

REVIEW OF MID DAY MEAL PROGRAMME IN MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract

MDMP is a welfare programme that is being operated through the country and involves millions of children, crores of public funds, and thousands of officials manning the programme. While there can no denying that the programme needs to be monitored with an eagle's eye for lacunae, discrepancies and malpractices, it is equally imperative that each and every well-intentioned effort, however miniscule, needs to be appreciated, rewarded and publicized for the simple reason that man motivation is a simple but a highly effective tool that can rev up the gargantuan lumbering machinery involved in the implementation of MDMP to generate unprecedented results, as expected of this populist programme. The present study, keeping MDMP guidelines and objectives as a benchmark (as laid down by the MHRD), strives to evaluate MDMP with specific reference to the state of Maharashtra. While the intention behind MDMP is undoubtedly commendable, the execution requires a lot more effort in order to upgrade the programme from tokenism to efficiency.

Keywords: *Mid Day Meal Programme, Maharashtra, schools.*

Introduction

Against the backdrop of 61 percent of stunted and 20 percent of wasted children under five years of age and India's Global Hunger Index score of 46.4 in 1992 (Global Hunger Index Report, 2016), the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), popularly known as Mid Day Meal Programme (MDMP) was launched on August 15, 1995 as a centrally sponsored scheme to boost school enrolment, attendance, retention and enhance the nutritional status of school children in all government run and government aided primary schools across the country. The provision of cooked mid day meals formally acquired the status of a legal entitlement only after the intervention of Supreme Court via. Civil Writ Petition Number 196/2001. The NP-NSPE ever since its inception has been revised periodically to give it more teeth. By April 2008, the scheme was extended to all upper primary children studying in classes VI-VIII across Government and aided schools and Education Guarantee Scheme/Alternative and Innovative Education centres. Today MDMP in India is the world's largest school feeding programme, reaching out to about 10.03 crore children

in over 11.50 lakh schools across the country (Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD, 2017a)).

Maharashtra has been implementing the Mid Day Meal Scheme, in the form of dry rations since 1995-96. Subsequently, in response to the Supreme Court's directive (CWP 196/2001) to provide cooked meals instead of dry rations to children on all school days, the Scheme in the form of free hot cooked meals was introduced in 15 tribal districts of Maharashtra, in 2002 and was further extended to all districts of Maharashtra in January, 2003 to cover children of classes I-V in Government schools, schools run by local bodies, Government aided private schools and students enrolled in Education Guarantee Scheme Centres (Vastishalas) and Alternative and Innovative Education Centres (Mahatma Phule Education Guarantee Scheme Centres). In line with MDMP revisions, the scheme was extended by Government of Maharashtra from January 1, 2008 to children in upper primary (VI-VIII) classes initially in 43 educationally backward blocks in 10 districts and later throughout the state since September 2008(MHRD, 2017b).

Statement of the Problem

Ever since its inception, MDMP has been afflicted by corrupt practices, leading to frequent complaints of food poisoning largely on account of bureaucratic negligence and shoddy implementation, putting into grave risk the lives of helpless and hungry school children, the very beneficiaries for whom the scheme is intended. There is enough of anecdotal evidence on poor quality of meals served on mid day meal thali. Given the enormous scale of the programme and Maharashtra's shocking statistics on hunger, malnutrition and out of school children, the programme needs to be monitored with an eagle's eye for lacunae, discrepancies and malpractices.

Review of Literature

Lath (2006) reviewed the MDMS and the school health clinic program implemented in Mumbai by the Municipal Council of Greater Mumbai based on the opinions of the people involved in the scheme and reported that the MDMS was a great enticement in motivating the students to attend school and the school health programme provided basic health care to all children. The mid day meal contractors were opposed to multiple paperwork mandated for the allotment process and were willing to bend all rules and resort to any means to increase their tally of allotted students. Mahila Mandals vehemently resented the entry of ISKCON and were peeved at the step-motherly treatment meted out to them (ISKCON was allotted 11000 students as against only 1300 for each Mahila Mandal for the same security amount). MDM operations were being inefficiently managed for lack of sufficient and timely funding. The study made a case for local food and tastes to be incorporated in the preparation of meals, to enable the child to unambiguously feel that the meal he/she consumed at

school was similar to meals served at home and suggested that instead of providing free rice, the cost of rice should be incorporated in the cooking cost (suitably inflation-adjusted) to offer the contractor some leeway in proportionately distributing the costs incurred on preparing meals, without having to compromise on the quality or resorting to illegal means like selling off part of the allocated grains.

Chugh (2008) while documenting the best practices adopted under Mid Day Meal Scheme in Maharashtra observed that the scheme was being implemented with great enthusiasm in Maharashtra with wholehearted participation of Village Education Committees, Ward Committees, Self Help Groups, parents, teachers and other community members. Monitoring committees at state, district, block, village/ward levels were appointed to oversee operations at grass root level. The provision of food grains was time bound and its utilization by the schools was also satisfactory. All in all, MDMS had been able to improve school enrolment and retention.

Gol (2010) in its performance evaluation of Cooked Mid Day Meal Scheme across seventeen states in India (Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh) from 2000-2006 observed almost universal coverage of the scheme in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. Barring Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, all sample states were faulted for lack of co-ordination with the Health Department. Majority of the children were satisfied with the quality of mid day meals served in sample schools of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, whereas dissatisfaction was reported from sample schools in Karnataka and Bihar. Drinking water facilities were available only in 75% of the sample schools of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Meghalaya and West Bengal. With the exception of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, all the sample schools were seriously understaffed in terms of CCHs across the country.

Gol (2013) reviewed the implementation of the MDMS in Buldana and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra and observed that the implementation was unsatisfactory in drought prone areas. The State Government had not complied with revised cooking cost norms and had released only a truncated amount of central funds after a delay of more than four months hampering the implementation of MDMP at the base level. State Level Steering cum Monitoring Committee had convened only one meeting till September, 2013. Mid day meals were not served as per prescribed norms due to lack of training of CCHs. Food samples were not tested for nutrition content or the presence of e-coli, etc. The salaries to CCHs were delayed by five to six months. Provision of eating plates was insufficient in some of the schools. Other than tasting mid day meals, SMC members were unaware of their role and responsibilities

under MDMP and most of the parents were oblivious of the entitlements under the scheme. Almost 30% of the children confirmed that mid day meal was the main meal of their day. On the positive side, 87% of the children reported satisfaction with the taste while only 44% were not satisfied with the variety. School teachers played a proactive role not only in supervising the mid day meal scheme but also ensuring its smooth implementation. School Health Cards were maintained in nearly all of the visited schools and micronutrients were provided to all the elementary class children under MDMP. The JRM Nutrition Team recommended some nutritious recipes to be incorporated in MDM menu.

CAG (2016) in its performance audit of Mid Day Meal Scheme in Maharashtra for the period 2010-15, among other things, flagged various shortcomings like inadequate coverage of schools in notified drought-affected districts; inordinate delays in release of funds to the districts, blocks and schools; irregular supply of cooked meals in 66% of the schools; inflated cooking costs paid to ISKCON; shortfalls in lifting of rice by 289 food service providers in Mumbai; 97% of the mid day meal samples from Mumbai schools failing to meet the prescribed nutritional norms; indiscreet procurement of IFA capsules; irregular tasting of mid day meals by teachers and SMC members; laxity in capacity building and health check-up of CCHs; usage of cooking oil and condiments past their expiry dates; ineffectual public grievance redressal system; drop in school enrolment despite entitlement of free mid day meals. In light of the reported deficiencies, CAG suggested the State Government to examine the causes for disruption in the supply of mid day meals; arrange for direct transfer of funds to schools; bolster its monitoring mechanism; ensure that the central kitchens follow all MDM guidelines and conduct community mobilization activities to increase school enrolment and retention.

Objective of the Study

This study delves into the details of implementation of Mid Day Meal Programme in Maharashtra, highlighting its salient features and performance in the recent times.

Research Methodology

The study is a descriptive one, based on the information provided by the Government of Maharashtra in its Annual Work Plan and Budget for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Results and Discussion

Based on the information provided by the Government of Maharashtra in its AWP&B for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 (MHRD, 2017b), the relevant details of implementation of the Mid Day Meal Programme in Maharashtra are summarized as under:

(i) Nutritional Provisions and Cost: As per nutrition and quantity norms prescribed under MDMP, a primary school student must get a minimum of 450 calories and 12 grams of protein per meal per school day, while an upper primary student must get 700 calories and 20 grams of protein per meal per school day. A mid day meal should have 100 grams of grains (rice/wheat), 20 grams pulses, 50 grams vegetables, and 5 grams oil for primary students, and 150 grams grains (rice/wheat), 30 grams pulses, 75 grams vegetables, and 7.5 grams oil for upper primary students. The nutrition content should further be improved by using green leafy vegetables and double fortified salt. The cost of meal per child per school day in Maharashtra schools as per State nutrition/expenditure norms for primary school students in 2016-17 is given in Table 1.

Table 1 Nutritional provisions and cost for primary students in Maharashtra

| S.No | Food item | Primary School Children | | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------|----------------------------|
| | | Quantity (in grams) | Cost (in Rs.) | Calories | Protein content (in grams) |
| 1 | Food grains (Wheat/Rice) | 100 | Supplied free | 340 | 7 |
| 2 | Pulses | 20 | 1.48 | 70 | 5 |
| 3 | Vegetables | 50 | 0.64 | 25 | 2 |
| 4 | Oil and fat | 5 | 0.64 | 45 | 0 |
| 5 | Salt and Condiments | as per requirement | 0.32 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | Fuel | as per requirement | 0.48 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | Any other item | as per requirement | 0.57 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 175 | 4.13 | 480 | 14 |

Source: AWP&B, 2017-18, Government of Maharashtra

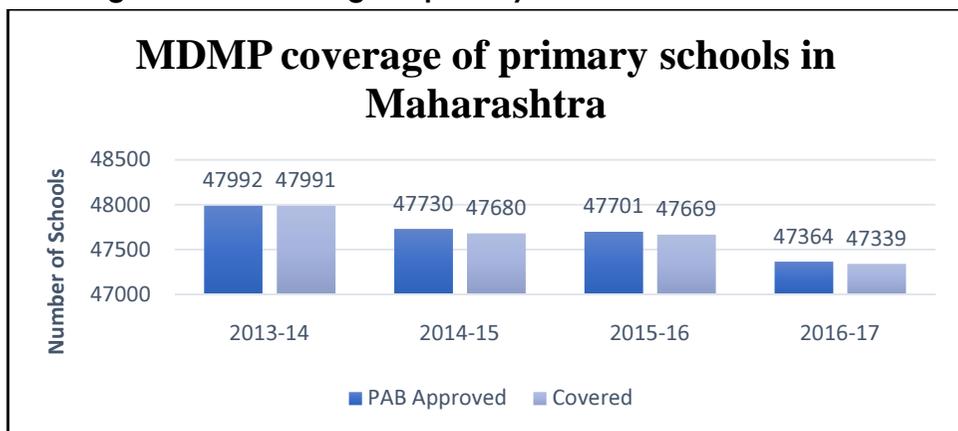
The cost of meal per child per school day in Maharashtra schools as per State nutrition/expenditure norms for upper primary school students in 2016-17 is given in Table 2. The MDMP guidelines categorically state that the MDMP singularly aims to provide a cooked mid day meal 'satisfying prescribed food and nutritional norms' within the stipulated cost limits. The underlying objective of the programme is implicit in its mission to provide atleast one wholesome, nutritious hot cooked meal to a poor deprived school child in a day as his/her legal entitlement so as to mitigate to some extent the ill effects of hunger and malnutrition among school children.

Table 2 Nutritional Provisions and Cost for Upper Primary Students in Maharashtra

| S.No | Food item | Upper Primary School Children | | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|------------|----------------------------|
| | | Quantity (in grams) | Cost (in Rs.) | Calories | Protein content (in grams) |
| 1 | Food grains (Wheat/Rice) | 150 | Supplied free | 510 | 10 |
| 2 | Pulses | 30 | 2.51 | 105 | 8 |
| 3 | Vegetables | 75 | 0.78 | 40 | 2 |
| 4 | Oil and fat | 7 | 0.98 | 67 | 0 |
| 5 | Salt and Condiments | 2 | 0.54 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | Fuel | 0 | 0.81 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | Any other item | 0 | 0.56 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 264 | 6.18 | 722 | 20 |

Source: AWP&B, 2017-18, Government of Maharashtra

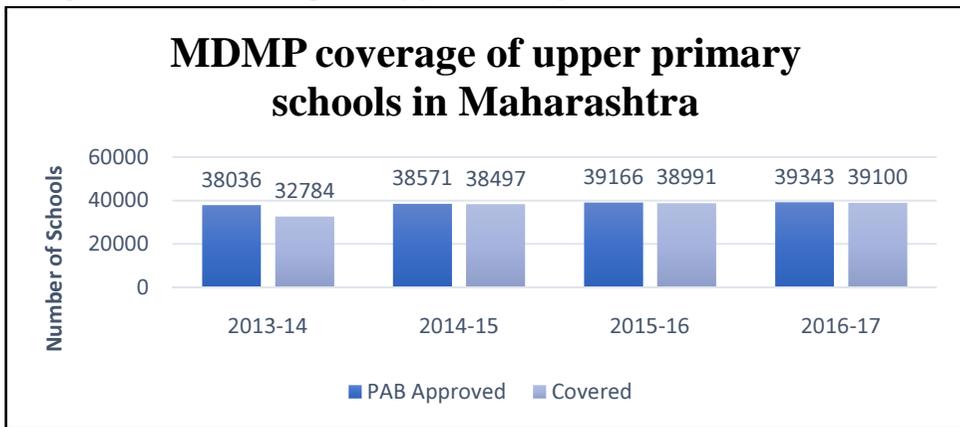
(ii) Coverage of Institutions: Institutions eligible for Mid Day Meal Scheme in Maharashtra include primary (I-V), upper primary (VI-VIII) and primary with upper primary (I-VIII) schools (Government + Local Bodies + Government Aided + Madarasas/Maqtabs + Special Training Centres). National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Schools are primary schools but eligible for MDMP benefit as per upper primary norms. The difference between Programme Approval Board (PAB) approval (target) versus number of institutions covered (achievement) for primary and upper primary schools for the period 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively. The information reveals that almost all of the eligible institutions in Maharashtra have been covered under MDMP: 86028 (2013-14), 86301 (2014-15), 86867 (2015-16) and 86707 (2016-17).

Fig.1 MDMP coverage of primary schools in Maharashtra

Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

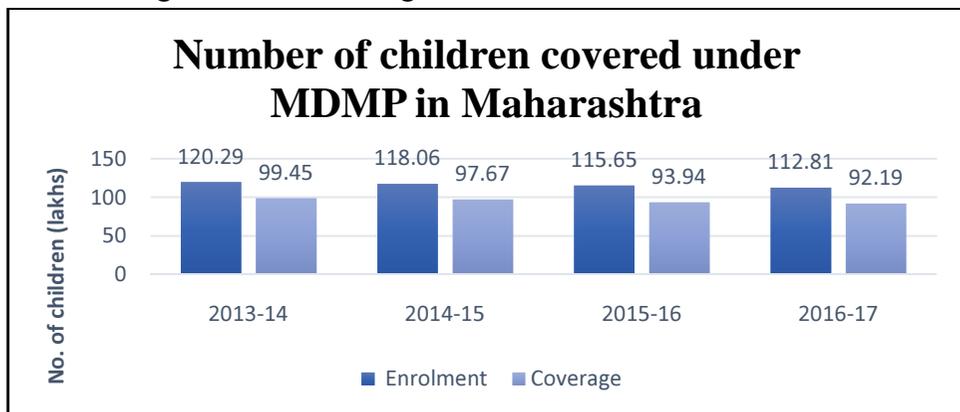
(iii) Coverage of Children: The MDMP guidelines, 2006 stipulate that every child who attends the eligible institution is to be covered under the scheme and shall be served cooked mid day meal on all school days. Coverage in terms of number of school children who availed cooked mid day meals (achievement) against total enrolment (target) is depicted in Figure 3. The percentage coverage of school children against total enrolment has reduced from 83% (2013-14 and 2014-15) to 81% (2015-16) and to 82% (2016-17). A gap of 32 to 36% between enrolment and coverage at upper primary level is noticed in the districts of Hingoli, Jalna, Raigad, Washim, and Mumbai during 2016-17. As far as MDMP coverage of children in drought affected areas is concerned, only 22% (13.25 lakh children) were covered out of 61.76 lakh approved by the PAB for 2015-16 and it has marginally improved to 37% (8.48 lakh children against the PAB approval of 22.94 lakh) during 2016-17. This is a serious lacuna reflecting the lacklustre attitude of the officials involved. Shortcomings in the implementation of MDMP in 22 drought affected areas for 47 additional days should be immediately addressed by the State.

Fig.2 MDMP Coverage of Upper Primary Schools in Maharashtra



Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

Fig.3 MDMP Coverage of Children in Maharashtra

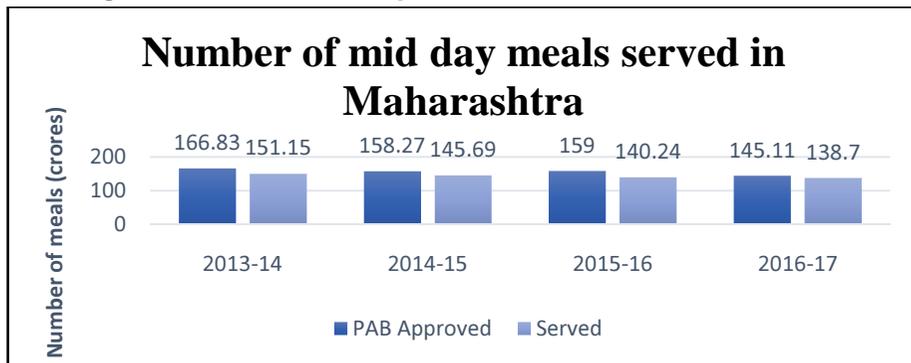


Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

(iv) Coverage of Working Days: The guidelines for MDMP provide that mid day meal should be served to all children attending school on each working day. The State of Maharashtra has covered cent percent of the approved days (151) for both primary and upper primary schools and 88% of the approved days (235) for NCLP schools during the first three quarters of 2016-17.

(v) Number of Meals Served: The difference between number of meals to be served (target) versus number of meals served (achievement) for primary and upper primary is shown in Figure 4. The percentage coverage in terms of mid day meals served against PAB approvals is 91% (2013-14), 92% (2014-15), 88% (2015-16) and 96% (2016-17).

Fig.4 Number of mid day meals served in Maharashtra



Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

(vi) Utilization of Food grains, Cooking cost and Transportation Assistance: An amount of Rs. 450 per MT is borne by the State to fill the gap in total transportation cost required under MDMP. The State is expected to utilize at least 75% of the allocations during the first three quarters of a financial year. The State had utilized about 171360.19 MTs (55%) of food grains as on December 31, 2015 which was less than the expected consumption. Low utilization of food grains was found in the districts of Sindhudurg (42%), Nashik (44%), Hingoli (45%), Akola (47%), Washim (48%), Dhule (50%), Nanded (52%), Thane (52%) and Pune (52%). Utilization of cooking cost has also been on the lower side ranging from 62% (2013-14) to 54% (2015-16). During 2015-16, Buldana and Latur had utilized only 45% of the cooking cost and mismatch between utilization of food grains and cooking cost was the highest in Nagpur and Latur.

The situation with respect to utilization rates of food grains and cooking costs and the mismatch between them has marginally improved in 2016-17. Utilization of transportation assistance has been in the range of 64-66 percent for the period under consideration. Details on food grains, cooking cost and transportation assistance for the given period are shown in Table 3. Given the dubious reputation of Maharashtra on malnutrition among children, such low utilization figures in Maharashtra are beyond comprehension and calls for immediate review of MDMP operations at the grass root level.

Table 3 Utilization of food grains, cooking cost and transportation assistance in Maharashtra

| Utilisation of food grains, cooking costs and transportation assistance in Maharashtra | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Food Grains | | | Cooking Costs | | | Transportation Assistance | | |
| | Allocation (MTs) | Utilisation (MTs) | % Utilisation | Allocation (Rs. lakhs) | Utilisation (Rs. Lakhs) | % Utilisation | Allocation (Rs. lakhs) | Utilisation (Rs. Lakhs) | % Utilisation |
| 2013-14 | 286570.3 | 178447.8 | 62% | 94638.78 | 58898.5 | 62% | 2149.28 | 1386.75 | 65% |
| 2014-15 | 274566.4 | 173007.8 | 63% | 96119.02 | 61682.6 | 64% | 2059.25 | 1353.37 | 66% |
| 2015-16 | 313788.9 | 171360.2 | 55% | 119376.7 | 64228.2 | 54% | 2202.39 | 1456.77 | 66% |
| 2016-17 | 253233.3 | 168675.1 | 67% | 103673.9 | 69091.9 | 67% | 1899.25 | 1217.01 | 64% |

Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

(vii) Payment of Cost of Food grains to the FCI: Out of the total bills raised by FCI upto the month of December 2016, amounting to Rs. 4868.03 lakhs, an amount of Rs. 3994.98 lakhs (82%) had been paid by the State.

(viii) Payment of Honorarium to Cook-cum-Helpers: As per the State directive, the FSPs in rural and urban areas are allowed to engage Cook-Cum-Helpers (CCHs) for cooking and serving of mid day meals in the schools and cleaning of eating plates and school premises after the distribution of mid day meals. The State Government has prescribed its own criteria for engagement and payment of honorarium to CCHs in rural and urban areas, shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Norms for payment of honorarium to CCHs in Maharashtra

| Norms for Payment of Honorarium to CCHs in Maharashtra | | | | |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| S.No | Rural Areas | | Urban Areas | |
| | MDM Beneficiaries | Grant Approved per month (Rs.) | MDM Beneficiaries | Grant Approved per month (Rs.) |
| 1 | up to 25 | 1000 | up to 500 | 2000 |
| 2 | 26-199 | 2000 | up to 1000 | 4000 |
| 3 | 200-299 | 3000 | up to 5000 | 6000 |
| 4 | 300-399 | 4000 | up to 10000 | 8000 |
| 5 | 400-499 | 5000 | above 10000 | 10000 |
| 6 | 500-599 | 6000 | | |
| 7 | 600-699 | 7000 | | |
| 8 | 700-799 | 8000 | | |
| 9 | 800-899 | 9000 | | |
| 10 | 900 and above | 10000 | | |

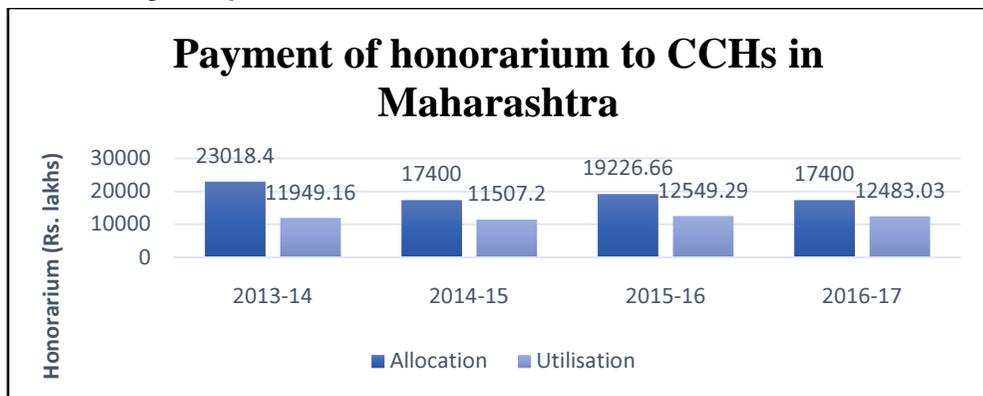
Source: AWP&B, 2017-18, Government of Maharashtra

The honorarium (Rs. 1000 shared in the ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and the State) is paid to each cook-cum-helper per month for ten months in a year and for

additional two months in drought affected areas. Year wise allocation and utilization of funds for payment of honorarium to CCHs is shown in Figure 5.

During 2015-16, 163523 CCHs (83% females and 17% males) were engaged by the State as against PAB approval of 174000 and the State had utilized only 65% funds against the allocation of Rs. 19226.66 lakhs, reconfirming the fact that there are more often than not, uncalled procedural delays in the release of salaries to CCHs. In the face of bureaucratic apathy, as substantiated by poor utilization data, it would be naïve to expect the CCHs (who anyway live a hand to mouth existence) to even perform their basic duties, which eventually would have a debilitating effect on MDM operations. During this period, 151028 CCHs received honorarium through Real Time Gross Settlement/cheques in their respective bank accounts. In 2016-17, there has been an improvement as 166113 CCHs (85% females and 15% males) were engaged as against the approval of 174000, the State has managed to utilize 72% of the funds allocated for payment of honorarium to CCHs and 164352 CCHs have received their honorarium in their respective bank accounts.

Fig.5 Payment of honorarium to CCHs in Maharashtra

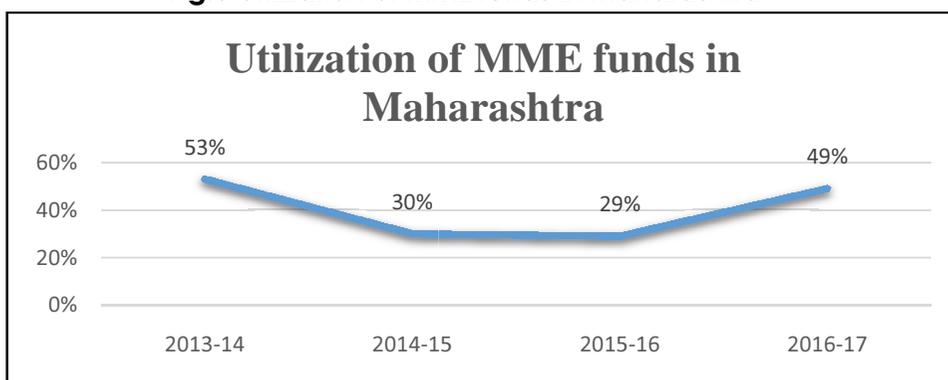


Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

(ix) Utilization of MME Funds: Percentage utilization against allocation of MME funds shows a declining trend from 53% in 2013-14 to 30% in 2014-15, as shown in Figure 6. Only Rs. 538.11 lakhs (29%) were utilized against the allocation of Rs. 1835.29 lakhs for 2015-16. Low utilization of MME funds reflect poor management, monitoring and evaluation of MDMP in Maharashtra. As against the allocation of Rs. 1659.69 lakhs for MME, the State has spent Rs. 814.79 lakhs (49%) during the first three quarters of 2016-17. MHRD has appointed Centre for Development Communication and Studies (CDECS), Jaipur and Indian Institute of Education (IIE), Pune for monitoring of the Mid Day Meal Scheme in the State of Maharashtra. These Monitoring Institutes (MIs) had reviewed the implementation of MDMP in the districts of Jalana, Hingoli, Washim, Buldana, Nanded, Thane, Mumbai, Nashik and Dhule districts during 2013-14 and IIE, Pune had conducted social audit of MDMS in Pune and Latur districts during 2014-15. In the reports submitted

to MHRD, MIs have highlighted various deficiencies relating to release of funds, food grains and honorarium, quality of food grains, availability of safe water for drinking and cooking, poor quality of mid day meals and repetitive menu served under MDMP in Maharashtra. As a follow up measure to the shortcomings highlighted by the MIs, the State Government has issued instructions at various levels to comply with MDMP guidelines; Steering-cum-Monitoring Committees (SCMCs) have been constituted at the State, Village, District and Block levels to strengthen the monitoring mechanism; SMC members, mother volunteers, and inspecting staff of the respective education departments have been assigned the responsibility of supervision and monitoring of MDMP at the school level; vigilance and flying squads have been set up to monitor the MDMP at State and district levels. As part of the monitoring exercise, 33 meetings of District Steering cum Monitoring Committee have been convened and as many as 86600 school inspections have been undertaken in 2016-17.

Fig.6 Utilization of MME funds in Maharashtra



Source: Year wise AWP&B, Government of Maharashtra

(x) Construction of Kitchen-cum Stores: Central assistance of Rs. 51448.01 lakhs has been released for construction of kitchen-cum-stores for 71783 schools in Maharashtra during 2006 -07 to 2016-17. Out of 71783 units sanctioned till December 2016, 57831 (81%) kitchen sheds have been constructed and construction of 1258 units (1%) was in progress. The State Government had not started any construction work for kitchen-cum-stores in 12694 schools (18%) and had utilized only 81% of the funds allocated for the same. From a quality and safety perspective and in the interest of MDMP, the State government should prioritise time bound completion of construction of kitchen-cum-stores.

(xi) Procurement of Kitchen Devices: Central assistance of Rs. 12996.11 lakhs has been released to Government of Maharashtra towards procurement of kitchen devices for 259922 schools during 2006-07 to 2015-16 which includes 119786 units for replacement. The State has procured kitchen devices for all the sanctioned schools.

(xii) Release of Funds: PAB-MDM approved outlay for the State of Maharashtra was Rs. 842.89 crores for the year 2016-17. The central government had released full amount

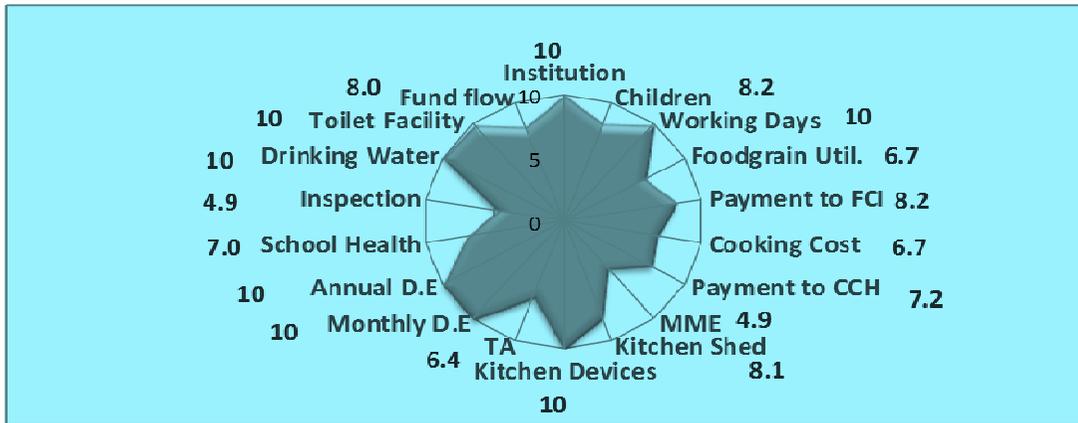
Rs. 706.86 crores to the State as per the stipulated time schedule. The State added its share of Rs. 209.80 crores. There was a delay of two months in the release of adhoc central assistance to the districts at the State and Directorate level. Further there are substantial delays to the tune of 3-4 months in the release of funds at the district level. Any delay in the release of funds to the schools and through them to the CCHs further hampers the smooth implementation of MDMP.

(xiii) School Health Programme: School Health Programme with special focus on provision of micronutrients like iron, folic acid and zinc tablets, Vitamin A dosages, deworming medicine, health check-ups, distribution of spectacles to children with refractive error, recording of height, weight etc. is being implemented for all elementary class students in Maharashtra. Out of 86707 schools approved under MDMS in the State during 2016-17, 68993 schools (70%) have undertaken school health check-ups; only 30% of total eligible schools have distributed deworming tablets and 21% have administered weekly doses of iron and folic acid supplementation. Unless hot cooked school meals are complemented with appropriate health interventions in the form of micronutrients supplementation and deworming medication, MDMP will fail to address the problem of hidden hunger among school children and thereof their nutritional status.

(xiv) MDMS Complaints: As per AWP&B of 2017-18, a total of 23 complaints related to MDMS were reported in Maharashtra ranging from food grains related issues (11 such complaints) in Ahmednagar, Buldana, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gondia, Hingoli, Jalna, Latur, Osmanabad, Ratnagiri, and Washim; non-payment of honorarium to CCHs (8 complaints) in Akola, Aurangabad, Chandrapur, Gondia, Solapur, Nanded, Nasik and Yavatmal; and untoward incidents (4 incidents) in Latur, Mumbai, Nagpur and Palghar. 43 and 24 MDMS complaints were reported in 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively. There is a mismatch in data on MDMS complaints received released by MHRD and AWP&B.

(xv) Testing of Food Samples: As per AWP&B 2017-18, for the entire State, only 3213 mid day meal samples were tested for calorific and protein content till December 2016, and out of these 3213 food samples tested, only 76 samples met the prescribed nutritional norms whereas 3110 samples fell short on the said parameters. Obviously, the officials concerned with implementing MDMP in Maharashtra are only concerned about MDMP coverage in terms of schools and children, without bothering to check, whether the mid day meals served are nutritive enough to solve the problem of malnutrition, so widely prevalent in the State.

Fig.7 Score card of Maharashtra on MDMP for 2016-17



Source: AWP&B, 2017-18, Government of Maharashtra

(xvi) Score Card on MDMP:2016-17 score card based on performance analysis of the key indicators of the Mid Day Meal Programme in Maharashtra is depicted in Figure 7. The State Government would do well to review poorly performing indicators reflected in the radar chart such as utilization of MME funds, school inspection for MDMP monitoring, utilization of food grains, cooking cost and transportation assistance, School Health Programme, payment of honorarium to CCHs, flow of funds along the administrative chain, and construction of kitchen-cum-stores in a time bound manner for scaling up the performance of MDMP by several notches.

Conclusion

While the intention behind MDMP is undoubtedly commendable, the execution requires a lot more effort in order to upgrade the programme from tokenism to efficiency. The programme has been regularly marred by accusations of inefficiency, corruption and substandard efforts (Vibhute, 2014)-accusations that are far from untrue. MDMP, being a constructive programme, cannot be managed by people who don't truly understand its importance and value the lives of the children who depend so much on it. The nutrition of children is not something that can be achieved half-heartedly; for the MDMP to truly take off and transport the children that need it and the country that initiated it into a better tomorrow, the various disparate parts of its execution must unite into a machine, a model of efficiency powered by good intentions and the will to serve the children, and it is this machine that will truly help strike the final blow against hunger and poverty and lead the youth of the country into salvation.

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