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A Study on The Impact of School Feeding Programmes on Education in India

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ABSTRACT

The “right to food” and “right to education” are among the fundamental rights of every Indian citizen. The right to food is intrinsic to a life with dignity. (Secretariat, Right to Food Campaign 2008) The paper aims to establish the impact of food on educational programmes, with examples from India. It reflects upon how provision of food increases motivation and interest to attend school. It presents examples of food distribution programmes in schools and their challenges in the present day in India. The study attempts to discuss how food can be used as a medium to tackle other challenges faced by the community surrounding the school like unemployment, poverty, child labour and resource conservation.

Keywords: education, absenteeism, school feeding programmes, enrolment, dropouts, community

Introduction

Education is one of the most important factors to achieve social, economic and political change. A well educated population is one of the key objectives of the twenty-first century. Education is a strong tool to ensure there is economic mobility; which is essential for making society equitable and just. Education allows development of skills and competencies which makes the population more equitable and just. Children; the future human resource, play a significant role in the nation building process of a country. Alongside bringing them up as responsible citizens, it is important to ensure their development. Poverty, malnutrition, food insecurity are complex overlapping phenomenon that exist due to linked economic, social and political deprivations.

Nutrition is essential for everyone, especially children as it is directly connected to various facets of their growth and development. To determine the nutrition profile of children, studying both nutrition level and diet is important. To establish the status of nutrition of a child, one must consider a number of interrelated factors; it is strongly influenced by food intake - both the quantity and the quality and exercise. Good nutrition permits the well being of the child and the ability to learn, which allows them to perform better in school.

School going children skip their meals due to factors like poverty, emotional disturbance, lack of awareness about the importance of regular meals which causes malnutrition among them. This in turn affects their performance in school

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http://heb-nic.in/cass-studies	Quick Response Code:
Received on 20/02/2019 Accepted on 25/02/2019 © HEB All rights reserved	

and impacts their fitness levels too. The effects of malnutrition are ghastly; they cause a decline in memory, hearing ability and even cuts down intellectual functioning. Adequate nutrition plays a significant role in the physical and mental growth of the learner. (Mehta 2)

Understanding School Feeding Programmes in India - the example of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme

Post independence, few of the challenges India faced were the resolving of low literacy and nutrition levels. To do so, the Government embarked on programmes such as Operation Blackboard and National Programme of Nutritional Support. The Mid Day Meal Scheme was launched in Tamil Nadu during the 1960s by former Chief Minister K Kamraj, which was later expanded by the M G Ramachandran government. The scheme was positively received and appreciated globally. Institutions like the World Bank too, praised its success and reach. In 1955, the Mid Day Meal Scheme rose to the status of a centrally sponsored programme. Following the order of the Supreme Court in 2001, all State Governments began to provide mid day meals to children in schools for a minimum of 200 days a year. The reach of the central scheme was extended from being Government school oriented to a scheme that provided to Government aided and local body owned schools too. The aim of the scheme is to promote social equality among the children and increase enrolment; decrease dropouts and absenteeism. With time, the scheme was extended to upper primary classes, i.e classes VI - VIII. The nomenclature of the scheme changed with time too; it was now named the National Programme of Mid Day Meals in schools. The scheme currently provides 450 calories in addition with 12 grams of protein for children in the primary level, followed by 700 calories for children in the upper primary level. The responsibility of implementing the scheme lies with the State governments. (Rani 1-2)

Impact of School Feeding Programmes

Studies conducted to measure the impact of the mid day meal scheme show that there has been a positive impact; student enrolment has increased, absenteeism has reduced, dropout rates have reduced partially. This has allowed the achievement of universalisation of elementary education, especially in the rural areas. It has also removed issues like classroom hunger, development of positive habits like washing hands before and after eating, washing their own plates after their use. (Sofi 2) The scheme has increased the interest among parents to send their wards to school. (Mondal 2)

School feeding programmes are based on the expectation that it will increase the enrolment and daily attendance among the children. In 2002, the school feeding programmes in Bangladesh recorded a 14.2 percent increase in enrolment and 6 percent increase in attendance, which indicates there has been an elevation in the motivation level among students and parents regarding the school. After studying schools from countries in Africa, it was reported that the absolute enrolment increased by 22 percent among boys and 28 percent among girls. Introduction of a mid morning snack alone in Bogota, Columbia, brought about a 23 percent decrease in daily absence from the school. In Sri Lanka, a 5.9 percent increase in enrolment was recorded at the school grade level in 2009. (Lawson 36-38)

Challenges in Implementation of School Feeding Programmes

The implementation and achievement of the objectives of school feeding programmes like the mid day meal scheme face varied challenges. (Sahai 3-4)

- Easy and good transport is not available in many areas; this impacts the enrolment of the students in the school.
- There are leakages in the supply chain; sometimes food grains get adulterated and pilfered.
- Some schools lack the basic infrastructure like a kitchen, store room and clean drinking water with affect the implementation and quality of the meal.
- Students are segregated by while sitting for the meal; this prevents the implementation the objective of achieving

social equity. Sometimes, meals are not accepted by the school/ students parents because of the caste/ community the cook belongs to.

- Teachers have reported an increase in workload owing to their key role in the implementation of the scheme in the school; they have to make the arrangements and keep records of the implementation of the scheme. This has also impact the teacher's attitude towards academics and has affected the quality of teaching. (Rani 4-5)

Conclusion

Providing a meal a day in the school has a significant impact elevating the levels of poverty. It provides motivation to the family to invest more effort in their own development as a basic need for survival has already been met. It can be used to generate more employment at the community level by employing members of the community to overlook implementation instead of assigning this task to the teachers. The constant involvement of the community in the activities of the school would also reduce issues like dropouts and absenteeism. Instead of transporting grains to the school for cooking meals, in rural areas, farmers can be empowered better if they can be assigned to provide grains and vegetables necessary for each meal. This would ensure that the farmers receive a daily wage or regular income; controlling poverty and indebtedness among farmers too. This would lead to a reduction in resources required for the implementation of the scheme; by reducing transport, packaging. Communities can be given the responsibility of ensuring the quality and implementation of the scheme; representatives can be elected at the community level.

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