

**IMPACT OF MID DAY MEAL IN SHIKSHALAYA PRAKALPA
KOLKATA
*A Study***



Conducted by:

KOLKATA KONSULTANTS, A Unit Of Community Action Society

Supported by:

SARVA SHIKSHA MISSION, KOLKATA

&

CITY LEVEL PORGRAMME OF ACION

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A picture of the variety of food items that they receive as Mid Day Meal was drawn by children at a Shikshalaya (Bustee Unnayan Samity) during the Focus Group Discussion.



"We know how to cook and feed our children but we can't teach them, we send them to you for learning so that they can live respectfully in the society and that is why we send them to this school (Shikshalaya)"

A mother virtually shelter less living next to the railway tracks of Majherhat railway station, shared this during the FGD in a Shikshalaya run by COSMOS

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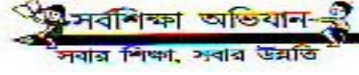
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FOREWORD



Sarva Shiksha Mission (SSM) has been committed to the cause of universalizing elementary education in the country for some years now. Various strategies are being undertaken to enroll and retain children into the formal school system. At SSA, Kolkata we too have undertaken various programmes and strategies to strengthen the existing system and initiate new strategies. Shikshalaya Prakalpa is one of the most successful models in the country in ensuring disadvantaged urban children universal access to primary school under the Alternative and Innovative Education Scheme (AIE) of SSM. The unique model of NGO and Government partnership in managing the programme has been also one of the major reasons for its success.

Mid Day Meal, a national programme too is initiated to accelerate the process of bringing and keeping children in formal school system including EGS and AIE schemes. In December, 2005 with the support from Department of School Education, Government of West Bengal the mid day meal scheme was introduced in the Shikshalayas. The urban children being part of a complex life style face different challenges that keep them away from school. Therefore SSA, Kolkata in consultation with the other stakeholders felt the need of taking a deeper look into the situation and analyse the impact created by the mid day meal scheme on the children attending Shikshalaya Prakalpa along with understanding the nature and quality of implementation after more than 2 years of inception.

The NGO named, Kolkata Konsultants a unit of Community Action Society have worked with support from the Project Management Unit (CLPOA) and other implementing NGOs to execute the study. We sincerely hope that the findings of the study would be though provoking for the readers and would enable to understand the ground situation especially in the context of the inherent challenges faced in its functioning. We also intend to consider the recommendations made in the study along with all the implementing partners of the programme so as to further strengthen the programme.

We would also appreciate your feedback and suggestions on the work to successfully continue in our future endeavours.

Sri. Durgapada Dutta

Chairman, Sarva Shiksha Mission , Kolkata

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

26 million children are born in India every year adding to the existing 375 million child population of the country. In spite of India's commitment to ensure the basic rights of the child as per the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child yet one of every two children are under nourished while several million children never enroll into formal school and several drop out even before completing primary education. It has been also found that 70 percent of the drop out children is undernourished. Therefore poor enrolment and retention status of children in the education system and their poor nutritional status have an obvious correlation. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) has made a significant contribution in the country in providing nutritional supplementation to children under 5 year of age. Though there remained a gap in similar supplementation at the elementary schooling level until the National Programme for Nutritional support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) 2004 was enforced by the government following the Supreme Court Judgement in November 2001 that directed states to provide cooked Mid Day Meal (MDM) in all schools. The scheme ensured all children access to hot cooked MDM not only in formal primary schools (upto class V) but also to the EGS/AIE centre (alternative schools run under Sarva Shiksha Abiyan). The scheme was further revised in 2006 to enhance the existing provisions to make it more effective and inclusive to encourage poor children from disadvantaged communities to attend school more regularly and concentrate in the class room activities. This programme and ever since proved to be a strong complementary initiative to the 93rd Constitutional amendment ensuring free and compulsory elementary education as a fundamental right for all children in the country.

In West Bengal the scheme has also been initiated in almost 90 percent of the primary schools including EGS and AIE centres. Shikshalaya Prakalpa run under the aegis of SSA, Kolkata is managed and implemented by NGOs. Started in 2001, this citywide programme has been a pioneering initiative in the country to ensure access to formal schooling for all children through community based initiative and government-NGO partnership. The programme is managed by the Project Management Unit (PMU), City Level Programme of Action (CLPOA) who further coordinates with 60 other NGOs to implement the programme at the community level. Each Shikshalaya (alternative form school) has 25 to 50 children located on the streets, slums or squatter colonies where the learning is facilitated by one or two sevak/sevikas 1:25 ratio. The children learn in a joyful multi-grade methodology supported by the

academic Resource Group, Loreto Day School, Sealdah. Children once enrolled in the age group of 5-9 years can complete upto class IV in the Shikshalaya. MDM was introduced in Shikshalaya Prakalpa since December 2005 with support from School Education Department, Government of West Bengal and currently reaches out to 436 Shikshalayas reaching out to 22,248 children (2007-08). Considering its extensive coverage and implementation for over 2 years the need of review the impact of the MDM programme on the children and assess the areas of improvement was felt by the key organisers. Thus The Impact of MDM in Shikshalayas- a Study was commissioned with support from external agency, Kolkata Konsultants, to assess the overall impact of the MDM programme with special focus on enrolment, attendance, community participation and quality of implementation.

20 percent of the total Shikshlayas were considered for the process through a scientific sampling method to have a appropriate representation of all language Shikshalayas and all regions of the city. Both secondary and primary data was collected for the purpose the primary data collection was done through interview conducted with 1000 individuals including children, sevak/sevikas, cooks, parents and the local club members or space providers. The process, findings and recommendations have been compiled into a detailed report.

The findings

Background and Profile of the respondents

- More Girls (57 percent) are benefited through the Shikshalaya programme especially the enrolment is highest for Muslim girls (30 percent). The average age of children attending Shikshalaya is 8 years. More respondent children are freshly enrolled, over the last 2 years (2006-07 & 07-08) after the inception of MDM (58.17percent). The children are concentrated in classes I &II (80 percent
- The Shikshlayas are supported by young sevak/ sevikas, cooks, parents and club members with their mean age ranging between 30-35 years, people at high productive age.
- The cook cooks for an average of 1-3 centers (25-150 children) with a maximum of 12 centers. Mostly women are involved as cooks (92.5 percent) and sevak/sevikas (87 percent). Cooks are mostly women from the locality or mothers (40 percent) of the children identified by sevak/sevikas (58 percent).

- The sevak/sevikas are educated youth, mostly women, most of whom are qualified to the level of higher secondary and graduation (69 percent). The sevak/sevikas are not necessarily from the immediate community.
- Parents belong to the disadvantaged communities having per month mean income, Rs.2150.48, working as daily labourers or they are into petty businesses. Mothers are mostly housewives while some work as domestic helps.

Views of respondents on the activities of Shikshalaya:

- Shikshalayas have been found to be child friendly as most children enjoy attending the centre regularly even before the MDM was implemented. For the children and parents from the disadvantaged communities the teaching learning in the Shikshalayas is the 1st priority. MDM is the 4th priority for the children and 2nd priority for the poor parents.
- Sevak/sevikas are working in the Shikshalayas as they feel good to have the opportunity to support the disadvantaged children of the community. They also benefit a lot from the training programme they receive.
- Club members having limited involvement in the Shikshalaya are aware about the visible activities of the Shikshalaya i.e MDM and teaching learning.

Consumption pattern of MDM:

- The serving time of MDM for 72.37 percent Shikshalaya is between 12.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m. while for the rest of the centers the meals are served in the morning, late afternoon or in the evening.
- 35 percent of the children take their food home to share it with their siblings and parents and not just for infrastructure. The food is shared with an average 1.45 members of the family of them 84 percent consume it immediately.
- The sharing behavior of the children with the MDM encourages the younger siblings to join Shikshalayas yet this being an uncontrolled situation and a reduced calorie intake of the child cannot be denied as well.

Nutritional supplementation through MDM:

- Most children do not come to the Shikshalaya with empty stomach. However 4 percent come without food. The poorest of the poor reached out through the programme after MDM. The children do not seem to skip meals as per the parents.
- A encouraging variety in terms of the menu for 5 working days is provided to the children through the MDM by the NGOs within the limited resources of the programme. The cultural context is also considered by them while planning for the menu.
- Interestingly 35 percent parents have said they have also made some changes in their consumption pattern after MDM by including more vegetable in their diet

Level of Satisfaction of the Respondents on MDM:

- 96 percent children like the food served as MDM. It is fascinating to note that 80 percent of the children enjoy the MDM more compared to home food as MDM has more variety, is tasty and served hot.
- Parents are highly satisfied with the quantity(83 percent), quality (74 percent) and time (72 percent) and items served (63 percent) of the MDM. Sevak /Sevikas and club members are also satisfied with the quantity and quality of the MDM but felt that the time should be more appropriate.

Impact on the Shikshalayas

- Secondary data reveals that the enrolment has not visibly increased rather stabilised since the implementation of MDM. But the attendance have increased by at least 2 percent every year.
- The secondary data also reveals that there is an improvement in the retention of children over the last 3 years as attendance has stabilised there is an increasing number of children in classes III and IV.
- The MDM has regularised 26 percent of the difficult to reach children who were irregular before the starting of MDM.
- The sevak/sevikas (88 percent) and club members (86 percent) have observed an increase in the attendance trend after MDM is implemented. There is continuity in the attendance of children felt the sevak/sevikas and the club members also reflects improvement in the retention pattern over the last 2 years.

- It is universally felt that MDM provides at least supplementary nutrition to the poor children.
- 66 percent of the sevak/sevikas felt there is an improvement in the learning levels of children. 41 percent of the parents too felt the same way as children are taking more interest in education.
- Improvement in the health and growth of children has also been reported by all the stakeholders.

Shared Roles and Responsibilities in Implementing MDM:

- 13 percent of the sevak/sevikas time (i.e 23-35 minutes) is contributed towards the MDM from their teaching learning time. The cumulative responsibility of running the MDM programme is undertaken by the NGO and sevak/sevika with very low involvement of mothers and club members in the process (20 percent).

The Infrastructure & Other Support for MDM:

- Shiskhalayas run in community spaces and thus infrastructure is a challenge for 61 percent of the clubs with lack of space, enough light and fire safety. 15 percent of the sampled Shikshalayas do the cooking within the centers disturbing the teaching learning process and causing high chances of fire hazard. Storage and transportation of rice is a problem too.
- 90 percent children know to wash their hands and 42 percent wash their hands with soap. 59 percent do not clean the utensils before and after eating. Much of their health and hygiene practice is same as at home.
- Only 9 percent sevak/sevika has reported of some training on health, hygiene and nutrition to carry forward the message to the children.
- 42 percent of the Sevikas felt that there is no need to involve the club members in the MDM process. The club members have reconfirmed the finding by saying that they are not asked to contribute (20 percent) and NGOs are indifferent (20 percent) though lack of time is sited as the major reason for non involvement

Redressal Mechanism for MDM:

- Though everybody has a scope to share their dissatisfaction on the MDM only 4 percent children have complained when they disliked the food though this should be encouraged further.
- Most complaints are made by the sevak/sveikas on the availability of raw materials (28 percent), parents on the taste of the food (49 percent), club members and cooks on quantity.

- The complaint is made at certain invisible hierarchy. Steps have been taken against the complaints as said by more than 50percent of the respondents.

Looking Beyond MDM:

- More than 80 percent of the children and parents have said the children would continue to attend Shikshalayas even if MDM is stopped.
- Relatively low percentage of club members (55.88 percent) and sevak/sevikas (60.58 percent) have responded positively on attendance of children after MDM.
- Around 5 percent of children and parents have declared that they would not attend Shikshalaya if MDM is stopped. Therefore, it can be said that MDM is ensuring a certain percentage of the most difficult to reach children access to education, working towards universalisation of education of all children.

The findings have reflected very encouraging results in terms of the effectiveness of the programme to the disadvantaged urban children emphasizing on the satisfactory quality of implementation as couched by all stakeholders. The monitoring mechanism, micro management in the process by the NGOs and the community based approach has found to be the key contributing factors for the success. Though it is obvious that the programme is functioning with its own challenges and some key concerns have also emerged. The intensive role of the sevak/sevikas and the low level of participation of the community has been one of the major concerns some of the others being the limitation of infrastructure, availability of fuel and increased need of awareness about the scheme to parents and common people and convergence amongst various departments.

Suggestions have also been taken form all relevant respondents and other stakeholders running the programme which has been further utilised to draw the recommendations based on the understanding and observation of the research team. The recommendations can be categorised into long term and short term goals broadly in the areas of improving quality, process of implementation, increasing community participation, enhanced awareness on the scheme, empowerment and capacity building of the sevak/sevikas and the community and finally networking, convergence and advocacy. Some strategies have been suggested under each of the broad heads for further reference and strategy building purposes.

To conclude it has been strongly felt that though the relevance of MDM cannot be denied for enrolling and retaining children from the most difficult to reach backgrounds, yet the most important factor for all, especially parents and children remained the quality of learning. That emphasised that MDM should exist only if it supplements the learning of the child and not just as an isolated programme in itself.