

## **Monitoring and Evaluation of Mid-Day-Meal Scheme in Sikkim**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE) commonly known as the Mid Day Meal Scheme has been implemented in the State of Sikkim by providing uncooked rice to primary school children @ 3 Kg per child per month. As per directive of the Supreme Court vide its order dated 28th November 2001 all the State Governments including the Government of Sikkim were directed to implement the Mid Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in Government and Government aided lower primary schools with a cooked Mid Day Meal. The objectives of the study were to know the status of the mid day meal programme in Sikkim, its monitoring and evaluation. The data were collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The field study was based on the observations of eleven primary/upper primary government schools in Gangtok and around city in which Mid-Day Meals Scheme was functional. Best Practices For Mid – Day Meal Programme was School Development Management Committee Schools, General Observations during Visits to the Schools, Management of meal provision in schools, Quantity and Quality of Meals etc. Mid Day Meal programme is one of the most important programmes of the Government to encourage children to come to schools and participate in the learning process without worrying for their meal, especially that of day time. The programme in the holistic manner helps in bringing back all school going age children back to schools, improve retention ratio of school children and arrest dropout rate besides providing nutritious meals to growing children. The State has done commendable work in implementation of Mid-Day Meal Programme by coverage of institutions and children as per plan; working days on which meals were served; percentage of meals served, etc. There was, however, short utilisation of funds in overall terms, less utilisation of funds in Kitchen-cum-Store, transport assistances, etc. The Department will further improve the implementation of Mid-Day Meal if suitable measures are taken to absorb the funds allocated.*

**Keyword:** *Mid-day Meal Scheme, Monitoring, Evaluation*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Sikkim – a small Himalayan State became the 22nd state of India in the year 1975. Situated in-between latitudes 270-280 N and longitudes 880-890 S, in the North Eastern part of India, the State shares its borders with China in the north, Bhutan in the East, Nepal in the west and Darjeeling District in the south. The State has been laying importance to education even before the pre merger days which as gained momentum after merger to the Indian Union.

#### **Implementation of Mid Day Meal in Sikkim**

The National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE) commonly known as the Mid Day Meal Scheme has been implemented in the State of Sikkim by providing uncooked rice to primary school children @ 3 Kg per child per month. However, the State governments including the Government of Sikkim were directed to implement the Mid Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in Government and Government aided lower primary schools with a cooked Mid Day Meal. The cost of conversion of food grains into hot cooked meals has to be met jointly by the Government of India. Mid Day Meal has been provided to all Government, Government aided primary schools and EGS Centres and upper primary schools in the State. For implementation of the scheme, the Government of India provides food grain free of cost through Food Corporation of India (FCI).

### **II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**Sen** (2005) conducted study on “Cooked Mid Day Meal Programme in West Bengal – A study in Birbhum District” and found that Mid-day Meal has made positive intervention in universalisation of Primary Education by increasing enrolment, attendance of the children. **Mathur** (2005) conducted study on “Situation Analysis of MDM programme in Rajasthan”; and found that Cooked Mid Day meal has reduced classroom hunger especially those belonging to underprivileged sections. Cooked mid day meal has also contributed to the cause of social equity as children, cutting across caste and class lines sit together to share a common meal. **Jain**

**and Shah** (2005) conducted study on “MDM in 70 most backward villages of Madhya Pradesh” and found that meal has positively affected the learning abilities of school children. **Julia** (2005) conducted study on assessment of Programme Implementation and its impact in Udaipur District”; and found Cooked MDM had become a permanent part of the daily routine of rural primary schools in Udaipur. Introduction of menu based mid-day meal has positively impacted enrolment and daily attendance of children. **Noronha and Samson** (2005) conducted a survey of 12 MCD schools undertaken in Delhi, the survey found out that School children in all the schools are getting cooked food. **Naik** (2005) reported on Akshara Dasoha Scheme of Karnataka and found that the programme has made positive impact on teacher absenteeism. **National Council of Educational Research & Training’s latest Report (2005)** found that learning achievement of students at the end of Class-V - inferred that children covered under MDM Programme have higher achievement level than those who were not covered under it.

### **III. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

It is an incontrovertible fact that school meal programmes exert a positive influence on enrolment and attendance in schools. A hungry child is less likely to attend school regularly. Hunger drains them of their will and ability to learn. Chronic hunger can lead to malnutrition. Chronic hunger also delays or stops the physical and mental growth of children. Malnutrition adversely affects Universalization of Elementary Education. Even if a malnourished child does attend school, she finds it difficult to concentrate on and participate in the teaching-learning activities in school. Unable to cope, she would drop out. There is also evidence to suggest that apart from enhancing school attendance and child nutrition, mid day meals have an important social value and foster equality. As children learn to sit together and share a common meal, one can expect some erosion of caste prejudices and class inequality. Moreover, cultural traditions and social structures often mean that girls are much more affected by hunger than boys. Thus the mid day meal programme can also reduce the gender gap in education, since it enhances female school attendance. With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1995, initially in 2,408 blocks in the country. Central Assistance under the scheme consisted of (i) Free supply of food grains @ 100 grams per child per school day, and (ii) Subsidy for transportation of food grains up to a maximum of Rs. 50 per quintal. In addition to foodgrains, a mid day meal involves two other major inputs, *viz.*, “cost of cooking” and “provision of essential infrastructure”. In the light of above discussions, it is evident to monitor the mid day meal scheme in Sikkim.

### **IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To know the status of the mid day meal programme in Sikkim.
- To monitor and evaluate Mid-day Meal programme in the state.
- To document good practices implementing at the school level.

### **V. METHOD OF THE STUDY**

The data were collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The field study was based on the observations of eleven primary/upper primary government schools in Gangtok and around city in which Mid-Day Meals Scheme was functional. Field research consisted of unannounced visits to the schools to observe meal preparation and distribution, and informal discussions with government school teachers, cooks, parents, primary school children, and block officers. Primary data were collected by using interview schedule, observation schedule and focus group discussions. School Management Committee members (implementing agency), community members, parents, teachers, and students were involved in the focus group discussions. Besides this, observation method was also adopted to note the condition of kitchen-shed, availability of the drinking water facility, availability of water for cooking and cleaning vessels, preparation and distribution of the meal, manners of the children during the time of serving mid-day meals and hygienic conditions in the kitchen and school premises. School data on weekly menu, number of cooks etc. were collected from the headmasters and teachers. Care was taken to ask questions in a non-suggestive manner, and whenever possible, the accuracy of responses was checked by asking the same question to several people and comparing them with first-hand observation. Since the visit to the schools in which the food was being prepared in the school itself was done while the cook was preparing the school meal, the possibilities of altering its quantity or quality were limited. The information regarding the Mid Day Meals Programme was also obtained through discussions with the officials of the Mid Day Meals Directorate. Relevant secondary data like, Annual Work Plan and Budget 2011-12, MDM data, revised guidelines for Mid-day Meal Scheme, and office orders and reports, etc. were collected from the Office of the Mid-Day Meals Directorate, Sikkim.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present status of the implementation of the MDM in the Sikkim is reflected below:

- Against the envisaged coverage of 579 and 294 institutions in the Primary and Upper Primary, the achievement was 582 and 297 which was more than 100 *per cent* during 2010-11.
- Against the envisaged coverage of 58,000, 70,000 and 64,000 children during 2008-11 in Primary School, the achievement was more than *per cent* except during 2009-10. The achievement, however, was quite low during 2008-09 in Upper Primary.
- The working days coverage was more than 100 *per cent* during the last three years except 95 *per cent* in Upper Primary during 2010-11.
- Against the allotment of 2,241 MT, there was a short lifting of 1,766 MT food grains during the academic session 2010. During 2008-10, there was a short utilisation of allocated food grains by 81 *per cent*. There was short utilisation of funds during the last three academic session i.e. 2008 to 2010. No fund was utilised against the allotment of ` 28.25 lakh during 2009-10.

### **Best Practices For Mid –Day Meal Programme School Development Management Committee Schools**

The cooks were appointed by the SDMC committee members. The menu is almost same in all the schools. Calorific value of the food is about Rs 450 calories. In addition to the food, once a week additional item in the form of fruit is given to the children. Normally on this day of the week the school attendance is more. The menu of the food given to the children was displayed either on the notice-board of the school or it was permanently painted on the school wall near the entrance. The principal of all the schools under SDMC scheme kept meticulous records of the receipt of food-grain and funding, daily attendance and number of meals prepared. The Principal were also responsible for ensuring that the cook was supplied with calculated amount of food grains as per the attendance of the children and that the food was cooked properly. The attendance of children along with the food-grain utilized was displayed in the register. The unutilized food-grain was also mentioned in the register. Teachers in all the schools felt that the meal programme had brought and overall improvement in their school. In all of the schools children were asked to clean their hands before and after having food. In all schools the head masters responded that they got the utensils for cooking the food through the funds provided to them by the government such as DPEP funding. The community members also sometimes donated money to the schools which was used for buying vessels. In all the schools there were kitchen sheds. However cooks did opt for cooking fully or partly outside the kitchens. Basically it was the convenience of the cook that mattered. Cooks reported that it took them about two hours to prepare the school meals. The cooks were satisfied with the salary. The cooks in the schools owned by the SDMC were appointed by the School Development Management Committee in which the parents, community members and the Headmasters are also members.

### **General Observations during Visits to the Schools Management of meal provision in schools**

In each of the schools visited, interviews with a variety of people (principal, teachers, community members, parents, children) as well as personal observation confirmed that the school normally provided cooked mid-day meals on a daily basis. All of the schools under SDMC reported that they were always supplied with enough food grains for the needs of the meal programme. Once a week the children were also provided fruit along with the cooked meals. Personal observation and interviews with teachers, cooks, and school children indicated that the bulk of the food prepared was given to the intended beneficiaries: children in primary classes (I-V) who were attending class at the government school. In all the schools the teachers reported that the school meal scheme had not increased their workload. However, the teachers did help in one way or the other in the provision of mid day meals to the children.

### **Quantity and Quality of Meals**

According to the teachers, cooks, and students, weekly menus at these schools now included variety of food items such as khichdi, rice, dal and sabji. According to the researcher's observations and interviews with the teachers, cooks, and school children, the meals were always shared out among all of the primary class children present; each child who wanted food was given a portion. The headmaster determined the amount of food to be prepared each morning by observing how many children were present in the school. The food grains were weighed according to attendance and given to the cooks. The In-charge of Mid-Day Meals weighed the food grains and gave it to the cook. All of the cooks and teachers reported that food grains of 100 grams per child, which is the amount specified by law were given to cook. Most of the children who ate the mid-day meals at school found it satisfying both qualitatively and in quantity.

### **Impact of the school meals**

The teachers of the schools interviewed claimed that the school meals had an effect on the school attendance. The teacher in three schools said that the mid-day meals scheme not only boosted daily attendance among his students, but also helped to keep them in class for the duration of the school day. The teachers said that student attendance had increased noticeably following the introduction of the mid-day meals because "the meals we provided here were so much better than what the children were getting at home." One teacher told us that some of the students were also attending the school just for having mid-day meals and returned home after having them. Teachers in five out of eleven schools also reported a surge in daily attendance, which all of them attributed mainly to the school meal program. Teachers in all schools said that the children's academic performance had improved because they no longer got hungry during the school day.

The field research indicates that cooked mid-day meals have now become a permanent part of the daily routine of primary schools in Sikkim. The government is continuing to increase both the funding and the quality requirements for the Mid-Day Meals Scheme. The Centre is providing Rs.1.58 per student per day as cooking conversion cost against 0.50 paise per student per day from the State Government for primary students and the Centre is giving Rs.2.10 per student per day as cooking conversion cost against 0.50 paise per student per day from the State Government for upper -primary students

In all the schools the cooks were appointed for cooking the food. The appointment of cooks has ensured that the preparation of the mid-day meal does not interfere with classroom activity. The study found that cooked mid-day meals have become part of the daily routine of the schools. Cooks had been hired in most schools and the meals did not seem to greatly disrupt classroom activities. Several teachers also credited the mid-day meals with putting an end to classroom hunger and thus improving the students' academic performance.

Many teachers believed that the meal programme was responsible for increasing enrolment and attendance at their schools, though most of them explained that the meals mainly attracted younger children. The school meals had boosted the enrolment and attendance of the youngest primary school children.

Close supervision and regular inspections are essential to achieve higher quality standards. Better monitoring also helps to eradicate petty corruption, such as the pilferage of food by various intermediaries.

### **Advantages of the Mid-day meal scheme**

On the basis of the study it was found that there are certain advantages of the scheme, which are as follows:

#### **Provision of Quality Meals**

The Government, NGOs and the public private partnership organisations have made schools in Sikkim a place of attraction for children who were not able to afford decent meal in their homes. The variety in food items served everyday is guaranteed with complete satisfaction of the parents and children. The varied menu also sustains the interest of children. In mid-day meal programme the special attention is being paid to cleanliness and hygiene of cooked food. This also guarantees that the food that the children do not fall ill on consuming it.

#### **Development of Good Food Habits and Social Equity among Children**

The scheme has been successful in developing good food habits among children. Teachers also instruct the students regarding good food habits. Children learn good habits such as: washing hands before and after meals, chew their food properly, do not waste food, do not scatter food while eating, clean the sitting place, eat in rows and discipline, provide help in cooking, cleaning utensils and keeping them on proper place. The scheme provides an opportunity where children of all groups and communities to sit together and have their meals. The children also learn to wait for their turn. The children also learnt serving food to others.

#### **Employment Generation**

A sustainable means of livelihood has been provided to persons to effectively implement the scheme vide appointment of cooks, computer operators, helpers for cooking etc.

#### **Transparency in MDM**

Weekly menu information is permanently displayed on notice boards or even painted on the walls of the school to make everybody aware about the Programme. Every person is allowed to check the expenditure and other statements. Involvement of SDMC (School Development and Management Committee) and PTA (Parent Teacher Association) in the Programme also makes it transparent. Important points for inspection are also circulated.

Maintenance of proper record is very important for successful running of any programme. All of the school having MDM keep the record and maintain registers for food grains and buying of vegetables and dals.

The register includes detail about the funds received for conversion cost and cooking cost, daily attendance of the cook, daily attendance of children, item bought and served. All schools have a display board on which the information regarding the donor and amount/nature of donation given and the item on which the expenditure is incurred is mentioned. This provides transparency with regard to fund flow and utilization of funds.

Software has been developed for effective MIS reporting. External evaluation agency is also earmarked. The SIERT conducts the independent external evaluation. Participation of community in the programme also ensures that there is complete transparency in the Programme.

### **Development of Social Equity**

Children were not discriminated in the schools on the ground of caste, gender, religion, creed or disability, while serving cooked food to children in schools. All children are treated equally irrespective of their differences.

### **Community's Participation in MDM**

One of the good practices of MDM is the participation of community members in MDM of the school. It is noted that sometimes the parents and community members oversee MDM while cooking and at the time of serving. Sometimes they do taste the cooked food before serving the food to the children. Community was also participating by the way of providing firewood and utensils.

School managements should also be encouraged to draw on the support of the community. Gram Panchayats and Village Education Committees may be approached for arranging community members to regularly, on a rotation basis, help the school management in ensuring efficient cooking, serving and cleaning operations. The involvement of teachers and community members in ensuring that children eat together in a spirit of camaraderie and develop sensitivity to their peers with different abilities, by offering them precedence, and instilling values of equality and cooperation would be very valuable support to the implementation of the programme. Support of the community members, including mothers groups, could also be solicited to ensure that children wash their hands with soap before eating, use clean plates and glasses, avoid littering and wastage of food, and clean their plates, rinse their hands and mouth after eating.

MDM Scheme also offers wide opportunity of self-employment to poor women who could constitute self-help groups. Such groups can take the responsibility of cooking and serving mid day meal with the overall assistance of the local level implementing agency. Mid Day Meal Scheme can provide the groups the scope for income generating activities such as growing & supplying vegetables, etc., Mid Day Meal Scheme could also provide opportunity for involvement of SHGs in the management of the programme, thus ensuring that teaching-learning processes in the classroom are not affected, while SHGs take responsibility for regular the procurement, cooking and distribution process. In the selection priority should be given to SHGs with membership of poor women, and whose children are participating in the MDM programme.

School managements may also be encouraged to seek local support for drawing out varied, but wholesome and nutritious menus. School Managements should maintain a roster of community members who will be involved in the programme. Community members should be encouraged to their observations on the implementation of the scheme and the School Management should make available a register for regular recording of such observations.

### **High Attendance Rate**

High attendance rate is a good practice in the state with regard to MDM. With the serving of cooked food, MDM appears to have raised the attendance of children in schools.

### **Some suggestions for preparation of nutritious and economical Mid- Day Meal:**

The Mid-Day Meal programme does not merely aim to provide a cooked meal, but one satisfying prescribed nutritional norms. At the same time, this has to be done within certain cost norms. Following are some suggestions which would help in achieving the twin-objectives:-

- Food grains must be stored in a place away from moisture, in air tight containers/bins to avoid infestation.
- Rice should preferably be parboiled or unpolished.
- 'Single Dish Meals' using broken wheat or rice and incorporating some amount of a pulse or soyabeans, a seasonal vegetable/green leafy vegetable, and some amount of edible oil will save both time and fuel besides being nutritious.
- Cereal pulse combination is necessary to have good quality protein. The cereal pulse ratio could range from 3:1 to 5:1.
- Sprouted pulses have more nutrients and should be incorporated in single dish meals.
- Leafy vegetables when added to any preparation should be thoroughly washed before cutting and should not be subjected to washing after cutting.

- Soaking of rice, dal, bengal gram etc. reduces cooking time. Wash the grains thoroughly and soak in just sufficient amount of water required for cooking.
- Rice water if left after cooking should be mixed with dal if these are cooked separately and should never be thrown away.
- Cooking must be done with the lid on to avoid loss of nutrients.
- Over cooking should be avoided.
- Reheating of oil used for frying is harmful and should be avoided.
- Leafy tops of carrots, radish, turnips etc should not be thrown but utilized in preparing mid day meals
- Only “iodised salt” should be used for cooking mid-day meals.

**Mid-Day Meal not to adversely affect teaching-learning:**

There persists a widely held belief that provision of cooked meals disrupts classroom processes: that teachers spend too much time in supervising the cooking operations to the detriment of academic timetables. Teachers should, however, be involved in ensuring that (a) good quality, wholesome food is served to children, and (b) the actual serving and eating is undertaken in a spirit of togetherness, under hygienic conditions, and in an orderly manner so that the entire process is completed in 30-40 minutes. It should however, be ensured that the food prepared is tasted by 2 – 3 adults including at least one teacher before it is served to children.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Mid Day Meal programme is one of the most important programmes of the Government to encourage children to come to schools and participate in the learning process without worrying for their meal, especially that of day time. The programme in the holistic manner helps in bringing back all school going age children back to schools, improve retention ratio of school children and arrest dropout rate besides providing nutritious meals to growing children. The State has done commendable work in implementation of Mid-Day Meal Programme by coverage of institutions and children as per plan; working days on which meals were served; percentage of meals served, etc. There was, however, short utilisation of funds in overall terms, less utilisation of funds in Kitchen-cum-Store, transport assistances, etc. The Department will further improve the implementation of Mid-Day Meal if suitable measures are taken to absorb the funds allocated.

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