

Mid day meals and food security among children: Assuring nutritional security of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: MDM Programme has opened a new initiative to safeguard children from hunger and to curtail drop-out rate and malnutrition. The study analyse the proposal and progress of MDM scheme in Tamil Nadu.

Methods/Statistical analysis: The study is based on secondary data. The data has been collected from the website of Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Findings: Tamil Nadu is the pioneering state to implementing a feeding programme to children outside the home. In 2001-02, the nutritious meal scheme for school children aged 5 to 15 years covered 6.46 million beneficiaries in Tamilnadu. But in 2010-11, there were 42, 824 meal centres covering 5.77 million children. The benefits of MDM are not limited to enrolments only. It has significant impact on class room activities, intellectual capacity and social development. Tamil Nadu has also covered high school students under the mid-day meal scheme. The proposal of the scheme is capable of curving malnutrition and ensuring food security of children. The contribution of the state is outstanding and coverage of the scheme across the state is expanding year by year.

Application/Improvements: A comprehensive and elaborate mechanism for monitoring and supervision of the MDM Scheme is essential for complete eradication of malnutrition and an emphasis must given for facilitating safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities within the school premises.

Keywords: Mid day meal scheme, promise, nutritional security, implementation, progress.

1. Introduction

India is the seventh largest country in terms of geographical area, second most populated and twelfth largest economy in the world. The decadal growth rate is 17.6 percent and average literacy is 74.04 percent as per 2011 census. Despite the higher growth rate, the problem of malnutrition, anemia and iodine deficiency are common among children in India over the years. Approximately 94 percent of children in the age of 6 to 9 are mildly, moderately or severely underweight. About 67.5 percent of children less than 5 year and 69 percent of adolescent girls suffer from anemia due to iron and folic acid deficiency [1]. To eliminate hunger and under nutrition, the government of India has implement several initiatives, one approach is price control through public distribution system, second through food for work programme, and third is large scale feeding programme such as the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) for children in 0-6 years age group and pregnant and lactating mothers [2] and mid day meals programme for school going children.

Indian Government formally launches a school-feeding program in 2001, known as the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). This program was implemented to address issues of food security, lack of nutrition and access to education throughout the nation. It has been implemented with primary objective of providing free cooked lunches to children at school, besides this, other objectives include improving the nutritional status of children, to achieve regularity in school attendance of poor children and helping them to concentrate on classroom activities, [3] thereby increasing the enrollment, retention and attendance rates. Children from lowest strata of the society do not have access to receive daily food with adequate calorie intakes. This scheme is solution as well as a path to human development. Gradually, India's Mid Day Meal program reaching out to about 120 million children is the world's largest school feeding program. In contrast with all this achievements, children in India still suffer from malnutrition and hunger. This paper analyses proposal of mid day meal scheme and its development in Tamil Nadu over the years.

2. Background of the study

Tamil Nadu is one of India's most progressive states, has achieved top ranking in several economic and social indicators. The state has achieved fifth position in terms of GDP and third in terms of industrial development. Tamil

Nadu's indicators are higher compared to other states and the country's national average in literacy (80 percent), the sex ratio (995 females per 1,000 males), (98 per cent) institutional health coverage and in terms of enrolment in primary education (100 per cent). According to 2011 census Tamil Nadu is the most urbanized state with an urban population of 48.45 per cent. Tamil Nadu has a child population of 6.8 million, with 10 per cent of children in the 0-6 age group, as per 2011 census. Over the years, the state has adopted progressive child and women policies by introducing path-breaking social policy interventions. Perhaps the best known example is the noon meal scheme introduced in schools in the early 1960s. The scheme has opened a new path to protect children from hunger and malnutrition and increase enrolment, thereby restrain drop-out in primary classes. But at the same time the situation is still alarming. More than 30 per cent of children in Tamil Nadu aged under 5 years are underweight. More than 30 per cent of adolescent girls (15-19 years) and half of pregnant women (15-19 years) are anaemic. The nutritional security is an important challenge for ruling government in the state and achievement of nutritional security is essential for human development.

3. Mid day meals in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu was the first state that comes up with a massive initiative for preparing noon meal programme to school going children in India. Mid-Day Meal Scheme was launched in Primary Schools in Tamilnadu during 1982 for classes I-V and to Pre-school in Rural areas for Children of 2-5 years. From 1982, the scheme was subsequently fully stretched out to Nutritious Meal Centres in urban areas and the scheme was further extended to school students in the age group of 10 to 15 in 1984. Later through various government policies, the program became a gigantic and large number of students receives the benefit. The school going children belong to 1 to V Standard receives nutritious meal throughout the year, excluding holidays and students in the VI to X Standard receive the meal in all the school working days, at least 220 days in a year. Amartya Sen has observed that in India, hunger is not enough of a political priority. The public expenditure on health is very low and funds allocated to programmes like child nutrition remain unspent. It is only in States like Tamil Nadu that shows a political will and commitment to tackle these issues by setting goals like achieving the status of a "Malnutrition Free State". In terms of the number of beneficiaries covered, Tamil Nadu's noon-cum-nutritious meal scheme is the largest in India.

3.1 Promise of nutritional security

As a very important strategy to overcome malnutrition among children, Government of India formally mandated Mid-Day Meal programme all over the country and Tamil Nadu is a pioneering state with regard to Mid Meal Programme. Gradually MDM in Tamil Nadu has led to an impetus to the spread of education in the recent years. A series of actions taken by the State Government with the assistance of Central Government in implementing educational schemes has brought a remarkable improvement in access, enrolment and gradually the nutritional health has to be improved. By the implementation of mid day meal scheme, the government offer a menu for preparing daily food in order to achieve proposed calories. (Table 1) shows daily menu of food offered under MDMS.

Table 1. Daily menu under MDMS

Day	Menu
Monday	White Rice, Vegetable Sambar with one boiled egg (one banana for those who do not eat egg)
Tuesday	White Rice, Vegetable Sambar with one boiled egg (one banana for those who do not eat egg) and 20 gms of boiled green gram or Bengal gram (alternatively)
Wednesday	White Rice, Vegetable Sambar with one boiled egg (one banana for those who do not eat egg)
Thursday	White Rice, Vegetable Sambar with one boiled egg (one banana for those who do not eat egg)
Friday	White Rice, Vegetable Sambar with one boiled egg (one banana for those who do not eat egg) and 20 gms of boiled potato

Source: Ministry Of Human Resource Development (2013)

The scheme offer nutritious food to children including both veg and non veg food items in order to achieve minimum calorie intakes, thereby avoid malnutrition. The menu has been prepared in consultation with nutrition experts to cater to the nutrition requirements and taste of children. The scheme ensures that every school going

child avails its right to nutritious food in the country. (Table 2) shows feeding scale per beneficiary per day in order to acquire offered nutrition.

Table 2. Feeding Scale per Beneficiary per day – Primary & Upper Primary

Sl. No	Food Item	Primary (calorie -450, protein – 12 grams)	Upper Primary (calorie - 700, protein – 20 grams)	IX & X (calorie -700, protein – 20 grams)
1	Rice	100 gram	150 gram	150 gram
2	Dall	15 gram	15 gram	15 gram
3	Oil	3 gram	3 gram	3 gram
4	Salt	1.9 gram	1.9 gram	1.9 gram
5	Vegetables, condiments and Fuel	70 gram	80 gram	80 gram
6	Egg	46 gram / egg 5 days a week	46 gram / egg 5 days a week	46 gram / egg 5 days a week
7	Green gram / Bengal gram	20 gram (Every Tuesday)	20 gram (Every Tuesday)	20 gram (Every Tuesday)
8	Potatoes	20 gram (Every Friday)	20 gram (Every Friday)	20 gram (Every Friday)

Source: Ministry Of Human Resource Development (2013)

Scheme offer protein rich food, consist of, 20 grms each of potato, green gram (full form) and black Bengal gram (full form) per beneficiary in a week in place of egg in every week. However, the combination of potatoes, channa dal and green gram has more calories and proteins, which will help the students to free from class room hunger. To achieve the objectives of nutritional security prescribed by the guidelines of Mid Day Meal Scheme, the following nutritional content has been achieved. The nutritious noon meal containing a caloric value of 450 to 700 and 12 gm to 20 gm of protein is served every day with the minimum ration of 142 gm to 266 gm per day per beneficiary. The meal is prepared with rice, dhal, oil and a vegetable. In addition a boiled egg is given daily. If the meals are nutritious, it will facilitate the healthy growth of children avoid class room hunger. The objective is Improve enrolment, retention and attendance in schools. Mid-day meals contribute not only to the right to food but also to the right to education.

3.2 Implementation in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is the first state in India which had exhibited a massive initiation in noon meal programme to children outside the home. Neither a child that is hungry, nor a child that is ill can be expected to learn through providing a meal programme at local level. Realizing this need the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme was launched in primary schools during 1962-63. Mid-Day Meal improves three areas: 1. School attendance 2. Reduce dropouts 3. A beneficial impact on children's nutrition. Through the implementation of Mid Day Meal Programme, the school is not only a center for providing knowledge but also a place for ensuring health of sprouting India. The scheme covered all the districts of Tamilnadu. 27447 primary schools and 15043 upper primary schools incur the benefits of mid day meal scheme. The total number of cook cum helper in both primary and upper primary is 108643. The ratio school to cook cum helper is 1:2. That is atleast 2 cook cum helper occupy in each schools. Besides the availability of cooks and helpers, a great attention is given for setting up kitchen, store room and other infrastructures. By facilitating basic infrastructure, the proposed objectives have to be achieved and are important for successful implementation.

Tamil Nadu has achieved this desired outcome through rapid implementation of the scheme in primary, secondary and higher secondary schools and political will and commitment on the part of rulers to tackle ongoing issues strengthen the programme. Through various welfare initiatives, the state becomes forefront in human development. In spite of standing in many development parameters, many challenges continued to be unchanged, which retards the potentiality of development. Caste and gender-related poverty issues are prominent and these have a direct impact on the vulnerability of children in Tamil Nadu. At the same time, children are suffered from regional and social disparities, which pose a great problem in some regions and especially among socially excluded communities such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other highly disadvantaged and deprived sections of the society. Such socially excluded section requires assistance, especially childrens. Mid day meal programme indirectly contribute immensely for the welfare of deprived sections of the society. The scheme provides nutritious food to children outside the home together with education. As a result the mortality of children due malnutrition and hunger is reduced at a considerable rate. The scheme was implemented in primary schools in the initial period later it was

extended to almost all the schools and a wide coverage was achieved in both rural and urban areas. (Table 3) shows approval and coverage of schools under mid day meal scheme in Tamil Nadu.

Table 3. coverage of schools in Tamil Nadu

Sl. No	Stage	2010-11		2011-12		2012-13	
		Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage	Approved	Coverage
1	Primary	28027	27075	27526	27440	28415	27447
2	Upper Primary	14797	15360	9045	9367	15372	15043
	total	42824	42435	36571	36807	43787	42490

Source: Ministry Of Human Resource Development (2013)

In 2012-13, 42490 schools provide noon meals to children, but it was 42435 schools in 2010-11. There is a gap between the number of approved and coverage. In 2011-12, number of approved schools is 36571, covered schools is 36807. There is an over coverage of 236 schools during this year. Except 2011-12, 2010-11 and 2012-13 year data shows under coverage. Comparatively, the area is expanded over the years and more children get the benefits of Mid Day Meals Programme.

3.3. Progress of mid day meal scheme in Tamil Nadu

One of the important achievements of the state is that there has been constant improvement in the supply of food under the MDMS. The MDMS was introduced during the pre independence period in rural areas of Tamil Nadu in 1925 for preschool children in the age-group 2 to 5 years and for primary school children in the age group of 5 to 9 years [4]. During 1982, along with education emphasis was given more on nutritious food while including ingredients like different vegetables, eggs, pulses and cereals. Later, from 1982 onwards, this scheme was extended to urban areas and even old age pensioners were covered under the scheme from 1983 [5]. In 1982, the then Chief Minister, M G Ramachandran (MGR) launched one of the largest expansions of feeding through the Chief Minister's Nutritious Noon-Meals Programme, a programme solely targeted to combat hunger and get children to school. From 1984, the scheme covered school students of 10-15 years of age. And from December 1995 pregnant women were brought under the scheme. Thus the Chief Minister's Nutritious NMP of 1982, was mainly aimed at providing 400 calories of food to the poor children in the state in the age group of 2 to 10. It was estimated that under the programme nearly 55.96 lakhs children were fed in about 20,747 Child Welfare Centers and 32,470 elementary schools costing Rs. 120 crores per year [6].

A boiled egg was supplied to children along with nutritious meal once in a period of 14 days from 1998. The period of supply one egg in a fortnight was reduced to one boiled egg once in a week. Meanwhile, a number of reforms are made by state Government for strengthen MDMS yield fruits. These initiatives includes that the teachers who involved in the NMP were relieved from the meal related responsibilities and in their place a cook and a helper were appointed for every 500 children in the school. Tamil Nadu was the first state in the country made an initiation to implement institutional feeding programme to combat the malnutrition and other food related problems of students. The state has recognized that the social investment in nutrition could reduce health care costs thereby reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases, improving the productivity and economic growth, promoting educational attainment, intellectual capacity and ensure social security. The coverage of the school meal component alone, even leaving out the pre-school part, has been quite massive throughout. In 2001-02, the nutritious meal scheme for school children aged 5 to 15 years covered 6.46 million beneficiaries, consisting of 5.98 million in rural areas and the rest in urban areas. However, with the State undergoing a demographic transition, the numbers have since declined. In 2010-11, there were 42, 824 meal centres covering 5.77 million children, with 5.47 million of them coming from rural areas. In terms of the stage of education, 3.20 million were in the primary schools of classes 1 to 5, 1.82 million in the elementary education stage of classes 6 to 8 and the remaining 0.75 million were in classes 9 and 10. The wide coverage of the scheme throughout the state indicates the success in implementation and monitoring.

4. Conclusion

Food is a very important aspect of human life. It determines our character, our behavior and most importantly, provides energy for running daily businesses. The ultimate aim of the Mid-day meal programmes is to improve the nutritional status of poor children. Also to attract them to schools and reduce dropout rate. Besides this, the programme also gives assistance in the eradication of child labour in the way of providing food from schools. This makes the Mid-day Meal Programme one of the important schemes in building India. In 2001-02, the nutritious meal scheme for school children aged 5 to 15 years covered 6.46 million beneficiaries in Tamilnadu. But in 2010-11, there were 42, 824 meal centres covering 5.77 million children. The benefits of MDM are not limited to enrolments only. It has significant impact on class room activities, intellectual capacity and social development. Tamil Nadu has also covered high school students under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The contribution of state government for mid-day meals is much higher in addition to what the Centre allocates in comparison with other states. It is clear that mid day meal scheme is an effective policy to control malnutrition and hunger in Tamil Nadu. This scheme has also helped in improving attendance of children in schools and also, has played a very important role in imparting education and assuring nutrition to the economically and socially backward sections of the society. This makes Mid-day Meal Scheme a welfare scheme. A comprehensive and elaborate mechanism for monitoring and supervision of the MDM Scheme is essential for complete eradication of malnutrition and an emphasis must given for facilitating safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities within the school premises. There is wide gap between approval and coverage of schools. Government intervention is required to check the reason for this variation, and then only the complete coverage is achieved.

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