

Mid-Day Meal Scheme : Achievements and Challenges

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ABSTRACT : *Mid-Day Meal scheme was launched by the Government of India with the aim of boost universalization of primary education and increase enrolment especially of children belonging to poor and downtrodden sections of the society. It is also visualized that such a meal would promote friendship and feeling of brotherhood among the children belonging to different caste, color and creed. Until 2001, providing dry rations in most states, Things began to change after 2001 when a Supreme Court order in the right to food case directed all states to provide cooked meals to all primary school children. Despite all achievements, there are many problems in the implementation of this scheme. A major drawback found in this scheme is spending teaching time; insufficient basic infrastructure of school. Parents, Panchayats and local authorities are negligible in this scheme. Such place, access to MDMs for Dalit children is hampered by the fact that the meals are served primarily in dominant caste hamlets. There are also instance of discrimination. Recently the death of 23 children due to poisonous food served to them under MDMs has put a question mark on this scheme. Hence, to better implementation of this scheme it would be necessary to take measures.*

KEYWORDS : *Dalits, Discrimination, Implemantation, Hamlets, Panchayats.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The 86th amendment of constitution has made free and compulsory education as a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. India is also signatory to the “Millennium Development Goals which made during the UN Millennium summit on 8 Sep. 2000. 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. In the same way, Mid- Day Meal scheme is a such scheme also. “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. It is also visualized that such a meal would promote friendship and feeling of brotherhood among the children belonging of different caste, color and creed. So, the goals of social equity and gender equity are being realized with help of MDMs. 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 workes on the ground and to identify the achievements so far as well as the remaining challenges.

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF MID-DAY MEALS

When the MDMs was launched in 1995, state governments (who were responsible for implementing the scheme) were given two years to put necessary system in place so as to be able to provide cooked meals to primary school children. Until 2001, most states failed to put the required arrangements in place and instead provide students with monthly dry ration on their attendance in school. Tamilnadu had launched a cooked MDMs in the 1950 and expanded it significantly in 1982 and Gujarat introduced mid-day meals in the 1980s. Besides this, the entire state of Kerala, and some pockets of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, began providing cooked meals 1995.

Until 2001, however, the MDMs was implemented neither in letter nor in spirit and was limited to providing dry ration in most states. Things began to change after Nov. 28, 2001, when a supreme court order in the 'right to food' directed all states to implement the mid-day meal scheme by providing every child in every government and government assisted primary schools with a prepared mid-day meal with minimum contents of 300 calories of energy and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days. The new guidelines in line with the Supreme Court order dated April 20, 2004, provide for meals to be served during the summer vacation in draught areas. Some states including Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu have been following this directive. The central guidelines allow state governments to manage the MDMs through the designated 'nodal department' such as school education, rural development, women and child development, or social welfare. Non-governmental organizations have also been permitted to be involved in the provision of MDMs. There are significant variations in management system across states. In sum states like Rajasthan the concept of Public-Private partnerships for mid-day meals is taking root, especially in urban areas.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS -CHALLENGES

Many studies have shown that MDMs has helped in preventing classroom hunger, promoting school participation and fostering social equality and enhancing gender equity. Most of the children and parents expressed their satisfaction on the implementation of MDMs. According to the parents of children the education health and nutrition of their children have improved because of MDMs.

- A study done by professor Amartya sen's Pratichi Research Team in West-Bengal shows that mid-day meal has increased the enrolment and attendance of children in schools. The increase has been more rapid with respect to girls and children belonging to sc/st categories.
- The major findings of the PROBE (Public Report on Basic Education) Report indicated that 84% households reported that the children get cooked mid-day meal in schools and children enjoy varied menu. Good practices like washing hand before eating and after eating are imparted in the schools.
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme in Madhya Pradesh by National Institute of Public Cooperation & child Development Indore has reported that MDM has played a crucial role in reducing dropout, especially among girls. The academic performance of children has also improved. The scheme has played a significant role in bringing social equity among all the sections of the society.
- Annual status of education report 2010 reported that in 83.4% schools served MDM on a day of visit and 81.3% schools were having kitchen sheds for cooking mid-day meal.
- Supreme Court commissioners have observed that the MDM is widely acknowledged as one the most successful schemes of government of India. Increase in enrollment and attendance of children in primary schools has been noticed after the introduction of MDM.
- Performance audit (2011) conducted by centre for environment and food security on food security schemes Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. Performance of MDM is for better in Orissa in comparison with the Uttar Pradesh. An overwhelming 86.7% of Orissa children second best category of MDM, while 51.8% of children in UP were getting regular but inadequate and unsatisfactory meal in their schools.
- The study conducted by the planning commission (2010) shows that cooked Mid-Day Meal has created a platform for all social and economic backgrounds to take meals together, thereby facilitating achieving the objective of social equity. It has also been observed that the programme has resulted in the diversion of the attention of teachers and students on a activities related to it, rather than towards teaching and learning activities, which results in loss of studies.

'Towards achieving Millennium Development Goals-India 2013', analyses the achievement at national level of MDGs and the targets on the basis of updates data sets. This report has showed that the country is now well set to achieve cent percent primary education for children in the primary schooling age of 6-10 years. DISE (District Information System on Education) 2010-11 reports, Net Enrolment Ratio at primary level is 99.89 which is 87.4 in 2004. Apparent survival Rate (Ratio of enrolment in grade V to grade 1) is 82 for 2010-11. Gender parity (ratio of girls to boys) in primary education reached the target value of 1 in 2008-09 itself which is 1.01 in 2010-11. MDMs has been successful in cultivating good habits like washing hand before and after meals and in educating them about the importance of clean water, good hygienic environment and other related matters. By breaking the shackles of caste, creed and class among the children, MDMs has fostered the feeling of cooperation sharing, co-ordination and fraternity, thereby leading the development of children emotionally and society also. Psychological development of children is also ensured. Despite all these achievements, there are many problems, in the implementation of this scheme. A major drawback found in this scheme is that the teachers have to spend 2 or 3 hours for the implementation of this scheme. Because of the involvement of the teachers in the scheme, the study time of students and quality of education suffer.

The number of students in most of the government primary schools in rural areas is meager so that the effectiveness of this scheme is also at stake. The availability of easy and good transportation system managed by the primary schools has adversely affected the number of students in government schools. The report of planning commission on performance evaluation of cooked Mid-Day Meal Scheme also shows that most of states did not follow the guidelines of Government of India to deliver food grains at the school point by PDS dealer, thereby resulting in the leakage of supply chain, food grains supplied got adulterated and pilfered. Different survey also revealed the fact that in most of schools, the basic infrastructure for preparing meals was not available as per requirements. Some schools lack proper kitchen, store rooms and source of clean water supply which affected the quality of meal adversely. According to report of 5th joint Review mission on Mid-Day Meal Scheme in Uttar Pradesh 2013 shows that disruption of supply of food grains due to which for number of days. Meal is not cooked in the school which adversely affects the nutrient intake of children.

The study by Thorat and Lee 2005 is among the few whose focus was on access among Dalits. They find that in Rajasthan and Tamilnadu, access to MDMs for Dalit children is hampered by the fact that the meals are served primarily in dominant cast hamlets. Segregated seating or different foods being served to children of different caste are also instances of discrimination. In Bihar plates were labeled with initial of the child's caste, in Rajasthan children from the lower caste had to be given water by other children, whereas the other children were allowed to help themselves to the water directly. The study of Indian institute of Dalit studies 2003. In Andhra Pradesh, Bihar Rajasthan, Tamilnadu and Uttar Pradesh shows that 37% report caste discrimination in MDMs and 48% report opposition to Dalit cooks. Recently the death of 23 children due to poisonous food served to them under MDMs has put on question mark on this scheme. No doubt MDMs is good in itself but the problem lies in its implementation.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

To make MDMs more effective and successful, it is urgently required to ensure timely transfer and food grains in schools. 5th Review Mission on MDMs in Uttar Pradesh recommended in order to avoid large scale disruption in Mid- Day Meal Scheme, directly transportation of food grains from block level to school by civil supplies department is recommended where the implementing agency is the school management committee (SMC). 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. Also the time taken in transporting food grains from FCI godown should also be monitored 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 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 occur 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. 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. Role of NGOs is commendable in MDMs but goal of social equity is affecting from preparing meals and supply it by NGOs. 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.

V. CONCLUSION

For effective implementation of MDMs, all the functionaries involved in the scheme, need to be aware about nutrition, health hygiene and safety of foods. Non-governmental organization, local youth and active social workers can also play a significant role in this scheme. Hence, quality of education and time span of teaching should not suffer any cost. Adequate staff does not mean the provision of just one cook. It is required is smoothing similar to the Gujarat or Karnataka model where three persons are employed for the provision of the MDM, an organizer, a cook and a helper.

It is to be noted that MDM of the country is the biggest programme of the world and every effort must be done to make this scheme successful. In the end, the success of the programme will depend on continued public participation and vigilance as well as sustained political interest in the scheme. By educating every child of the country it becomes possible to rule out the differences of rural India and 'urban India' and to realize also the concept of 'inclusive growth'.

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