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## Midday meals leave a long-lasting impact: study

### **Context:**

According to a new study on the inter-generational benefits of India's midday meal scheme

### **Relevance:**

GS-II: Social Justice (Issues related to Poverty and Hunger, Government Policies and Initiatives, Welfare Schemes)

### **Dimensions of the Article:**

1. Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) Scheme
2. How the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme came to be-
3. Has the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme helped?
4. Criticism of MDM scheme and Implementation

## Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) Scheme

- The Mid-day Meal Scheme is a school meal programme of the Government of India designed to better the nutritional standing of school-age children nationwide.
- Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is a party, India has committed to yielding "adequate nutritious food" for children.
- The Midday Meal Scheme is covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013.
- The programme supplies free lunches on working days for children in primary and upper primary classes.
- The students of:



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1. Government schools,
  2. Government aided schools,
  3. Local body Education Centres,
  4. Education Guarantee Scheme, and alternate innovative education centres,
  5. Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan,
  6. National Child Labour Project schools run by the Ministry of labour.

## **How the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme came to be-**

- Post-Independence, Tamil Nadu was the first state to introduce the MDM scheme in the 1960s.
- The Central scheme to provide meals to school children began in 1995, however, most states just limited themselves to providing dry rations.

### ***Supreme Court Order: The Game Changer***

- A Supreme Court order of 2001 provided for all states to introduce cooked meals.
- The Supreme Court order specified the states to provide “at least 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days in a year”.



## 91 YEARS OF THE MIDDAY MEAL SCHEME

**1925** | Student meal scheme launched by Madras Municipal Corporation

**Mid-1980s** | Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry also start similar schemes

**1990-91** | States with similar programmes increase to 12

**1995** | Students in 2,408 blocks to get free foodgrains under national programme

**1997-98** | All blocks included

**2004** | Cooked midday meal launched for all primary schools

**2007** | In 3,479 backward blocks, scheme extended up to Class VIII

**2008-09** | Students up to Class VIII in all govt-run or aided schools and madrassas and maqtabas avail of midday meal

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development

### ***Supreme Court on MDM during Pandemic***

- The SC alerted state governments “Non-supply of nutritional food to the children as well as lactating and nursing mothers may lead to large-scale malnourishment, particularly in rural and tribal areas.”
- Taking suo motu cognisance of the matter the Court asked states to ensure that “schemes for nutritional food for children are not adversely affected”.

### **Has the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme helped?**

- Research has shown how hot, cooked food attracted students to schools and improved their nutritional status.
- MDM has been proven to attract children from disadvantaged sections (especially girls, Dalits and Adivasis) to school.
- Along with Improvement of regularity, educational and nutritional benefits, socialisation benefits and benefits to women are also highlighted.



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- Hence, the main positives of this scheme are:
    1. Avoiding classroom hunger.
    2. Increased school enrolment and attendance.
    3. Improved socialisation among castes.
    4. Reducing malnutrition.
    5. Empowering women through employment.

### ***About the recent study on long term impact of MDM scheme***

- Girls who had access to the free lunches provided at government schools, had children with a higher height-to-age ratio than those who did not.
- The prevalence of stunting was significantly lower in areas where the mid scheme was implemented in 2005.
- The linkages between midday meals and lower stunting in the next generation were stronger in lower socio-economic strata and likely work through women's education, fertility, and use of health services.

### **Criticism of MDM scheme and Implementation**

- Despite the success of the program, child hunger as a problem persists in India, 42.5% of the children under 5 are underweight.
- Some simple health measures such as using iodised salt and getting vaccinations are uncommon in India.
- Many children don't get enough to eat, which has far-reaching implications for the performance of the country as a whole.
- A 2005 study found that Caste based discrimination continued to occur in the serving of food.
- Media reports have also highlighted several implementation issues, including irregularity, corruption, hygiene, caste discrimination, etc.
- Poor food quality is a major concern, affecting the health of children (as many media reports show students falling sick due to lapses in quality checking and control). There are provisions for regular social audit, field visits and inspections but these are seldom carried out.
- The schools do not function during holidays and vacations which deprives children of their one daily meal.

*-Source: The Hindu*



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