

MID DAY MEAL (MDM) SCHEME BRIEF

One of two flagship programmes initiated to achieve the goal of Education for All, India's Mid Day Meal (MDM) scheme is the largest school lunch programme in the world. It currently reaches 12 crore children in 9.5 lakh schools across India. This scheme brief provides an overview of the scheme and examines available evidence on how MDM has performed against its stated objectives

BACKGROUND

The Mid Day Meal (MDM) 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.

Initiated in 1995 in 2408 blocks, the NP-SPE was re-launched in 2004 as MDM and has been revised several times since then. 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.

Funding MDM operates with central assistance of 150 grams of food-grains per child, a cooking subsidy of Rs.1.50 and a transportation subsidy of Rs.1.80 for states and union territories subject to a matching contribution of Rs.0.50 and Rs.20, respectively. 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.

How does it work? As per the scheme's original design, panchayats and nagarpalikas were the implementation unit, with the district being the unit for allocation of foodgrains. Following the 2004 revision of guidelines, the responsibility for implementing MDM was vested with state and union territories governments while the National level Steering cum Monitoring Committee has oversight authority. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD) conveys all central assistance to State Nodal Departments, which in turn convey the funds to District Departments or to Panchayati Raj Institutions in states where applicable.

Ministry	Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD)
Department	Department of School Education and Literacy
Sector	Education
Goal	Support universalisation of elementary education
Output Indicators	Nutritional status of children, Enrolment, Attendance, Retention
Funding	Shared by centre and states
Year of Inception	1995
Expiration date	None
2009-2010 Budget outlay	Rs.8,814 crore

Table 1: MDM at a glance

Hunger and undernutrition can have permanent health impacts on children. Healthy mid-day meals are one way to ensure children have access to one nutritious meal per day. The rationale behind the scheme is that mid day meals contribute to the right to education by facilitating enrolment and attendance by improving the nutritional levels of children thereby reducing sick days and improving ability to pay attention.

School feeding programmes are effectively a transfer of the value of food to households. In addition, these meals foster social equality and help impart knowledge on nutrition and hygiene. Additionally, midday meals foster gender equity by eroding cost barriers to girl children attending school and providing opportunities for employment for women.

PROGRESS

MDM supports the goal of universalisation of elementary education by providing one cooked meal to children in primary levels (levels 1-5), which improves the nutritional status of children thereby encouraging enrolment, attendance and retention. However, a CAG audit (Report 13 of 2008) of the scheme revealed that the implementation of the programme focussed primarily on providing one cooked meal with no consideration for the scheme's broader education, nutrition and health objectives.

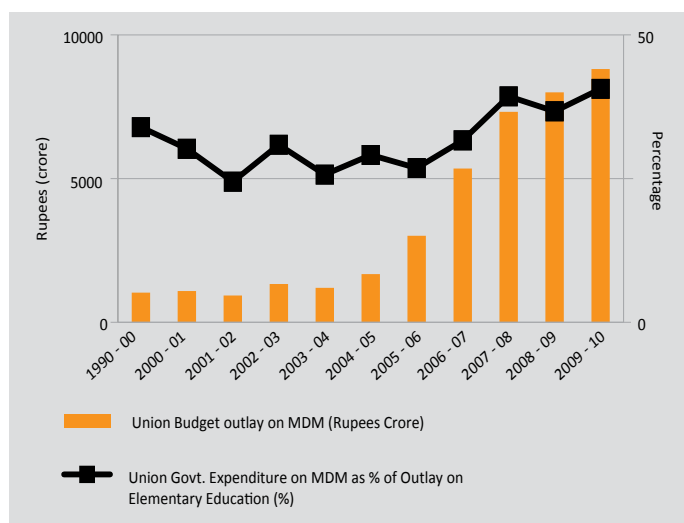


Figure 1: Budget Outlay on MDM

Source: Union budget

Enrolment, attendance and retention Statistics on the enrolment of children in primary classes from 2002 to 2009 show an increasing trend (where retention and attendance rates are available). While the data are consistent with a programme impact, it is not possible to attribute these improvements solely to MDM rather than other changes during the time period.

Nutritional status Initial MDM guidelines did not specify impact parameters for measuring nutritional status. In 2004 the guidelines were revised to specify height and weight of children in primary schools as a measure of nutritional status. However, it was not until 2007 that MoHRD requested the Ministry of Family and Health Welfare to monitor this since it fell within the latter's gamut of operations. The CAG audit (Report 13 of 2008) found that MoHRD took no action to ascertain improvement and impact from the data provided. It also found that MoHRD did not take steps to establish links with the National Rural Health

Brief history of the Mid Day Meal Scheme

August 1995 National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education launched in 2408 blocks with central assistance of 100 grams of food grains per child per school day and a transportation subsidy of Rs.50 per quintal.

1997-98 Extended to all blocks of the country to cover children in classes 1-5 in government, government aided and local body schools.

2002 Extended to all EGS and AIE centres.

September 2004 Re-launched as the Mid Day Meal scheme with a focus on providing children 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein per school day. Central assistance revised to provide free food grains, cooking assistance of Rs.1 per child per schoolday and a transportation subsidy of Rs.100 for special states and Rs.75 for other states. It also included a management and evaluation cost of 2 percent of the cost of food grains, cooking and transportation subsidy. There is also a provision for providing meals to children during summer vacations in drought-affected areas.

July 2006 Central assistance for cooking cost of Rs.1.80 per child/school day for North Eastern states provided they contributed Rs.0.20 per child/school day and Rs.1.50 per child/ school day for other states and UTs, provided that they contributed Rs.0.50 per child/school day.

October 2007 Expanded to cover an additional 1.7 crore children in upper primary (classes VI to VIII) in 3479 Educationally Backward Blocks and from April 2008 all blocks in the country were brought within its gamut. The calorific value of a mid-day meal at upper primary stage was fixed at a minimum of 700 calories and 20 grams of protein by providing 150 grams of foodgrains (rice/wheat) per child/school day.

8.41 crore Primary students and 3.36 crore Upper Primary Students (a total of 11.77 crore students) are estimated to benefit from MDM scheme during 2009-10.

Mission to ensure the provision of micronutrient supplements despite its focus on improving nutritional status of primary school children.

Special focus The programme guidelines emphasise the need to focus on children from disadvantaged groups and also to provide nutritional support to students in drought-affected areas during summer vacations. However, the guidelines fail to define the socio-economic categories that comprise special focus groups.

How much money is being spent? The Union budget has allocated approximately Rs.40,000 crore to MDM in the last 10 years. The most notable feature in the budget outlays is the exponential increase following the revision of guidelines in 2004 and 2006. Allocations increased 40 percent in 2004, 80 percent from in 2006, and 78 percent in 2007 (Figure 1). This is reflected in the shifting of the burden of cooking costs from states to the centre, as well as increases in the transportation subsidy from Rs.50 per quintal to Rs.75 and to Rs.100 for J&K and the NE states. Following a second revision in 2006, the centre paid Rs.1.80 and Rs.1.50 per child per schoolday for special status states and others respectively, subject to a corresponding state contribution of Rs.0.20 and Rs.0.50.

The programme is designed to meet infrastructure requirements by leveraging the facilities provided by other development programmes, including Sampurna Grameena Rozgar Yojana, Basic Services for Urban Poor, Urban Wage Employment Programme, Slum Development Programme for urban areas for the construction of kitchen-cum-stores. Similarly, water supply requirements are supposed to be met through the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme, Swajaladhara and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan schemes. Necessary health interventions like regular check-ups, supplementation of micronutrients and de-worming medicines are supposed to be taken up under the National Rural Health Mission.

How has the scheme performed? MoHRD maintains no data on the performance of MDM. As a result, there is no evidence to show that changes in enrolment, attendance and retention, and nutritional status of children can be attributed to the scheme. Further, although states furnish enrolment data to support demand for allocation of food grains, they do not maintain data related specifically to the performance of MDM.

PROBLEMS

MDM has been in operation since 1995. Yet, the repeated revisions in the guidelines point to a lack of clarity on the

objectives of the programme through 2006. Despite stated objectives to boost universalisation of primary education, MoHRD had not formulated ways to measure the impact of the programme on enrolment, retention or attendance (CAG 13 of 2008). Data collected from states on enrolment were being used solely for allocating foodgrains. Nor had MoHRD collected data on the nutritional status of beneficiaries or established linkages with the Ministry for Family and Health Welfare to provide health check-ups as prescribed in the guidelines.

Lack of evidence on impact Official sources of information on MDM do not provide any evidence on the extent to which the programme has reduced chronic hunger and malnutrition among school-going children. Moreover, no impact evaluations have been conducted to estimate the effect that the scheme has had on health and education levels of children.

Irregularities in drawing and utilisation of food grains Data from various states reveal that projected enrolments, on which food grain disbursement are made, were unrealistically high compared to historical and actual enrolment. The excess withdrawal of food grains creates scope for food grains to be diverted for unintended purposes. There have been several instances of mismatches in utilisation of cooking costs and food grains procured by states. Similarly, there are mismatches between food grains supplied by the Food Corporation of India and that procured by state agencies. None of the states were able to furnish utilisation certificates nor had they identified ways to reduce theft and misuse (CAG 13 of 2008).

Insufficiency of, and delay in, delivering cooking cost at the school-level States have cited two primary reasons for inadequate implementation of MDM: insufficient funds to cover cooking costs and delays in budget allocations. States claim that the current cooking cost of Rs.2 per student is insufficient and have repeatedly requested to raise it to Rs.3 and Rs.4 for primary and upper primary levels. Further, despite the centre advising states to plan and budget for delays, it still receives regular complaints of delays in allocation which impacts the delivery of the scheme.

Deviation from prescribed norms Food served in several states fell short of the prescribed 100 grams with deviations ranging from 5 to 83 grams (CAG 13 of 2008). Moreover, 9 states did not monitor the quality of food and the other states conducted irregular or no on-site inspections. Additionally, MoHRD did not provide micronutrient supplements, which it claimed was the states' responsibility. CAG audit (Report 13 of 2008) concluded that MoHRD had overlooked its crucial role in

monitoring whether mid-day meals were being made available to school-going children. It also observed that in violation of the programme guidelines, meals were not provided in drought-affected areas in 2008.

Ineffective monitoring and evaluation Provisions for monitoring were not adhered to and the mechanisms for internal control were weak. The monitoring and steering committees did not meet regularly to take stock of the status and performance of the scheme. In fact, since its inception the national level committee met only twice in 2005 and not once thereafter compared to the prescribed five meetings between 2004 and 2007 (CAG 13 of 2008).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community participation Enhanced participation of local communities is often cited as the preferred way to improve monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of the scheme. Adopting community-based monitoring could give teachers the

responsibility of ensuring that food is cooked as per guidelines. Some states have made provisions for involvement of parents in monitoring and for local women to be involved in cooking.

Linking MDM to other education and health schemes Most states have not attempted inter-sectoral partnerships that would help achieve wider health and education benefits. Two exceptions are Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, which have linked MDM to annual de-worming and vitamin supplementation. Following this example, states should leverage funds from other social sector schemes to compliment MDM. For instance, kitchen areas can be constructed using the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, drinking water from the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme, and cooking utensils using the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.education.nic.in

Ministry of Education's website which gives official information on the Mid Day Meal scheme

www.cag.gov.in

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India audits various union and state programmes at the behest of the implementing central ministry. The CAG report 13 of 2008 summarises the audit of the MDM scheme.

www.worldbank.org

The World Bank's country website provides information about various development indicators

www.wfp.org

The World Food Programme (WFP) is part of the UN group of organisations and works on providing humanitarian assistance to fight hunger

www.sccommissioners.org

Website of Officers of the Commissioners of the Supreme Court provides information on the legal mandates underpinning government schemes and programmes and associated amendments