

Chapter I

Mid Day Meal Programme - A Historical Perspective

Mid day meal programme is the popular name for the school meal programme in India. It involves provision of lunch/snacks/meal free of cost to school children on school working days.

The key objectives of the programme are:

- ▶ protecting children from classroom hunger,
- ▶ increasing school enrolment and attendance,
- ▶ improving socialisation among children belonging to all castes,
- ▶ addressing the issue of malnutrition among children and
- ▶ social empowerment of women by creating employment.

Mid day meals, as a public welfare concept in India, dates back to 1925 when such a project was launched for the underprivileged children in the then Madras Corporation area. One of the pioneers, Madras Corporation started providing cooked meals to children in Corporation schools in the Madras city; the programme was later introduced on a larger scale in 1960s. Tamil Nadu's mid-day meal programme is among the best known in the country. The programme was introduced at a national level by the government of India in the late 50s and early 60s and later in the 80s as a centrally sponsored programme.

Besides Madras, several other states/cities of India too have had the mid-day meal programme prior to the Government of India's initiative. In 1928, Keshav Academy of Calcutta introduced compulsory Mid-Day Tiffin for school boys on payment basis at the rate of four *annas* per child per month. A school lunch programme was started in parts of Kerala in 1941; followed by Bombay implementing a free mid-day meal scheme in 1942, who with UNICEF assistance distributed skimmed milk powder to children aged between 6-13 years. Another project was launched in Bangalore city in 1946 where the scheme provided cooked rice with curds to the children. In 1953, Uttar Pradesh Government introduced a scheme, on voluntary basis, to provide meals consisting of boiled or roasted or sprouted grams, ground-nut, puffed rice, boiled potatoes or seasonal fruits. Several states introduced such schemes during 1950s, with the aid of international agencies like the UNICEF, FAO and WHO. An Expanded Nutrition Programme was launched jointly by the Government of India and the FAO, WHO, UNICEF during 1958-59, which subsequently developed, into the Applied Nutrition Programme (ANP). Under this, demonstration feeding programmes for the school children wherein nutritious food was cooked by the women groups and fed to the children under the nutrition education component¹.

Other international voluntary / charity organization like Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Church World Services (CWS), Co-operative of American Relief Every where (CARE), USA's Meals for Million also assisted this programme by providing nutritious foods and other assistance such as

- ▶ Co-operative of American Relief Everywhere (CARE) provided Corn Soya Meal (CSM) Balahar, bulgar wheat and vegetable oils.
- ▶ United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) joined hands for the supplementary feeding programme in India to combat malnutrition and provided milk powder/ peanut flour (protein rich foods) as well as imparting nutrition education.
- ▶ Church World Services (CWS) assisted in providing milk powder to Delhi and Madras Municipal Corporation.
- ▶ Meals for Million (USA) aimed at combating the menace of malnutrition globally. It supplied Multipurpose Food (MPF) and developed the Indian Version of MPF at Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysore. MPF is a versatile food that can be easily incorporated into snacks and biscuits (Nutro Biscuits), which are nutrient dense, particularly in terms of proteins and vitamins.

The idea of a National Mid-Day Meal Programme had been considered again and again for over a decade. In 1982, the idea of 'Food for Learning' with FAO commodity assistance was mooted. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls were to be covered under this programme. An overview of the MDM programme in India is given in Annexure I².

In 1983, the Department of Education of the Central Government after inter-ministerial consultations, prepared a scheme as per the guidelines of the World Food Programme (WFP). According to this scheme 13.6 million SC children and 10.09 million ST girls in classes I-V were to be covered in 15 states and 3 Union Territories, where the enrolment of SC /ST girls was less than 79 percent. The proposal was circulated among states and Union Territories (UTs). While many states expressed their willingness to implement the programme, others reported that there were some practical difficulties in implementing a mid day meal programme meant exclusively for SC and ST children particularly continuing when WFP assistance was withdrawn.

A programme with Central Government assistance for mid day meal for the benefit of children enrolled in primary schools throughout the country was considered during 1984-85, the rationale for the programme were:

- ▶ The Mid Day Meal Programme for primary schools could form the basis of an anti-poverty educational programme.
- ▶ Implementation of this programme for the children aged between 6-11 years may maximize enrolment and reduce school dropout rates, which were important from the viewpoint of universalisation of elementary education as well as achievement of higher literacy rates in the country.

This programme would also help in providing nutrition to the under-fed and under nourished children in rural areas.

The broad features of the programme were

- ▶ Supplying of food items providing 300 calories per day and 12-15 g protein per child with coverage of primary school children in a phased manner.

- ▶ Expenditure per child per day including expenses on administration to be 60paise.
- ▶ No elaborate administrative infrastructure to be built up.
- ▶ Funds required for the programme to come from provisions marked for poverty alleviation scheme.
- ▶ States should evolve suitable logistics and make arrangements for cooks, helpers, administration, supervision and monitoring.

It was recognized that the scheme had some inherent problems such as possibilities of leakage, inadequacy of buildings, non-attendance of teachers, and participation by non school-going children and misuse by those in charge of the programme. It was hoped that these problems would get addressed with time. However the programme was not approved as part of the subsequent annual plans, apparently due to resource constraints.

In December 1988, the Department of Education formulated a proposal for covering 994 ICDS blocks with concentration of SC/ST children @ Rs.1/- per child per day. The important element of this scheme was:

- ▶ The scheme should cover all children in primary classes in government and local body schools
- ▶ Mid day meals should be provided on all working days.
- ▶ CARE assistance, if any, should be excluded.
- ▶ Cereals and to the extent possible pulses, edible oils and condiments should be supplied to the schools through authorized state agencies.

In 1990-91, seventeen State governments were implementing the programme for primary school children between the age group of 6-11 years with varying degrees of coverage. Twelve states namely Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, and Uttar Pradesh were implementing Mid Day Meal Programme from their own resources. In three states namely Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal, the programme was implemented partially with assistance from CARE. As reported by Ministry of Human Resource and Development, thirteen States and five Union Territories were administering mid day meal programme as of December 1994.

The Present

MDMP - 'Nutrition Support to primary education' is considered as a means of providing free and compulsory universal primary education of satisfactory quality to all children below the age of 14 years.

A National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education commonly known as MID DAY MEAL PROGRAMME (MDMP) was re-launched by the then Prime Minister of India on 15th August 1995. It was aimed at improving enrolment, attendance and retention, while simultaneously improving the nutritional status of students in primary classes. Universalisation of primary

education being our national goal, MDMP was launched with the following objectives:

- ▶ Increase enrolment, improve school attendance as well as retention,
- ▶ Promote social integration,
- ▶ Improve nutritional status of the primary school children and
- ▶ Inculcate good food habits in children.

The programme envisaged the provision of cooked meals/ processed food of calorific value equivalent to 100g of wheat /rice for children studying in classes I- V in all Government, local body and Government aided primary schools free of cost. This recommendation was based on a study done by NNMB (1990-92) on dietary consumption patterns of rural children using a one-day 24-hour recall method. It was observed that the children had a deficit of the magnitude of 628 kcal and 6-7g protein in the daily diets. From the nutritional angle, the endeavor should be to bridge the average nutritional gap of 600 kcal through a balanced diet of cereals, pulses, fats and vegetables; the cereal component could be to the order of 60-90 percent of the calorie deficit or roughly 100g of food grains / child / day¹.

The programme which started in August 1995 has seen all India coverage in 1997-98 and the coverage of children under the programme has increased from 3.4 crores in 1995-96 to 10.5 crores in 2003-04 in about the same number of schools. However there were a lot of variations over the years with regard to implementation.

The coverage of more than 12 crore children in rural and urban areas under the scheme makes the mid day meal programme one of the largest nutrition support schemes in the world³.

Initially, it was perceived that the mode of delivery of nutritional support could be in the form of hot cooked meal, precooked food or food grains. Only four states viz. Gujarat, Kerala, Orissa and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry were providing cooked meals. All other states were providing dry rations supplied by Food Corporation of India (FCI) distributed under Public Distribution System (PDS) @ 3 kg of food grain per child to a family for ten months which would be equivalent to set norms for 100g /day / child for 200 school days (subject to a minimum attendance of 80 percent). Some states like Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir reported that they could not implement the programme due to resource constraints. Chandigarh and Delhi due to logistic problems continued to serve processed foods like fruit bread, biscuits and fruits. Lakshwadeep administration, which has been implementing its own MDMP, has since been exempted from participating in the national programme from 1997-98 as special case.

The MDMP is being implemented remarkably well in some states. The Pondicherry government has employed the state of art technology and has opened a centralized kitchen with latest food production gadgets and

sophisticated cooking techniques to ensure that food is cooked and delivered to the children in a safe and hygienic manner. Each central kitchen was catering to about 8,000-10,000 children. Similarly, the Tamil Nadu Government has initiated a locally structured institutional machinery to ensure that meals are delivered to the beneficiaries. Gujarat has an exclusive department overseeing the implementation of the scheme and has also been a pioneer in supplying fortified food to children. In Kerala, some teachers willingly contributed a portion of their salaries to ensure that conversion costs of raw to cooked food are met and the food is served to children regularly.

In April 2001, People's Union for Civil Liberties (Rajasthan) initiated the right to food litigation. This public interest litigation has covered a large range of issues relating to right to food, but the best known intervention by the court is on mid-day meals. On November 28, 2001 the Supreme Court of India gave directive making it mandatory for the state governments to provide cooked meals instead of 'dry rations'. In one of its many directions in the litigation the Supreme Court directed the government to fully implement its scheme of providing cooked meals to all children in primary schools. This landmark direction converted the mid-day meal scheme into a legal entitlement, the violation of which can be taken up in the court of law. The direction and further follow-up by the Supreme Court has been a major instrument in universalising the scheme. Excerpts from that Order are:

It is the case of the Union of India that there has been full compliance with regard to the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). However, if any of the State gives a specific instance of non-compliance, the Union of India will do the needful within the framework of the Scheme⁴.

- ▶ We direct the State Governments/ Union Territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary Schools with a prepared mid day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12g of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days. Those Governments providing dry rations instead of cooked meals must within three months (February 28, 2002) start providing cooked meals in all Governments and Government aided Primary Schools in all half the Districts of the State (in order of poverty) and must within a further period of three months (May 28, 2002) extend the provision of cooked meals to the remaining parts of the State
- ▶ We direct the Union of India and the FCI to ensure provision of fair average quality grain for the Scheme on time. The States/ Union Territories and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) are directed to do joint inspection of food grains. If the food grain is found, on joint inspection, not to be of fair average quality, it will be replaced by the FCI prior to lifting.

The direction was to be implemented from June 2002, but was violated by most States. But with sustained pressure from the court, media and in particular, from the Right to Food Campaign more and more states started providing cooked meals.

In May 2004 a new coalition government was formed at the centre, which promised universal provision of cooked meals fully funded by the centre. This 'promise' made in the Common Minimum Programme was followed by enhanced financial support to the states for cooking and building sufficient infrastructure. Given this additional support the scheme has expanded its reach to cover most children in primary schools in India.

The Tenth Plan⁵ made certain modifications in the MDMP in order to achieve the goals set in the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* programme; the modifications would be made in the scheme in the light of feedback received from evaluation studies, the experience gained from the working of the scheme, and the opinions of experts. The modifications would include the following:

- ▶ Expanding the programme to cover the children of the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative Innovative Education (AIE).
- ▶ Ending the present practice of distributing food grains and providing hot cooked meals or ready-to-eat food based on sound nutritional principles.
- ▶ Allowing adequate flexibility in the management of the programme by the local bodies/community through VECs, School Management Committees (SMCs),
- ▶ Fostering stronger community participation through Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and such other units of the school system in the implementation of the programme. Encouraging the participation of credible NGOs, wherever possible.
- ▶ Decentralizing the management of the programme to enable reduction in leakages and mismanagement.
- ▶ Providing funds in advance to the implementing agencies through the state nodal officer for the transportation of food grains.
- ▶ Limiting teachers' involvement in the programme to supervision activities.
- ▶ Extensive use of the computerized MIS (CMIS) net for monitoring purposes. External agencies are to be involved in monitoring and supervision to ensure greater accountability. Elected representatives will also be involved in supervision.
- ▶ Linkage with poverty alleviation programmes in rural and urban areas, adequate support of the Union Ministry of Health and the state Health Departments for the school health programme and support from the Department of Women and Child Development for nutrition education.
- ▶ A memorandum of understanding be entered into with the key stakeholders (state governments, local bodies, etc.) on the key parameters.

Item	Central Assistance in Rupees (Rs.)
Average cost of food grains	1.11
Average transport subsidy	0.08
Assistance for cooking cost	1.00
Assistance for management, monitoring and evaluation	0.02
Total	2.21

The central government has made the following fund allocations for providing mid day meal to primary school children (Table 1.1).

The implementation of the SC decision is wrought with trials and tribulations; cash-

strapped governments unable to meet the demands of allocating Rs. 2.50-Rs 2.75 per child per meal, inadequate infrastructure for building service units so that the cooked hot meal can be prepared and distributed under hygienic conditions and the lack of trained professionals to man these service units.

Mid Day Meal Scheme implementation across India

The implementation levels across India are shown in Figure 1.1⁷ as of 2003. Details of the implementation levels in different states as of September 2005 as stated by the official website are given in the Annexure II⁸. The figures indicate that the total number of students enrolled along with number of students availing of the meals, the Table also specifies the kind of implementation level i.e. whether full or partial as mentioned by the state to the *Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan*, Govt. of India and the nature of the meal i.e. cooked or otherwise.

A wide variety of meals are being served by various states Annexure III⁹. The total coverage of the MDM as of 2004 has been presented in Annexure IV⁸. There are some states where "Ready to Eat" or RTEs that include Biscuits, fruits, Roasted *Channa*, etc. are served to the children.

In response to the difficulties of 'on-site feeding' a new focus on delivering an appropriately-timed (with regard to effecting improvements in learning capacity) and high quality, consistent ration; the government is developing programme models that include less costly commodities and more efficient systems for the delivery of meals to school children.

Drawing on the private sector and NGOs for the school feeding programme overcomes many of the difficulties of on-site preparation of meals, and may be one of the many inexpensive ways to feed children in schools. The private sector in this case could be a local canteen or caterers (in cities) or an NGO.

An example of NGO and Government of India partnership is ISKCON supplying MDMs in Bangalore and Delhi. After this experience, the education Department issued guidelines to facilitate participation by NGOs. Under these guidelines, State Governments can select NGOs for the programme; and the food grains and transportation cost are made available to these NGOs who in turn take on the responsibility of converting the grains into a cooked meal.

Figure 1.1: Mid-day meal scheme implementation across India⁷



In Karnataka, nine NGOs are implementing cooked meal programme covering 57,608 children studying in 357 schools, under the overall supervision of the State Government¹⁰. In addition, ISKCON also was covering over 20,000 children studying in upper primary and secondary classes in the Bangalore rural district.

A model for public-private partnership also evolved in Hyderabad where Naandi Foundation manages a central kitchen to provide cooked meals to about 2 lakh children in Hyderabad.

Bangalore	1,20,000
Hubli/Dharwad	82,045
Jaipur	60,000
Vrindavan	37,000
Baran	9,300
Mangalore	5,550
Mysore	3,100
Hassan	2,144

The Akshaya Patra Foundation (ISKCON) has been providing free meals everyday to children studying in government schools in and around Bangalore city, Hubli, Mysore, Hassan and Mangalore in southern India. The Akshaya Patra Mid-day Meal Programme began serving 1500 children in July 2000 and was scaled up to 12,500 children by April 2001, over 23,000 children by April 2002, over 50,000 children in 2003, 90,000 children in March 2005. As of August 2005, 1,19,000 meals are served everyday in Bangalore. The programme has now been extended to Jaipur and Baran in Rajasthan (Table 1.2).. As of March 2006, 3,20,139 children are fed everyday¹¹. Their projected figures are to feed 10,00,000 underprivileged children by 2010.

Though even these programmes incur costs in monitoring and supervision, and the initial costs for developing school meal alternatives and making arrangements with vendors can be substantial. Programmes that utilize school canteens or caterers for school feeding programmes may offer the most economical approach to school feeding. However, the technical and logistical implications, and hence costs in training and supplies to improve the provision of food through these sources are not substantial.

In Andhra Pradesh, the MDMP being implemented in 5,82,388 schools covering 74.6 lac school children during the year 2002-03⁹. With the Centre providing rice free of cost and the programme is being implemented by organizations like DW CRA, DWCUA, Naandi and ISKCON.

For the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderbad, following their success with the pilot project the government chose Naandi and delegated them, the responsibility of preparing and distributing the mid-day meal. The midday meal scheme is also underway in Vishakapatnam benefiting 42,000 children and will soon commence in Bhopal, Jabalpur, Indore, Udaipur and Bhilwara serving a total of 2,68,000 children¹².

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Government, Naandi created the biggest central kitchen in Uppal (spread over 2 acres with built up

area of 14,000 sq ft), from where the midday meals are being supplied to 880 schools in the twin cities, benefiting 1.98 lakh children on all the school days.

Government-run MDMP successes: Gujarat has had an extremely effective Mid-Day-Meal Programme (MDMP). The Commissionerate with the Chief Minister as its Chairperson administers the MDMP. In this state, the Mid Day Meal (MDM) programme covering the age group 6-11 years in 53 *talukas* was introduced in the sixties as a Government sponsored programme.

About 5083 schools in 68 *talukas* were covered under this programme till October 1984. The Government of Gujarat extended the programme in the entire state to cover all the students in the age group of 6-11 years from 19th November 1984, for “mitigating malnutrition among the vulnerable groups.” The state Government felt that the provision of nutritious meals to primary school children could play a very crucial role in increasing the literacy rate.

In addition to the cooked food, Government of Gujarat also provides from their budgetary sources, a package of micro-nutrient supplements and medicines, like Vitamin A for the control of night blindness, tablet Albendazole for de-worming, and tablet Ferrous Sulphate as a control for iron deficiency, to all the primary school children to sustain the health standard along with the nutritional standard. This scheme is operative since 1993.

This ‘package’ of MDM along with de-worming and Iron tablets to combat anaemia as a ‘built-in’ component has been widely acclaimed by the Government of India, UNICEF, World Health Organization and other leading organizations.

The cooked MDM scheme was discontinued briefly in Gujarat from August ‘90 till October ‘91 and a new scheme “Food for Education” was introduced in its place wherein primary school children having 70% attendance were provided 10 kgs. of food grains free of cost per month. The MDM scheme however, was reintroduced from 15th January 1992. On an average 35.00 lakh children are provided Mid-Day Meal during 2003-04 (July-2003 to March-2004) per day¹³.

It would be wrong not to mention Tamil Nadu - the pioneer state of the MDMP, by far the greatest success story of all. In 2003, Tamil Nadu catered to approximately a total of 10 million children in the primary and middle schools and over 9 lac under-5 through the child welfare centers⁸.

One of the reasons for the success of this programme in this state can be attributed to the fact that the empowerment of women issue was also integrated into this scheme by providing greater opportunities for both women in rural and urban areas, preference being given to widows and destitute women.

As of 2003, 39,036 centres were functioning under the Rural Development Department and the total number of beneficiaries was 60,29,035. In addition 2082 centres functioning under the Commissioner of Municipal Administration

had a total number of 4,57,607 beneficiaries. A total of Rs. 403,02 crore provision for the MDMP was made for the year 2003-04⁸.

It can be said that in the long run that only those programmes that make good use of the educational infrastructure for delivery and logistics will be most efficient. The very fact that School Feeding Programmes (SFPs) do not require, for the most part, additional infrastructure means that they can be less expensive than other types of feeding programmes that distribute benefits to groups that are not in one location. With successes of the state-run MDMP like Gujarat, which run effectively through the school system itself it becomes evident that it is not necessary to have additional infrastructure that will only add to the cost of the meals.

It is evident that different models have evolved from different states to implement this programme efficiently

- ▶ The schools, which have become strong partners with the government to run the MDMP (e.g. Gujarat)
- ▶ The NGOs like Naandi and ISKCON. These institutions however, bank on funding to provide the meals
- ▶ The government private sector partnership, e.g. TATAs and Wipros
- ▶ Women empowerment model e.g Tamil Nadu

It is up to each government to work out their logistics and choose the model / models most suited for their State.