

# Evaluating the Impact of Mid-Day Meal Program on children: A Sociological Study

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## Abstract

In India, there has been considerable interest from state governments in the performance of the mid-day meal scheme, particularly in relation to the benefits it provides to marginalized children. While many other studies have found evidence that this scheme applies. While positive effects on enrolment and increased daily caloric intake during the school day may occur, effects on long-term nutritional status and effects of school meals on learning and cognitive skills are unclear. Therefore, the availability of mid-day meals had a significant beneficial effect on children affected by the drought, controlling for other factors has a positive effect of mid-day meal. Altitude by age outweighed the negative effects of drought. This positive effect may also be amplified by a 2004 Supreme Court order mandating the provision of mid-day meals during school summer vacations in drought-affected areas.

## 1. Introduction:

Today one hundred and twenty centuries include a school lunch program as part of their national policies. Yet just 100 year ago, only a few local charities in a few Europeans cities used to provide meal children. In other words a program type that existed in the past as an occasional Charity project exists today around the world as a woman social benefits program. Various efforts to fight malnutrition have existed since 1920. In 1974, Indra proclaimed a national policy on children, which opened the path for a variety of national programs to be created. One of the most of these successful programmes is the Integrated Child Development service, which was started in 1975 and provides supplemental nutrition, immunization, pre School education and checkups to pre-school children, infants,

pregnant women and nursing mothers. The program has been successful at reducing the number of severely malnourished young children seeing decline from 15.35% of the population to 8% of the population. Whole this program has been very successful, program service stop at the age of 6, leaving school children unaccounted for efforts the reduce malnutrition in school children have been proclaim and slower in emerging. For instance, the state of Tamilnadu has had a successful state- wide School lunch program since 1982, while the National Programme of Nutritional support to primary education has been on the book since 1995 but has largely ignored until recently. Thus, school children have been largely left out of malnutrition scheme that focused substantially on Infant and mothers or worked only in certain areas. Thus, changed following an Indian Supreme Court decision on November 28, 2001. This Landmark decision directed all state government to introduce hot mid day meal in any school that received government assistance.

While there are certainly many implementation problems facing the new programs, 12 crore children are currently covered by the scheme, making it the largest School lunch program in the world. It is one of the few that were prompted by an explicit concern with human rights. The Supreme Court decision occurred after a case was brought through public litigation, by a human right organisation, the people's Union for Civil liberties, arguing for a right to food. The Supreme Court found in favour of this right and has been actively involved in overseeing the transition of these program that existed on paper, into programmes that exist in schools. The Indian Supreme Court was instrumental in Indian case in implementing the mid day meal scheme.

The state of Tamilnadu first implemented a forerunner of the mid day meal scheme. The state of Tamilnadu is located in south east corner of India and is the 11th largest state in India. In 1923 while India was still under Colonial rule, some schools in Madras City begin experimenting with school lunches in primary school. The corporation of Madras introduced the scheme in an effort to alleviate malnutrition and to encourage School attendance. Following this voluntary organisations begin funding school lunches in other schools across Tamilnadu. In 1956, a People movement for organised Charity was started that focus on a school improvement. That year school lunch is began operating in 8000 elementary schools providing lunch for 2 lakh children. Today, Tamilnadu has one of the most efficiently organised school lunch systems in India. Every primary school

has three staff members who deal solely with the school meals programs: A cook, a helper and an organiser who handle Logistic and accounts. All of the children's in the state are covered by the program. In 2003, an Independent survey conducted by the origin and growth of school lunch program centre for Equity studies, New Delhi reported that " it was a joy to observe the mid-day meal in Tamilnadu a living example of what can be achieved when quality safeguard are in place".

In 1995 legislation was passed at the national level for the National Programme of Nutritional support (NPNS) to primary education. In the mid 1990s India achieved agricultural self-sufficiency and began to have an excess of grain stocks; in addition the government began to emphasize primary education as a key to Indian development.

The next estimate was done in 1991, the population division of the United Nations department of international Economic and social affairs. The program was intended to give a boost to universalisation of primary education, by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously impacting on nutrition of student in primary classes. Under this program, the central government was to supply all government-aided primary schools with 100 gms of wheat and rice per student per day, free of cost. The cost of collecting and transporting in the grain from the nearest Food Corporation of India go down, or warehouse was to be paid by the state. The central government was willing to reimburse for transportation to rural areas at a rate of rupees 50 per quintal. The amount of food grains and reimbursement was to be determined by the student enrolment and attendance. While the program was being implemented, the central government offered to provide "food grains at the rate of 3 kgs per student per month distributed to all children in the classes' first to fifth subject to a minimum attendance of 80%". While this kind of transfer is the heart of the conditional cash transfer program that has proved so successful in Mexico and other parts of Latin America, in India this was provided as an interim measure and not seen as the final goal in and of itself. In India, at least the dry rations tended to increase the school enrolment but they did not necessarily increase School attendance. Although there was an 80% attendance required, this was not enforced and often it was the parents who came to school to pick up the food, while the children were working somewhere else. In 2004, the possibilities for achieving mid day meals improve drastically. Two things happened: another Supreme Court order and a newly elected coalition

government, the Progressive Democratic Alliance, composed of the Congress Party and leftist parties from Kerala and West Bengal. In October 2004, a revised National programme of nutritional support to primary education was passed. This program was designed to help universalise the mid day meal scheme and improve the quality of the food. The objectives were similar to the 1995 guidelines, to boost the universalization of primary education and it to provide nutritional support to those students in the primary stage. The new guidelines promise greater monies from the central government and include detailed monitoring programmes. Importantly, the new guidelines also provide for mid day meals to be continued during the summer and drought affected areas. Overall responsibilities for the programs remained at the level of the state, such as providing in first structure, making the Logistic and administrative arrangement and all other financial cost and not providing by the central government. The revised guidelines are much more detailed than the 1995 guidelines, including the designation of committee to oversee the programme at the national, state, district and block levels, and a number of administrations that the meals should be of good quality and they be safely prepared, that the meals are to be varied from day to day.

The continued pressure from the court and the greater financial support from the central government seem to have had the desired effect on the laggard state, such that some of those states actually implemented the programme, while others at least passed orders about it, even if they did not yet implement it. Thus late 2004 and 2005 was marked by a states seeming to implement the programme. During this period there was also a marked increase in the number of domestic NGOS that partnered with the state to provide the meals. This had been encouraged under the revised guidelines.

As various NGOS offered to provide the mid day meals programs as a charity measure for instance, beginning in 2001 the domestic NGOS, the Sri Veera Vinayaka Janaserva Trust and Akshaya Patra again to provide meals in different districts. The revised guidelines even include "detailed guidelines for associating NGOs in mid day meals programme." These includes the required caloric content of the meals, a non-discrimination requirement are liability statements absolving the central government of liability and accounting requirements.

## **2. Right to food:**

The Indian Supreme Court decisions, finding in a favour of the right to food, also issued Orders and appointed commissioners to oversee 8 food schemes including the mid day meals programme. All of these schemes already existed in some form, but the supreme Court order "converted the benefit of these schemes into legal entitlements" or rights. Thus, the Supreme Court order updated and enforced previously existing legislation, within a new context of human rights. Not only was this decision an important milestone in the international struggle for the right to food, but this decision was also a radical reframing of food provision schemes as necessary for the protection of human rights. An addition to the work of voluntary organisations, the frame of human rights was important for the implementation of the mid day meal programme. There is no question whether or not there is a human right to food. Human rights are "literally the rights that one has simply because one is a human being." nutrition is a human right because it would be impossible to live in life at all and particularly life of dignity, without nourishment. The Other schemes are the Integrated Child Development service, the public distribution system, Antyoda Anna Yojana, Annapurna, the National old age pension scheme, the National Maternity Benefit scheme and the National Family Benefit Scheme.

### **3. Mid-Day meal programme in Uttar Pradesh:**

Implementation of the National Flagship Program mid day meal in Uttar Pradesh has given an impetus to the spread of education in the recent year. Various steps taken by the state government in Implementing Educational Scheme with the assistance of Central Government have brought about remarkable improvement in Access, enrolment and retention. Efforts are being put on for achieving the goal of quality education and objective of rights to education at in a state. The Mid Day Meal Scheme was launched on 15th August, 1995 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the objective of universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance as well as impacting nutrition of students in primary classes.

On 28th August, the Hon'ble Supreme Court passed an order to the State Government/Union Territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing prepared mid-day meals with minimum ingredients to every child in every government and government-aided primary schools. 300 calories of energy and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for at least 200 days.

Cooked food is being served to the beneficiaries since 1st September 2004. Since 2006, the meals served in primary schools have been enriched by increasing the total to 450 calories and 12 grams of protein. In upper elementary schools, this is 700 calories and 20 grams of protein.

Food safety involves the selection, handling, preparation and storage of food in such a way as to prevent food borne illness and contamination. It requires several routines that must be followed to avoid potentially serious health hazards. Due to lack of these food safety measures during the implementation of Mid Day Meal, we have seen many health related problems in different parts of our country. Keeping this in view this brief study has been conducted to see the current status of implementation of the Mid Day Meal Scheme as per the guidelines.

The study was conducted among rural and urban government primary schools in Meerut. The overall results shown in this study revealed that food safety and hygiene practices are poor in rural and urban schools of Meerut. The situation is comparatively better in urban primary schools, although the impact of the mid-day meal program is greatest in rural areas.

#### **4. Mid-Day Meals Benefit Children's Health:**

Midday meals provide a nutritional safety net for children and improve their learning outcomes and attendance. The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme in India is one of the largest free school meal programs in the world - approximately 116 million children are covered under the national programme. A new analysis exploring the inter-generational impact of providing free primary school meals reveals how children of beneficiaries continue to have better development prospects throughout their lives.

The report, titled "Inter-generational nutritional benefits of India's national school feeding program," was published Monday in *Nature*. "School meals appear to have benefits for learning and nutrition in participants, but no studies have examined whether the benefits extend to their children," the paper states.

In 1995, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (now renamed as PM-Poshan) was officially launched in India, after being introduced in select states. By 2001, a Supreme Court order made it mandatory for government and government-aided schools to provide free cooked meals containing at least 450 calories (kcal) and 12 grams of protein to all children. An estimated 118 million children are covered by the program, which is the largest school feeding program in the world. Although the

policy was primarily designed to address child malnutrition, decades of research have uncovered a number of benefits.

## 5. School meals as a policy solution to address child nutrition:

Today the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is the largest school lunch program in the country. It is reported that MDMS has met the nutritional needs of school children both in rural and urban areas. Therefore, the present study was an attempt to evaluate the nutritional contribution of MDM to the actual daily dietary intake of children. For this purpose, two hundred school children aged 7-9 years were randomly selected in equal numbers from both rural and urban schools. It was observed that the cyclic menu provided by the State Mid Day Meal Cell for six days was followed uniformly by all the schools. The data showed that curry rice was the most preferred food (45%), followed by vegetable roti and dal rice (35%), dhal roti (30%) and chana roti (29%). The least favorite food was sweet rice (26%). The energy and protein content of the six-day menus ranged between 350–386 kcal and 10.9–11.9 g protein per day, which was lower than the recommended norms of 450 kcal and 12 g protein. A comparison of the average daily nutrient intake of children with the RDA showed that intake of all nutrients was insufficient. The mid-day meal was seen as a substitute rather than a supplement to the home meal. The percentage contribution of energy, protein and fat by MDM to children's actual nutrient intake was 28.2, 51.7 and 27.5, respectively. The percentage contribution of other nutrients was  $\beta$ -carotene (22.7), thiamin (28.3), riboflavin (25.3), niacin (28.7), folacin (23.6), vitamin C (15.2), iron (25.7) and calcium (27.7). The findings suggest increasing the intake of fats, green leafy vegetables and vitamin C-rich fruits to improve the calorie and micronutrient contribution of midday meals to school children's diets.

## Conclusion:

Mid Day Meal Scheme (under Ministry of Education) is a centrally sponsored scheme which was started in 1995. It is the world's largest school feeding program aimed at achieving the goal of universalisation of primary education. Provides cooked food to every child in the age group of six to fourteen years studying in classes I to VIII who is enrolled and attending school. In 2021, it was renamed as 'Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Yojana' (PM Poshan Yojana) and also covers students of Balvatikas (children aged 3-5 years) to pre-primary classes. The findings of this paper suggest that the mid-day meal scheme increased the likelihood of enrollment in primary school and on-time enrollment in first grade.

An analysis of the heterogeneity in the results shows that the program had a major impact on socially disadvantaged groups and girls.

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