

A study on the challenges of Mid-Day Meal in Arunachal Pradesh with special references to Namsai District

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Abstract

The Midday Meal Scheme stands as a cornerstone in the holistic development of children, wielding its influence in addressing their basic nutritional needs and fostering a positive impact on their education and overall well-being. By providing a daily meal in schools, the program serves as a powerful incentive for regular attendance, contributing to increased enrollment and reduced dropout rates, particularly among economically disadvantaged communities. The study's objective was to find the major challenges of Mid-Day Meals in Arunachal Pradesh with special references to Namsai District. In this research, the researcher used the Descriptive Survey method and collected data from 110 Secondary School teachers with the help of an Online Questionnaire. The survey reveals key challenges in the Mid Day Meal program: a critical lack of government support demands policy reforms; corruption and bureaucratic hurdles necessitate targeted interventions; and schools face infrastructure deficiencies requiring investment. Transportation issues affecting ingredient supply highlight the need for improved infrastructure. Operational challenges due to resource shortages call for a reassessment of allocation. A shortage of trained staff is a critical concern, emphasizing the need for strategic measures.

Keywords: Mid-Day Meal

Introduction

The Midday Meal Scheme, a flagship program initiated by the Government of India, represents a paradigmatic intervention aimed at the intersection of education and nutrition. Conceived as a vehicle for addressing the dual imperatives of enhancing school attendance and ameliorating nutritional deficiencies among economically vulnerable children, the scheme has evolved into one of the largest school feeding programs globally. Instituted with the vision of promoting universalization of elementary education and improving the overall well-being of school-going children, the Midday Meal Scheme is emblematic of the government's commitment to fostering an environment conducive to learning and development. As the program has expanded its reach to millions of children across the country, it has encountered a myriad of challenges that necessitate critical examination. This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the challenges confronting the Midday Meal Scheme, with a particular focus on understanding the intricacies and dynamics within the unique context of Namsai District. By scrutinizing the obstacles that impede the seamless execution of this ambitious initiative, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform policy, drive improvements, and ensure the sustained efficacy of the Midday Meal Scheme. The nexus between nutrition and education forms the cornerstone of the Midday Meal Scheme's philosophy, acknowledging that a child's ability to learn is intricately linked to their nutritional status. However, the program operates within a complex landscape marked by diverse socio-economic, logistical, and cultural nuances, each presenting its own set of challenges. Through

a nuanced investigation into these challenges, this study endeavors to uncover the underlying factors inhibiting the optimal realization of the scheme's objectives, thereby laying the groundwork for informed interventions and policy refinements. In navigating the landscape of challenges faced by the Midday Meal Scheme, this research aims to not only identify and dissect specific obstacles but also to contextualize these challenges within the broader framework of education, nutrition, and community development. The findings of this study aspire to contribute not only to the academic discourse on school feeding programs but, more importantly, to serve as a pragmatic guide for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders vested in the welfare and future of the nation's school-going children.

Objective of the study

1. To find out the major challenges of Mid-Day Meals in Arunachal Pradesh with special references to Namsai District.

Research Question

1. What are the key challenges related to the Mid-Day Meal in Arunachal Pradesh with special references to Namsai District?

Literature Review

Addressing the challenges embedded in school meal programs necessitates a nuanced comprehension of various dimensions, as elucidated by a myriad of scholarly works. Glewwe and Miguel (2008) as well as Drèze and Kingdon (2001) shed light on the pivotal role of nutrition, accentuating its direct influence on children's cognitive capacities and academic performance. This underscores the crucial need for a well-balanced and nutritious dietary component in school meal programs. Concurrently, the research conducted by Raju and Reddy (2014) directs attention to logistical challenges, unraveling intricate issues pertaining to the transportation, storage, and overall infrastructure that serve as impediments to the effective implementation of these programs. The significance of community participation is prominently underscored by Desai et al. (2016), who posit that local involvement is indispensable for the sustained effectiveness of school meal initiatives. Furthermore, studies by Gelli et al. (2017) and Kumar et al. (2019) accentuate the critical considerations surrounding hygiene and sanitation practices within the context of school feeding programs, highlighting the potential hurdles posed by inadequacies in facilities. The interplay between improved nutrition and positive educational outcomes is thoughtfully explored by Krishna Kumar (2008) and Kremer et al. (2009), providing insights into the transformative potential that well-designed school meal programs hold. Chakrabarti's (2012) research delves into the intricate challenges associated with policy implementation, emphasizing the imperative of coherent and well-executed policies to surmount obstacles. Lastly, the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is underscored by Jomaa et al. (2011) and Aboud (2006), reinforcing their indispensable role in the continual improvement of school meal programs. This comprehensive body of literature not only elucidates the multifaceted challenges inherent in school meal programs but also forms the foundational knowledge base for the development

and implementation of comprehensive, informed, and sustainable interventions in this crucial domain.

Methodology and Materials

This study employed a descriptive survey method to find out the major challenges of Mid-Day Meals in Arunachal Pradesh with special references to Namsai District. The participants in this study were 110 secondary school teachers from Namsai District, Arunachal Pradesh. In this research paper, the researcher used an Online Questionnaire to collect data.

Data Analysis

The survey results reveal a significant consensus among respondents, with 84.5% strongly agreeing and 15.5% agreeing that "The Mid Day Meal program in our region lacks adequate government support for timely funding and efficient operation." This overwhelming agreement underscores a widely held perception that government support is insufficient, potentially compromising the program's effectiveness. The findings highlight a critical issue that requires urgent attention, as a lack of timely funding and efficient operation can adversely impact various facets of the Mid Day Meal initiative. The results advocate for policy reforms, increased transparency, and community awareness to address issues such as corruption and bureaucratic hurdles, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to the success and sustainability of the program.

The Mid Day Meal program in our region lacks adequate government support for timely funding and efficient operation.

110 responses

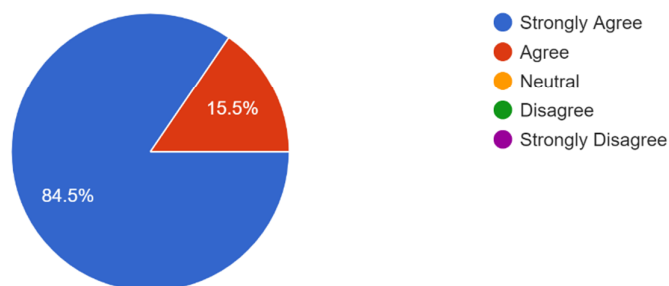


Figure 1: Perceived Lack of Government Support for Timely Funding and Efficient Operation in the Mid-Day Meal Program.

The survey results demonstrate a substantial consensus, with 72.7% strongly agreeing and 27.3% agreeing that "Corruption and bureaucratic hurdles significantly hinder the smooth functioning of the Mid Day Meal scheme." These findings underscore a pervasive perception among respondents that corruption and bureaucratic challenges pose significant obstacles to the effective operation of the program. The high percentage of strong agreement suggests that these issues are particularly impactful and prevalent. This highlights a critical need for targeted interventions and reforms to address corruption and streamline bureaucratic processes, aiming to create a more efficient and transparent environment for the Mid Day Meal scheme. The results emphasize the urgency of mitigating these challenges to ensure the

seamless implementation and success of the program in providing nutritious meals to the intended beneficiaries.

Corruption and bureaucratic hurdles significantly hinder the smooth functioning of the Mid Day Meal scheme.

110 responses

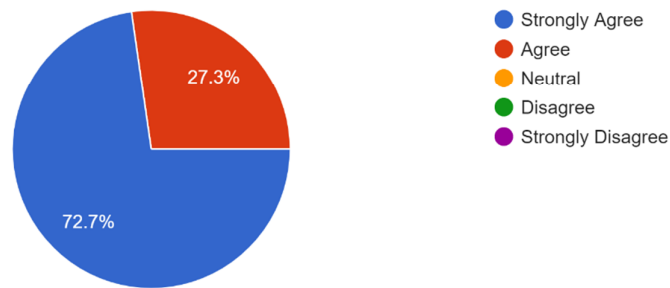


Figure 2: Impact of Corruption and Bureaucratic Hurdles on the Operational Efficiency of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

The survey results reveal a notable consensus, with 76.4% strongly agreeing and 23.6% agreeing that "Many schools participating in the Mid Day Meal program suffer from inadequate infrastructure, such as leaking roofs and lack of basic amenities." This overwhelming agreement underscores a widespread perception that infrastructure deficiencies pose significant challenges to the successful implementation of the Mid Day Meal program. The high percentage of strong agreement suggests that issues such as leaking roofs and the absence of basic amenities are pervasive and impactful. This highlights a critical need for targeted interventions to address infrastructure shortcomings, ensuring that participating schools provide a conducive environment for the effective delivery of nutritious meals. The results underscore the urgency of investing in infrastructure improvements to enhance the overall success and impact of the Mid Day Meal initiative in the region.

Many schools participating in the Mid Day Meal program suffer from inadequate infrastructure, such as leaking roofs and lack of basic amenities.

110 responses

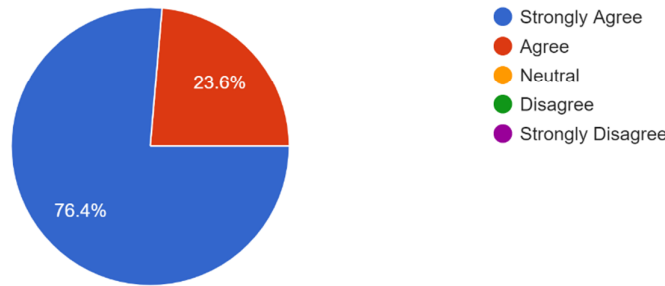


Figure 3: Challenges in School Infrastructure: Implications for the Mid-Day Meal Program.

The survey results demonstrate a significant consensus, with 76.4% strongly agreeing and 23.6% agreeing that "Difficulties in transportation and remote locations make it challenging to ensure a regular and efficient supply of meal ingredients." This widespread agreement underscores a shared recognition of logistical challenges faced by the Mid Day Meal program. The high percentage of strong agreement suggests that transportation and geographical remoteness are substantial impediments to maintaining a consistent and efficient supply chain for meal ingredients. The findings emphasize the critical importance of addressing logistical barriers to ensure the timely and reliable delivery of ingredients, particularly in remote areas. Strategies such as improved transportation infrastructure and supply chain management may be essential for overcoming these challenges and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the Mid Day Meal program in the surveyed region.

Difficulties in transportation and remote locations make it challenging to ensure a regular and efficient supply of meal ingredients.

110 responses

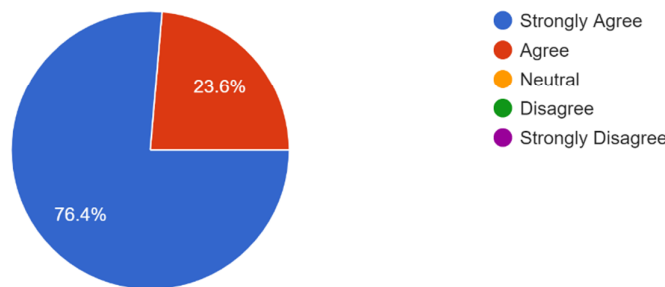


Figure 4: Transportation Challenges in Mid Day Meal Program.

The survey results reveal a substantial consensus, with 74.5% strongly agreeing and 25.5% agreeing that the Mid Day Meal program faces formidable challenges due to resource

shortages, leading to delays in ingredient deliveries and intermittent supply of utilities. This widespread acknowledgment emphasizes the urgency of addressing operational and logistical issues within the program. The high percentage of strong agreement underscores the need for policymakers to reevaluate resource allocation and consider measures to enhance the efficiency of ingredient supply chains and utility provision. These findings not only signal potential disruptions to the program's ability to provide consistent, nutritious meals to school children but also serve as a compelling basis for advocacy efforts aimed at instigating positive changes and improvements in the Mid Day Meal program.

The Mid Day Meal program faces challenges due to a shortage of resources, leading to delays in delivering ingredients and intermittent supply of utilities.

110 responses

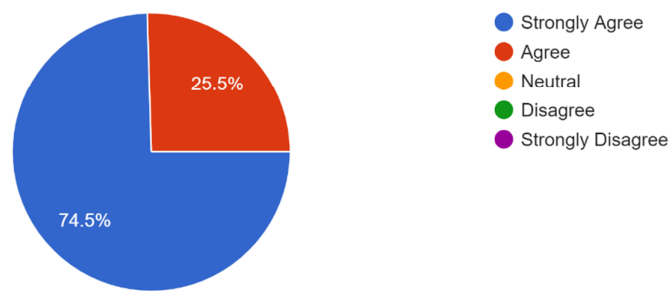


Figure 5: Challenges in the Mid-Day Meal Program Due to Resource Shortages.

The data indicates a significant consensus among respondents, with 73.6% strongly agreeing and 26.4% agreeing that the success of the scheme is under threat due to a shortage of trained staff and challenges in appointing personnel for daily meal preparation. This widespread agreement underscores a critical issue in the scheme's operational capacity, suggesting that the lack of qualified personnel poses a substantial risk. The emphasis on both the shortage of trained staff and difficulties in personnel appointment implies a multifaceted challenge, likely impacting the program's ability to consistently provide daily meals. Addressing this staffing issue is crucial for the scheme's sustainability and effectiveness, calling for strategic measures such as enhanced training programs and streamlined appointment processes to ensure a competent and stable workforce.

The scheme is jeopardized by a lack of trained staff and difficulties in appointing personnel for daily meal preparation.

110 responses

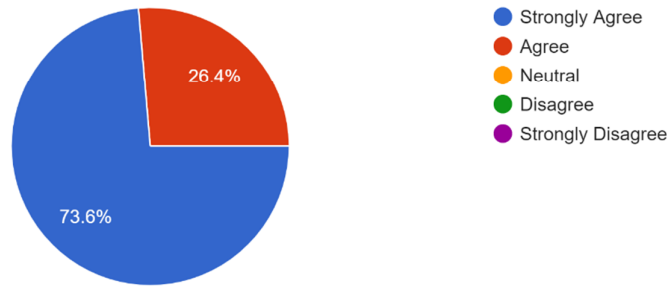


Figure 6: Staffing Challenges Impacting Daily Meal Preparation in the Scheme.

The survey results reveal a significant consensus, with 73.6% strongly agreeing and 26.4% agreeing that the Midday Meal Scheme is adversely affected by an insufficient flow of funds, impacting both its regularity and effectiveness. This high level of agreement underscores a widespread recognition of financial constraints as a critical impediment to the successful implementation of the program. The majority's strong agreement suggests a shared concern about the inadequacy of funds, indicating a potential risk to the consistent provision of meals and the overall effectiveness of the scheme. Addressing these financial challenges is paramount to sustaining and enhancing the Midday Meal Scheme's impact, calling for strategic measures to secure adequate funding for its successful continuation and positive outcomes.

The flow of funds is insufficient, affecting the regularity and effectiveness of the midday meal scheme.

110 responses

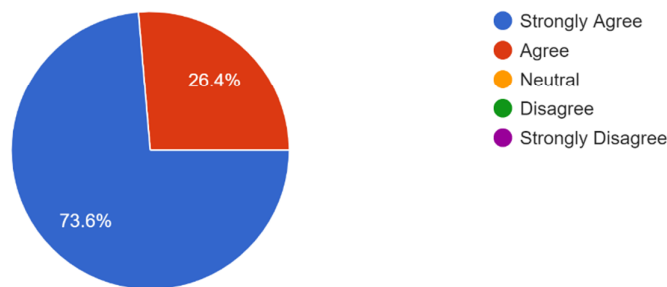


Figure 7: Impact of Insufficient Funds on the Midday Meal Scheme.

The survey results illustrate a noteworthy consensus, with 74.5% strongly agreeing, 23.6% agreeing, and 1.8% expressing a neutral stance on the perception that the quality of meals provided through the Mid Day Meal program is frequently subpar, resulting in a lack of interest or even refusal to consume them by students. The overwhelming agreement, especially in the

"strongly agree" category, suggests a prevalent concern about the quality of meals, indicating a potential issue that demands attention. The inclusion of a neutral response acknowledges a small but existing segment with a more ambivalent viewpoint. Addressing this widespread sentiment is crucial, as it not only affects the nutritional well-being of the students but also underscores the need for a reassessment and potential improvement in the quality standards of the Mid Day Meal program to better meet the expectations and preferences of the recipients.

The quality of meals provided through the Mid Day Meal program is often subpar, leading to a lack of interest or refusal to consume them by students.

110 responses

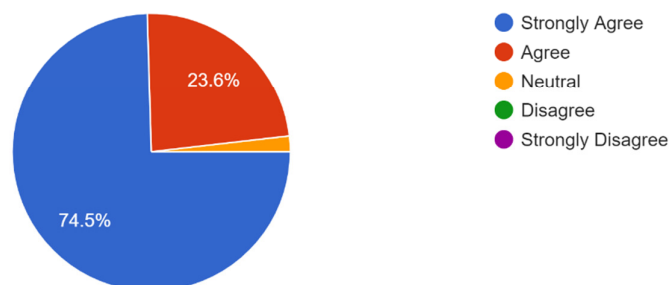


Figure 8: Perception of Meal Quality Impact on Student Participation.

Findings

The survey findings reveal a consistent and pervasive consensus among respondents regarding multiple challenges faced by the Mid Day Meal program. A staggering 84.5% strongly agree, and 15.5% agree that the program lacks adequate government support for timely funding and efficient operation, emphasizing a critical need for policy reforms and increased transparency. Figure 1 visually represents this overwhelming agreement. Additionally, 72.7% strongly agree, and 27.3% agree that corruption and bureaucratic hurdles significantly hinder the smooth functioning of the Mid Day Meal scheme, indicating a pressing need for targeted interventions to address these challenges. Infrastructure deficiencies in schools, such as leaking roofs and lack of basic amenities, are acknowledged by 76.4%, emphasizing the urgency of investing in school infrastructure to create a conducive environment for effective meal delivery. Difficulties in transportation and remote locations impacting the regular and efficient supply of meal ingredients are recognized by 76.4%, necessitating strategies like improved transportation infrastructure. The Mid Day Meal program's operational and logistical challenges due to resource shortages, leading to delays in ingredient deliveries and intermittent supply of utilities, are highlighted by 74.5%, calling for policymakers to reevaluate resource allocation. The shortage of trained staff and difficulties in appointing personnel for daily meal preparation, with 73.6% strongly agreeing and 26.4% agreeing, indicate a critical issue in the program's operational capacity. An insufficient flow of funds, impacting both the regularity and effectiveness of the Midday Meal Scheme, is recognized by 73.6%, emphasizing the need for strategic measures to secure adequate funding. Moreover, the perceived subpar quality of meals, acknowledged by 74.5% strongly agreeing, 23.6% agreeing, and 1.8% expressing a neutral stance, suggests a prevalent concern that necessitates a reassessment and potential improvement in the quality standards of the Mid Day Meal program.

Discussion

Studies have shown limited menu variety across regions, often neglecting local dietary preferences and cultural sensitivities (Paltasingh & Bhue, 2022). This can lead to decreased meal acceptance and wastage (Upadhyaya & Bisla, 2019). Micronutrient Deficiencies: Concerns exist regarding inadequate intake of micronutrients like iron and zinc, crucial for cognitive development (Nambiar & Desai, 2012). Dietary Diversity: Incorporating local ingredients, seasonal variations, and regional preferences can enhance cultural acceptance and nutritional variety (Biswas-Swarup & Sengupta, 2017). Fortifying staple foods with micronutrients can address deficiencies effectively (Kumar et al., 2014). Lack of proper kitchen facilities, storage space, and hygienic practices can compromise food safety, leading to foodborne illnesses (Pellissery et al., 2016). Cooks and kitchen staff often lack adequate training in food hygiene and safety protocols, further risking contamination (Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013). Investing in hygienic kitchens, proper storage facilities, and clean water supply is crucial for ensuring food safety (Verma & Biswas, 2009). Regular training programs on food safety and hygiene for cooks and kitchen staff are essential (Biswas-Swarup & Sengupta, 2017). Reports highlight instances of higher-caste students refusing food prepared by Dalit cooks due to ingrained societal prejudices (Paltasingh & Bhue, 2022). Unequal access to food within meals, especially for girls, has been documented in some areas (Sinha, 2008). Promoting inclusivity and combating caste-based discrimination through awareness campaigns within schools and communities is crucial (Pellissery et al., 2016). Engaging women in MDM preparation and management can promote gender equality and address unequal access to meals (Si & Sharma, 2008). Late disbursement of funds to implementing agencies hampers efficient program execution and affects meal quality (A study on the effectiveness of the mid-day meal program, 2022). Concerns exist regarding misuse of funds, diversion of food grains, and irregularities in procurement processes (Paltasingh & Bhue, 2022). Ensuring timely fund release, robust financial tracking systems and transparent budget allocation can address delays and mismanagement (Upadhyaya & Bisla, 2019). Engaging local communities in monitoring MDM implementation and conducting regular social audits can deter corruption and promote transparency (Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013). Teachers often bear the burden of overseeing MDM arrangements, alongside their teaching duties, leading to increased stress and reduced teaching time (Problems Faced by the Teachers..., 2022). Mid-day meal timing might not optimally align with children's hunger pangs, leading to distractions and interrupting the learning flow (A study on the effectiveness of mid-day meal program..., 2022). Providing additional staff specifically for MDM management can alleviate the workload on teachers (Upadhyaya & Bisla, 2019). Exploring flexible meal timings based on children's needs and local contexts can minimize classroom disruptions (Verma & Biswas, 2009).

Suggestions

The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program, aimed at providing nutritious meals to school children, faces multifaceted challenges that impede its efficacy. Issues ranging from inadequate infrastructure and logistics to funding constraints and insufficient community participation necessitate targeted solutions for sustainable improvement. To address these challenges, it is crucial to invest in upgrading kitchen facilities, enhancing transportation systems, and ensuring food safety. Standardizing meal plans, monitoring nutritional content, and advocating for increased funding can mitigate issues related to the

quality and quantity of meals. Active community involvement, enrollment incentives, and hygiene education are essential to overcoming barriers related to attendance and enrollment. Culturally sensitive meal planning, robust monitoring and evaluation systems, and comprehensive sustainability strategies are pivotal for the program's success. Clear communication channels and regular stakeholder engagement are fundamental in fostering transparency and building support. Collaborative efforts from government bodies, NGOs, communities, and stakeholders are imperative to navigate these challenges and ensure the sustained success of the MDM program.

Conclusion

A holistic and collaborative approach is imperative to surmount the challenges faced by the Mid-Day Meal program. Policymakers, educational institutions, communities, and various stakeholders must join forces to implement targeted solutions and ensure the program's success. Addressing infrastructural bottlenecks is a pivotal step in optimizing the delivery and execution of the Mid-Day Meal initiative. Investments in kitchen facilities, storage capacities, and transportation infrastructure can significantly enhance the program's efficiency, ensuring that nutritious meals reach schools in a timely manner. This requires coordinated efforts between government bodies, local authorities, and non-governmental organizations to allocate resources effectively and prioritize the development of necessary infrastructure. Enhancing the nutritional content of the meals is equally crucial. Collaborating with nutrition experts, local farmers, and food industry stakeholders can contribute to the creation of well-balanced and culturally appropriate menus. This approach not only ensures adequate caloric intake but also promotes a diverse and nutrient-rich diet, addressing the broader nutritional needs of growing children. Promoting community engagement is a key factor in the success of the Mid-Day Meal program. Building awareness among parents and community members about the benefits of the initiative can foster support and participation. This can be achieved through targeted outreach programs, educational campaigns, and involving local communities in the decision-making process, thereby creating a sense of ownership and responsibility.

The collaborative efforts of policymakers, educational institutions, communities, and other stakeholders are indispensable for unlocking the full potential of the Mid-Day Meal program. By addressing infrastructural challenges, enhancing nutritional quality, and fostering community engagement, the program can play a pivotal role in improving child nutrition, increasing school attendance, and contributing to the holistic development of the nation's youth. It is through a united front that we can ensure the Mid-Day Meal program becomes a powerful catalyst for positive change in the lives of the next generation.

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