

GENESIS OF MID-DAY MEAL PROGRAMME IN INDIA

By Geeta Menezes

Abstract

Food insecurity poses a threat to the health, education, and overall development of children and is of critical concern to governments in developing countries. Governments have addressed this fundamental problem by implementing school meal programs that provide children with at least one nutritionally adequate meal a day. These programs are known to lead to higher attention spans, better concentration, and improved class performance. The Mid-day Meal Programme in India is the world's largest school feeding programme, aimed at improving the nutritional status of school children and promoting the universalization of elementary education, reaching out to about 10.80 crore children in over 11.58 lakh schools/EGS centres across the country. Given the current horrific statistics of India on child malnutrition, hunger and educational attainments, the role of school feeding programme like mid-day meals in eliminating classroom hunger and addressing both the educational and nutritional needs of school children has assumed a greater significance. This paper provides a descriptive summary of India's experience with the Mid-day Meal Program.

Keywords –School feeding, children, Mid-day meals.

Introduction

The Mid-day Meal Programme in India is the world's largest school feeding programme, aimed at improving the nutritional status of school children and promoting the universalization of elementary education, reaching out to about 10.80 crore children in over 11.58 lakh schools/EGS centres across the country (GoI, 2014). Given the current horrific statistics of India on child malnutrition, hunger and educational attainments, the role of school feeding programme like Mid-day meals in eliminating classroom hunger and addressing both the educational and nutritional needs of school children has assumed a greater significance. This paper presents a brief history of the Mid-day Meal Scheme in India and describes the salient features and performance of the current Mid-day Meal Scheme.

Mid-day Meals-A Historical Perspective

Food insecurity poses a threat to the health, education, and overall development of children and is of critical concern to governments in developing countries. Governments have addressed this fundamental problem by implementing school meal programs that provide children with at least one nutritionally adequate meal a day. These programs are known to lead to higher attention spans, better concentration, and improved class performance. School meal programs also provide parents with a strong incentive to send children to school, thereby encouraging enrolment and reducing absenteeism and dropout rates. School meal programs support health, nutrition, and education goals and consequently have a multi-pronged impact on a nation's overall social and economic development (Cheriyian et al., 2007).

The school lunch programme is not a recent phenomenon. At the global level, Victor Hugo introduced the lunch programme in France in 1885. Since then, the school lunch programmes have been introduced in various parts of the world, e.g., US (1946), UK (1945), Japan (1947), China (1964-69), Australia (1950), Switzerland (1946) and Singapore (1975). The school lunch programme also received attention in some of the developing countries like Indonesia (1967), Thailand (1970), and Korea (1973) (Si & Sharma, 2008).

Mid-day Meal in schools has had a long history in India. In 1925, a Mid-day Meal Programme was introduced for disadvantaged children in Madras Municipal Corporation. In

1928, Keshav Academy of Calcutta introduced compulsory Mid-Day Tiffin for school boys on payment basis at the rate of four annas per child per month. A school lunch programme was started in parts of Kerala in 1941; followed by Bombay implementing a free mid-day meal scheme in 1942, who with UNICEF assistance distributed skimmed milk powder to children aged between 6-13 years. Another project was launched in Bangalore city in 1946 where the scheme provided cooked rice with curds to the children. In 1953, Uttar Pradesh Government introduced a scheme, on voluntary basis, to provide meals consisting of boiled or roasted or sprouted grams, ground-nut, puffed rice, boiled potatoes or seasonal fruits. Several states introduced such schemes during 1950s, with the aid of international agencies like the UNICEF, FAO and WHO. An Expanded Nutrition Programme was launched jointly by the Government of India and the FAO, WHO, UNICEF during 1958-59, which subsequently developed, into the Applied Nutrition Programme (ANP). Under this, demonstration feeding programmes for the school children were launched wherein nutritious food was cooked by the women groups and fed to the children under the nutrition education component. Other international voluntary / charity organizations like Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Church World Services (CWS), Co-operative of American Relief Everywhere (CARE), USA's Meals for Million also assisted this programme by providing nutritious foods such as corn soya meal, bulgar wheat, vegetable oils, milk powder/ peanut flour (protein rich foods), multipurpose food as well as imparting nutrition education (Sharma et al., 2006).

By the mid 1980s three States viz. Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the UT of Pondicherry had universalized a cooked Mid-day Meal Programme with their own resources for children studying at the primary stage. Mid-day Meal was also being provided to children in Tribal Areas in some States like Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. By 1990-91 the number of States implementing the Mid-day Meal Programme with their own resources on a universal or a large scale had increased to twelve, namely, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh. In another three States, namely Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal, the programme was being implemented with State resources in combination with international assistance. Another two States, namely Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan were implementing the programme entirely with international assistance (GoI, 2006).

National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), 1995

With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), commonly called as Mid-day Meal Programme (MDMP), was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995, initially in 2408 blocks in the country. 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 primary classes (I-V) of government, government aided and local body schools, but also children studying in centres run under the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) Scheme. Central Assistance under the scheme consisted of (a) free supply of food grains at the rate of 100 grams per child per school day, and (b) subsidy for transportation of food grains up to a maximum of Rs 50 per quintal. In addition to food grains, a Mid-day meal involved two other major inputs (a) 'Cost of cooking' covering cost of ingredients, e.g. pulses, vegetables, cooking oil and condiments and cost of fuel and wages/ remuneration payable to personnel, or amount payable to an agency (SHG, VEC, SMC) responsible for cooking, and (b) 'Provision of essential infrastructure' covering kitchen-cum-store, adequate water supply for cooking, drinking and washing, cooking devices (stove, chulha, etc.), containers for storage of food grains and other ingredients and utensils for cooking and serving. In NP-NSPE, 1995 the cost of cooking was to be borne by the State Governments/ UT administrations. Unable to provide adequate funding for meeting the cooking costs, many State Governments/ UT Administrations resorted to distribution of food grains, rather than providing cooked Mid-day meals. To ameliorate some of the difficulties experienced by the States and UTs, Planning Commission requested State Governments in December 2003 to earmark a minimum of 15% of Additional Central Assistance under the Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) towards cooking cost under the Mid-day meal scheme. Nonetheless, the programme continued to suffer on account of budgetary constraints in the States and UT Administrations (GoI, 2006).

Under NP-NSPE, cooked mid-day meals were to be introduced in all government and government-aided primary schools within two years. In the intervening period, state

governments were allowed to distribute monthly grain rations (known as 'dry rations') to school children, instead of cooked meals. Six years later, however, most state governments were yet to make the transition from dry rations to cooked meals. The Supreme Court gave them a wake-up call on November 28, 2001, in the form of an order directing all state governments to introduce cooked mid-day meals in primary schools within six months. This landmark direction converted the mid-day meal scheme into a legal entitlement, the violation of which can be taken up in the court of law. The direction was to be implemented from June 2002, but was violated by most States. But with sustained pressure from the court, media and in particular, from the Right to Food Campaign more and more states started providing cooked meals (Dreze & Goyal, 2003).

Revision of NP-NSPE

Since its inception, NP-NSPE has been revised from time to time. The NP- NSPE, introduced in 1995, was re-launched as the Mid-day Meal Scheme and revised in September 2004 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 the following items: (i) cooking cost at the rate of Re 1 per child per school day (ii) transport subsidy was raised from the earlier maximum of Rs 50 per quintal to Rs. 100 per quintal for special category states, and Rs 75 per quintal for other states (iii) management, monitoring and evaluation costs at 2% of the cost of food grains, transport subsidy and cooking assistance (iv) provision of Mid-day meal during summer vacation in drought affected areas. The revised NP-NSPE 2004 scheme also provided for a 4-tier institutional mechanism for programme management, through the constitution of Steering-cum-Monitoring Committees at the National, State, District and Block levels.

New guidelines were issued in 2006. The Guidelines identified three important grounds for revising the norms and modalities of the MDMP since the previous amendments in 2004. The provision for cooking cost of one rupee was rather inadequate. Second, the lack of kitchen sheds was a major problem, leading to use of class rooms for storage, and even, in some instances, for cooking, thus disrupting the educational process significantly, besides being fraught with risk. Third, professional opinion strongly suggested the need for revision of

nutritional norms upwards, and for adding components of micronutrient supplementation and deworming. Under the new guidelines of 2006, the nutritional norm in respect of calories/student/day was revised to a minimum of 450 from 300 in 2004. Protein intake norm per student per day was also increased from 8-12 grams in 2004 to a minimum of 12 grams in 2006. In order to meet the new norms, a minimum of Rs.2 per child per day was allotted for cooking expenses- an increase of Re.1 from 2004. Of this, the central government provided, per day per child, Rs.1.80 to specified vulnerable states and Rs.1.50 to other states. The balance would be met by the States as appropriate. The revised guidelines also provided for central support under the MDMS scheme, up to a maximum of 60,000 rupees per shed, for the construction of kitchen sheds (to serve as kitchen-cum-store) wherever the State/Union Territory was unable to meet the cost through convergence with other centrally funded programmes. The new guidelines provided for a one-time grant of Rs.5,000 per school towards assistance for cooking/kitchen devices. They also provided rupees 100 per quintal for 11 special category states and 75 rupees per quintal for other states towards meeting the cost of transport of grain. Finally, the central government provided 1.8 per cent of scheme cost to the States/UTs for management and monitoring and evaluation (MME), with the Centre spending 0.2 per cent of scheme cost towards MME (GoI, 2006).

In October 2007, the scheme was expanded to cover children in upper primary (classes VI to VIII), initially in 3479 'educationally backward blocks' (EBBs). Around 17 million upper primary children were included. Beginning with the financial year 2008-09, the programme covers all children across the country studying in Government, Local Body and Government-aided primary and upper primary schools and the EGS/AIE centres. 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. During 2009, the food norms were revised to provide more pulses and vegetables and to lower the quantity of oil and fat. The cooking costs were revised upwards in December 2009 and again with effect from the beginning of the financial year 2009-10 on April 1, 2010. Further, a decision was taken to revise cooking costs upwards by 7.5% from April 1, 2011 to account for inflation. A separate cost component for payment of honorarium at 1000 rupees per month per cook was also introduced in December 2009. Norms for engagement of cooks and helpers, linked to enrolment, have also been specified (GoI, 2011).

Salient Features of the Current Mid-day Meal Scheme

The Mid-day Meal Scheme grew out of the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-SPE), which sought to increase primary school enrolment and attendance rates by offering meals to improve the nutritional levels of children. By providing a nutritious meal at school, the scheme seeks to improve child health, improve their ability to concentrate, and incentivise parents to send their children to school. It is seen as a tool for realizing both the 'right to food' and 'right to education'.

The objectives of the Mid-day Meal Scheme are: (i) improving the nutritional status of children in classes I – VIII in Government, Local Body and Government aided schools, and EGS and AIE centres (ii) encouraging poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly and help them concentrate on classroom activities (iii) providing nutritional support to children of primary stage in drought-affected areas during summer vacation (GoI, 2014).

Food Norms for 2014-15

The prescribed nutrition to be provided by the Mid-day Meal is (i) 450 kcal and 12g of protein which is derived from 100 g of food grains (rice/wheat), 20g of pulses, 50g of vegetables and 5g of oil for children studying in primary classes and (ii) 700 kcal and 20g of protein, which is derived from 150g of food grains (rice/wheat), 30g of pulses, 75g of vegetables and 7.5g of oil in upper primary classes.

Cooking Cost Norms for 2014-15

Stage	Revised cooking cost per child (Rs.)	Centre-State sharing			
		Non-NER States (75:25)		NER States (90:10)	
		Centre	State	Centre	State
Primary	3.59	2.69	0.90	3.23	0.36
U. Primary	5.38	4.04	1.34	4.84	0.54

Source: GoI, 2014

The above cooking cost norms indicate the minimum mandatory contribution by the Centre and State Governments. However, States / UTs are allowed to contribute more, as some States/UTs had been doing in the past, than their minimum mandatory share from their own resources to serve mid-day meals with prescribed nutrition. The institutions to be covered under Mid-day Meal Scheme would be termed as Government schools, Government aided schools, Special Training Centres and Madrasas & Maqtabas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with effect from 05.08.2014 (GoI, 2014).

Union Budgetary Allocation for the MDMS has increased over the years. Allocations to the MDMP have increased by 55 percent in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, from Rs. 6,678 crores in financial year 2007-08 to Rs. 10,380 crores in financial year 2011-12. In total, Rs. 48,000 crores were allocated to MDMS during the plan period. Allocations for financial year 2013-14 stand at Rs. 13,215 crores, accounting for 32 percent of the total elementary education budget. The main source of funding for MDMS is the education cess or Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh (PSK). PSK is a 2 percent tax-on-tax paid by the public (GoI, 2014).

Mid-day Meal Rules, 2015

The Central Government notified 'Mid-day Meal Rules, 2015' on September 30th, 2015 in accordance with the provisions of National Food Security Act, 2013. The Rules inter alia provide for temporary utilization of other funds available with the school for MDM in case school exhausts MDM funds for any reason; Food Security Allowance to be paid to beneficiaries in case of non-supply of meals for specified reasons; and monthly testing of meals on a random basis by accredited Labs to check its quality. Further, the Rules also provide that concerned State Governments shall fix responsibility on the person or agency if meals are not provided on 3 consecutive school days or 5 days in a month. These rules and their effective compliance by implementing agencies in the States will ensure better regularity in serving Mid-day meals in schools and also improve quality of the meals as well as overall implementation of the Mid-day Meal Scheme in the country (GoI, 2015).

Performance of the Mid-day Meal Scheme

Based on GoI statistics collected for the first three quarters of 2013-14, the performance of MDMS on different criteria is as follows:

(i) Coverage of children against enrolment: At the national level, 78% of the enrolled children have been covered under Mid-day-Meal Scheme during the first three quarters of 2013-14 (138749393 Vs 107983357). The percentage coverage of children has increased by 3% in the third quarter in comparison to the second quarter of 2013-14. During the third quarter of 2012-13, 73% of the enrolled children were covered and thus the coverage has improved over the year. States/UTs of Kerala (100%), Lakshadweep (98%), Arunachal Pradesh & Haryana (97%), Goa (95%), West Bengal (93%), Karnataka (92%), Mizoram (92%), Himachal Pradesh and Assam (91%), have reported more than 90% coverage. On the other hand coverage under MDMS in the States / UTs of Chandigarh (47%), Jharkhand (54%), Uttar Pradesh (55%), Tripura (60%), Delhi (61%) and Bihar (68%) is below 70%. During the first three quarters of 2013-14, the MDMS covered 107983357 school children and the total number of meals served were 16575071037.

(ii) Coverage of working days: The guidelines for MDMS provide that mid-day meal should be served to all children attending school on each working day. All the States/UTs have covered 90% or more of the approved days at both primary and upper primary level.

(iii) Utilisation of food grains and cooking cost vis-à-vis allocation: The Scheme aims to provide 450 and 700 calories of energy for primary and upper primary students respectively. To facilitate this, the scheme provides for 100 grams of food grains for primary and 150 grams for upper primary students every day. In addition cooking cost is provided at the rate of Rs 3.34 and Rs 5.00 for primary and upper primary students respectively to add nutrition value to food grains by way of pulses, vegetables as well as oil and fat. Ideally the consumption of food grains and utilisation of cooking cost should match with each other, which is almost matching at the national level with 88% utilisation of food grains vis-à-vis 86% utilisation of cooking cost against the annual allocation. However there is a mismatch between the consumption of food grains and utilisation of cooking cost in various States/UTs. While, the utilisation of cooking cost is higher as compared to utilisation of food grains consumption in the States/UTs of Sikkim, Daman & Diu, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Haryana, Assam, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, it is vice-versa in the States/ UTs of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh J&K, and Delhi. In the States/UTs of Chandigarh, West Bengal, Assam, Haryana, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and

Uttarakhand, the consumption of food grains is less than the national average of 88%. As far as utilisation of cooking cost is concerned, the national level utilisation is 86% of the allocated funds for the first three quarters. The States/UTs of Mizoram, Puducherry, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, J & K, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal have utilised less than 80% of the allocated cooking cost for first three quarters of 2013-14.

(iv) Reconciliation of food grains and cooking cost utilisation vis-à-vis number of meals served: As per the norms, 100 gm food grains per meal for primary and 150 gm food grains for upper primary should be used. At the national level per meal utilisation is 96% of the prescribed quantity. However in the States/UTs of Chandigarh, Haryana, West Bengal and Assam, per meal utilisation of food grains is less than the norms. On the other hand per meal utilisation is more than the norms in the State of Meghalaya and Manipur. Likewise the utilisation of cooking cost is much lower than it should be in the State/UT of Puducherry, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Assam. This is ironical; on the one hand the children in these States suffer from debilitating, malnutrition and anaemia, on the other hand available resources under MDMP are being utilised sub-optimally. Moreover, the lack of synchronisation between utilisation of food grains and cooking cost also reflects a lack of focus and effective monitoring.

(v) Lifting of food grains and utilization of transportation assistance against allocation: The analysis of the data on lifting of food grains and the utilization of transportation assistance shows that at the National level, 87% of the allocated food grains had been lifted. The State/UT wise analysis reveals that Chandigarh, West Bengal, Tripura, Tripura, Rajasthan, Assam, Puducherry and Haryana have lifted less than 80% of the allocated food grains for the first three quarters of 2013-14. Rest of the States/UTs have lifted more than 87% of the allocated food grains.

At the national level, 68% of the allocated Transportation Assistance has been utilised. Manipur has not utilised the Transportation Assistance at all during the first three quarters. Jharkhand, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, and Rajasthan have utilised less than 50% of the Transportation Assistance. The low utilisation of transportation assistance may be due to non-payment of bills of transporters which needs to be looked into.

(vi) Payment to Food Corporation of India (FCI) as on 31.12.2013: The position relating to payments of bills to FCI is precarious; as per the status provided by the States/UTs, out of the total bills raised by FCI up to the month of December, 2013 amounting to Rs. 1081.91 crore, an amount of Rs. 610.31 (56%) only has been paid and almost 44% of the billed amount is still pending for payments to be made to FCI by various States/ UTs .This huge pendency of bills may result into stoppage of supply of food grains to the defaulting States which will adversely affect serving of MDM.

(vii) Construction of Kitchen-cum-Store: Provision of infrastructure facilities such as kitchen-cum-store are an essential component for proper implementation of the MDMS for supply of healthy, hygienic and hot cooked meal to the children and also safe storage of food grains at the school level. The provision of kitchen cum store has also been made mandatory under Right to Education Act 2009. The Government of India has sanctioned 10, 05,192 units of kitchen sheds for schools. States/UTs have constructed only 6, 75,350 units (67%) by the third quarter of 2013-14. Construction has been completed for 25854 kitchen-cum-stores during the third quarter, and the major contributors in this are Andhra Pradesh (4980), Jharkhand (2961), Madhya Pradesh (3839), Maharashtra (4657) and West Bengal (5295). However it is important to mention that even with this progress the construction work has been completed for less than 60% of the sanctioned kitchen cum stores in the States / UTs of Andhra Pradesh (15%), Kerala (13%), Tamil Nadu (26%), Maharashtra (51%), Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Odisha (52%). The pace of construction of kitchen–cum-store in all these States demand for better planning and monitoring.

(viii) Engagement of cook-cum-helpers: States/UTs have engaged 2570627 (91%) cook-cum-helpers in the first three quarters of 2013-14 against the approval of 2829317. 16 States/ UTs have engaged 100% cook- cum-helper as approved by PAB. 61% of the allocated funds have been utilised at the national level during the first three quarters of 2013-14. The States/UTs of Assam, Goa, Manipur, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya and Puducherry have utilised less than the national average.

(x) Utilisation of MME: The NP-NSPE (2006) makes it compulsory to expend 1.8% of the total monetary assistance to States/Union Territories under the MDMS (free Foodgrains,

transport cost, cooking cost and CCH) for MME. Monitoring is an integral part of implementation of the MDMS and utilisation of MME funds shows the performance of the States/UTs in monitoring of the MDMS. The total allocation of MME funds for the first three quarters of 2013-14 is Rs. 167.80 crore against which Rs. 120.31 crore (72%) has been utilized by all the States/UTs. More than 90% fund utilization has been reported from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Odisha, and Tripura. On the other hand less than 50% MME fund utilization has been reported from Goa, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Delhi, Daman & Diu, Kerala, etc.,. Low utilisation of MME fund indicates poor monitoring of the programme and need for a proper and comprehensive MME plan. The UTs except Puducherry have shown very good performance on the aspect of monitoring of institutions. Among other States Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Sikkim have shown good performance in inspection of schools by State/District/Block officials and almost 100% of the schools have been inspected during the first three quarters of 2013-14. Less than 50% school inspection has been reported from Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Haryana, Mizoram and Puducherry.

(xi) State Steering-cum-Monitoring Committee (SSMC) Meeting: SSMC, headed by Chief Secretary is an apex body at the State/UT level for guiding, monitoring and implementation of the scheme at State/UT level. The meetings of SSMC at regular intervals are required to review the Scheme and suggest policy measures for effective implementation of the programme. QPR analysis shows that only 33 SSMC meetings have been held in all the States/ UTs during the first three quarters. At district level 1307 meetings have been convened.

(xii) School Health Programme: Mid-day Meal has unquestionably addressed the issue of classroom hunger and malnutrition amongst the school children. It also provides nutritional support for the school children through distribution of micronutrients to the children. Regular health check-ups of school children are supposed to be carried out at least twice a year in convergence with National Rural Health Mission. In addition, distribution of Iron Folic Acid, De-worming tablets and Vitamin A has to be undertaken for the school children, as per the schedule of the Department of Health. While the status of coverage of children under School Health Programme is satisfactory in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Punjab, Sikkim &

Tamil Nadu, no child has been reported to be covered under SHP during the third quarter of 2013-14 in the States/UTs of Haryana, Kerala, and Manipur.

(xiii) Availability of Gas-based Cooking: Gas based cooking in the schools is important from environmental perspective. All the States/UTs are encouraged to introduce gas based cooking in schools wherever possible. At present around 30% schools are using LPG for cooking purposes. More than 60% schools are using Gas for cooking of Mid-day Meals in the States/UTs of Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Haryana and Punjab (100%), Karnataka (98%), Himachal Pradesh (86%), and Gujarat (89%).

(xiv) Availability of Drinking Water and Toilet Facility: It is the responsibility of the schools to make available safe drinking water for maintaining normal health. The facility of drinking water is available in 100% schools in only the States/UTs of Goa, Mizoram, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Daman & Diu, A&N Islands, Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi, West Bengal, Odisha, Puducherry, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. In the remaining States/UTs where drinking water is not available to children in some of the schools, efforts need to be made by the State Governments to ensure the availability of safe drinking water in all the schools as well as to inculcate hygienic habits like washing hands and eating in clean utensils. Toilet facility is available in 100% schools in only the States/UTs of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Uttarakhand, A&N Islands, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Delhi and Lakshadweep.

(xv) Submission of Information: Timely submission of information like Quarterly Progress Reports, Monthly Progress Reports etc. helps in monitoring and taking appropriate action in time for proper implementation of the scheme. The States/UTs are requested to submit the QPRs, MPRs and other information within the prescribed time line, to enable the MHRD to review the information and take corrective action wherever required. QPR for the third quarter have been received in time from only 15 States/UTs of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, A&N

Islands, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Puducherry. The delay reflects the lack of effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms at the State/UT levels.

Mid-day Meal Casualties

The tragic death of 23 children studying at a primary school in the village of Gandamal, close to the town of Chapra in Bihar's Saran district, after they consumed the Mid-day meal of rice and soybeans on 16th July 2013 has caused widespread indignation, shock and disquiet. The food served has been found to have contained the deadly insecticide monocrotophos. This Mid-day meal tragedy is reflective of the denial of human dignity to the underclass and has brought into the limelight many concerns that have been raised in the past: lack of proper infrastructure and staff, nutritive quality of the food, accountability mechanisms, caste issues and so on.

Conclusion

Thus the Mid-day Meal Scheme in India is the world's largest school-based feeding programme, aimed at improving the nutritional status of students and promoting the universalization of elementary education. The Mid-day Meal Programme has been quietly feeding more than 10 crore children every day for more than 10 years. Unfortunately, this popular and relatively successful programme makes it to the headlines only when things go wrong and there are casualties due to quality and implementation issues – the most horrific incident being the tragic death of 23 children on July 16, 2013 in Saran district of Bihar after eating Mid-day meal at school. Mid-day Meals should be welcomed as an ideal opportunity for the State and the civil society alike to pool in their energies and work towards addressing the immediate needs of our poor/deprived children to help them realize their latent potential. The MDMP is of immense benefit for both education and nutrition of children. However, it is necessary to improve its implementation. The tragedy that happened in Bihar some days back should not be repeated anywhere in the country. Exclusive monitoring structures should be set up for effective monitoring and implementation of the scheme. Processes should also be set in place to ensure vibrant community involvement so that the Mid-day meal programme becomes a peoples' programme. Given the malnutrition status of India, the Mid-day Meal Programme is perhaps the best investment India can make to safeguard its future.

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