



## Mid-Day Meal Programmer: Issues and Challenges

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### Introduction:

India is a sovereign democratic republic with a parliamentary form of government, based on universal adult franchise and is governed by a **CONSTITUTION** framed by the elected representatives of the people. The constitution of India is a document which governs not only the administrative machinery, the social, economic and political development of the country but also the educational development. One of the fundamental rights is education without which no economic, social or political development is possible. In actual practice, right to equality and right to freedom become subservient to right to education. Uneducated and illiterate millions should remain only down-trodden and dependent upon other. It is, therefore, well said, upon the education of people, fate of a country depends. According to Indian constitution, education is both a union and a state subject. It is, therefore, both the centre and the state are responsible for its expansions and progress. Local Bodies are highly useful for the spread of Primary Education, as well as successfully implementation of mid-day meal.

India's triple problem-mass illiteracy, pervasive poverty and child labour are the results of over-population, mass unemployment, economic duress, social inequity and other infirmities. Under such circumstances the programme of providing mid-day meal to primary school children in India was launched on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1995. Under this programme cooked mid-day meals were to be provided in all

government and government-aided schools within two years. Until 2001, however, only the states of Kerala, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Karnataka and Delhi were providing cooked meals under the scheme, while the remaining states and Union Territories continued to provide food grains (wheat or rice).

At the end of 2001, the Indian Supreme Court issued a directive ordering states to institute a warm school lunch-known locally as "midday meal"- in government and government-aided school. 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. In May 2004 a new coalition government was formed at the centre, which promised universal provision of cooked meals fully funded by the centre. This 'promise' made in the Common Minimum Programme was followed by enhanced financial support to the states for cooking and building sufficient infrastructure.

Given this additional support the scheme has expanded its reach to cover most children in primary schools in India. The Tenth Plan made certain modifications in the MDMP in order to achieve the goals set in the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* programme; the modifications would be made in the scheme in the light of feedback received from evaluation studies, the experience gained from the working of the scheme, and the opinions of experts.



Currently operational in all blocks of the country, MDM covers all children studying in government schools, including local body, government-aided primary and upper primary schools and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS)/ Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) centres.

In these circumstances the present researchers identified their research problem "Mid-day meal programme: Issues and Challenges". The main aim of the study was to find out the effect of MDM, attendance and retention rate, availability of infrastructure, to know implementation and supervision condition, achieve the goal of healthy mind in healthy body etc.

## Literature Review:

A field survey was organized by the **Centre for Equity Studies (Delhi)** in 2003 for assessment and monitoring of MDMS in Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Chattisgarh. The important findings were: ( a) In 76 of the 81 sample schools, investigators found that mid-day meals were being served regularly; ( b ) Infrastructural facilities (cooking shed, water supply, etc.) vary widely, and are often inadequate; ( c ) Class I enrolment increased by 15% in the three states combined, between the 2001-02 and 2002-03 academic years; ( d) Since children often come to school without any breakfast, they find it difficult to concentrate on an empty stomach. Mid-day meals seem to have resolved this problem; (e) Mid-day meals have also helped to avert an intensification of child under nutrition in many drought-affected areas; (f) The experience of sharing a meal together may help overcome caste barriers. The survey found little evidence of open discrimination (g) Most lower-caste parents did not feel that their children had been subject to discrimination; and ( h) There has been

upper-caste resistance to the appointment of *dalit* cooks.

In another study conducted by **Thorat and Lee (2004)** at Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS), New Delhi observed that: (a) The distribution of dry grain to government school children under the MDMS takes place in dominant caste localities; and (b) Employment of *dalit* cooks is problematic in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.

A comprehensive study of MDMS was conducted by **De et al (2005)** in 410 Schools under Delhi Municipal Corporation. The main findings of the study were: ( a) The quality of *rajma* and vegetable *pulao* has not been up to the mark; ( b) Parents were never allowed to taste the meal distributed; (c) Hygiene was seldom maintained in the case of MDMS; ( d) Some teachers preferred dry food instead of cooked meal; ( e) Most of the schools lack adequate infrastructure (*including toilet facilities*) for the successful implementation of MDMS; (f) A few school children found the food very unattractive. Some said that eating the food made them ill; and (g) Some parents felt that the food served was not sufficient for growing children.

Recently the Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development has placed a proposal to introduce public-private partnership (PPP) for delivering ready-to-eat packaged food in schools instead of cooked meal. Many are of the opinion that such a move would lead to intensification of Contractor Raj and would create obstacle towards decentralization. The Ministry has tried to project that hot cooked meal has failed to address malnutrition in order to introduce ready-to-eat packaged food under the MDMS (**SSMI, 2008**). The involvement of *Mithanins* in Chattisgarh has contributed to reduction of teacher absenteeism and misbehavior of teachers in the schools and has increased effectiveness of the MDMS.



## Objectives of the study:

The overall objective of the study is to assess the impact of the MDMS on increase of enrolment, attendance and retention rate of the children particularly the disadvantaged children in the primary and upper primary schools of Tripura. The other objectives are: i) to evaluate overall functioning of the MDMS in selected schools of South Tripura District; and ii) to examine the status and availability of infrastructure of the schools undertaking the Mid-day Meal.

## Methodology used in the Study:

A survey was conducted during May-June 2013, covering 20 schools in South Tripura District. Towards this end, a questionnaire was designed for collecting data. Data were collected through Inspector of Schools, Block Resource Persons, Cluster Resource Persons, SHGs, Local Bodies, Head Masters, teachers, students and parents by following interview method through questionnaire. To put the paper in a complete form some information are also obtained from Secondary sources.

## Finance & Management:

The central government provides food grains free of cost while it shares the cost of cooking, construction of kitchen and honorarium to helpers with North Eastern states on 90:10 basis and with other states on 75:25 basis. In 2012-13, the central government allocated Rs 11,937 crores and in 2013-14 Rs.13,250 crores for MDMS. The contribution of the state governments varies from state to state. The Government of Tripura allocated Rs. 53.78 crores in 2012-13. Central assistance is provided in phases for the construction of kitchen cum stores and for replacing kitchen devices. The centre also funds all costs associated with management, monitoring, and evaluation of the scheme. Government of India provided rice free of cost and Rs.125/-per quintal as subsidy for transportation of food grains for NE States including Tripura. Centre provides one time fund for construction of kitchen sheds at Rs 60,000 per unit and Rs 5000 for

procurement/replacement of kitchen devices for each school.

## Effectiveness of Mid-day Meal Programme in India:

The number of children covered under MDMS has increased from 3.34 crore in 3.22 lakh schools in 1995 to 12 crore in 9.5 lakh primary schools/ EGS (education guarantee scheme) centers in 2006-07. It covered about 18 crore children in the year 2008-09. It has been reported that the MDMS has benefited 8.1% of rural population and 3.2% of urban population. The MDMS has catered to the nutritional needs of low-income groups in both rural and urban areas (**Planning Commission, 2007**). Most states have succeeded in reaching the targeted children. Some states such as Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Delhi have been able to reach between 73% and 76% of the targeted children. In the year 2009 the MDMS was extended to bring children studying in Upper Primary Schools attached with High and Higher Secondary Schools within the periphery of Midday Meals Programme.

The recent reports about the tragedy of 23 school children death after eating poisoned midday meal, occurred in Saran District of Bihar has created a great concern in India regarding servicing of safety foods under the MDMS. There are also reports of such incidents from other parts of India like Tamilnadu, Odisha etc. which raises the obvious question of food safety and other hygienic factors attached with this. The researchers are of the opinion that awareness and training programmes should be organized at regular intervals in order to ensure in providing safety food and consciousness during the time of cooking Mid day meals. The monitoring and supervision process in the implementation needs to be improved and revamped.

### Effectiveness of Mid-day Meal Programme in Tripura:

The state Govt. of Tripura launched Mid-Day-Meal Scheme in the state w.e.f 1st March, 1980 for children reading in classes' I-V in Govt. and Govt. aided schools. Under the scheme, the school going children of primary stage were provided dried food like biscuit, chira, muri and locally available seasonal fruits for 200 days in a year. Mid-Day-Meal Programme is running in 4004 Primary schools and 1002 nos. Independent S.B Schools of the state. Afterwards mid-Day meal had also extended to 623 Upper Primary Schools attached with High and Higher Secondary schools. Till date, a total of 4, 49,353 children in the Primary stage and 2, 09,344 in the Upper Primary stage have opted for the Mid-Day meal in schools. It indicates that around one-sixth of total population of the State have covered under the midday meal programme. In Tripura almost 95% of the school going Primary and Upper Primary children are covered under the Scheme. The Tripura state has also extended Mid-day-Meal to all EGS & AIE centers established under SSA Scheme

w.e.f.1<sup>st</sup> December 2005. Some important information about MDMS are outlined below:

#### Weekly menu list:

- Rice & Vegetable curry  
2 days in a week
- Rice & Egg curry  
2 days in a week
- Khichudi  
1 day in a week
- Payesh(sweet dish)  
1 day in a week (Saturday)

#### Offered menu with food value contains:

- Calorie value  
514 Kcl per day
- Protein value  
22 gms per day
- Calcium  
56 mg per day

#### Cooking cost per child per day is as per the norms fixed by the Govt. of India:-

- Primary Classes (I-V)  
@ Rs. 3.51 per child per school day
- Upper Primary Classes (VI-VIII)  
@ Rs. 5.00 per child per school day

### **Table: 1**

#### Basic statistics of Tripura at a glance:

Sl No.	Particulars	Tripura	South Tripura
01.	Area	10492 sq km	3,052sq km
02.	Population(as per 2011 census)	36,73,917	8,75,144
03.	Male	18,74,376	4,40,245
04.	Female	17,99,541	4,34,899
05.	Literacy Rate	87.22%	84.66%
06.	No. of primary schools	2280	664
07.	No. of Upper primary schools	1250	320
10.	No. of Children (6-1)	4, 49,353	1,10,332
11.	N0 of Children (11-14)	2, 09,344	47,548

(Source: Census Report, 2011 & Department of School Education, Govt. of Tripura)

**Table: 2**

**Information regarding Drop-out and unregistered primary and upper Primary Children (6-14) selected in the South Tripura District:**

2001	Primary (6-11)		Upper Primary (11-14)		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Drop-out	1948	1661	2582	2201	8392
Un-registered or Un-enrolled	4242	4072	2505	2401	13220
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6190</b>	<b>5733</b>	<b>5087</b>	<b>4602</b>	<b>21612</b>

2006	Primary (6-11)		Upper Primary (11-14)		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Drop-out	1203	1357	1297	1535	5392
Un-registered or Un-enrolled	2617	2791	2324	2252	9984
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3820</b>	<b>4148</b>	<b>3621</b>	<b>3787</b>	<b>15376</b>

2012	Primary (6-11)		Upper Primary (11-14)		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Drop-out	37	19	30	18	104
Un-registered or Un-enrolled	45	38	29	33	145
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>249</b>

(Source: Directorate of School Education, Govt. of Tripura )

**Table: 3**

**Survey Report of the selected Primary and Upper Primary Schools in South Tripura District:**

Sl.No	Name of Primary/Upper Primary Schools	No. of registered Students	No. of Unregistered Students	No. of Drop-out	Attendance (%) (June, 2013 & on Visit day)	No. of Teachers	MDM Served	Water Source	Health Check-up	In frastructure
01	Ramchandra Reang Para S.B	47	Nil	Nil	60.70 78.72	03	96%	Treated	Nil	80%
02	Chagaria S.B School	26	Nil	01	88.00 61.53	03	100%	Nil	Nil	30%
03	Satrugna para S.B	282	01	02	72.00 50.12	14	45%	Treated	01/30	84%
04	Satmura S.B	125	01	06	73.69 27.20	10	80%	Nil	01/30	55%

05	Manur-Much S.B	15	01	01	64.38 73.33	02	75%	Nil	Nil	50%
06	Bokafa Ashram	152	Nil	Nil	72.25 64.45	09	82%	Treated	Nil	78%
07	Santirbazar Girls	528	Nil	Nil	77.48 72.55	12	77%	Treated	01/30	80%
08	Padma-mohan	99	Nil	01	61.88 55.45	07	75%	Nil	Nil	65%
09	Gobinbari S.B	60	Nil	01	77.24 46.22	06	56%	Nil	Nil	60%
10	K.C.Para S.B	171	02	08	76.12 58.24	10	77%	Nil	Nil	68%
11	R.K.Gange S.B	67	Nil	Nil	78% 62%	06	70%	Treated	Nil	65%
12	Anuram-para J.B	24	Nil	01	82% 42%	02	65%	Nil	Nil	55%
13	Khemanda Tilla J.B	20	Nil	Nil	75% 52%	03	70%	Treated	Nil	65%
14	Mangaljoy T.D.Para	60	Nil	Nil	77% 71%	04	69%	Treated	Nil	76%
15	Madhya Bokafa J.B	32	Nil	Nil	80% 67%	01	74%	Nil	Nil	65%
16	Paschim Kathaliya Chara	26	Nil	01	76% 54%	03	67%	Nil	Nil	70%
17	Mandadari J.B	57	Nil	Nil	75% 53%	02	65%	Treated	Nil	66%
18	Lankajoy-Para J.B	52	Nil	Nil	73% 60%	03	71%	Nil	Nil	70%
19	Kali Lowgan J.B	42	Nil	01	79% 45%	02	68%	Nil	Nil	55%
20	Islamia Q. Madrasa	17	01	01	77.72 67.43	02	90%	Nil	Nil	58%

### Overall Findings of the Survey:

- All the selected schools of the South Tripura District are providing cooked Mid Day Meal to primary and upper primary children. A total increase of 14.75 % in the enrollment of children was recorded during the last 5 years 2008 to 2012. We observed that in the last five years there was a decrease in drop-out and unregistered students from 15,376 to 249. We also observed that some schools area with

an average 1-2 unregistered/unenrolled students. Again few unregistered children spend some time with the already registered children in the school premises after completing their lunch.

- Food grains were timely supplied in the schools and schools were found to have stock of rice between 50kgs to 300kgs. 90 % of schools under survey have kitchen sheds for cooking in the school premises. Majority of the

schools were using fire wood as a fuel for preparing food. School verandah, field, class room is the main venue for serving food.

- There were 35 cooks employed in the 20 selected schools. Majority of cooks were poor women and widow. They belong to Schedule caste, Schedule Tribe and backward classes. All cooks were recruited by local bodies i.e. Gram Panchyat, Village Committee, and Nagar Panchyat.
- Mid-day meal programme creates employment opportunities for poor women. In the sample schools, an overwhelming 100% of cooks are women, and most of them come from underprivileged backgrounds. In addition, the scheme guidelines often state that in the appointment of cooks priority should be given to the disadvantaged. In Tripura for instance, the guidelines clearly specify that all cooks must be women, with preference given to widows.
- It was found that average attendance of students in June, 2013 was 74.8% and on the day of visit the attendance was 58%. The differences in the average attendance and visit day attendance poised a great confusion in the minds of readers and researchers. This may be attributed because of the mal-adjustment made by the school authorities with a good purpose and also with a view to smooth administering the MDMS. As the costs associated with the

management mid day meals programmes have been increasing day by day in comparison with the amount provided by the Government for the purpose, the authorities having no options available at their end resort to such kind of adjustment by portraying high rate of attendance.

- The treated drinking water facility was available in the 40% of schools and rest of schools collect untreated water from nearby houses from sources like tube well, ponds, water flowing from agricultural lands, etc. Toilet facilities in 45% schools was ranked good, 15% fair, 10% very good and 30% poor.
- Health Checkups were arranged yearly 1-2 times in 15% schools and majority of the schools do not maintained health cards. In some Schools children were provided essential medicines and vitamins tablets at free of cost.
- Mid-Day-Meal Programme implementation is the overall responsibility of committees constituted at school level. Teacher In charge of Mid-Day-Meal Programme maintains the day to day record of the programme. There are only two registers to be maintained at school level. One register is for maintenance of funds (Cash Book) and second register is kept for food grains. At the end of the month, every school submits its monthly report of stock register for food grains to the Centre Head Teacher which transmits it to the Block Primary Education Officer.

Block Primary Education Officer compiles the reports received from various schools and communicates to the District Education Officer (EE), who in turn compiles the entire district report and sends to the State Mid-Day-Meal Cell. District Education Officers (EE) convene monthly meeting of Block Primary Education Officers.

It was found that the above mentioned system/ procedure of implementation have been strictly followed by the schools under study.

- We observed that in majority of cases, the School's MTA (Mother Teacher Association), SMC (School Managing Committees)/ Local Bodies were not proactive in looking after the supervision and inspection. However, the Inspector of Schools/ Deputy Schools Inspector visits these schools once a month. The scope for involving the parents in the process of implementation of the programme was very limited.

We observed that there are no social barriers while taking Mid-day meal all children of different castes and religion. This environment creates human values, cooperation, unity, harmony, self respect and respect for others among school children.

## Suggestions:

- Dedicated Supporting staff should be provided to teachers for maintaining records and making purchases.
- All the teachers should be involved in the Mid Day Meal by rotating their duty.

- Supply of Mid Day Meal should be substantially managed by local NGOs or SHGs which may helps in relieving the teachers from the additional work. This may indirectly contribute time to the teaching-learning process in schools.
- Funds should be given at regular interval to the schools to avoid discontinuation of Mid Day Meal Scheme or financial burden over teachers.
- Seasonal fruit, green leafy vegetables and Vitamin rich foods should be added daily to the menu to meet the micro nutrient.
- There should be flexibility in the menu to sustain the interest of children in the Mid Day Meal.
- The main source of energy in the menu is carbohydrates in the form of cereals. Being bulky in nature it is difficult for primary children to consume 100 gm rice or 4 chapattis and 150 gm rice or 6 chapattis for upper primary children. So the concentrated source of energy i.e. fat should be increased in the diet.
- Cooks should be trained for hygiene and desirable cooking practices with a view to avoid adulteration, food poisoning etc.
- Eating Utensils like multipurpose Thals and Spoons should be provided in the schools for comfortable eating.
- School Health Programme need to be systematized in terms of regular health checkup, Follow up, nutrient supplement and maintenance of Health Cards.
- MTA (Mother Teacher Association, SMC (School Managing Committees)/ Local Bodies and Inspector of





Schools/ Deputy Schools Inspector should come forward in the effective implementation process of Mid day Meal Scheme through frequent visit and supervision.

- The monthly remuneration of Cooks and Helpers should be increased.
- Cleaning of dish, mouth and hands before eating food and washing hand after taking food.

## Conclusion:

Every child requires education and good health for which the Constitution of India provides democratic right through its preamble. As a part of this, Mid day Meal Scheme was introduced in India. The Central and State Government are responsible for effective planning and implementation of the Scheme. The scheme started with the basic objectives of increase in enrolment, decrease in the drop out ratio and to provide food to all the Primary & Upper Primary school going children. This programme has been successful in increasing enrolment and attracting the poor children who were outside the scope of pursuing education. The effective implementation of the MDMS has become a great challenge for all states including Tripura. However we found some interesting results in the context of Tripura. The remarkable achievements regarding MDMS in Tripura includes sharp increase in enrolment, bringing 95% of the school children under the MDMS net, decrease in drop outs and number of unregistered students and strict adherence to the mid day meal guidelines. The areas which needs immediate intervention for improvement are proper Inspection and Supervision, regular Health check-up, removal of corruption, provision for safe water, training and awareness camps for cooks, upgrading infrastructure, etc. It is anticipated that the Government, Local Bodies, DEO,

BDOs, SMCs, MTA, Parents, Students, NGOs, SHGs and media may come forward and play an active role in the successful implementation of the Scheme through their involvement in systematic planning, organizing and coordinating the programme.

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