

Efficacy of Mid-Day Meal Scheme in India: Challenges and Policy Concerns**Author : Rahul Khajuria, PhD Scholar, Food & Nutrition Department of Home Science****NIMS university Jaipur, Rajasthan****303121****Abstract**

The Mid Day Meal Scheme in over India is considered to be the world's largest schools meal initiative, serving blazing cooked meals to the under privileged childrens. The article intends to highlight the effectiveness of the Mid Day Meal Scheme in improving schools and the local communities in India. The focal point on the challenges being confronted with the implementation of the programme and suggests some relevant policy measures for Improve it . The ideas behind the foundation of the programme are to remove malnutrition, supplement nutritional foods in school meals, to motivate out- school children towards regular school, to decrease absenteeism and dropout rate, and bridge to inequality among the children irrespective of their caste, class and gender backgrounds. After the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) 2008-2009, the programme is being observed by the School Management Committees.

Introduction

As per the Global Hunger Index Report, the position of India is ranked 105 out of 127 countries (2024), which seems to be lower than the other neighbouring Asian countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh. Adding the nutrition component through the Mid-Day Meal Scheme among the schools student in India has started gain the adequate attention. Chronic hunger is serious issue and needs to be addressed with utmost importance. Every participant has the right to live a dignified life. It is the responsibility of government to ensure and safeguard that right, which has remained a major concern for along time. Like right to information and the right to education, the Government of India has introduced the right to food of the people. To ensure the quality food at affordable price to the needy persons, the National Food Security Act, 2013 has been approved. Food and nutrition can be provide a healthy foundation and facilitate social as well as academic development among the children (Abery & Drummond, 2014). Mid day meal lunch programme has resulted in facilitating educational as well as health benefits among the children. Mid day meal scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme of the Government of india, introduce in 1995, aiming at reducing classroom hunger and supplement nutritional food to the school children. The Government of India has expanded the initiative across the country since 2002; followed by this, all the states and UT have started providing cooked meals in the government schools. Subsequently, it has become the largest school provide feeding programme in the world. Another purpose to mainstream the children in formal schooling who are out of school and to reduce student mostly absenteeism. The programme has many other functional aspect. It has brought together the student from different caste, classes, gender and economic background to a common platform. They all join for lunch in the school premise at one place which facilitates and promotes social equity among them. Several studies have revealed that Mid day meal scheme has a positive impact on girls education. It has increased the enrolment of girls at elementary level and decreased the dropout rate of the children (Draze 2004, Mirajkar & Narayanaswami, 2019). The Mid day meal scheme is not only the supports of nutrition to the children but also helps upholding overall family interests. The programme helps to maintaining the economic stability of the poor families who cannot afford the nutritious

meal. It has been successful especially in tribal areas where the undernourishment is rampant. But the effective implementation can be only to be possible through a proper monitoring of this programme. The involvement of community in the school lunch programme to enhance the quality of mid day meals scheme is found to be effective. The Government of India through the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, has endorsed all the states to involve the local community in monitoring the scheme. Particularly the role of mother through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in monitoring MDMS has been recognised widely (Gol, 2006-2007).

Table 1: Food and Nutritional and Calorific norms under Mid day meal scheme

Items	Primary(I-V)	Upper Primary (VI-VIII)
Nutritional Norms (Per Child per day)		
Calorie	450	700
protein	12 gram	20 gram
Food Norms (Per child per day)		
Food- grains(rice/wheat)	100 gram	150 gram
Pulses	20 gram	30 gram
vegetables	50 gram	75 gram
oil & fat	5 gram	7.5 gram
Salt & Condiments	As per requirement	As per requirement
Micro-Nutrients	Adequate qualities of micro-nutrients like folic acid, iron, vitamin A, etc., in convergence with NHM	

Review of Literature

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is significant initiative in the elementary education sector that work to increase the student retention and enrolment among children (6–14 year old). In 2012–13, 57.7 % of primary schools had Mid day meal scheme coverage; by 2017–18, that number had risen to 63.9 %, an increase of 6.0 percentage points. In both 2012–13 and 2017–18, the coverage of Mid day meal scheme at the upper primary level of remained essentially constant at 57 per cent.

Table 2: State-wise number of children enrolled under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in India

(2021-2022 to 2023-2024)			
States/UTs	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	32336	31114	31113
Andhra Pradesh	3003652	2961813	2961812
Arunachal Pradesh	167562	160974	160976

Assam	4263753	4320763	4320765
Bihar	18095154	17239411	17239413
Chandigarh	95333	93761	93761
Chhattisgarh	3041122	2909915	3396886
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	61693	63273	74292
Delhi	1626378	1604504	1604504
Goa	161692	161493	181375
Gujarat	5488312	5172282	5172282
Haryana	1491169	1447990	1447990
Himachal Pradesh	509804	497774	497774
Jammu & Kashmir	9415541	887033	887033
Jharkhand	4402597	4180954	4180954
Karnataka	4632409	4511680	4511680
Kerala	2728451	2785523	2785523
Ladakh	-	16577	16577
Lakshadweep	7481	7290	7290
Madhya Pradesh	680997	6664246	6664246
Maharashtra	10785967	10692617	10692617
Manipur	171159	169803	169803
Meghalaya	716048	592325	592325
Mizoram	136931	131849	131876
Nagaland	168338	159710	159710
Odisha	4641493	4513758	4513758
Puducherry	56515	48427	48427
Punjab	1574541	1574443	1574443

(2021-2022 to 2023-2024)			
States/UTs	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Rajasthan	6265546	6267136	6267136
Sikkim	60695	55905	55905
Tamil Nadu	5010743	4900596	4900596
Telangana	1913838	1795956	1795956
Tripura	446223	432279	432279
Uttar Pradesh	18019346	18193664	18193664
Uttarakhand	716913	689306	689307
West Bengal	11579243	11562465	11562465
India	119827933	117498631	118016530

Note: Including Ladakh

Annexure referred to in reply to part (b) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2145 for 05.08.2024 asked by Shri Rajeev Rai, Hon’ble MP regarding Quality of Food in Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

Central Assistance Released and Utilized under PM POSHAN Scheme (in Lakhs)

S. no.	States / UTs	Released	Utilization	Released	Utilization	Released	Utilization	Released	Utilization	Released
		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		2023-24
1	Andhra Pradesh	28563.77	26861.33	37510.17	37320.99	35731.48	35460.14	36531.92	33872.58	25342.88
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2367.9	2367.9	2917.87	2917.87	2968.58	647.16	1707.01	3106	2573.12
3	Assam	55325.82	56024	75703.77	76469.2	61570.1	67949.19	88721.4	71906.34	59594.79
4	Bihar	109313.34	113259.9	139248.01	138557.69	103016.32	142606.72	76399.12	168288.4	92323.54
5	Chhattisgarh	25489.23	26886.06	38080.87	42439.58	21315.32	34067.95	51008.15	41419.62	24313.65

6	Goa	1276.05	1161.03	1709.34	981.35	668.18	1416.47	1531.12	2248.9	1832.31
7	Gujarat	39287.11	37962.06	52871.83	59593	50706.46	49297.72	52293.03	74368.81	37785.29
8	Haryana	10889.91	13315.45	15572.73	15764.16	10163.12	8456.23	15290.09	34580.7	16089.74
9	Himachal Pradesh	7557.54	7789.72	10500.11	9477.67	6290.49	9731.03	13801.77	14118.06	9435.53
10	Jammu & Kashmir	2666.45	7949.01	15960.26	14306.84	12221.88	14788.59	8684.9	17334.88	13680.88
11	Jharkhand	32310.9	30621.39	35203.74	33824.83	25189.45	56534.44	38424.29	64142.71	34202.20
12	Karnataka	52056.79	49733.8	51553.53	56520.02	48834.32	60863.39	69076.57	59162.25	55973.07
13	Kerala	19962.41	20305.5	27688.82	28776.38	18482.19	32123.1	42543.83	39309.54	24901.32
14	Madhya Pradesh	50407.62	51791.74	82754.74	87607.86	47220.22	47793.37	36285	59340.01	63404.21
15	Maharashtra	99468.82	84615.36	100250.03	86677.29	49075.07	121547.2	159240.67	142401.71	79372.10
16	Manipur	2192.3	2262.23	3900.45	4099.46	1678.74	2862.5	2763.32	3058.55	2459.64
17	Meghalaya	7835.83	7466.38	8733.94	8777.11	8564.77	8624.13	10124.13	11164.12	10186.01
18	Mizoram	2047.93	1858.51	2313.45	1340.07	892.98	558.94	2974.36	4898.66	2407.96
19	Nagaland	2279.38	2557.08	2744.38	2675.07	1472.51	2411.82	3196.49	2458.51	2250.44
20	Odisha	40358.68	39699.88	58301.22	64346.08	48208.87	50065.72	56373.86	54801.79	51937.63
21	Punjab	13855.77	14797.65	21769.15	20113.24	19146.03	19277.64	18712.92	17926.66	19988.62
22	Rajasthan	47252.76	44287.52	71100.05	71641.38	53106.11	78354.32	89960.12	68337.96	31727.94
23	Sikkim	817.45	762.31	840.58	856.96	500.65	848.59	1145.02	835.15	801.45
24	Tamil Nadu	43121.49	41150.06	49221.67	34969.3	23264.94	42238.65	47700.1	40284.4	39852.49
25	Telangana	18821.14	16223.73	4524.22	0	4334.63	9641.08	16682.36	14517.48	14550.92
26	Tripura	5598.51	6976.09	6220.56	8385.98	7718.82	7240.19	6857.03	8110.85	4434.26
27	Uttarakhand	10273.31	9604.07	13024.3	12473.54	12477.64	12380.16	11575.54	18425.51	11482.42
28	Uttar Pradesh	118201.96	111492.96	207166.14	210748.19	199805.66	193883.87	133407.6	116422.04	100659.56
29	West Bengal	107102.66	107482.58	134330.72	131530.83	139412.35	138035.74	148947.05	Awaited	00.00
30	A&N Islands	754.85	354	648.71	456.33	540.19	416.03	365.23	291.82	505.97
31	Chandigarh	884.26	722.45	1338.56	908.99	1721.62	1616.13	1773.77	1004.42	639.40
32	D&N Haveli	572.89								807.92
	Daman & Diu	258.31	775.96	1307.94	1200.32	1221.23	1274.38	1227.1	1899.62	
33	Delhi	10319.99	7022.89	11297.29	9955.46	4403.79	6972.51	21527.1	1015.91	8370.83
34	Lakshadweep	122.35	10.01	32.62	144.74	0	0	83.74	25815.88	95.39
35	Ladakh	98.93	93.17	555.79	320.36	376.96	380.82	200.61	118.04	504.21

36	Puducherry	290.01	397.36	503.45	532.06	373.33	577.47	363.04	317.19	634.04
TOTAL (In Lakh)		970004.42	946641.10	1287401.01	1276710.00	1022675.00	1260943.00	1267501.91	1216289.16	845121.73
TOTAL (In Crore)		9700.04	9466.41	12874.01	12767.10	10226.75	12609.43	12675.02	12162.89	8451.22

Annexure referred in reply to parts (c) to (e) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2145 for 05.08.2024 asked by Shri Rajeev Rai, Hon'ble MP regarding Quality of Food in Mid- Day Meal Scheme.

Number of Children reported ill after consuming meals under PM POSHAN Scheme during 2019 to 2024 (till 30.07.2024)

Sl. No.	State / UT	Year-wise Number of Incidents							Number of Children Reported ill
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total	
1	Bihar	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	198
2	Delhi	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	170
3	Odisha	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	42
4	Tamil Nadu	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	43
5	Uttar Pradesh	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	47
6	West Bengal	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	25
	Total	1	-	1	1	3	2	8	525

Challenges and Policy Concerns

The success of each and every programme depend on the participation of dedicated implementing authorities. Despite its effectiveness, Mid day meal scheme is confronted with many challenges in its implementations. A large no. of children in India are belonging to lower socio-economic background. A study conducted in Jammu and Kashmir has revealed that the highest percentage of parents whose children attended mid-day meals were involved in agriculture and allied activities. The provision of consistent service delivery to a large population poses to a major challenge in developing countries due to the constraint of resource. It should be the major concern during the policy formulation to internalise to the ground level realities through need-based assessment and initiatives. To make a national programme inclusive and sustainable, it is essential to have a proper road map in the direction of implementation and through the detailed analysis of ground realities. The main challenges confronted as well as different strategies to overcome the situation have been deliberated on the subsequent section.

Conclusion

India is having the world's largest school lunch programme through Mid Day Meal Programme, has benefited the children of disadvantaged group in increasing their enrolment, retention and also improving nutritional status. It has become an effective means for the improvement of school and community at large scale. The Mid Day Meal programme is not only helps to remove the classroom hunger but also provides the employment opportunities to women from disadvantaged sections and strengthens the school community linkage. The programme has been increased the socio-economic status of rural women. Some of the good habits and healthy practices among the school children are nurtured and social integration and solidarity among them are encouraging. Healthy children are expected to attend the school more sincerely and to concentrate better than sick children.

India has been confronted with serious challenges such as unemployment, poverty, hunger, malnutrition and illiteracy since a long time. Many of the poor children earn for their families at an early age at the cost of sacrificing their childhood. Consequently, the childhood of several age children disappears before they enter into youth and adulthood. This had not only become an obstacle to achieving the goal of the UEE but also a serious threat to the human development. Food insecurity hampers to all the health, education and overall development of the children. The provision of free and healthy meals in the schools has been great relevance in this context. Despite this initiative, India is still named as the home for the malnourished children in the world. Through focused interventions and applicable policy reforms, children can be made free from starvation with added advantages of leading a healthier and happier life, who are considered to be the potential human resources for the country.

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