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Title: Assessment of Mid - Day Meal Scheme in tribal schools: A study of Melghat region of Maharashtra

The present study has tried to focus on the given assignment of evaluating the actual performance of the Mid - Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). It aimed to understand its process of implementation and its impact on beneficiaries in Melghat within a short span of research time. In conclusion, with above results of the present study revealed that Mid-Day Meal Programme (MDMP) in Tribal schools of Melghat has helped in promotion of children towards better nutritional status, increasing enrolment, surge in daily attendance particularly girl child, narrowed social distance and fostered gender equity and most importantly address the issue of hunger and poverty.

Beneficiaries as well as beneficiary mothers and teachers were satisfied with the functioning of the programme, quality of food, menu and thus suggested for its continuation with addition of newer recipes. The nutrient intake through menu was 42-49 per cent deficit in calorie and 48-58 per cent deficit in protein than recommended for the scheme. This can be enhanced by including *chapati*, *roti*, *bhaji*, egg, milk and non- vegetarian recipes as suggested by children and beneficiary mothers. Organoleptic results revealed that all children relished the *Mid-Day Meal* menu and liked rice, *sambar* the most.

Documentation of the central kitchen proved that the food was hygienically prepared and handled. Safety measures set by the organization right from preparing of raw ingredients to delivering of lunch boxes does not provide a way for any type of contamination. With the timely support and flow of funds from Central, State Government, NGOs, Corporates and individual donors the programme was successfully functioning and implemented in most of the tribal schools in Melghat but still there are gaps and challenges to address in the need of an hour.

Although we were able to fathom the magnitudes of financial and administrative process and benefits perceived by the stakeholders at the local level, there are many aspects that remained untouched in current study. The scope of this study could be expanded to ascertain administrative and financial efficiencies (or the lack of it) and other aspects, more particularly the nutritional aspect related to the two genders, in much more detail. A separate and contextual study may be conducted to understand these aspects in comparison with rural and urban. In fact, a much larger study at the State level could be conducted that not only includes aspects not covered in this study, but also widens the sample size of schools, and stakeholders to get a much broader and representative picture of Melghat's Mid-Day Meal Scheme on various dimensions with more financial support. There are many challenges yet to overcome for successfully implementation of MDMS. Future improvements to the quality of school meals (preferably backed up by better monitoring) will likely ameliorate many of the Mid - Day Meal Scheme problems and enhance its beneficial effects on both nutrition and school attendance.
