



A STUDY ON DOKKA SEETHAMMA MID-DAY SCHOOL MEAL IN ANDHRA PRADESH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE JUNIOR COLLEGES

Economy

Dr M Nirmala Bai Second Grade Teacher Municipal Corporation Primary School, R.S mada Street Tirupati

ABSTRACT

This paper is presented only research purpose Dokka Seethamma (Sithamma; 1841–1909) was an Indian social activist who gained recognition by spending much of her life serving food for poor people and travellers. Dokka Joganna, a Vedic Scholar and farmer, married her, and this allowed her to offer food to the poor, which she did for more than 40 years. Sreemathi Seethamma, born in 1841, was the daughter of Anappindi Bhavani Sankar from Mandapeta in Ramachandrapuram Taluk, East Godavari District. She lost her mother in childhood and was married to Dokka Jagganna from Lankalagannavaram. The Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, envisioned as a robust initiative to provide nutritious meals to intermediate students, has encountered significant challenges in its implementation. Despite the government's intentions and the extensive framework laid out on paper, ground realities paint a different picture, with issues ranging from inadequate funding and poor meal quality to lack of consistent monitoring and community involvement. Insights gathered from the People's Pulse survey indicate that students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders are dissatisfied with the scheme's current state. Financial constraints, inferior meal quality, inconsistent monitoring, and lack of accountability have undermined the scheme's potential to positively impact student health and nutrition. To ensure the success and sustainability of the mid-day meal program, it is crucial for the government to adopt a more holistic and community-driven approach. Implementing transparent monitoring mechanisms, revising financial allocations, improving food quality, and ensuring the welfare of cooking staff are essential steps in this direction. Involving local communities, donors, and public representatives can further enhance accountability and foster a sense of collective responsibility.

KEYWORDS

social economy

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme should be to nurture students' well-being and support their educational journey through consistent and quality nutrition. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the proposed recommendations, the government can revitalize the scheme and restore confidence among students and stakeholders alike.

FUELLING THE FUTURE:

Intermediate education is a crucial turning point in a student's career, laying the foundation for their future. It's often emphasized that success in Intermediate studies can lead to good job opportunities and the ability to support one's family. However, for many underprivileged students, the first hurdle to education is hunger. Without proper nutrition, focusing on studies becomes a daunting task. Recognizing that a lack of food was causing a decline in attendance at government junior colleges, the Andhra Pradesh government launched the "Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme." This initiative addresses the impact of poverty and hunger on education, ensuring that students receive nutritious meals to help them concentrate and thrive academically.

Objectives of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme are:

1. To increase attendance and eliminate dropouts.
2. To make students more interested in studies and improve their health.
3. To strengthen intermediate education.
4. To satisfy the hunger of poor students.
5. To provide social equality among students.

Background of the Scheme:

The Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme is named after "Dokka Seethamma," revered as the daily breadwinner and Annapurna of the Godavari districts. Initially implemented for schools, the scheme has now been extended to intermediate colleges as well. On January 4, 2025, the Minister Shri Nara Lokesh, inaugurated the scheme at Payakapuram Government Junior College, Vijayawada, while ministers, public representatives, and officials simultaneously launched the scheme in other parts of the state.

Implementation in 475 Colleges:

Currently, 1,48,419 students across 475 government junior colleges in the state are benefiting from the "Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme". As part of the implementation, 398 colleges have been linked to nearby government schools to facilitate meal distribution, while the remaining 77 colleges have been connected to centralized kitchens. The government has allocated a budget of Rs. 29.39 crore for the scheme from January to March this year, and orders have been issued to allocate Rs. 85.84 crore for the next financial year.

Defective GO 40:

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued GO 40 to implement the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme. However, the lack of clarity in the guidelines outlined in this GO has led to numerous challenges in implementing the scheme, making it inherently defective.

Menu:

According to the menu released by the government, the following items are to be served:

1. Monday: Rice, green gram, boiled egg, chickpeas.
2. Tuesday: Rice, chicken curry, lentil, rasam, ragi java.
3. Wednesday: Veg pulao, aloo kurma, boiled egg, chickpeas.
4. Thursday: Rice, chicken curry, sambar, ragi java.
5. Friday: Puli-hara, gongura or vegetable chutney, boiled e g g , chickpeas.
6. Saturday: Rice, vegetable curry, curry, rasam, and Pongal sweet.

Menu needs change:

During inspections conducted by People's Pulse, it was observed that menu boards were absent in the colleges surveyed. When researchers inquired whether the food items matched the prescribed menu, 76.7 percent of students responded affirmatively, 20.8 percent noted some discrepancies, and 2.5 percent stated that the items did not match the menu. Furthermore, when asked if they were satisfied with the existing menu or desired changes, 29.7 percent of students expressed their satisfaction, while 3.8 percent stated they did not like it, and a significant 66.5 percent suggested improvements. Venkateshwarlu, a first-year Intermediate student from Guntur, remarked, "It would be better if chicken eggs were served three or four days a week instead of every day, and it would be preferable to include some fruit as an alternative to chicken eggs." Similar opinions were recorded across the state, indicating a collective desire for a more diverse and balanced menu. It would be prudent for the government to consider these opinions to further enhance the quality and appeal of the mid-day meal scheme.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE SCHEME

Based on a comprehensive survey conducted by People's Pulse, which included feedback from students, parents, teachers, NGO representatives, mid-day meal staff, and student unions, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the scheme's effectiveness:

Enhanced Monitoring and Social Audits

The government's reliance on IVRS surveys creates a false impression of smooth implementation, while ground realities suggest otherwise. Conducting social audits regularly would offer a transparent assessment of the scheme's effectiveness and expose any instances of corruption, such as the past irregularities in chickpea supply.

Revising Financial Allocations

Currently, the government allocates just 14.50 per meal per student,

which is grossly inadequate. Considering the rising costs and the need for quality nutrition, this amount should be increased to at least 30 per meal. In comparison, Anna Canteen meals cost 27 per plate (22 from the government and 5 from the beneficiary), emphasizing the need for parity and fair budgeting in the mid-day meal scheme

IMPROVING QUALITY OF FOOD

The menu designed by the government appears promising on paper, but practical implementation falls short, as quality meals cannot be provided at the existing budget. Additionally, the food prepared by Akshaya Patra and other private agencies often lacks the desired taste and freshness, as meals cooked in the morning tend to spoil by noon.

Cooking quality, particularly the softness and flavor of rice, has been a recurring issue, with 34.8% of students reporting dissatisfaction with undercooked and spoiled rice. Moreover, the usage of inferior- quality rice (Doddu rice) should be replaced with fine rice to enhance acceptability.

CUSTOMIZATION OF FOOD PREPARATION

Although Akshaya Patra is a reputed organization, students often find the meals unpalatable due to differing taste preferences. Assigning meal preparation responsibilities to women's associations in each college, as practiced in schools, could significantly improve food quality and taste, catering to local preferences.

CLARIFICATION ON NUTRITION STANDARDS

The government must issue clear and comprehensive guidelines on the nutritional standards of mid-day meals, including precise details on the quantity and quality of food to be provided. This clarity will ensure uniformity and help stakeholders understand the scheme's actual objectives

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

To ensure the successful implementation of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, it is essential to establish a structured and transparent monitoring mechanism. Based on inputs from various stakeholders and insights from the People's Pulse Research survey, the following recommendations are proposed:

DEDICATED MONITORING CORPORATION

A special corporation should be established to manage and oversee the mid-day meal scheme. This corporation should be headed by a competent leader or public representative, with the appointment of a special officer to ensure accountability. The corporation's governing body should include the college principal, representatives from voluntary organizations, social workers, student union leaders, and other relevant stakeholders.

REVIEW MECHANISM AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

Although the Government Order mandates the collector to monitor the scheme, in reality, inspections have been inconsistent and sporadic, with officials making only initial visits on the scheme's launch day. To maintain accountability, it is crucial to conduct regular surprise inspections at the ground level. Frequent and unannounced visits by ministers, district in-charge ministers, local public representatives, and senior officials will significantly enhance the scheme's effectiveness

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The government should appoint an official advisory committee at the state level to monitor the mid-day meal scheme's implementation. This committee should comprise public representatives, teachers' MLCs, student union leaders, and members of voluntary organizations. To ensure effective oversight, the committee should convene meetings every 15 days to assess progress and address any shortcomings.

REPRESENTATIVES TO CONDUCT INSPECTIONS

Public representatives who aim to highlight the scheme's importance and success in their campaigns should actively participate in frequent surprise inspections. Such inspections not only uphold the spirit of public service but also reinforce the scheme's credibility. The survey revealed that 79.8% of students reported a lack of inspections, leading to complacency among staff.

COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SUPPORT

To alleviate the financial burden on the government and further enhance the quality of meals, the involvement of donors and industrialists should be encouraged. Setting up a dedicated trust to

coordinate donations would be beneficial. Moreover, acknowledging donors through display boards at colleges, featuring their names and contributions, would encourage continued participation and foster a sense of pride and community involvement. Local leaders should actively promote this initiative, which will not only improve meal quality but also enhance the government's reputation for inclusive and collaborative governance.

ENSURING CLEANLINESS AND HYGIENE

Drinking water facilities and cleanliness must be prioritized in all participating institutions. The cooking and serving staff should be strictly instructed to maintain hygiene, including washing plates and utensils thoroughly. Strict action should be taken against those who violate government directives regarding cleanliness and hygiene standards. Some students have expressed reluctance to consume meals due to unhygienic practices by the cooking staff.

EXTEND THE SCHEME DURATION

As per the survey, 86.2% of students expressed a desire for the scheme to operate year-round. The government should consider implementing this extension to ensure consistent nutritional support throughout the year. To ensure continuous oversight, one of the village secretariat staff members should be designated as the supervisor of the mid-day meal scheme at the local level.

REFERENCES

1. The Hindu English Daily : Jan. 21 2020 Statement of Health Minister of Andhra Pradesh
2. Singh N. And Badiger C. (2018): "Knowledge of Rural children about Mid-Day Meal"
3. V. Sangeetha, J.P.Sharma,V. Lenin (2013). *Food Security Vs Nutritional Security Need for Multi-sectoral Convergence*, *International Journal of Agriculture and Food Science Technology*.
4. Hemant Mishra "India's experience with implementing the Mid-Day Meal (MDM)
5. Manisha Garg and Kalyan Sankar Mandal (2013): *Mid-Day Meal for the Poor, Privatised Education for the Non-Poor* Vol. 48, Issue No. 30, 27 Jul, 2013 "Poshan Abhiyaan - Jan Andolan"
6. *poshanabhiyaan.gov.in*. March 2023. "Mid-Day Meal scheme to be now called PM POSHAN, to cover students of pre-primary classes also - Times of India"
7. *The Times of India*. 29 September 2021. Retrieved 13 October 2021.
8. Chettiparambil-Rajan, Angelique (July 2007). "India: A Desk Review of the Mid-Day Meals Programme" (PDF). *World Food Programme. Archived from the original* (PDF) *on 20 October 2013*. Retrieved 28 July 2013.
9. [www.wikipedia journals](https://www.wikipedia.org/journals)
10. Report dokka sethamma report online