

General Studies – 2; Topic: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDM)

1) Introduction

- The Midday Meal Scheme is a school meal programme of the Government of India designed to improve the nutritional status of school-age children nationwide
- Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which India is a party, India has committed to provide "adequate nutritious foods" for children.
- The main objective of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme is to attain the goal of universalization of primary education.
- Most countries, advanced as well as developing, have some sort of school meal programme.

2) Benefits of the scheme

- Promote the participation of the child in school especially the disadvantaged sections (especially girls, Dalits and Adivasis).
- Reduce classroom hunger, promote better learning and facilitate the healthy growth of a child
- Lead to better enrolment and retention in schools.
- The increase has been more rapid with respect to girls and children belonging to SC/ST categories.
- Promotes good eating habits like washing ones hands, finishing ones food, etc,
- Fosters social and gender equality as all children get the same food and must eat together and boosting female attendance in school.
- Provides nutritional support to children in drought affected areas during summer vacation.

3) Concerns

- Caste based discrimination continues to occur in the serving of food.
- Implementation issues, including irregularity, corruption, hygiene, inadequate nutritional content, etc.
- Despite the success of the program, child hunger as a problem persists in India.
- In some schools food was prepared by using wood which gave bad smell to food and also polluted the environment.
- Teachers themselves cooking take away their core duties of teaching.
- Some schools did not have proper kitchen and store room facilities for Mid-Day Meal preparation
- The number of students in most of the Govt. primary schools in rural areas is meagre, so the effectiveness of this scheme is at stake.
- There are instances where children come to school only for food, leaving soon after it is served, thus not meeting their educational requirements.

4) Way Forward

- Bihar Bettiah district and thane district of Pune have employed mothers as quality monitors of mid day meal food served and it has produced good results. This should be replicated in rest of the country.
- Seeking the help of corporates is an easy way out — opening the door to a system of contractors.

- Community monitoring, social audits, decentralised grievance redress systems, public display of information on beneficiaries and menus, etc to reduce corruption and increase accountability in MDM.
- Teachers should not be assigned the responsibility of implementation of Mid-Day Meal scheme as it can hamper the teaching-learning process.
- Cooks should be well paid, so that they work with interest and commitment.
- There should be proper provision of LPG, kitchen and store room for Mid-Day Meal preparation
- Mandatory reporting the MDM data regularly by the state to the centre with a view to curtail irregularities.
- Ensure timely transfer of funds and good grains to schools.
- The quality of food grains and cooked meal must be checked regularly and all complaints regarding the quality must be solved urgently.

5) Using Biometrics in MDM Scheme

- **Positives**
 - a. Aadhaar would eliminate the proxy enrolment and provide benefits of the scheme to deserving children in a seamless manner.
 - b. It might affect the children who are supposedly double enrolled – i.e, attending private schools, while registered in government school.
- **Drawbacks**
 - a. Since there are children without an Aadhaar card, it implies limiting children to access MDMs, rather than improve access.
 - b. It does not affect the irregularities in supply, poor hygiene, and irregular nutritional content of meals.
 - c. States like Uttar Pradesh and Mizoram have only 26% students enrolled under Aadhaar, with Nagaland having 15% enrolment.