

Fighting Classroom Hunger: Analysis of Mid-day Meal Scheme of Odisha

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Abstract:

India State Hunger Index (ISHI) reported that, “India is home to the world’s largest food insecure population, with more than 200 million people who are hungry.” Adding to this, the report urged that, the country’s poor performance is driven by its high levels of child under-nutrition and poor calorie count. Education plays a vital role in the development of human potential. State Governments are spending considerable portion of their resources to provide educational facilities all over the country. In spite of these efforts, the goal of cent percent universalization of elementary education appears to be far and elusive due to inherent socio-economic factors present in the society. Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years is the constitutional commitment and it is estimated that primary school children (6-14 years) form about 20% of the total population. Poor school enrolment and high school dropout rate are attributed to the poor nutritional status of the children compounded by poor socio-economic condition, child labour and lack of motivation. The researchers have used empirical research to find the real gap in the system.

Keywords: Mid-day meal, Sociology, Education, PM-Poshan, Primary School, Socio-Economic

INTRODUCTION

The India State Hunger Index (ISHI) has highlighted that India harbors the largest food insecure population globally, exceeding 200 million individuals facing hunger. The report emphasizes that the nation's poor performance in addressing this issue stems from high levels of child under-nutrition and inadequate calorie intake. Poverty exacerbates these challenges, negatively impacting children's nutritional levels and educational attainment.

Education, crucial for unlocking human potential, receives substantial investment from State Governments nationwide. Despite these efforts, achieving complete universalization of elementary education remains distant due to entrenched socio-economic factors. Constitutional commitments mandate free and compulsory education up to age 14, encompassing approximately 20% of the total population. Unfortunately, many children from low socio-economic backgrounds suffer from undernutrition, leading to early school dropout rates, hindering their overall development. Poor enrollment and high dropout rates are linked to inadequate nutrition, compounded by socio-economic conditions, child labor, and lack of motivation.

Recognizing the pivotal role of nutrition in education, the Mid Day Meal Program (MDMP) was introduced nearly a century ago, gaining national attention in 1974 and launching nationally in 1995.

Aimed at enhancing primary education universalization and student nutrition, MDMP has evolved over the years, emphasizing quality checks and covering millions of children in elementary schools nationwide. Renamed the PM-POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman) Scheme in September 2021 by the Ministry of Education, the program aims to include an additional 24 lakh students in government and government-aided schools by 2022. It provides free lunch on school days, benefiting 12 cores of students across 12 lakh schools in India, making it the largest social welfare program in the country.

In Odisha, the Mid-day Meal Programme was initiated in 1995 with the aim of supplying cooked midday meals to primary school students in all Government and Government-aided Schools from Class I to V throughout the state, amounting to approximately 210 working days per year. However, starting from July 1st, 2001, it was decided to limit the provision of cooked meals to primary school children in rural areas exclusively. Specifically, this included the eight KBK districts (comprising 80 Blocks, including 44 ITDA Blocks) and 74 ITDA Blocks in Non-KBK districts.

Implementation of Mid-Day Meal Programme in Odisha

As stated earlier Mid-day Meal programme was introduced in Odisha on 1st July 1995 as a nutrition intervention programme. The following are the basic features of Mid-day Meal programme in Odisha.

Coverage of Mid-day Meal programme

In Odisha the Mid-day Meal programme is running in more than sixty thousand primary schools (all the govt., aided, Madrasa and national child labour schools) and nearabout sixty lakh students are getting benefit out of this programme.

Food Grains Management

The government of India allocates food grains (rice) as per the list of students submitted by the State Govt. The State Govt. reallocates the rice in favour of the districts. The respective collectors lift the rice through the storing and transporting agents appointed by them through tender procedure from the nearest FCI godown. The Block transporting agents carry the rice to the school point from the godown. The SHG/Teachers in-charge of MDM receive the rice at the school level. This process has been streamlined. The collectors have been instructed to take care of proper storage of food grains.

The revised ration cost per meal under MDM is Rs.4.04 for primary students and Rs.6.03 for upper primary students. This is effective from 25th August, 2014.

Amount of Food Grains and Menu

For the primary students 100gms of rice, 25gms of dal, 60gms vegetables, 12gms of soyabodi and one egg is supplied in the meal on a fixed weekly menu. For the Upper Primary School students, 150gms of rice, 30gms of dal, 100gms vegetables, 25gms of soyabodi and one egg is given in the meal on a fixed weekly menu. Under a common menu in all the primary schools of Odisha, rice and dal is provided on Monday & Thursday, rice and soyabodi curry is given on Tuesday & Friday and rice and egg curry on Wednesday & Saturday.

Calorie Contain

The average protein content per meal is 13.8gms for primary school students and 20.5gms for Upper Primary School students. The average K. Calorie content per meal is 493.6 for primary students and 728.67 for Upper Primary students.

Departmental Arrangement

Government of Odisha has made systematic departmental arrangement at each level for the smooth functioning of the scheme. At state level, Mid-day Meal programme comes under Department of School and Mass Education and one O.A.S. officer is working as State Nodal Officer. At district level, the district collector is in charge of the District Headquarters. BEO is acting as District Nodal Officer. At Block level, the BDO, BEO, BRCC and CRCC are taking the responsibility of the programme. At school level, the SMC, SHG in charge and Headmaster are taking the responsibility of the programme.

Monitoring

Steering-cum- Monitoring committees in block, district and state level have been formed to monitor the scheme. The state Govt. also ordered that, one member from SMC/Mothers Committee/Parents to be invited to come to school, and inspect MDM and taste the cooked food.

Engagement of Cook-Cum-Helper

With the objectives to provide an earning opportunity to the local resident especially women of weaker and deprived section of the society, the Government of Odisha decided to engage them as MDM Cook-Cum-Helper. For 25 students one Cook-Cum-Helper is allotted and between 26 to 100 students, two Cook-Cum-Helpers are allotted. Then for another 100 students, one more Cook-Cum-Helper is allotted. School Management Committee (SMC) is the appropriate authority to engage the Cook-Cum-Helper. Presently the Cook-Cum-Helper gets Rs.1000/- per month during school working days.

Tasting the Food before it is Served

The state Govt. has decided that, every day the cooked food is to be tasted/checked by two teachers and cook-cum-helpers before it is served to the children. The taste checking teacher and cook-cum-helper shall sign on the register maintained for the purpose on daily basis. The Govt. also circulated that, it is the headmaster who will take personal diligence to supervise the quality, quantity, health & hygiene with regard to Mid-day Meal and be responsible for lapses.

Innovative Practices

For the enrichment of better Mid-day Meal programme, different innovative practices are going on. They are Hand Wash Abhiyan, Multi-Tap Water Source, Mid Day Meal Observation Register, Selection of Sishu Khadya Mantri and Sishu Swasthya Mantri, Inclusive dinning, Observance of Happy birth Day, Capacity building of new recruits etc. In the same line the state Govt. decided that, Madhyan Bhojan Puraskar would be given on 15th Aug. or 26th January every year.

MDM Panchaniyam

By the order of state Govt. five non-negotiable rules (MDM Panchaniyam) for Mid-day Meal is displayed on the wall of the school. The MDM Panchaniyams are:

1. Safe, clean and hygienic ambience
2. Safe, nutritious and hygienic cooking and consumption
3. Hand wash before and after food
4. No gender/social discrimination
5. Safe drinking water.

The slogan of Mid-day Meal programme in Odisha is taken as “Nutrition for Education”.

Software for School Student Helpline

From 1st January, 2015 a special web portal named www.studenthelplineodisha.nic.in on School Student Helpline is functioning. All type of grievance related to Mid-day Meal programme can be accessed and complied through the website.

Involvement of Private Organisations

Government of Odisha welcomed different private body’s involvement in Mid-day Meal programme to make the scheme a big success. Presently, the SHGs are keeping all the records of attendance as well as daily requirement of food grains. They procure food, prepare and distribute it to the children. Vedanta Aluminum Limited, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with District Administration of Kalahandi and NAANDI Foundation to provide Mid-day Meal in Lanjigarh block of the Kalahandi district. Presently the NAANDI Foundation is providing Mid-day Meal to some blocks of Ganjam, Kalahandi and Keonjhar districts. Except NAANDI Foundation, Akshaya Patra Foundation, a Bangalore based voluntary organisation, has started providing Mid-day Meal in some blocks of Puri, Nayagarh, khordha district etc.

Role of Teachers

Presently teachers are not directly assigned duty in Mid-day Meal programme due to hindrance of teaching learning. However, they have to monitor the programme and should ensure that:

- Proper quality and quantity of food is being served to children as per the attendance on each day.
- Entitlements of children are displayed at a prominent wall in the school.
- Food is being cooked in a hygienic manner and children wash their hands before and after eating.
- No stray animals etc. are allowed in the school premises at any time.
- Periodic health check-up of the cook-cum-helper is done.
- The quality of food should be tested before it is served.

CONCLUSION

The most important factor which plays an important role in growth is education and proper intake of food which affects the whole life cycle of the child. And India has the major portion who are not that economically sound who can’t afford good food or education. Mid-Day Meal Programme (MDMP) is the biggest programme implemented by any government covering 10.44 crore children in 12.12 lakh elementary schools across the country. This grand Programme initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development; Government of India been showing tremendous impact on the universalization of elementary education. To maintain the balance Government came up with the idea that MDM should be carried on even during closer of schools during covid-19. The intervention was done by distribution of MDM during Covid-19 in form of dry ration in the school to the children. It had made a huge contribution especially to those who are economically weak. But as per the money which is been given has no guarantee that it will contribute in the food consumption of the kids to go up. Problem that people mainly faced is the delay or say gap in distribution of dry ration and money.

Students want delicious food at least once a week. There are a few who were shy to put forward their wishes but most of the children wanted milk in their menu.

Hence there is need to improve the scheme management. There are various others studies of different writer or sociologist who have studied several issues of Mid Day Meal scheme. Many studies of mid-day meal scheme have discussed aspects like impact of Mid-Day Meal on school enrolment, student's attendance, drop-out rate, strengths and weakness of Programme. There are fewer studies about the impact of Mid Day Meal scheme for the total development of the children in sociological perspective. Therefore, there is a need of more studies on the understanding of the impact of mid-day meal scheme for the development of children in primary schools.

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