impacts of midday meals in educational, nutritional and other dimensions remains to be understood in depth, the evidence available suggests that mid day meal have had positive effects at least on enrolments. The school meals have likely boosted the enrolment and attendance of the youngest primary school children, but their ability to affect the attendance and retention of older students is questionable.

Initiatives by the Central Government

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (**NP-NSPE**) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on **15th August 1995**, initially in 2408 blocks in the country. To run this scheme at grass root level, local bodies/ authorities have got power to set up a committee under the chairmanship of District Collector with active participation of the people like members of Parliament (MPs), MLAs, President of Zila Parishad, Chairman of Nagarpalika and also officials of concern departments to create an awareness of the programme.

By the year 1997-98 the NP-NSPE was introduced in all blocks of the country. It was further extended in 2002 to cover not only children in classes I -V of Government, Government aided and local body schools, but also children studying in EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) and AIE (Alternative and Innovative Education) centre. Central Assistance under the scheme consisted of free supply of food grains @ 100 grams per child per school day, and subsidy for transportation of food grains up to a maximum of Rs 50 per quintal.

Unique Features of the Scheme

Mid Day Meal Program has been one of the earliest supplementary nutrition programs in the country. The program has nutritional as well as educational objectives. On November 28, 2001 the Supreme Court of India passed an order stating:

"A basic entitlement of every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary Schools with a prepared Mid-day Meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8–12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days"

In **September 2004** the scheme was revised to provide cooked mid day meal with 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein to all children studying in classes I – V in Government and aided schools and EGS/ AIE centres. In addition to free supply of food grains, the revised scheme provided Central Assistance for (a) Cooking cost @ Re 1 per child per school day.

In **July 2006** the scheme was further revised to provide assistance for cooking cost at the rate of (a) Rs 1.80 per child/school day for States in the North Eastern Region, provided the NER States

contribute Rs 0.20 per child/school day, and (b) Rs 1.50 per child/ school day for other States and UTs, provided that these States and UTs contribute Rs 0.50 per child/school day.

In **October 2007**, the scheme has been further revised to cover children in upper primary (classes VI to VIII) initially in 3479 Educationally Backwards Blocks (EBBs). Around 1.7 crore upper primary children were included by this expansion of the scheme.

From 2008-09 w.e.f 1st April, 2008, the programme covers all children studying in Government, Local Body and Government-aided primary and upper primary schools and the EGS/AIE centres including Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under SSA of all areas across the country. The calorific value of a mid-day meal at upper primary stage has been fixed at a minimum of 700 calories and 20 grams of protein by providing 150 grams of food grains (rice/wheat) per child/school day.

From the year 2009 onwards the following changes have been made to improve the implementation of the scheme:-

- a) Food norms have been revised to ensure balanced and nutritious diet to children of upper primary group by increasing the quantity of pulses from 25 to 30 grams, vegetables from 65 to 75 grams and by decreasing the quantity of oil and fat from 10 grams to 7.5 grams.
- b) Cooking cost (excluding the labour and administrative charges) has been revised from Rs.1.68 to Rs. 2.50 for primary and from Rs. 2.20 to Rs. 3.75 for upper primary children from 1.12.2009 to facilitate serving meal to eligible children in prescribed quantity and of good quality .
- c) Payment of honorarium @ Rs.1000 per month per cook- cum-helper was introduced from 1.12.2009. Honorarium at the above prescribed rate is being paid to cook-cum-helper.
- d) A common unit cost of construction of kitchen shed @ Rs.60,000 for the whole country was impractical and also inadequate .Now the cost of construction of kitchen-cum-store will be determined on the basis of plinth area norm and State Schedule of Rates.
- e) Due to difficult geographical terrain of the Special category States the transportation cost @ Rs.1.25 per quintal was not adequate. On the request of the North Eastern States the transportation assistance in the 11 Special Category States (Northern Eastern States, Himachal

Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand) have been made at par with the Public Distribution System.

f) Decentralization of payment of cost of foodgrains to the FCI at the district level from 1.4.2010 allowed officers at State and National levels to focus on detailed monitoring of the Scheme.

During 2011-12 total coverage of children against enrollment was 10.52 Crore (i.e. Primary-7.71 crore and Upper Primary 3.36 crore children). During 2012-13, 10.68 Cr. children (Elementary level) had been covered in 12.12 lakh Schools. 10.45 Cr. children were covered in 11.58 lakh Schools during 2013-14.

Problems of Mid Day Meal Scheme

Mid-day-meal-scheme has been in operation since 1995 and there is a repeated revision in the guidelines for clarity on the objectives of the programme through 2006. Despite stated objectives to boost universalisation of primary education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) had not formulated ways to measure the impact of the programme on enrolment, retention or attendance

Mid-day meals in India's government schools were envisaged to stop hunger from keeping children away from schools and to improve enrolment. Children do come to school and meals get served, but quite often, terrible accidents happen. Sometimes hygiene plays the devil, sometimes adulteration. Here are some of the most compelling takes on mid-day meals:

- The lunch killed 27 children—all between age four and 12—at a government school in Chhapra district in Bihar, about 80km from the state capital Patna, while more than a dozen are still hospitalized.
- A few examples of poor monitoring and coordination show the issues this scheme encounters. A little over three year ago in July, 2013, 23 children from the Indian state of Bihar died as a result of unsafe food preparation. Outrage within the community led to protests as well as a government probe into the incident.
- This follows 12 students in the Buxar district becoming sick, 33 students in Vaishali and 25 students in Siwan, all during the month of July.

- In many schools in Uttar Pradesh, found that the amount of food given was much lower than required by the government guidelines; many schools in Bihar didn't even serve meals for months.
- In December 2005, Delhi police seized eight trucks laden with 2,760 sacks of rice meant for primary school children. The rice was being transported from Food Corporation of India godowns Bulandshahr district to North Delhi. The police stopped the trucks and investigators later discovered that the rice was being stolen by an NGO.
- In November 2006, the residents of Pembong village (30 km from Darjeeling) accused a group of teachers of embezzling midday meals. In a written complaint, the residents claimed that students at the primary school had not received their mid day meal for the past year and a half.
- In December 2006, *The Times of India* reported that school staff was inflating attendance in order to obtain food grains.
- Twenty-three children died in Dharma Sati village in Saran District on 16 July 2013 after eating pesticide-contaminated mid day meals.
- On 31 July 2013, 55 students at a government middle school fell ill at Kalyuga village in Jamui district after their midday meal provided by an NGO. On the same day, 95 students at Chamandi primary school in Arwal district were ill after their meal.
- In the absence of adequate infrastructure (such as kitchen sheds, utensils etc.), it can lead to accidents and maintaining hygiene can be difficult.
- In 2004, 87 children died when the thatched roof of a classroom was ignited by sparks from a cooking fire.
- In 2011, a child died after succumbing to burn injuries she sustained after accidentally falling into a cooking vessel.
- Delivery of mid day meals is hampered by a host of reasons—from non-availability of food grains to the absence of kitchen stores and cooks.
- A worrying observation was on the mid day meal's impact on learning: the report cites anecdotal evidence that the administration of mid day meals distracts from teaching.
- The diversion of funds and food grains, teachers preparing meals and spending less time in teaching and lack of food hygiene were also flagged in a parliamentary committee report, underlining institutional apathy and lack of concerted efforts in the implementation of the scheme.

Some of the problems most commonly reported in various studied related to the mid-day meal programme in different parts of country includes:

- Insufficient funds to cover cooking costs and delays in budget allocations. States claim that the current cooking cost per student is insufficient and have repeatedly requested to raise it.
- Lack of evidence on impact official sources of information on mid day meal does not provide any evidence on the extent to which the programme has reduced chronic hunger and malnutrition among school-going children.
- food served in several states fell short of the prescribed 100 grams with deviations ranging from 5 to 83 grams and repetition of the same menu every day.
- provisions for monitoring were not adhered to and the mechanism for internal control was weak. The monitoring and steering committee did not meet regularly to take stock of the status and performance of the scheme. Limited opportunities for parental participation in the programme. Caste and religious bias among some parents in some places.
- Other issues range from delayed payments, poor food quality, snakes and worms in the food, cooks not receiving pay and food not being delivered or being wasted. There is even embezzlement of the money by way of fake enrollments.
- It is also a difficult challenge to deliver food to rural areas. Roads are not paved and the infrastructure is lacking. Even if food makes it to these remote areas, kitchens to cook the food in are not available within the schools.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

- Transfer of funds up to the school level should be needed to ensure of full utilization.
- A periodic feedback by the parents, students, teachers and members of public representative e.g. Gram Panchayat, Block Samiti, Zila Parishad should be taken essentially.
- The parents are not suppose to hesitate to check the mid day meal time to time.
- A demand drive approach should be adopted for managing the cooking material eg. Grain, rice, wheat, utensils, fuel etc.
- The quality of cooked food served should be enhance.
- There should be provision for training of cooks-cum-helpers on aspect of hygiene, health, sanitation, cooking and serving.

- The action plan should be formulated in such a way, so that teacher and students may not disturb in their teaching-learning process.
- A proper record should be maintained, to up-dated the programme.
- The personnel, who are engaged the execution of the programme, should be highly responsive, transparent and accountable to the public and their official.
- The wages should be revised periodically, so that the skilled worker may retain for long time.
- The gap between enrolment vs. actual number of student availing mid day meal should be monitor.

Evaluation of the Scheme

The concept of implementing mid day meal is almost a century old in India. With early beginnings in Madras Presidency and followed by its introduction in Gujarat and Delhi, in that order, in the post-independence period. Today, the scheme is implemented in almost all states. Thus, the scheme is an important instrument to encourage children to attend school.

The mid day meal scheme has many potential benefits: attracting children from disadvantaged sections (especially girls, Dalits and Adivasis) to school, improving regularity, nutritional benefits, socialization benefits and benefits to women. Some of benefits have indeed been realized. These positive benefits reflect on enrolment of disadvantaged children, on attendance, on learning effort, on improving nutritional inputs, on improving nutritional outcomes and so on.

Conclusion:

The mid day meal scheme is generally a successful one, but that should not blind policy makers from potentially dangerous problems that have arisen in this large-scale meal program or let its success blind them from the serious issue of malnutrition in India.

"India is home to the world's largest food insecure population, with more than 500 million people who are hungry", India State Hunger Index (ISHI) said. Many children don't get enough to eat, which has far-reaching implications for the performance of the country as a whole. "Its rates of child malnutrition is higher than most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa," it noted, "The

2009 Global Hunger Index ranked India at 65 out of 84 countries. More than 200 million went hungry in India that year, more than any other country in the world. The report states that "improving child nutrition is of utmost urgency in most Indian states".

Any government program of this size—with the goal of assisting 120 million children every day—no doubt suffers from organizational problems.

Recent data released by UNICEF and the Global Health Database shows that by 2015 around 33 percent of Indian children will be malnourished. India currently has more malnourished children than sub-saharan Africa and half of all child deaths are a result of malnutrition.

Hopefully nonprofits and the government can work together to improve and perfect the mid day meal Scheme, as India's children definitely need it and can benefit from its proper implementation.

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