

Hon'ble Supreme Court order on Mid Day Meal Scheme was the historical decision for the State like Jharkhand, where Starvation deaths among the Children most of the time maligned the civil society. Government of Jharkhand was observed reluctant to initiate but also there was no way to ignore due to constant admonition from the Supreme Court in this regard. For State Government "Vidyalaya me Siksha dena hai ya khana khilana hai, Ek galat prampara ka shuruat kiya ja raha hai, lekin kya karen, Sarvoch Nyayalay ka adesh bhee palan karna hai".

Ultimately Scheme started in all the school Phase wise. Definitely, scheme is challengeable to improve the literacy standard and nutritional status of the children in the State and large Scale involvement of the human resources in the way of State building.

Jharkhand is one of the most drought-affected states in the country, which is constantly experiencing hunger situation in different regions in the State. Food insecurity among the vulnerable and destitute people is too intensive and starvation deaths have been reported from severely drought-affected areas. Food and social security schemes were found deficient and ineffective to eliminate the prevalence of hunger in the rural sector. Schemes related to food & social security were not functioning effectively in other states too, and became ecstasy to the people for corruption and making huge money from it. This led to high dissatisfaction among the mass, and people from Rajasthan took initiative to protest against existing anomalies in schemes, which are for the susceptible people to sustain from acute hunger, and filed petition against those involved in blocking the entitlements of the poor.

Writ Petition (Civil) 196 of 2001 was submitted in April 2001 by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (Rajasthan). The petition essentially demanded to use country's gigantic food stocks without delay to prevent starvation and hunger. In the petition and subsequent deliberations, the petitioner argued that the best means of preventing hunger is a combination of (a) employment guarantee for the able-bodied, and (b) social security arrangements for the destitute. Hon'ble Court in its historical declaration on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2001 ordered to start Cooked Mid day meal in all the States for minimum of 200 days with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day. Order became boon for the children of Jharkhand where nutritional status and enrollment is low in comparison to other States. But State Government was not serious to start the programme in time and no compliances made by the state. Hon'ble Supreme court in its order dated 8<sup>th</sup> May 2003 reminded State Government to start in at least 25% of the district covering most vulnerable families.

Mid day meal programme in the Jharkhand State initiated with the joint allocation of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of food Supplies. Ministry of Human Resource Development is playing main role to coordinate with other ministry, this ministry basically provides the ration cost other than rice and honorarium for the cook and fuel charges. Ministry of Food & Supply is providing grains with the help of Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State Food Corporation (SFC). Ministry of rural Development bears the cost of construction of Kitchen shed.

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Study on Mid Day Meal in Jharkhand concentrates basically on understanding of cooked mid day meal in the State, Government response on the programme, how it may be helpful to address the issue of starvation, impact on reducing drop out and increasing enrolment in primary schools, what are the problems in implementation and irregularities in the programme.

## **Phases of the Programme in the state**

After the separation from Bihar, Mid day Meal (dry grain) programme continued in the State. State Government with the help of Food Corporation of India used to provide 3 kg ration to each children per month in 21112 Primary Schools of the State (including Government aided School). Though after the declaration of Supreme court order dated 28<sup>th</sup> November 2001, State Government continued the mid day meal in which dry grains were provided instead of cooked food. Programme was not regular, because it was not the prime interest of the government and dry grains continued up to November 2003. In the year November 2003 after the order of Supreme Court to start the programme in at least 25% of the schools in the Districts (among the most vulnerable population) State Government started Mid Day meal programme in 200 primary school of 22 Districts of the State. During the Financial year 2003-2004, Human Resource Development Department (Government of Jharkhand) released a Status report on Mid Day meal, which says that programme started in 22 districts of the State covering 212 blocks. As per the report "200 Government Schools in every district have been identified for the implementation of cooked Mid Day meal in the current financial year. Rest of the Schools will be continued with the dry ration. Latehar, Palamau, Lohardaga and Dumka district of the State have started to provide cooked meal in 200 schools. A sum of Rs. 20,05,36,200/- has been released so far to the districts for implementation of the programme in 2003-2004 (*vide letter no 18/2001/3064 dated 28.11.04*). During the financial year 2004-2005, State Government circulated an order (*vide letter no. 18/01/59 dated 21/9/04*), which says Human Resource Development Department (Government of Jharkhand) is now releasing Rs.77, 94, 60, 000/- against the total budget of Rs.116 crore, in order to cover all the Primary and Middle Schools among I to V Standard of Children in the School. Rs. 7, 44, 60, 000/- released under the head of "Pradhanmantari Gramodaya Yojana" (amount is included in Rs.77, 94,60,000/-).

It seems that after the pressure from the commissioners report on the issue of non-execution of Mid Day meal programme in the State, Department of Human Resource Development became serious and started to implement the programme in the State, but it is also fact that State government in initial phase are in problematic stage to implement the programme in all the schools at a time, and because of this programme Implemented phase wise to cover the Mid Day meal programme in the State. Ultimately in the Financial Year 2004-05 Government

made its announcement to start programme in all the schools of the State. At this stage State Government is clear from its announcement to start programme in all the schools of the State. It is in paper but off course it is necessary to see the picture at the Field whether announcements have been actually grounded or not.

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## *Field based notes*

### Study – I:

Study during January to March 2004 on Mid Day Meal Scheme in Jharkhand revealed that Mid Day Meal scheme not started in all the primary Schools of the State. 21% of the schools were with the facility of drinking water and rest of the schools was not having drinking water facility for school children. 83% of the Schools were without the facility of cooking utensils and therefore no Mid Day Meal in Schools. 60% of the schools were without the availability of plates for mid Day Meal. 83% of the schools are without the Kitchen shed and abandoned school building, classroom or open sky being utilised for the purpose of cooking meal. Food grains stored in the Classroom or in the Schoolteachers' house, which affected the sitting arrangements in the School. Children are used to come school with the bag and plates. School inspectors were found disinterested in making regular inspection of the Scheme. Record keeping practiced irregularly and anyhow teachers are updating the records just for the sake to maintain records.

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### Study – II:

Government of Jharkhand implemented Midday Meal scheme as pilot basis in Latehar district first due to keen interest of the District Collector (DC), Latehar. During April 2004, Study team visited the Manika block of Latehar District and found the following facts-

- Drinking water available in 81.25% of the sample schools where Mid Day Meal Scheme initiated in pilot phase.
- In 81.25% of the schools neither kitchen shed is available nor it is in the process of construction.
- Cooking utensils, plate and glasses has been provided to schools where survey was conducted.
- Storehouse to keep food grains in schools is not available in 93.75% of the sample schools.
- Quality of food grains supplied under the scheme was observed as poor in 18.75% schools while in 81.25% of the schools it was found that the quality was of average level, but in none of the schools good quality food grains were supplied.
- Cooked meal was observed of average quality in 75 % of the schools whereas in 18.75% schools poor quality of cooked meal were served to the children.
- It was found that in 93.75% of the schools there is no inspection book in the schools and also revealed that in 50% of the schools no government officer visited to assess or to monitor the programme.
- Differences in actual stocks and records maintained were revealed in 37.5% of the sample schools.





regular pressure building by the civil Society activist group in the State. During the period series of agitation and complaints are being made by the social organization in the State. School children also made their representation before the governor and the chief minister in the Capital of Jharkhand. Print Media also played vital role to demise the State Government for non-committal attitude towards the decisions of the Hon'ble Court.

## Never learns to say "NO"

State Government Says... YES... Mid Day Meal in all Schools

Contacts have been made to the Mr. Pran Kumar Jha, Assistant Director, Primary Education, Government of Jharkhand on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2004 and he replied the questions...

### **Q. Is cooked Mid Day Meal scheme being implemented in State**

A. Yes

Q. When did it begin?

A. 2003

Q. Has the State developed manual for the MDM Scheme

A. No

Q. Coverage of the Mid Day Meal Scheme in the State

A. Districts-22, Blocks- 213, Number of Schools- 20377

Q. What is the total number of student covered under the scheme?

A. 2003-2004- 3,34,332

2004-2005- 27,58,884.

Q. What are the ingredients provided in the Mid Day meal Scheme?

A. Children are being provided "Khichri", Dal – chawal on daily basis. In some districts Eggs, Fruits and milk is also being provided weekly.

Q. Who has the authority to decides the menu for the MDM

A. It has been left to the community to decide daily menu in the school. Sarswati Vahini is responsible for its implementation.

Q. What are the provisions for storage of food lifted from the centre?

A. Normally food grain is being stored in the schoolroom or in the house of Village Education committee/ Sarswati Vahini members.

Q. What are the criteria to determine the allotment of food grain to the State?

A. Quota of food grain is being fixed by the central government.

Q. Briefly explain the role played by the following under the scheme: A. Teacher- Teachers do not play any role in preparation of cooked Mid day Meal

School education Committee – Entire responsibility of the implementation has been given to Village Education committee and Saraswati Vahini.

Panchayati Raj Institution- Presently Panchayati Raj Institution are not in place in Jharkhand.

School administration- Block Education officer, District Superintend of Education

These officers have been given the supervisory role-supporting role in the programme.

Q. Has the State conducted training programme before the implementation of the Scheme

A. No

Q. Has the State issued any independent and specific rules under the Bihar Education project in reference to the MDM Scheme?

A. Joint meeting of personnel is being conducted on a regular basis in reference to MDM and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Q. What is the unit cost incurred by the State (per child, per meal) under the MDM Scheme

A. Rs 2/- (two) per day per child is being provided as conversion cost.

Q. How is the MDM funded?

- a) Amount of central fund (in terms of grain)- Rs 33/- per month per children for 200 days)
- b) Amount of state Funding – at the rate of Rs.2/- per day per children for 200 days.

Q. What are the different recurring expenses? (Per month)

- a) Grain per child per month- 2.5 kg grain
- b) Pulse and other cooking material- per child per month- 20-25 grams per day
- c) Fuel- per school, per month- N.A
- d) Transport- per month, per school- Rs75/- per quintal for month.

Q. Which departments undertake these recurring costs?

A. State Government undertakes the responsibility of conversion and other recurring Cost.

Q. What are the different non-recurring costs? (Per school, per child)

- a) Construction of kitchen shed
- b) Utensils- Rs 5000/-
- c) Gas stove- Included in the cost of utensils
- d) Water supply- NA
- e) Others

Q. Which department undertakes these non-recurring costs?

A. HRD department and SSA undertake these recurring costs.

Q. What is the salary of the cook per month?

A. It has been left to the discretion of the District Administration and community to fix the honorarium to the cooks.

Q. Are the children supplied with micronutrients?

A. No

Q. What are the problems that you face in the implementation of the MDMs?

- a) Procurement of grain from the centre FCI does not supply allotted quota of food grain. The supply point of FCI are far located in some districts.
- b) Transportation – presently handling charges are being provided by Govt. of India, which is not sufficient.
- e) Any other- State need Government of India support, as it is not possible for the State Government to carry the programme alone from its budget.

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## Midday Meal should continue...

After getting the 110% response from the State Government, it became necessary to verify the implementation status. During Monsoon 2004, failure of rainfall led to loss of khariff crops and ultimately starvation deaths in different districts of Jharkhand occurred, which was covered on the front page of the Print media and the process of pressure building started in the State Capital by various pressure groups. Mr. Arjun Munda, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Jharkhand, under the pressure, announced the universalisation of Mid Day Meal in all the Schools of the State.

After the declaration, the team in different schools has made visits; some facts and figures have been collected. Information has been collected from all the grass root key players (Cook, Guardian, Teacher) of the Mid Day Meal scheme. It has been found that 38.64% of the State is running with the availability of only two classrooms and 9.09% schools are with single classroom. 27.27% schools of the State are running with single teacher. 77% schools are having no toilet within the School campus. This is about the availability of infrastructure for the Primary School in the State. There is a problem in keeping the food grain in schools; it reveals that 61.70% of the schools are keeping their food grain in the classroom. It can be assumed that what will be the atmosphere of teaching and how the sitting arrangements are managed in the school classroom, as because as per the facts it has been found that classroom is not sufficient and also food grain are dumping there.

Under the Scheme Cook has been recruited and we found that 20.41% cook's belong to the Schedule Caste families, 53.06% cook's are from the Schedule tribe families, other backward community are 16.33%, Muslim contributes 8.16% whereas 2.04% cooks represents the General caste community. Gram Sabha and village education committee adopted certain criteria to select the cook, which are as follows - Social accessibility, interested to cook, nearer to the primary school and who can make the food while maintaining the sanitation. It is also being traced that 46.67% cooks having no wages against their services for the scheme. In most of the cases it is being found that cooks are getting Rs.600/- per month as honorarium. In case two or more cooks they are dividing the amount themselves out of Rs.600/-. It is good indicator that Schedule tribe and Schedule caste women are getting the opportunity to give their services for the Mid Day Meal Scheme, it gives two way impact for achieving the goal of the scheme that is engagement of the economically poor community in the scheme and interest towards sending their children to the School for education. It is also fact that the stick of "GURUJEE" (Schoolteacher) is also playing vital role to control the villages but in recent days Gram Sabha also proved to be a factor to minimize the "POWER of GURUJEE'S STICK" in the society.

State Government agrees that they have already sanctioned the money for construction of Kitchen Shed in the School but it was found that 57.78% schools are preparing their meals in open space and cooks are facing problems to keep the things safe and to maintain the sanitation around the school campus. 50% schools in the State are without the facility of drinking water in the School campus. School children are being engaged for collection of water from the nearest water sources. It has been found that schoolteachers are maintaining the daily records in 60% places and they are master to manipulate the daily expenditure and balance of the food grain.

Mata Sammittee and cook are inefficient to maintain the records as because there was no training on the part to maintain the record. In more than 90% places it has been found that group of women are engaged in cooking of meal and they don't have clear information about their shares of wages. Whereas State Government is also not clarifying their stand towards the rate of wages, it has been given the authority to the Village Education committee and ultimately cooks are getting highly irregular and low wages against their services. Though 96% cook are bold to say that programme is good and it should be continued for the sake of mental and physical growth of the children. 90% of the guardians are in favour to say that there is a positive impact on the children after the Cooked Mid day Meal started. They have to give less energy and time to pursue the children to go school.

One encouraging change revealed during the visit that the attendance among the Schedule Tribe, schedule Caste and Other backward community children have been increased. 35% increase in attendance found among the Other Backward Community girls and 16% increase in Schedule tribe and Schedule caste girls. It is good as because the nutritional and literacy status of the girls in Jharkhand is very poor and while Mid Day Meal Scheme also pressurized both guardian and the girl child to attend school regularly.

There is a need to modify certain things those are, State Government has to develop the menu chart like (State of Tamil Nadu developed the Menu for the coked mid Day meal scheme). There was no training to the Mata Sammittee and the cook regarding maintenance of records and norms to provide the mid day meal to the children. Therefore training must be organise to provide the basic ideas towards marinating the records. Before rainy season kitchen shed and the storeroom must be constructed which has been found neglected. Quality of food must be improved and there is a possibility to make necessary changes in same budget allocation. School inspectors are not regular in visiting the school, they should be accountable to visit schools for inspection regularly otherwise irregularities may cost as malfunctioning of the programme. Schoolteachers should confine their responsibility towards increasing the attendance and the quality teaching.

At last, it has been observed firmly that the objective beneath Midday Meal programme is at least on track in Jharkhand. Optimistic results are arriving from the field, which obviously demoralizes the pessimistic beliefs explained by the bureaucrats. This scheme has aided to ameliorate the literacy and nutritional status of children and there is a need to continue this programme efficiently including some more inputs to improve the functioning of MDM scheme in Jharkhand.