

CHAPTER-VI

Conclusion

The Mid Day Meal Scheme has been in existence for almost two decades now. While the government has made several improvements in the contents of the scheme over the years, yet not many positives have come about in so far as the delivery of the scheme is concerned. The last performance audit of the scheme was undertaken during 2007-08. That Performance Audit Report had raised many red flags such as over-reporting of enrolment figures, cases of leakages, financial indiscipline, poor quality of meals and inadequate monitoring. The current audit disclosed that most of these deficiencies still persist. This is indicative of the fact that while the scheme looks good on paper with impressive guidelines, the actual implementation still suffers from various shortcomings and lapses across the board.

Audit observed that 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. There are clear inferences from this data. One, there is a growing section of population which prioritises quality of education over free meals even at an expense. Two, it shows that a free MDM, by itself, is not a sufficient condition to retain children in school. Three, there is a popular perception that private schools provide a better learning environment.

A problem area that has been dogging the scheme is the leakages and financial indiscipline. 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. These findings are supported by audit evidence. The fact that this type of artificial enhancement of the numbers was observed in almost all the test checked states is a clear pointer towards the efforts of the various agencies involved in the scheme implementation to unduly benefit themselves from the scheme.

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. Instances of inferior quality of rice being exchanged for better quality of rice also came to light. Audit also observed that the checks to ensure quality of

meals and adequacy of nutritional value of food served to children remained only on paper. Cases of cooking of poor quality meals in unhygienic conditions, inadequate and poor quality of infrastructure in terms of kitchen sheds and utensils were rampant across all states exposing children to health hazards. Absence of proper kitchen sheds led to cooking being undertaken in class rooms and corridors of schools seriously compromising the quality of education imparted to the 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 inadequate monitoring of the scheme by the Ministry and states was a major bottleneck in scheme implementation. The funds earmarked for monitoring and evaluation had been grossly underutilised. There was shortfall in inspections of schools by the officers at the district, tehsil/taluka, block level. Grievance redressal mechanism had not been established for resolving complaints. Thus good governance practices were not being followed. The Ministry must ensure that the deficiencies pointed out by Audit are addressed in a systematic and time bound manner.

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