

# Executive Summary

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The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (Mid Day Meal Scheme) was launched in August 1995 to boost universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance simultaneously impacting on the nutrition levels of children. The scheme lays emphasis on providing cooked meals with minimum 300 calories and 8-12 grams of proteins and adequate quantities of micronutrients. The scheme was extended to children studying in upper primary classes from 2008-09. The scheme was earlier reviewed by us in 2007 and the results were included in the CAG's Audit Report No. 13 of 2008 tabled in Parliament in October 2008. The Public Accounts Committee (15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha), in its Ninth Report (subsequently, 28<sup>th</sup> Report) on CAG's Report No. 13 of 2008 of Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDM Scheme) had made a number of recommendations. The current audit *inter-alia* looked into whether the Government has taken appropriate actions on the recommendations.

## Important findings of this Performance Audit Report are given below:

- The enrolment of children in the MDM Scheme covered schools registered a consistent decline over the years from 14.69 crore children in 2009-10 to 13.87 crore children in 2013-14. In contrast, the enrolment of children in private schools witnessed an increase of 38 *per cent* from 4.02 crore to 5.53 crore during the same period indicating that Mid Day Meal (MDM) in itself was not a sufficient condition to retain children in schools, and that there is a growing section of society seeking better quality in education.

**(Para No. 2.2)**

- It is time to realise that providing meal is a means to an end, serving the larger purpose of education. Clear trends were noticed, which demonstrated that the meal served its purpose only when the expectations of parents, with respect to good education for their wards, was fulfilled.

**(Para No. 2.2)**

- One of the objectives of MDM Scheme is to encourage poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly. Most states however, did not formulate any criteria to identify poor children belonging to disadvantaged sections. Neither did these states conduct any survey to identify such children. As a result, this important objective remained on paper only.

**(Para No. 2.3)**

- The mechanism in place for assimilating data on the number of children availing MDM was seriously compromised. The percentage of actual number of children availing MDM as gathered from various sources was consistently lower than that furnished by the states to the Ministry for claiming cost of foodgrains and cooking cost. Audit evidenced an institutionalised exaggeration of figures regarding students availing MDMs, irregular diversion or theft of foodgrains, submission of inflated transportation costs, fudging of data pertaining to supply of foodgrains, all pointing to widespread leakages and defalcations, leading to losses and misappropriations in the scheme.

**(Paras Nos. 2.6, 3.1, 3.2 & 3.8)**

- In most of the test checked schools, prescribed inspections were not carried out to ensure Fair Average Quality of foodgrains and quality of midday meal served. Most schools sample checked in audit were lacking in infrastructural facilities like kitchen sheds, proper utensils, availability of drinking water facility etc. There were numerous instances of food being prepared in open and unhygienic conditions exposing children to health hazards.

**(Paras Nos. 3.4 & 3.7)**

- Audit of the test checked schools in the states brought out that regular health checks were not conducted in many states and Union Territories. In the absence of the prescribed health checks, an important tool to ascertain improvement in nutritional status of children was found nearly abandoned. In most states the children were not administered micronutrient supplements and de-worming medicines.

**(Paras Nos. 3.6.1 & 3.6.2)**

- We also observed that in some cases utilisation of foodgrains in the quantity of meals supplied to the children was less than the prescribed quantity of 100/150 gms. One of the reasons attributed to this was that children consumed less quantity of meal than what had been prescribed. In the light of these facts, the present norms fixed for quantity of dry ration warranted a review.

**(Para No. 3.6.6)**

- In terms of scheme guidelines, the nutritional contents of a meal can be ensured if the quantity of foodgrains and other ingredients are used in right proportion. Audit observed that in some cases the utilisation of foodgrains and cooking cost for other ingredients were not in sync with each other, leading to inferences of fabrication of figures.

**(Para No. 3.6.6)**

- The prescribed nutrition to children was not provided in test checked schools of at least nine states. In Delhi, 1876 of the 2102 samples (89 *per cent*) tested by an agency engaged for the purpose, failed to meet the prescribed nutrition standards.

**(Para No. 3.6.6)**

- The provisions for monitoring and inspection prescribed in the scheme were not followed effectively. The steering and monitoring committees at national, state, district and block level did not meet regularly. Funds provided for management, monitoring and evaluation remained grossly underutilised. Thus good governance practices were not followed.

**(Paras Nos. 5.2, 5.3 & 5.4)**

- The Public Accounts Committee (15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha), in its Ninth Report (subsequently, 28<sup>th</sup> Report) on CAG's Report No. 13 of 2008 of MDM Scheme had made a number of recommendations. However, the current audit revealed that despite actions reported by the Ministry, the Committee's concerns remained largely unaddressed.

### Conclusion and Recommendations:

Our audit disclosed that the actual implementation still suffers from various shortcomings and lapses across the board. The enrolment data of the MDM covered schools vis-a-vis the private schools in primary/upper primary levels during the five year audit period, registered opposite trends. While enrolment increased by 38 *per cent* in private schools, it declined by 5.58 *per cent* in MDM covered, government and government aided schools. Which is indicative of popular perception that private schools provide a better learning environment. Audit observed mismatch in the data relating to the number of children availing MDM as reported vis-a-vis the number of children actually availing MDM during the day of visit to sampled schools by the monitoring institutions. The prescribed stipulation that foodgrains of at least Fair Average Quality (FAQ) were issued by the FCI was to be ensured through regular inspections. In most states however, inspections were not carried out in this regard leading to supply of inferior quality of rice to children. Adequate numbers of health check-ups of children were not conducted, in the absence of which the impact of MDM Scheme on the nutritional status and required micronutrient supplements of the children could not be ascertained. Cases of financial indiscipline such as furnishing of incorrect Utilisation Certificates, misappropriation of funds, fudging of data to claim higher cost of foodgrains were widespread. The monitoring by both the Ministry and States was inadequate.

### We recommend the following:

- ***The Ministry should establish a system to capture reliable data on the actual number of children availing MDM to implement the scheme economically and efficiently. The data submitted by states should be carefully examined through independent checks. A system of obtaining consent in respect of children availing MDM may be incorporated to check manipulation of figures.***

- *Rates of cooking cost may be revised in proportion with inflation, to provide meal with nutritional norms and calorific value prescribed under MDM Scheme.*
- *The system of inspections must be strengthened to ensure that foodgrains of atleast Fair Average Quality, as prescribed, are received from FCI Depot. State governments should fix accountability for lapses in this regard.*
- *Though the MDM Schemes still continued to play a central role in school education in large swathes of rural and hinterland India, new realities called for changes in its implementation, both in form and content, in the metropolitan, urban and suburban areas; keeping in view the prevailing socio-economic conditions, to make it more efficient and purposeful.*
- *The convergence activities with other departments must be accelerated to overcome deficiencies in the infrastructural facilities like provision of kitchen sheds and drinking water facility. Ministry may ensure regular health checks as prescribed and also advise the states to document the results of such health checks in order to ascertain the improvement in nutritional levels of children. Provision of weighing machines and height recorders in each schools must be ensured.*
- *MDM Scheme could be variegated in nature and can be made flexible by making provisions for alternate nutrition, local produce instead of dry ration based meals to lessen monotony, keeping in view regional variations of taste and availability.*
- *The monitoring and inspection mechanisms should be strengthened at all levels to prevent leakages and misappropriations. System of surprise inspections should also be introduced to check malpractices. Prescribed number of meetings of Steering cum Monitoring Committees (SMCs) may be held for smooth implementation and monitoring of the scheme.*
- *The Ministry may strengthen the system of flow of information submitted by the Monitoring Institutions and their further follow up with states, so that prompt action is taken to rectify the deficiencies point out by the Monitoring Institutions. Grievance redressal mechanisms should established so that complaints received can be resolved promptly.*