



NUTRITION FOUNDATION OF INDIA

**EVALUATION OF MID DAY MEAL PROGRAMME
IN MCD SCHOOLS**

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Study supported by Municipal Corporation Of Delhi

Scientific Report 18
2006

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Preface

Primary school children (6-14 years) form about 20 per cent of the total population. Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years is the constitutional commitment. However, even now school enrolment is not universal and about 40 per cent of the children drop out of primary school. Poor enrolment and high school dropout rate are attributed to poor socio-economic conditions, child labour, lack of motivation and poor nutrition status of the children.

Nutrition Support to Primary Education popularly referred to as Mid-day meal programme (MDM) is considered as a means of promoting improved enrolment, school attendance and retention. Simultaneously, it may improve the nutritional status of primary school children. With children from all castes and communities eating together, it is also a means of bringing about better social integration.

Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was initially supplying ready to eat food under MDM; from June 2003 MCD implemented Supreme Court's directive that all children should be served a hot cooked meal. MCD requested Nutrition Foundation of India (NFI) to undertake a concurrent third party evaluation of the MDM Programme (MDMP) in schools run/aided by MCD so that problems in implementation of the MDMP can be identified and rectified.

NFI had

- ▶ Helped MCD in standardisation of food items to be given to the children in MDMP.
- ▶ Assessed the infrastructural facilities available at the food suppliers hygiene in food preparation, transport and distribution,
- ▶ Evaluated the system for receiving and distribution of the meals at the schools and overall quality of the food served.

MCD utilised the findings from the evaluation to improve the quality of MDM in MCD schools. The number of food suppliers had been reduced; food is now being prepared in semi-automated kitchens by food suppliers who have received orientation training in ensuring hygiene and quality in cooking at Lady Irwin College. MCD has put in place a system for monitoring quality of meals served in MDMP.

NFI has also emphasised that highest priority should be accorded to orienting and training head masters/teachers so that they

- ▶ Understand the importance of MDM and do not regard supervision of MDM distribution to the children as additional work load
- ▶ Teach the students and inform the parents that the midday meal is additional to the home meal and not a substitute for it.

- ▶ Understand that the MDM provides an opportunity to impart health and nutrition education and give practical lessons on personal and environmental hygiene to children in primary school.
- ▶ Utilise the Parent Teacher Association and other mechanisms of involvement of civil society in improving the monitoring of MDM and ensuring that the problems are detected early and speedily rectified.

Multiple micronutrient deficiencies due to low dietary intake of vegetables have always been a major problem in children. In 2006 Department of Primary Education has revised the MDM guidelines so that 20 grams of pulses and about 50 grams of vegetables are included in MDM. Efforts should be made now to ensure that these guidelines are implemented.

NFI hopes to undertake orientation training of teachers in primary schools on

- ▶ How to use MDM as a focal point to emphasise the need for vegetables in balanced meals.
- ▶ How to teach the children and through them their parents the importance of pulses and vegetables in balanced diet and
- ▶ How they can be included in their home diet without over-stretching their means.

If this were done MDM may become a major tool for embarking on a programme using schools system to bring about improvement in quality of diets in poor households in India.

New Delhi

Prema Ramachandran

Acknowledgements

This evaluation and training programme to improve the quality of the mid day meals in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools was undertaken at the behest of Mr. Rakesh Mehta former Commissioner of MCD. The Nutrition Foundation of India gratefully acknowledges his unstinted support during the initial difficult phase of the evaluation and for acceding to our request that training of Food Service Providers (FSPs) should be undertaken for the improvement of the quality of the meals.

We also acknowledge the constant support of the Mr. Ashok Nigam, present MCD Commissioner, Mrs. Indira Yadav, Director Primary Education, Mrs. P Kataria, Additional Director PE, Mr. B.C. Narula DEO, the zonal DEOs, AEOs, SIs, school Head Masters (HMs), teachers, MDMs-in-charge, PTA members and the Food Service Providers. The foundation deeply appreciates the cooperation extended by Dr. Anupa Siddhu Director, Lady Irwin College (LIC), in conducting the training Programme under the auspices of the Foundation at the LIC.