



A Sociological Study of Mid-Day Meal Programme

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu first implemented a forerunner of the mid-day meals scheme. 12 Crore children currently covered by the scheme, making it the largest school lunch programme in the world. It is one of the few that prompted by an explicit concern with human rights. In Uttar Pradesh various steps are taken by the State Government in implementing the educational schemes with the assistance of Central Government. In the educational session of 2012-13 U.P. is just behind of target in case of coverage of school and no. of working days and more efforts are required to cover the more children.

Keywords: Mid-day Meal Programme, National Policy, Primary Education, Right to Food

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Today, one hundred and twenty countries include school lunch programmes as part of their national policies. Yet just one hundred years ago, only a few local charities in a few European cities used to provide meal children. In other words, a programme type that existed in the past as an occasional charity project exists today around the world as a common social benefits programme.

Various efforts to fight malnutrition have existed since 1920s. In 1974, India proclaimed a national policy on children, which opened the path for a variety of national programmes 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, immunizations, pre-school education and check-ups to pre-school children, infants, pregnant women and nursing mothers. The programme has been successful at reducing the number of severely malnourished young children-seeing declines from 15.35% of the population to 8% of the population. Whole this programme has been very successful, programme services stop at the age of 6, leaving school children unaccounted for efforts the reduce malnutrition in school children have been more piecemeal and slower in emerging. For instance, the state of Tamil Nadu has had a successful state-wide school lunch programme since 1982, while the National Programme of Nutritional support to primary education has been on the books since 1995 but was largely ignored until recently. Thus, school children have been largely left out of malnutrition schemes that focused substantially on infants and mothers or worked only in certain areas.

This changed following an Indian Supreme Court decision on November 28, 2001. This landmark decision directed all state governments to introduce hot mid-day meals in any school that received government assistance. While there are certainly many implementation problems facing the new programme, 12 crore children are currently covered by the scheme, making it the largest school lunch programme in the world. It is one of the few that was prompted by an explicit concern with human rights. The Supreme Court decision occurred after a case was brought through public litigation, by a human rights organization, 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 programmes that existed on paper, into programmes that exist in schools. The Indian Supreme Court was instrumental in the Indian case in implementing the mid-day meals scheme.

The state of Tamil Nadu first implemented a forerunner of the mid-day meals scheme. The state of Tamil Nadu is located in the 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 began experimenting with school lunches in primary schools. The corporation of Madras introduced the schemes in an effort to alleviate malnutrition and to encourage school attendance.

Following this voluntary organizations began funding school lunches in other schools, across Tamil Nadu. In 1956, a 'People's movement' for organized charity was started that focused on school improvement. That year school lunches began operating in 8000 elementary schools providing lunch for 2 lakh children. Today, Tamil Nadu has one of the most efficiently organized school lunch systems in India. Every primary school has three staff members who deal solely with the school meals programme: a cook, a helper and an organizer who handles logistics and

accounts. All of the children in the state are covered by the programme. In 2003, an independent survey conducted by the origin and growth of school lunch programme centre for Equity studies, New Delhi reported that "It was a joy to observe the Mid-day meal in Tamil Nadu- a living example of what can be achieved when quality safe guards 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 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 programme was intended to give a boost to universalization of primary education, by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously impacting on nutrition of student in primary classes. Under this programme, the Central Government was to supply all government-aided primary schools with 100 gms of wheat or rice per student per day, free of cost. The cost of collecting and transporting the grain from the nearest food corporation of India godown, 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 Rs. 50 per quintal. The amount of food grains and reimbursement was to be determined by student enrolment and attendance. While the programme 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 I to V subject to a minimum attendance of 80 percent." While this kind of transfer is the heart of the conditional cash transfer programme 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 school enrollment but they didn't 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 improved 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 programme was designed to help universalize 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 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 in drought-affected areas. Overall responsibility for the programmes remained at the level of the state, such as providing infrastructure, making the logistic and administrative arrangements and all other financial costs not provided by the central government. The revised guidelines are much more detailed than the 1995 guidelines, including the designation of committees to oversee the programme at the national, state, district and block levels, and a number of admissions that the meals should be of good quality that 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 seems to have had the desired effect on the laggard states, 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 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 programme as a charity measure for instance, beginning in 2001 the domestic NGOs, the Sri Veer Vinayaka Janaserva Trust and Akshaya Patra began to provide meals in different districts. The revised guidelines even include "Detailed Guidelines for associating NGOs in mid-day meal programme." These include the required caloric content of the meals, a non-discrimination requirement a liability statement absolving the central government of liability and accounting requirements. The non-discrimination requirement is particularly interesting due to the important role that caste discrimination plays in Indian society. One of the 'Socializing' aspects of the meals was thought to be that they would bring children together of different castes and reduce discrimination in the future.

2. RIGHT TO FOOD:

The Indian Supreme Court decision, finding in favour of the right to food, also issued orders and appointed commissioners to oversee eight food schemes including the mid-day meal programme. All of these schemes already existed in some form, but the supreme court order "converted the benefits 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. In addition to the work of voluntary organizations, the frame of human rights was important for the implementation of the mid-day meals 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 a life at all, and particularly a life of dignity, without nourishment. The human right to food is recognized in the universal declaration of human. The other schemes are the Integrated Child Development Services, 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 Programme mid-day meal in Uttar Pradesh has given an impetus to the spread of education in the recent years. Various steps taken by the State Government in implementing Educational Schemes 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 objectives of Right to Education Act in the state.

Table-1: Coverage of Schools:

S.No.	Stage	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13	
		Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage
1	Primary	108390	106545	107546	106309	116107	110051
2	Up. Pr.	51881	47182	46530	51798	53499	52402

In the educational session of 2010-11 at the primary level one lakh eight thousand three hundred ninety schools were approved to cover while one lakh six thousand three hundred and forty five were covered. Just behind of the target but it may be considered satisfactory. At the upper primary level fifty one thousand eight hundred eighty one schools were approved to cover but forty seven thousand one hundred eighty two were covered. Just behind of the target but it may be considered satisfactory. In the educational session of 2011-12 one lakh seven thousand five hundred forty six schools were approved to cover but one lakh six thousand three hundred and nine were covered at the primary level while at the upper primary level the target was to cover to schools forty six thousand five hundred thirty and more than the target fifty one thousand seven hundred ninety eight schools were covered. In the last educational session of 2012-13 at the primary level one lakh sixteen thousand one hundred seven schools were approved to cover while one lakh ten thousand fifty one were covered while at the upper primary level fifty three thousand four hundred ninety nine schools were approved to cover while fifty two thousand four hundred and two schools were covered.

Table-2: Coverage of Children:

S.No.	Stage	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13	
		Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage
1	Primary	15170833	8685569	14505991	8479926	14087769	7638993
2	Upper Primary	5832249	2628708	5872175	3130922	5892528	3052740

In the educational session of 2010-11 one crore fifty one lakh seventy thousand eight hundred thirty three children were approved to cover while eighty six lakh eighty five thousand five hundred sixty nine were covered. While at the upper primary level fifty eight lakh thirty two thousand two hundred forty nine were approved to cover but twenty six lakh twenty eight thousand seven hundred eight children were covered. In the educational session of 2011-12 one corer forty five lakh five thousand nine hundred ninety one children were approved to cover while eighty four lakh seventy nine thousand nine hundred twenty six were covered only at the primary level. At the upper primary level fifty eight lakh seventy two thousand one hundred seventy five were approved to cover but thirty one lakh thirty thousand nine hundred twenty two were covered. In the educational session of 2012-13 one crore forty lakh eighty seven thousand seven hundred sixty nine children were approved to cover at the primary level while seventy six lakh thirty eight thousand nine hundred ninety three were covered. At the primary level fifty eight lakh ninety two thousand five hundred twenty eight children were approved to cover while thirty lakh fifty two thousand seven hundred forty were covered.

Table-3: No. of working days:

S.No.	Stage	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13	
		Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage
1	Primary	220	224	220	225	234	215
2	Upper Primary	220	224	220	226	234	216

Number of working days (approved) in which mid-day meal was provided to the children in the educational session of 2010-11 at the primary level no of working days (approved) were 220 while 224 days were covered. In case of upper primary level 220 days were approved while 224 days were covered. In the educational session of 2011-12, 220 days were approved at the primary level and days covered were 225. In case of upper primary level 220 days were approved and 226 days were covered. In the educational session of 2012-13 at the primary level 234 days were approved while covered days were 215 and at the upper primary level 234 days were approved and covered days were 216.

4. CONCLUSION:

The case the Indian mid-day meals scheme is an interesting case which examines emerging social policy, particularly, in the developing world, as well as the right to food. The mid-day meals scheme works to improve the nutrition of a large number of school children in India, which is likely to lead to better development prospects for the country as a whole. School lunch programmes in developed countries fit somewhat into welfare state models, the welfare state is less strong in developing countries. Child malnutrition in India is extremely, higher than the developing country average. According to the Indian National Family Health Survey, the members of malnourished children consistently remain in the high 40% dropping in the last survey one percentage point. It is observed that the implementation of the mid-day meals scheme would not have been possible without the efforts of voluntary organizations. The role of voluntary organizations, groups outside of government, in creating and pushing social policy forward is an important component in the study of social policy. In addition, the creation of the mid-day meals scheme within the context of a human right to food has helped signal a way in which states can meet their commitments to international human rights treaties regarding the right to food. By making school meals a legal entitlement, as in India, other countries could reach their goals of promoting development and improving human rights.

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