

MIDDAY MEAL PROGRAM: SUCCESSES AND OBSTACLES

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ABSTRACT

An Indian school lunch program called the Mid-Day Meal Scheme was established to raise the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide. The POSHAN Scheme is the new name for the program. On working days, the initiative provides free lunches to children in government primary and upper primary schools, government-aided Anganwadis, Madarsa, and Maqtabas. The midday meal program has become nearly ubiquitous, feeding primary school students nationwide after overcoming many of the initial issues that plagued it since its inception in 1995. This evaluation of the MDMS looks at its accomplishments to date and tracks its evolution. The evaluation discusses the issues the system is still facing and offers potential solutions. The midday meal program has been demonstrated to improve students' overall academic performance, cognitive capacities, and levels of focus. When meals are served during school hours, children are better able to focus on their academics, which improves learning. There are problems with implementation, such as irregularities, corruption, poor hygiene, and insufficient nutritional value, among others. Even with the program's effectiveness, child hunger is still an issue in India. In some schools, food was prepared by using wood which gave bad smell to food and also polluted the environment. This study uses secondary data from multiple Indian states to investigate how the midday meal program affects body mass index. The Mid-day Meal Program was introduced in India to increase school-age children's enrolment, attendance, retention, and academic performance. Cooked midday meals are the norm for a sizable percentage of kids from lower socioeconomic groups.

Keywords: Food; Education; Midday Meal Scheme; Primary Schools; Government.

INTRODUCTION

Food and education are two of the most pressing issues facing the underprivileged in India. People with little financial resources have fewer nutritional alternatives and are less likely to enrol in school. India's future is represented by children from low-income families who lack access to these two fundamental necessities. As a response, the Indian government created the MDM Scheme to encourage education while also providing children with needed nourishment. The "National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE)" is the initiative's official name. On August 15, 1995, the Indian government launched the "National Programme of

Nutritional Support to Primary Education (commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme)" to provide students in primary schools with a midday meal. In 2002, the Supreme Court mandated that prepared Midday Meals be served in all government schools (rather than dry rations)[1]. Midday meal scheme is one of the world largest MDMS in school, with 11 crore kids in 12 lakh Indian schools participating. The MDMS is implemented by the federal and state governments together. The expense of the Midday Meal Scheme is split between the state and central governments, with the 25% of expenses will bear by state government and 75% cost will be bear by central government. All children between the ages of 6 and 14 have the right to free and compulsory education thanks to the 86th Amendment to the Constitution. India is also signatory to the "Millennium Development Goals which made during the UN Millennium summit on 8 Sep. 2000.[2] According to this MDG, India has to achieve the goal of universal elementary education by the year 2015. Many schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National literacy mission and operation Black Board have been started to achieve this goal. The Mid-Day Meal plan is also one of these, in the same way. National Programme of Nutritional support to Primary Education" which is properly known as „Mid-day Meal scheme was launched by the Government of India on 15 Aug. 1995, with the aim of boost universalization of Primary Education and to improve the nutritional status of children by the food being given to them at the school. The objective of the schemes is to increase enrolment, retention and the learning abilities of the beneficiaries, especially of children belonging to poor and downtrodden section of the society and to provide a delicious meal to school going children.[3] It is also pictured that such a meal would foster a sense of brotherhood and friendship among children of various castes, colors, and creeds. So, the goals of social equity and gender equity are being realized with help of MDMs.[4] Mid- Day Meal Scheme aims to overcome the problem of classroom „hunger“ which is a major obstacle in the path of effective and efficient education system. In a relatively short period of time mid-day meal has become a part of the daily school routine across the country. Today, according to government report 10.44 crore children benefit from hot cooked meal in 12.12 lakh schools, available 8.77 lakh kitchen cum store and appointed 24 lakh cooked cum helpers mainly from SC/ST and OBC. It is making to the largest school feeding programme in the world. This paper reviews to understand how the scheme actually works on the ground and to identify the achievements so far as well as the remaining challenges.[4-5]

The Mid-Day Meal scheme's primary goals are as follows [5]:

- ❖ Increase the number of underprivileged students enrolled in schools.
- ❖ Increasing enrollment leads to higher school attendance.
- ❖ To keep children in grades 1-8 enrolled.
- ❖ To give nutritional help to elementary school children in drought-affected communities.
- ❖ The government is also considering establishing nutrition gardens on school grounds, including student participation.

- ❖ Cooking competitions based on local ingredients could also be staged as part of the initiative to promote ethnic food and unique menus.
- ❖ The revised system will focus on monitoring schoolchildren's nutritional status in addition to providing healthful meals.
- ❖ Special supplies for nutritious goods would be made in districts with a high prevalence of anemia
- ❖ A nutritional expert will be assigned to each school to guarantee that pupils' BMI, weight, and hemoglobin levels are checked.[6]

AN OVERVIEW ON MIDDAY MEAL SCHEME

In India the school meal programme in India has a long history. In 1925, the Madras Municipal Corporation began a Midday Meal Program for poor children. In 1980, the states of Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and the Union Territory of Pondicherry used their resources to implement a prepared Midday Meal Program for primary school kids. With their assistance, twelve states were able to implement the midday meal programme on a large or universal scale by 1990-91[4-6]. As a centrally funded plan with 2408 blocks, the "National Nutritional Support Program for Primary Education (NP-NSPE)" was established on August 15, 1995. By 1997-98, the NP-NSPE had been implemented in all national syndications. The Education Protection System (EPS) and Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) programmes were expanded in 2002 to include students in government grades I to V, state-aided schools, and schools and children from local government and institutions[6]. Each child received a subsidy of up to Rs 50 per child for the transportation of food grains as part of the scheme, which also provided them with 100 grams of free food each day at school. The plan was amended in September 2004, "To give a prepared midday meal of 300 calories and 8-12 grammes of protein to all students in grades I – V in government and aided schools, as well as EGS/AIE centres".[7] In 2007, "the plan was again amended to include kids in the upper primary school in 3479 educationally backward blocks" (class VI to VIII). This extension of the system reached around 1.7 primary school pupils. The effort has included all school students who have studied in governmental, municipal, and governmental elementary and secondary schools, as well as EGS/AIE centres in every area of the country, including Madarsa and Maqtabas funded by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, from 2008/09, i.e. 1 April 2008. (SSA).[5-6] The caloric composition of the midday meal in primary schools was set at a minimum of 700 calories and 20 grammes of protein per kid every day at school, with 150 grammes of cereal grains (rice/whatever)." In 2009, major modification was done in midday meal scheme to implement the scheme in more proactive manner in all school running under government. Some major decision was taken to increase the standard of food in midday meal to ensure nutritious and balanced diet per student the amount of standard food material was increased i.e. vegetable 65 gm to 70 gm, dal / pulses 25gm to 30 gm but they lowering the supply of oil from 10-7.5 gm, The payment for cooks and assistants was fixed Rs.0.40 per kid per day labour and other administrative expenses included

in the cooking costs.[7] In many instances, the low honorarium made it extremely challenging to find work to prepare the meal. From December 1, 2009, a supplementary provision was made to pay Rs-1000 for each cook-cum-helper in the MDMS. The above-mentioned sum is paid as an honorarium to the cook and helper. However, several states pay more than Rs.1000/- as an honorarium to cook-cum-assistants through their state funds.[8]

SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF MIDDAY MEAL PROGRAM

Several studies can help, increasing student participation, increasing socioeconomic equality, and improving gender parity. The majority of the children and parents liked the MDMs' installation. MDMS contributes to improving the educational and health status of kids in rural areas. According to "Professor Amartya Sen's Pratichi Research Team in West Bengal, the mid-day meal has enhanced school enrollment and attendance[7]. In females and children in the SC/ST categories, the increase has been faster". The "PROBE (Public Report on Basic Education) Report" found that "84 per cent of families stated that their children receive a prepared mid-day meal in school and that youngsters enjoy a diverse menu". In schools, good habits such as hand cleaning before and after meals are instilled. MDM has had a critical role to reduce the dropout rate of girl students, according to the "National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development Indore's", MDMS in Madhya Pradesh. Children's academic achievement has also improved.[8] The plan has made a substantial contribution to achieving social justice for all members of society. The Centre for Environment and Food Security performed a "performance evaluation on food security initiatives in Orissa and Uttar Pradesh in 2011. In comparison to Uttar Pradesh, MDM's performance is better in Orissa. 86.7 per cent of Orissa students fell into the second-best category of MDM, whereas 51.8 per cent of children in Uttar Pradesh had a regular but insufficient and inadequate lunch at school".[9] Research has shown that "Mid-Day Meals has created a platform for students from a variety of social and economic backgrounds to have meals together, making it easier to attain social fairness." Instructors and students have also reported that the programme has forced them to spend their attention on tasks related to it rather than teaching and learning activities, resulting in lost study time".[9]

CHALLENGES OF MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

The Midday Meal Programme was approved by the Supreme Court in 2002. Many Indian governments have accepted it, and as a result, pupils attending state-run or state-assisted schools are entitled to free meals. The noon meal programme serves almost 120 million kids across the country, ensuring that each student receives nutritional meals. Despite the fact that the noon meal programme is a fantastic programme, it has certain obstacles in terms of execution and food quality. The Mid-Day Meal Program's most serious problems are listed. 9] The government only cares about figures like the number of schools it can cover and feed. They are careless about the

quality of MDMS meals. Political parties that use MDMS for political advantage place a lower priority on understanding the ground realities of MDMS food quality in country schools (in backward regions). [10] They never check to see if the program is working well or if the kids who should be using it are happy or unhappy. The majority of students who attend village government schools are impoverished; in some cases, the midday meal is the only meal for some students who are coming from very poor family backgrounds. In some rural-area schools, no one is there to check the quality of food which is served to students in school. The callous attitude may be observed in this case in Bihar, when 23 children died on July 16, 2013, after eating their midday meal. [9-11] According to the forensic results, it was a poisoning case since the oil used for cooking had previously been used to store pesticides. There have been several unreported incidents of diarrhea and poor health among students who ate this lunch. As a result, parents and children concerned about their safety have refused to eat these noon meals. The MDMS standards stipulate that the meal is of excellent quality and healthy, delicious, and digestible and that it should change from day to day to guarantee menu diversity. During the preparation and presentation of the meal, high standards of sanitation and cleanliness are required, and openness in accounting would be available to public scrutiny.[9] The CAG's Mid-Day Meal performance audit report 2015 showed financial mismanagement on the part of the HRD ministry and that states diverted cash worth 123.29 crores earmarked for the plan. In Karnataka, "ISKCON, which provided Mid-Day Meals to students in 304 schools in two taluks of Bellary district, used 1.04 lakh kg less rice than the permitted requirements in cooking MDM" as per audit. The standards also state that the lunch should be served every day consistently and that all supplies should be delivered on time to each school. Food supplies are redirected, supplies are reduced, waste due to miss management and corruption. In Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh, the flagship Mid-Day Meal Scheme are plagued by widespread caste and gender prejudice.[10] As evidenced by the recent event in Madhya Pradesh. In some areas, higher caste student decline to consume food prepared by SC/ST women. The MDMS is meant to function in accordance with the guidelines to treat each student equally. It is also anticipated that this opportunity will be used to instill a sense of equality and cooperation among children from all social backgrounds. The researchers performed a survey in a university study named Midday Meals Discrimination Caste (MDM). The survey revealed that, despite the fact that 97% of schools provide prepared meals on most days and 99% have MDMS facilities, food is provided in only 11% of communities, and in 2%, it is extremely rare. Additionally, food quality was reported to be poor in 38% of cases and did not follow the specified menu. The site has additional repercussions for SC children attending school because they often encounter harassment when travelling towns that prevent them from taking part in school, negatively affecting their participation in the MDMS. [11]

Despite the many successes, there are a lot of challenges with this scheme's implementation [10-11]:

- 1) This scheme's main flaw is that it requires the teachers to dedicate two or three hours to putting it into practice.

- 2) Due to the participation of the teachers in the plan, students' study time, and educational quality deteriorate.
- 3) Most government primary schools in remote areas have a small student population; hence, the long-term viability of this plan is likewise at risk.
- 4) The number of students attending government schools has been negatively impacted by the accessibility of a good, easy-to-use transportation system that is handled by primary schools.
- 5) The majority of states did not adhere to the instructions of the Government of India to deliver food grains at the school point by PDS dealer, which led to a leakage in the supply chain and the adulteration and theft of the food grains supplied, according to the Planning Commission's report on the performance evaluation of the cooked Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
- 6) A different survey also found that the majority of schools lacked the necessary basic facilities for meal preparation. Some schools lack an adequate kitchen, storage space, and a reliable source of clean water, which has an impact on the meal's quality in a negative way.
- 7) The interruption of food grain supply in Uttar Pradesh led to a number of days when meals were not prepared in schools, as shown in the report of the 5th Joint Review Mission on the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in 2013. This has a negative impact on the nutrient intake of children.
- 8) One of the few studies that specifically focused on access for Dalits was that of Throrat and Lee in 2005. They discover that in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, Dalit children's access to MDMs is limited by the fact that the meals are typically served in hamlets belonging to dominant castes.
- 9) Discrimination also occurs when children of various castes are served different foods or segregated seating. In Rajasthan, children from the lower caste had to be served water by other children, whereas the other children were free to help themselves. In Bihar, plates were marked with the child's caste's initials.
- 10) In the 2003 Dalit Studies Institute of India research, 37% of respondents in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh claim caste discrimination in MDMs, while 48% indicate hatred toward Dalit chefs, according to research. The recent deaths of 23 children from eating poisonous foods provided to them by MDMs have raised doubts about this programme.

SUGGESTIONS

The 5th Review Mission on MDMs in Uttar Pradesh recommended that in order to avoid large-scale disruption in the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, directly transportation of food grains from block where houses to school by civil supplies department is recommended, with the implementing agency being the School Management Committee, or SMC. This is necessary in order to make MDMs move effective and successful. Issued of food grains record cards similar to ration card is also recommended, FCI should be given the responsibility of coloring the food grain bags as mere stamping of MDM Logo is not enough.[12] Additionally, the time it takes to transport food grains

from the FCI godown ought to be tracked and recorded. There is need to take very strict action against the official of all levels and elected representatives who violates the guidelines. Awareness may be spread to adding more vegetables in MDM to meet the food norms and to improve nutritional status of children kitchen garden may be developed including plantation of fruit bearing trees like banana, guava, mango, papaya etc. Ministry of HRD has also issued guidelines to ensure quality; safety and hygiene under the MDMs are setting up of the management structure at various levels and tasting of the meal by at least one teacher. Ministry has conducted social audit of the scheme on pilot basis in two districts in Andhra Pradesh during 2012-13. It is to extend in other and states U.P. also during the current year. All necessary steps should be taken to avoid any untoward incident in the school. If any such accident does accure in the school, it should be responsibility of the Head Master to inform District Education Officer/District Health Officer/District Magistrate without any delay. All the states should issue necessary instruction for linkage with primary health centre or district hospital to ensure early treatment of children.[11-12] Supreme Court commissions, 2010-11 have recommended that the provision for cooking costs under the mid-day meal should be increased based on price Index developed for MDMs to counter the effect of inflation. Priority should be given to disadvantaged communities (especially Dalits and Adivasis) in the appointment of cooks and helpers. All cooks and helpers should be paid not less than statutory minimum wage. While the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in MDMs is commendable, the objective of social equity is impacted by NGOs' provision of meals. More like that preparing of meals by SC/ST women. Moreover serious action should be taken in the event of any form of social discrimination in mid-day meal such as discrimination against Dalit children or Dalit cooks[9].

CONCLUSION

The programme has shown many positive effects. Many parents who couldn't send their children to schools due to poverty were eager to get their children free nutritious food, and this incentivised them to send their children to school. The number of kids who went to school rose as a result of the Midday Meal Scheme. In order to provide 12 million students in elementary and secondary schools with free lunches, the Mid-Day Meal Programme was established in 1995. The plan's purpose is to reduce hunger and improve education while also improving nutritional status and increasing child participation and retention rates. Despite the efforts, the method failed to provide the desired outcome. The effort seeks to protect children in classrooms from hunger, boost school enrolment and attendance, and improve kids sociability. The MDMS' long-term objective is to deploy targeted treatments to alleviate India's hidden malnutrition problem. Despite the program's success, child hunger continues to be a severe problem in the country. The government ought to close the loopholes in the program for midday meals so that the lives of future generations won't be sacrificed to satisfy the avarice of a few. With more important centre-state coordination and oversight of the scheme's implementation, the mid-day meal program has a lot of potential. The

Mid Day Meal Scheme does a few things. First and foremost, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are provided with at least one nutritious meal per day. Secondly, since their stomachs are full, it allows them to focus on education without worrying about food. It also contributes to their mental and social development.

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