

Need and *Impact* of Mid-day Meal Programme

Dr Pardeep Jain, Kanchan, Mirnalini Oswal

Abstract

The Mid-day Meal Programme (MDMP) is, as the name implies, a programme to provide meals in schools which is an initiative of the Government of India and the state governments. This programme is an effort to lessen the miseries of young India, to ease its pains, to encourage in a true sense and to realize the dream of a society based on equality and social justice.

Education is the process through which a child is made capable of attaining the necessary competencies and skills to face the challenges in life to survive and to struggle for existence. Progress in education can unlock progress in health, nutrition and poverty reduction and vice versa. Children whose lives are blighted by hunger, poverty and disease are clearly not equipped to realize the potential in education. Accelerating progress towards "Education for All" is one of the defining challenges of the early twenty first century. The Right to Education is a basic human right. Prospects for reducing poverty, narrowing extreme inequalities and improving public health are heavily influenced by what happens in education. Four important factors are identified for achieving the goal of "Education for All" (EFL). These are Access to Education, Enrolment of children, Retention of enrolled children and Achievement. Mid-Day Meal is an effort to achieve and facilitate all the above factors.

With the Following Positive Outcomes Like:

- Increasing enrolment, retention and learning abilities of the beneficiaries,

especially children belonging to the poor and underprivileged sections of the society.

- Providing nutritional meals to school-going children to achieve the goal of a sound mind in a sound body.
- Promoting friendship and a feeling of common brotherhood among children belonging to different caste, colour and creed by providing meals to them together.

The National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education (i.e. the national "**mid-day meal scheme**") was initiated in 1995 as a centrally sponsored scheme, initially in 2408 blocks in the country. By 2001 a few states were providing cooked meals, but most were only giving "dry rations" of food grains to school children. The number of states providing cooked meals rose sharply from early 2002 onwards, after a Supreme Court order (dated 28 November 2001) directed all State Governments to introduce cooked mid-day meal in primary schools. The direction was to be implemented from June 2002.

One of the pioneers of the scheme was the Madras presidency that started



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providing cooked meals to children in corporation schools in Madras city in 1923. The programme was introduced on a large scale in 1960. The first major thrust came in 1982 when the chief minister of Tamil Nadu decided to universalize the scheme for all children in primary Classes in government schools. Later the programme was expanded to cover all children up to class ten. Tamil Nadu's mid-day meal programme is among the best known in the country.

Need for Mid-day Meal Programme (MDMP)

Despite the success of the program, child hunger, as a problem, persists in India. According to current statistics, 42.5% of the children, under 5 years, are underweight. "India is home to the world's largest food insecure population, with more than 200 million people who are hungry," India State Hunger Index (ISHI) said, adding that the country's poor performance is driven by its high levels of child under-nutrition and poor calorie count. "Its rates of child malnutrition are higher than most countries in sub-Saharan Africa," it noted. A report released as part of the 2009 Global Hunger Index ranks India at 65 out of 84 countries. The 2008 report says that India has more people suffering from hunger - a figure above 200 million - than any other country in the world. The report also says "improving child nutrition is of utmost urgency in most Indian states".

Impact of Mid-day Meal Programme (MDMP)

Boosting Up Enrolment

One of the key objectives of Mid day Meal Programme is to increase enrolment and retention in primary schools. Various schemes were implemented in primary education sector by the government to meet the goal of education for all. Access to primary education was universalized through flagship programme like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

However, despite this, a few children are still deprived of primary education due to the inability of their parents to send them to schools because of poor economic status. For these parents, sending their children to school means not only incurring extra financial burden but also depriving them of the money that their children would have earned otherwise. That being the attitude of these economically backward parents and children the only way of bringing them to school is to take care of their food and nutritional needs.

Meeting this objective, MDMP is working as a motivator to attract these students to schools. It helps to enhance the student daily attendance in schools. According to the report on Best Practices Adopted in MDMS in Haryana, MDMS has helped in ensuring greater enrolment and retention of girls at primary level. The programme has been successful in encouraging the participation of girls in the education process and reducing the gender gap. In 2006-07 total girls at the primary level in the state increased from 46.86% to 47.24% in 2007-08.

Another aspect of this objective includes the enhancement of enrolment of disadvantaged sections of the society. According to the Mid day Meal Programme - Annual Work Plan & Budget 2008-09, Punjab has a high concentration of Schedule caste population i.e. 28.9%, which is one of the highest in the country. In the state where almost 38% students are studying in private (recognized / un-recognized) schools, providing MDM in Government schools/ EGS/AIE centers has given a boost to the most disadvantaged sections of the society.

Solving Malnutrition Problems

Childhood malnutrition and poor health are two of the main barriers to Education for All. Progress in both areas has lagged far behind than progress in getting children into schools.

The upshot is that millions of children entering schools have had their brains, their cognitive development and their educational potential permanently damaged by hunger and ill health. Millions of children are affected by micronutrient deficiency, Iron deficiency anemia, which affects around half of the pre-school children in developing countries, impairs cognitive development and increases vulnerability to infectious diseases.

More rapid economic growth alone will not overcome these deficits. Over the past two decades, India has been among the world's fast growing economies. By contrast, child health and nutrition have been improving very slowly. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009 "In India, a large scale assessment found that 45% of the children in standard three could not read a text designed for standard 1 students"



Mahatma Gandhi " If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children and if they will grow up in their natural innocence we won't have to struggle, we won't have to pass fruitless resolutions but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace."

While keeping in mind the problem of malnutrition of children entering into schools, the Government, under the Mid day Meal Programme is providing meals with nutrition value which includes 450 calories and 12 grams of protein to all the children. The children come every day on their own and they eat whatever is given to them. This possibly helps to raise their intake of calories and proteins.

Reducing Dropouts

Mere provision of access to education and enrolment of children in schools is not enough to achieve the goal of education for all. This should be coupled with suitable measures to ensure that children stay in school to complete the full cycle of primary education. As health status has a significant impact on the development of children and on their education prospects, malnourished

children or children with poor health often have a limited capacity to pay attention in school and perform poorly as a result, have higher than average absenteeism rates, often fall behind at school and ultimately are at a greater risk of dropping out of school. In this case nutritional food provided in Mid day Meal Scheme helps to improve the health of the children which automatically affects their concentration in classroom activities and academic results and as a result drop-out rate reduces. Pralok Gupta (2010) has explained in his article that in 2000-01 drop out rate at primary/ elementary class was 40.7% / 53.7% and it has been reduced to 25.60% / 45.90% in 2006-07.

End of Classroom Hunger

"Teachers in all countries report that at least 9% of children come to school with an empty stomach and in some countries the share is as high as 18%". In this context, Mid day Meal Programme helps to end classroom hunger. Children reach school with an empty stomach and find it hard to concentrate in classroom activities. This invariably affects their performance. This problem is now largely resolved. In addition to this, Mid day Meal programme creates a habit of paying attention to hygiene, cleanliness and discipline among students. Students are encouraged to be disciplined and be hygienic as they form a queue to receive or eat meals. Teachers ensure washing of hands before meals.

Feeling of Common Brotherhood among Children

In addition to boosting enrolment, attendance, retention and child nutrition, MDM has another important objective of creating social equality among students. In this programme, children learn to sit together and share a common meal at a common place as there are no separate sitting arrangements or preferential treatment for the so called upper caste children. By doing so



MDMP helps to counter caste prejudices. MDMP facilitates school participation among the underprivileged children. This programme will help to reduce future class inequalities, since lack of education is a major source of economic disadvantage and social marginalization.

Employment Generation

Mid day Meal programme has generated employment opportunities mostly for women in rural areas. These women feel empowered after getting employment. As the scheme guidelines often state that priority should be given to the women from disadvantaged sections, so this helps in resolving their economic problems. This programme also helps in the liberation of working women as they are free from the burden of feeding their children at noon.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Mid day Meal Programme has been able to meet much of its objectives, despite many obstacles in its way. The mid-day meal scheme has succeeded in bringing poor children to school. The future of India lies in the health of her children. The mid-day meal

(MDM) scheme is thus a necessity. It is an investment the country makes in the health of its children. It has been able to mitigate the hunger of Young India which will ultimately help in building and developing the creativity and talent of children as an empty stomach can't achieve the dream of the country to become self-reliant. There is no doubt that employment generation and the feeling of brotherhood has increased significantly. The bane of casteism will also be on the decline to some extent with the increase in feelings of brotherhood.

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Dr Pardeep Jain

*Associate Professor
Dept. of Entrepreneurship
Development Programme
Sant Longowal Institute
of Engineering &
Technology, Longowal,
Dist. Sangrur*

Kanchan

*Research Fellow
Dept. of Entrepreneurship
Development Programme
Sant Longowal Institute of
Engineering & Technology
Longowal, Dist. Sangrur*

Mirnalini Oswal

*Student of BA LLB
(1st Year)
Institute of Law, KUK,
Haryana*