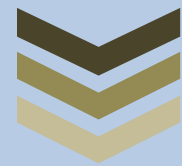


Evaluation of the Mid-Day Meal Programme – June 2012



- By Kusuma Trust

The Kusuma Trust UK (The Trust) is an independent grant-making organisation registered with the Charity Commission and Companies House in the UK.

- A study to review the impact of the programme on the attendance, retention, and academic performance of the children in Nayagarh, Odisha and Medak, Andhra Pradesh.

Introduction

The Kusuma Trust UK and its affiliate the Kusuma Foundation have supported the provision of 14,000 mid-day meals every school day since November 2009 to children in 120 Government schools in the Nayagarh district of Odisha and Medak district of Andhra Pradesh.

The mid-day meal programme is implemented by The Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF). The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) is a flagship Scheme of the Government of India initiated in 2002 with the purpose of addressing not only the issue of hunger, but also as an incentive to promote enrolment and retention of children in schools. TAPF has partnered with the respective State Governments in India to provide meals under this Scheme. The Government provides 60 per cent of the cost of each meal and Kusuma funds the remaining 40 per cent of the cost through a grant to TAPF.

Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted in January and February 2012. The purpose of the MDM evaluation was to review the impact of the programme on the attendance, retention and academic performance of children in Nayagarh and Medak. It also evaluated factors like socialisation, food variety, quality and hygiene.

The report below summarises the purpose and findings of the evaluation on the Mid-Day Meal programme in Nayagarh and Medak districts of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh respectively.

i. Enrolment and Retention

The MDM is cited by parents as one of the reasons for changing schools as they wish to send their children to schools which provide the MDM. In Medak, the MDM was viewed as one of several reasons for an increase in enrolment. Parents enrol children in schools to secure a better future for them through education and not just for them to receive the meals. In Nayagarh, poverty is cited as one of the reason for children dropping out.

The findings show that a well run MDM programme can contribute to an increase in enrolment and also prevent students from dropping out.

ii. Attendance

The MDM plays an important role in both Nayagarh and Medak as a driver for higher attendance and is a reason for children not to skip classes. As the food is nutritious and nourishing, there is lower absenteeism from sickness than before the programme was implemented. Meals provide energy and stamina, and increase the physical strength and concentration of children. These points were cited by the majority of those interviewed.

Children look forward to the MDM as well as other benefits like having time to interact and play with friends. Attendance is even higher on days when local delicacies and sweets are served. Teachers report a positive change in children's attitude towards their studies and extracurricular activities as a result of the MDM. Parents and teachers perceive that grades have improved and children participate more in group and extra-curricular activities. Children have developed a positive attitude and do not leave school early or get into bad habits, such as stealing or loitering on the streets.

iii. Socialisation

Teachers and other stakeholders see the MDM as more than simply the provision of food. The MDM is seen as providing an important social environment where children interact, breaking barriers such as those of the caste system. It enhances communication skills as well as builds children's confidence. All children in the schools, irrespective of caste and gender were treated equally. Stakeholders, such as Gram Panchayat members, Principals and teachers see a shift in the attitude of children in schools with the MDM programme.

iv. Food Variety, Quality and Hygiene

The children were keen on variety and were excited by the MDM when they get food they prefer like local delicacies and sweets. This variety in food is important because the MDM children observe that affluent children who attend private schools carry their own lunch, which contains food of their choice and liking. Children in MDM schools cite this as a reason to demand better quality food with variety built into the menu. Seeing teachers eat the meal provided an assurance of the quality of the food, and their participation generated an amiable feeling of sharing. The MDM has led to increasing awareness of health and hygiene amongst children and they share this knowledge with their parents and siblings too.

Conclusion

The evaluation suggests that the mid-day meal programme certainly had positive impact on the factors of attendance, enrolment, retention, socialisation and health of the children. If the mid-day meal is implemented effectively and is supported with other facilities like the quality of education, proper sanitation facilities, free books and uniforms, then it can further harness the potential of the programme by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance.