



Social Audit of Mid-Day Meal Scheme for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The goal of sustainable development is to ensure a healthy diet for people living in the country. To making development more sustainable, mid-day meal scheme becomes the primary objective. With this backdrop the present study valorize the imperativeness of social audit of Mid-Day Meal (MDMS)/ PM POSHAN for achieving sustainable development. This paper is based on relevant secondary data sources based on Annual Budget 2016-22, (GOI) Global Hunger Index 2020, MDM data, revised guidelines for MDMS, (CMDM) reports, National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) factsheet for various rounds. The Global Hunger Index 2020–22 shows that despite significant financial and human resources being dedicated to MDMS, the majority of school-age children still have "severe" health conditions. Government made every effort to solve the issue, but their implementation was horribly ineffective. The budget for nutrition-related services should be increased by the government and kept constant until malnutrition is reduced. An annual maintenance budget with a specific subsidy provided by government should be set aside for the kitchen sheds. The local group should be tasked with overseeing the program so that teachers may focus on teaching.

Key Words: Budget Allocation, Enrollment, Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Retention, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is described as the process of extending the variety of opportunities that will eventually allow individuals and communities to realize their full potential. The primary objectives of the programs are to boost registration, continuation and academic achievement among beneficiaries, especially among disadvantaged and poor children. The fundamental purpose of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is to make development more sustainable (Munasinghe, 2010; Sharma *et al*, 2014; Sharma *et al*, 2018).

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is known as the biggest school meal program, which comprises the distribution of meals free of charge to school students during all school days for pupils in governments, governmental-aided, local elementary and higher elementary schools, and

special training institutions. This has improved over time through sustained engagement by various government departments, civil society, and the judiciary in India (Sahai, 2014; Grover and Kaur, 2015). It is also envisioned that such a lunch will encourage a sense of fraternity and friendship among children who belong to various castes, races, and religions. In order to promote health and avoid sickness, diet is crucial. It also promotes primary education's universalization and enhances children's nutritional status. The program subsequently spread across the nation and is currently regarded as one of the most significant approaches against childhood undernutrition and for academic achievement (Sahoo and Pati, 2018; Kumari and Sinha, 2019). The history of MDMS in India is extensive. The system is being adopted in the majority of states, having initially begun in the Madras Presidency before independence and being later implemented in Delhi and Gujarat, in

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Table 1. Status of undernourished in India.

Indicator	1992	2000	2008	2016	2020	2022
GHI Score	46.4	38.8	36.0	28.5	16.3	29.1
GHI Rank	76 (85)	83(119)	102(118)	97(118)	94(107)	107(121)
Proportion of undernourished (As percent of total pop.)	25.0	21.0	19.0	15.2	27.2	16.3

Source: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)- various issues

**Figures in parentheses indicate total number of countries.*

that order, in the post-independence period (Deodhar *et al.*, 2007; Kadari and Roy, 2016; Narad, 2016; Singh, 2020).

In September 2004, as per the guidelines of the scheme, elementary schools were required to provide each student with 100 grams of food grains and 20 grams of pulses each day, while upper-primary schools were required to provide each student with 150 grams of rice and 30 grams of dal each day. Children in primary classes receive 450 calories; upper primary children obtain 20 grams of protein and 700 calories a day, compared to lower primary children, who receive 12 grams.

The program benefits around 12 crore children aged between 5 and 11 who attend 11.20 lakh schools nationwide. Of these, 22.6 lakh come from *Balvatika*, 7.2 crore are in primary school, and 4.6 crore are in upper primary. Punjab has been ranked second in the country for executing the MDMS. In the FY 2021–22, about two million pupils were served in the state's schools, compared to 6,656 in upper-primary schools and 13,723 in elementary schools. Under the MDM program, the government has allotted Rs 275.81 crore for the cooking's cost, cereals, and wages for the cook, helper, and managers (Current Affairs News, 2022). With this backdrop, the present study values the imperativeness of the social audit of mid-day meals (PM POSHAN) for achieving sustainable development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The literature and relevant information regarding the Mid-Day Meals Program/PM POSHAN Scheme was obtained through relevant

secondary data sources based on the annual work plan and Budget 2016–22, the Global Hunger Index 2020, MDM data, updated rules for the MDM Program, Cooked Mid-Day Meal Scheme (CMDM) reports, research gate, Google Scholar, NFHS factsheet for various rounds, research articles, web sites, internet survey reports, etc. Local and national dailies were also referred to. Literature on Mid-Day Meal was piled from a subscription-based database, viz., Web of Science (WoS), for the period 1994–2021. Clarivate Analytics United States administers Web of Science, the scientific citations referencing platform available online with a membership model that offers a comprehensive citations discovery function. It provides access to several databases that contain cross-disciplinary research, enabling a comprehensive review of specialized related fields within a particular discipline.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The different parameters like the Global Hunger Index (GHI), the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) factsheet, and year-wise budget allocations and expenditures regarding mid-day meals were given in Table 1.

The data highlights the declining trend in the proportion of undernourished people with a score of 29.1, which falls in the serious category of hunger in 2022. In 2000, it recorded an alarming score of 38.8, which was reduced to 28.5 by 2016. The proportion of undernourishment in the population went from 25 in 1992 to 16.3 in 2022. But when it comes to ranking at the international level, India projects a dismal status. Though it improved marginally compared to 2008, when India was ranked 102 among 118 countries. India

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Table 2. Nutritional status of children in India: NFHS (various rounds).

Particular	India			
	Rural	Urban	Total	Regional Gap*
Stunted				
NFHS III (Under 3 Years)	47.2	37.4	44.9	-9.8
NFHS IV (Under 5 Years)	41.2	31.2	38.4	-10
NFHS V (Under 5 Years)	37.3	30.1	35.5	-7.2
Wasted				
NFHS III (Under 3 Years)	24.1	19.0	22.9	-5.1
NFHS IV (Under 5 Years)	20.0	21.5	21.0	1.5
NFHS V (Under 5 Years)	19.5	18.5	19.3	-1
Under weight				
NFHS III (Under 3 Years)	43.7	30.1	40.4	-13.6
NFHS IV (Under 5 Years)	38.3	29.1	35.8	-9.2
NFHS V (Under 5 Years)	33.8	27.3	32.1	-6.5
Anemia				
NFHS-III (Under 3 Years)	80.0	80.5	80.1	0.5
NFHS-IV (Under 5 Years)	57.2	55.7	56.6	-1.5
NFHS-V (Under 5 Years)	68.3	64.2	67.1	-4.1

National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-III 2005-06, IV-2015-16, and V-2019-20).

came down to 97th among 118 countries in 2016. Still, it is far behind achieving its Millennium Development Goal of bringing down the proportion of undernourished people to 12.5 percent of the total population.

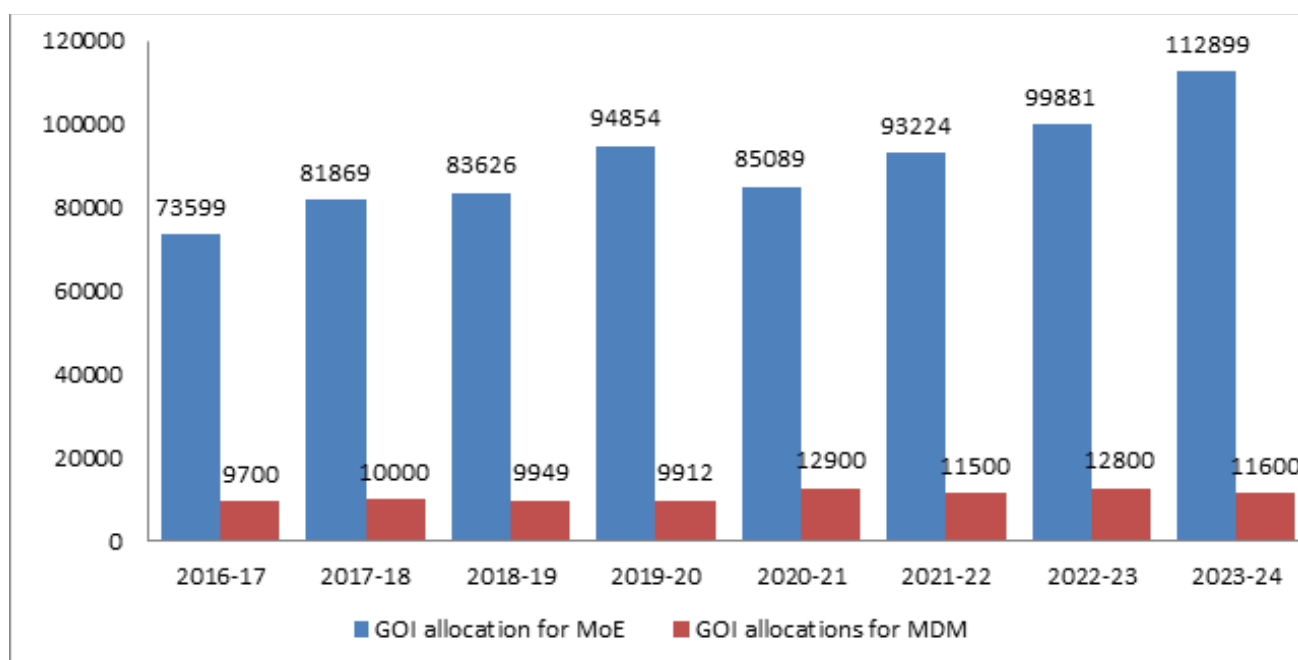
***Gaps were worked out on Percentage Points Method.**

Children's nutritional status is described by four physical growth indices: height-for-age (stunting), weight-for-height (wasting), and weight-for-age (underweight), and anemia are the most common micronutrient deficiency among children. The results (Table 2) show that stunting and underweight, which are prevalent among children, have decreased in the last two decades. The percentage of children recorded as stunted

declined from 44.9 to 35.5 from 2005–06 to 2019–20. Wasting and underweight also got reduced from 22.9 to 19.3 and 40.4 to 32.1, respectively, for the same period.

The National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) III (2005–06) round recorded the highest percentages of children under 3 years who suffered from anemia. However, the NFHS IV (2015–16) round recorded a healthy trend and had a decrease in the percentage of children under 5 years with anemia (56.6 percent). The percentages of anemic children in rural areas (57.2%) were higher as compared to urban areas (55.7%). The IIIrd and IVth rounds of the NFHS revealed that the percentages of stunted children below the age of 3 and 5 were greater in rural regions of India than in

Figure no. 1: Budget Allocations Year Wise



(Source: Union Budget for Expenditure, Ministry of Education, fiscal years 2016-17 to FY 2023-24)

urban regions. NFHS V (2019–20) rounds recorded the highest percentages of anemic children (under 5 years) inside rural regions (68.3%) compared to urban regions (64.2%). In 2019, anemia affected more than two-thirds (68.4%) children below the age of five in India.

The change in the trend was significantly due to the increase in urbanization trends captured during the 2011 census. Due to the stretched boundaries of major cities and towns, slums and squatters mushroomed and border-lined colonies in city after city in the above-mentioned period, contributing to an increase in enumerating malnutrition in urban areas. Hence, the regional gap, which was -9.8 percent during 2005–06, increased to -10 percent in 2015–16 and further showed a tilt towards urban, with a gap of -7.2 percent in 2019–20.

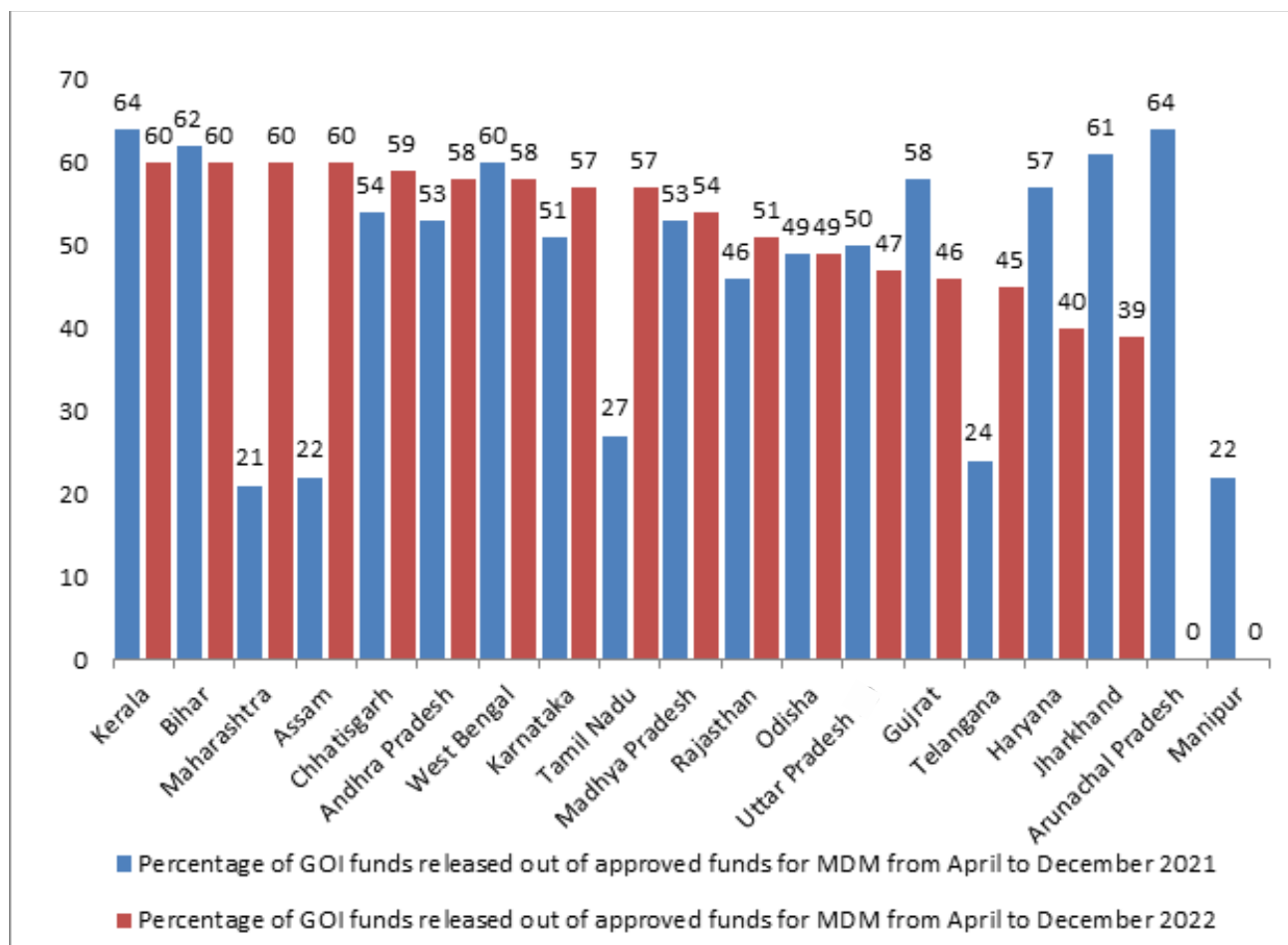
Wasting is a serious problem in India. Whereas India fared well as for stunting and underweight was recorded but performed dismally on account of wasting among children. Study recorded a continuous decreased in the percentages of children with stunting and underweight. The prevalence of underweight children aged 3 to 5 years had decreased in all three rounds of NFHS. It decreased from 40.4

percent in 2005-06 to 35.8 percent in 2015-16 and 32.1 in the year 2019-20. Regional gap of -13.6, -9.2 and -6.5 percentage point pertaining to underweight during IIIrd, IVth and Vth NFHS rounds respectively recorded a continuous decline. Thus the study showed that Punjab had succeeded in bringing down the proportion of stunted and underweight. Ruralities were marginalized compared to their urban counterparts.

Figure 1 shows that Budget Estimates (BEs) for the Ministry of Education (MoE) were 73,599 crore at the beginning of Financial Year (FY) 2016–2017. The Government of India has allotted 9700 crore for MDM in the Union Budget FY 2016–17. This increased to 10,000 crore in FY 2017–18. In fiscal year 2018–19, allocations were reduced even more. The proposal was for 12,147 crore, but the MDM budget for the Ministry of Human Resources was 9,949 crore, 2198 crore less than the requirement. Similarly, the revised allocations for FY 2019–20 were 18 percent less than the 12,054 crore proposal from the Ministry. The allocations for the program have mostly stayed the same from 2018–19 to 2019–20. To provide adequate support during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of India (GOI) approved an increase in MDM spending to 13,400 crore for Fiscal Year (FY)

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Figure 2: State-wise utilization of released funds



(Source: PAB Meeting for PM POSHAN, FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23. (2) Central Assistance Released FY 2021-22, and FY 2022-23)

Available online at: <https://pmposhan.education.gov.in/>. Last accessed on 3 January 2023

2020–21, up from 11,000 crore in the Budget Estimates (BEs). However, the revised estimates (REs) for the year were 12,900 crore, or 4% less than the announced figure. Budget Estimates (BEs) for MoE were at 93,224 crore at the start of Financial Year (FY) 2021–22, while the GOI allotted 11,500 crore for MDM in the Union Budget 2021–22, and 11 percent decreased from 2020–21 from revised estimates (REs) and 5 percent increase from the Budget Estimates (BEs). This was an improvement of ten percent from the preceding year's revised estimates (REs), but a decrease of 6 percent from the BEs. MDM is MoE's second-largest scheme, accounting for 12 percent of the Ministry's budget in FY 2021–22. The implementation of the plan has been directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore,

the PM-POSHAN plan is granted an amount of Rs 11,600 crore in the 2023–24 budgets. This is 9 percent less than the revised estimates (REs) but 13 percent greater than the budget estimates (BEs). The allocation of GoI for the PM-POSHAN Scheme also shows an approximate 10 percent lower in 2023–24 as compared to 2022–23.

States wise Performance of the PM-POSHAN Scheme

The program's funding was allocated in the 2004 budget, and it started to be implemented in 2005. The Central government pays 60 percent of the costs associated with running the program, and the State governments pay 40 percent. State budget proposals are approved by the Ministry of

Education's (MOE) Programme Approval Board (PAB) for MDM following deliberations and agreements with respective state governments. Figure 2 shows that just 52 percent of GOI approvals were released until December 2022-23, in contrast to 48% in 2021-22. By December 2022, 60 percent of the funding has only been distributed to five of the thirty-six states and UTs. Likewise, among the states allocated to GoI in FY 2021–2022, only six states obtained 60 percent or more. The amount of money released for twenty states and union territories was less than the national average in numerous states, including Jharkhand (39%), Haryana (40%), Telangana (45%), Gujarat (46%), UP (47%), Odisha (49%) and Rajasthan (51%). Seven among the twenty states and union territories (including Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh) did not receive any funding in the first three quarters of FY 2022–2023. There are state variations. In the final quarters of the fiscal year 2021–2022, over 50% of the money allocated to Assam, Manipur, and Sikkim was released. Kerala, Jharkhand, Haryana, and Chhattisgarh, on the other hand, have already received all of their funding prior to the final quarter.

Problems and Challenges

To ensure that the scheme is appropriately implemented, monitoring committees are in place at every level, from the center to the village level. Implementation of the midday meal program at government schools will be hampered by the program's problems with staff shortages, frequent power failures, and poor infrastructure, which are discussed further.

Lack of resources and infrastructure

Rural areas' poor facilities are a result of a lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure, which affects students' ability to clean up after meals and maintain good hygiene. These problems get worse by inadequate midday food staffing and classroom space (Mehta *et al.*, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Chhabra and Rao, 2014; Narad, 2016; Sachan and Singh, 2016; Sahoo and Pati, 2018; Sinha, 2019; The Hindustan Times, 2022).

Time lag in the current data flow system

Data manipulation, data corruption, and data distortion are made possible by the delay in data transfer from the school to the state level. The fact that teachers have to devote two or three hours to managing this program is an enormous drawback. Students' study time is hampered by teachers' participation in the system, and educational quality is compromised (Sahai, 2014; Kadari and Roy, 2016; Menezes, 2017).

Cooking costs and honorarium

About 81 percent of head teachers and teachers reported irregular payment of cooking costs, requiring them to buy ingredients on credit or with personal funds. The Allahabad High Court ordered 12 months' salary for MDMS cooks in 2019, but the government only pays 10 months' honorarium. The district magistrates and the state government were ordered by the court to settle the honorarium and arrears within four months (Grover and Kaur, 2014; Narad, 2016; Sahoo and Pati, 2018).

Conservative beliefs

To reduce the deficiency of protein it was proposed that high protein foods like egg, mushroom should be served in MDMS. One of the study discovered that Class 8 girls gained up to 71% more weight than their counterparts who did not receive eggs. Based on a study that involved over 4,500 students in two districts and was commissioned by the Karnataka government. Lingayat and Jain seers in Karnataka have historically strongly opposed schemes to include eggs. The nutritional contradictions religious and personal beliefs Choices about the diet have also been impacted by personal and religious norms that conflict against dietary recommendations (EPW, 2015). Minimizing menu-related disputes like the controversy started by NGO Akshay Patra's unwillingness to add eggs and locally consumed spices in the meals it had been contracted to provide in various states (Yamunan, 2019). All government programs have similar problems, but the Mid-day Meal Program's extensive history can be constructed to reduce their impact on newer programs like the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grover and Kaur, 2015; Kadari and Roy, 2016; Prajavani, 2021).

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So it is ironical that after allocating huge human and economic resources towards MDMS, the majority of school-age children's health status is in the "serious" category as is reflected in global hunger index 2020-22. In spite of best intents to address by governments, implementation required flawed and dismally poor.

The PM Poshan Scheme (previously known as Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Yojna) was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on September 29, 2021, replacing the MDMS program and reorganizing the Mid-Day Meal Program to meet nutritional goals by 2025 and provide hot lunch in govt. and government-funded schools. It was introduced for an initial five-year period (2021-22 to 2025-26). The new programme includes provisions for supplementary nutrients for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, teenage females, and adults in addition to schoolchildren. The Education Minister claims that students from Balvatikas, which were ICDS-affiliated pre-primary schools, are now part of the MDM Scheme. The PM Poshan Scheme will be operational from 2021–2022 until 2025–2026 (Gopal and Singh, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The MDMS is the largest school feeding program and helps students who arrive at school and feel hungry in class. The program's objective is to enhance the student enrolment, retention and socialization of students from various castes. Thus, the program offers a way to reduce caste-based inequality by allowing all children to sit and eat together. This program is a significant step in the right direction toward lowering malnutrition and improving the socioeconomic indices of the nation.

It has been suggested by the New Education Policy that the MDMS should include breakfast because a single meal, even during the workday, is insufficient to combat the dangers of malnutrition, the government should provide a healthy breakfast for children in the schools. The PM POSHAN program should be expanded to classes 10+2. To address discrepancies in delivery, coverage, and access, nutrition services within health systems should be assessed and reviewed

routinely. Government should increase its budget for nutrition-related services and maintain it until malnutrition is reduced. The kitchen sheds should be maintained annually with a special subsidy provided by government. The local group should be tasked with overseeing the program so that teachers may focus on teaching.

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