

Mid-Day Meal: An Eye-Catching Tool to Improve Education in India

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Abstract- At the primary level in India, the mid-day meal program is particularly well-liked. The purpose of the current study has to discuss how the mid-day meal program can increase student's enrollment at the school level. The mid-day meal program was introduced by the Indian government on August 15, 1995, in an effort to reduce the nutritional requirements of impoverished children in India. Since then, it has provided millions of children with freshly prepared meals in practically all of the government-run and aided or funded schools. Secondary sources of data are used to complete the study area.

Keywords: Mid-Day Meal, School, Education, Health, Enrollment

INTRODUCTION

To target the underprivileged group, the government created a number of programs in the field of basic education. Through the government's flagship Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) initiative, access to primary education was made universal. However, despite the program's excellent execution, certain children were still viewed as being deprived of primary education because of their low socio-economic status (Kainth, 2006). A variety of initiatives aimed at increasing school enrollment were implemented by the government in Developed nations. There are two main pathways through which it is thought that offering school meals will enhance enrollment.

There is no denying that children's growth, development, and educational prospects are significantly influenced by their health situation. Children who are malnourished or in poor health frequently perform worse in school, have higher than average absenteeism rates, frequently fall behind academically, and may ultimately be more likely to drop out of school (World Education Forum, 2000).

Since the Government of India (GOI) is aware that the problem of malnutrition is multifaceted, multi-sectoral, and intergenerational in character, it has established a number of programs to better meet the nutritional needs of children. One of the initiatives under the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India is the Mid-day Meal Scheme (Sharma, 2011). The world's largest school feeding program, India's Mid-day Meal Program was created to address the country's malnutrition problem and currently serves about 12 crore students across more than 12.65 lakh schools and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Centers (Bharthi, 2012). One of the main causes of "Persistent Hunger" is child undernutrition. The number of children who are not in school has decreased to less than 5% of the population in the age bracket of 6 to 14 years, from 4.4 crores in 2001-2002 to 70 lakhs in 2006, thanks to the aggressive implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the prepared Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2006-07). A significant contributing cause to "Persistent Hunger" according to the Global Hunger Index (2010) is child undernutrition. India is one of 29 nations that are dealing with the grave condition of hunger, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington. One of the major obstacles to reducing hunger is malnutrition in young children, which, if untreated, can have a long-term negative impact on a child's health, productivity, and ability to make a living.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MID- DAY MEAL SCHEME

In 1790, Benjamin Thompson pioneered the idea of simultaneously feeding and instructing hungry students. He provided the poor with free clothing and food at his facility in exchange for their labour.

Victor Hugo introduced the practice of providing cooked lunches to all students enrolled in residence schools in France in 1865. The noon meal program was introduced into British schools by the British government in 1905; it is a state-sponsored program. That was a time when this food distribution scheme was widely implemented in nations including the United Kingdom, the USA, Switzerland, Japan, and Australia. Additionally, it is also ascribed to this in Asian nations Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, and Singapore (Si & Sharma, 2008).

The situation of adopting school lunch programs around the world demonstrates the rising societal consciousness for the welfare measure of promoting the healthy development of children.

THE NEED FOR A MID-DAY MEAL PLAN IN EDUCATION

In order to improve living conditions for future generations as well as the quality of life for current inhabitants, building human capital is essential. The UN created the Human Development Index, which serves as a general assessment of the economy's ability to provide for the needs of health, education, and purchasing power. Access to education was seen as a major issue to be resolved twenty years ago.

Today, there are elementary schools with over 97 percent enrollment within 1 kilometre of over 99 percent of Indian habitations, giving the impression that the issue of access to education has been resolved. Naturally, it hasn't been fully resolved. Their access to education is really the major problem. Equal access to education is provided in all schools, regardless of infrastructure. Maybe it does. But further research is being done. Does the child's education get supported at school? Or does school teach kids how to continue learning after they finish their elementary education? Chanavan (2012). India follows China in having the largest educational system in the world. The scope of work required to guarantee high standards of education for all citizens of the nation is distinctive and difficult (Hazra, 2010). Underweight children under the age of five make up 42.5 per cent of the

population, compared to 4 per cent in Brazil and 6 per cent in China (Sharma, 2011).

Two of the biggest obstacles to EFA are childhood hunger and poor health. Both regions have made much less progress than the number of students entering schools. The end result is that malnutrition and poor health have permanently harmed the brains, cognitive development, and intellectual capacity of millions of children entering school. The health of children comes first. In the poor world, one in three children under the age of six will begin primary school with chronically impaired bodies, minds, and learning chances due to starvation and illness. The ramifications for education are significant yet frequently disregarded. A strong basis for education for all cannot be provided by increased access alone, especially when so many of the students entering the school have their lives had ruined by illness and famine (Education for All, Global Monitoring Report, 2009).

57 million malnourished Indian children live in India. 8.1 million Children do not attend school, while 45,2 million children work. According to estimates from the UNICEF and the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector, child malnutrition causes 22 percent of the nation's ailments and lowers productivity and income (NCEUS). These figures demonstrate the urgent need for a robust and ongoing program to address the interconnected issues of malnutrition and education. The world's largest feeding program, the Mid-Day Meal Programme in India, which was created to solve the aforementioned issues, serves around 12 crore children across the nation's EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) and over 12.65 lakh schools. cited as (Source:www.mdm.nic.in) (Bharthi, 2012).

The Supreme Court of India ordered all states to launch a meal program for students attending public schools on November 28, 2001, in an effort to combat hunger, improve students' health, and boost literacy rates. In November 2001, the Supreme Court issued a directive requiring all state agencies or individuals who handle all aspects of school administration to serve prepared lunches to students instead of only raw cereal.

SCOPE OF MID-DAY MEAL

In terms of child nutrition, educational advancement, and societal justice, there are three key factors driving the creation of Mid- Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). All

three viewpoints are connected, and MDMS's main objectives are to improve nutrition and school enrolment in order to build a healthy India. Since it will educate kids from all socioeconomic backgrounds and classes, the nation's literacy rates will rise as a result.

Two of the eight Millennium Development Goals—achieving universal elementary education and eradicating gender inequities in education—have been set as targets by India in the context of the United Nations Summit in 2000. In addition to sub-Saharan Africa, analysis shows that South Asia is lagging behind in achieving this objective. One of the key goals of the "Millennium Development Goals" (MGDs) is universal primary education, which guarantees that boys and girls must successfully complete Primary Education in an equal amount of time.

More than 200 million people live in India, which has the largest food insecure population in the world, according to the India State Hunger Index (ISHI), which also noted that the reason for the nation's poor performance is the high rate of child undernutrition and low calorie intake. Additionally, it is stated that "The child malnutrition of India" is higher than that of the majority of Sub-Saharan African nations (World Bank, 2003). According to a 2009 analysis on the world hunger index, India is ranked 65th out of 84 nations.

Indian MDMS's effectiveness

1. Elimination of School Hunger
2. Participation, attendance, and the encouragement of social integration
3. Enhancement of Nutritional Status and Health
4. Aid to the local economy
5. Opportunities for Under-represented Women in the Workplace.

PROBLEMS AND POLICY ISSUES

Behind every program's success is the involvement of committed implementing authorities. Despite its efficiency, MDMS faces numerous kinds of implementation difficulties. Children in India come from lower socioeconomic origins in big numbers in government schools. Research was conducted in Karnataka, in which the majority of parents whose children ate lunch at school worked as cultivators or

agricultural labourers (Mirajkar & Narayanaswami, 2019). Due to resource limitations, it is extremely difficult to consistently provide services to huge populations in underdeveloped nations. Internalizing the ground realities through need-based assessments and initiatives ought to be the main priority of the policy-making process. A proper implementation road map based on a thorough analysis of the realities on the ground is crucial for making a program inclusive and sustainable. The following section has discussed the main difficulties encountered as well as various methods for resolving the problem.

1. Food Quantity and Quality
2. Lack of Funds
3. Unusual Payment
4. Caste-Related Problems
5. Social Audit

FINDINGS

The Mid-Day Meal Program is having a good impact on children's school enrollment, retention, drop-out rates for Children who can't afford it due to their difficult socioeconomic circumstances, bringing out-of-school kids back to school, and overall access to education. Additionally, it offers a chance to close the gender gap because of the increased enrollment of female students in schools for higher education as a result of this program. In a broad sense, bringing equality is advantageous because this program predominantly employs women from scheduled castes and tribes; it aims to raise them out of poverty and give them a way of life by giving them a job.

CONCLUSION

Mid-Day Meal (MDM) must increase the number of school enrollments and improve nutritional status for low-income children who cannot afford to go to school or even eat a nutritious meal. The MDM program supports education for girls and works to reduce hunger among schoolchildren. The program has raised the socioeconomic standing of rural women. Schoolchildren's social cohesion as well as the development of constructive behaviours and healthy routines is encouraged. It is assumed that children who are healthy and well-fed will attend school more attentively (World Bank, 2014).

Since a long time, India has faced significant problems like illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, hunger, and

malnutrition. Many underprivileged kids sacrifice their childhoods to start working for their family young. As a result, many children's childhoods vanish before they reach adolescence and maturity. Not only has this complicated attaining UEE's objective, but it also poses a grave risk to the advancement of humanity. The health, education, and general development of children are all hampered by food insecurity. In this setting, offering free, wholesome meals in schools is quite important. India continues to hold the title of having the most malnourished children in the world notwithstanding this initiative.

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