



Midday Meal Scheme (PM Poshan Scheme)

For Prelims: Issues Related to Children, centrally sponsored scheme, Malnutrition, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

For Mains: Midday Meal Scheme and Associated Challenges.

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Finance has approved a hike of 9.6 % cooking cost per child under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

- Since the last hike in early 2020, the cooking cost per child has been Rs 4.97 per child per day in primary classes (class I-V), and Rs 7.45 (class VI-VIII) in upper primary classes. After the hikes come into effect, the allocation at the primary level and upper primary levels will be Rs 5.45 and Rs 8.17, respectively.

What is the 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.
 - In 2021, it was renamed as '**Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman**' scheme (**PM Poshan Scheme**) and it also covers students of balvatikas (children in the 3-5-year age group) from pre-primary classes.
- **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 meals 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 Maqtabas supported under the [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan \(SSA\)](#).
 - The scheme covers **11.80 crore children across Classes 1 to 8** (age group 6 to 14) in 11.20 lakh government and government-aided schools and those run by local bodies such as the municipal corporations in Delhi under the provisions of the [National Food Security Act, 2013 \(NFSA\)](#).
 - In the **Budget for 2022-23**, the Centre has earmarked **Rs 10,233 crore for the scheme**, while the states are expected to spend Rs 6,277 crore.

What are the 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.
 - Although dry foodgrains or cash transfers have been provided to families instead, food and education advocates have warned that this would not have the same impact as hot cooked meals on the school premises, especially for girl children who face more discrimination at home and are more likely to drop out of school due to the closures.
- **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

- Interventions to **improve maternal height and education must be implemented** years before those girls and young women become mothers.
 - The fight against **stunting has often focussed on boosting nutrition** for young children, but nutritionists have long argued that maternal health and well-being is the key to reduce stunting in their offspring.
- Expansion and improvement **of school meals is needed for inter-generational pay-offs**. As girls in India finish school, get married and have children all in just a few years — so school-based interventions can really help.

[Source: IE](#)