



Expansion of Mid-day Meal Scheme

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Why in News

The **Parliamentary Standing Committee** on Education has **recommended** that **all government schools** start providing **free breakfast in the coming academic year**, as a part of an **expansion of midday meal** scheme envisaged by **National Education Policy**.

The **National Education Policy** identifies “**providing food and nutrition**” as one of the key long-term thrust areas for **financing to cultivate a robust education system**.

Key Points

- **Need:**

Research shows that the **morning hours nutritious breakfast** can be **productive for the study** of cognitively more demanding subjects and hence these hours may be leveraged by providing a simple but energizing breakfast in addition to midday meals.
- **Challenges:**
 - Severe **funding Crunch** is likely to **delay the scheme**.
 - The Centre's **current expenditure** on the Midday meals scheme is about **11000 crore**. **Free breakfast** would **involve** an additional budget of **4000 crore** but the **School Education Department** saw a **budget cut** of almost **5000 crore** for the year 2020-21.

Midday Meal Scheme

- **About:**
 - The Midday meal scheme (under the **Ministry of Education**) is a **centrally sponsored scheme** which was launched in 1995.
 - It is the **world's largest school meal programme** aimed to attain the goal of universalization of primary education.
 - Provides **cooked meals** to every child within the age group of **six to fourteen years** studying in **classes I to VIII** who enrolls and attends the school.

- **Objective:**
Address hunger and malnutrition, increase enrolment and attendance in school, improve socialisation among castes, provide employment at grassroot level especially to women.
- **Quality Check:**
AGMARK quality items are procured, **tasting of meals by two or three adult members** of the **school management committee**.
- **Food Security:**
If the Mid-Day Meal is not provided in school on any school day due to non-availability of food grains or any other reason, the State Government shall pay **food security allowance** by 15th of the succeeding month.
- **Regulation:**
The **State Steering-cum Monitoring Committee (SSMC)** oversees the implementation of the scheme including establishment of a mechanism for maintenance of nutritional standards and quality of meals.
- **Nutritional Standards:**
Cooked meal having nutritional standards of **450 calories and 12 gm of protein** for **primary (I-V class)** and **700 calories and 20 gm** protein for upper primary (**VI-VIII class**)
- **Coverage:**
All **government** and **government aided schools, Madarsa and Maqtab**s supported **under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**.
- **Issues and Challenges:**
 - **Corrupt Practices:** There have been instances of plain chapatis being served with salt, mixing of water in milk, food poisoning etc.
 - **Caste Bias and Discrimination:** Food is central to the caste system, so in many schools, children are made to sit separately according to their caste status.
 - **Covid-19:** Covid-19 has posed serious threats to children and their health and nutritional rights. The nationwide lockdown has disrupted access to essential services, including **Mid-Day Meals**.
 - **Menace of Malnutrition:** According to the **National Family Health Survey-5**, several states across the country have **reversed course** and recorded **worsening levels of child malnutrition**.
India is home to about 30% of the world's stunted children and nearly 50% of severely wasted children under the age of five.
 - **Global Nutrition Report-2020:** As per the **Global Nutrition Report 2020**, India is among 88 countries that are likely to miss global nutrition targets by 2025.
 - **Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020:** India has been ranked at 94 among 107 countries in the **Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2020**. India has a level of hunger that is “**serious**”.

Way Forward

Children will be unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell. Hence, the nutrition and health (including mental health) of children will be addressed, through nutritional breakfast including mid day meals. This expansion would further help to stop hunger from keeping children away from schools and to improve enrolment.

Source -TH