

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MID-DAY MEALS

(based on deliberations of the National Advisory Council on 28 August 2004)

“A national cooked nutritious mid-day meal scheme funded mainly by the central government will be introduced in primary and secondary schools. An appropriate mechanism for quality checks will also set up.”

Common Minimum Programme of the UPA Government

1. Background

1. The National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education (i.e. the national “mid-day meal scheme”) was initiated in 1995. By 2001 a few states were providing cooked meals, but most were only giving monthly “dry rations” of foodgrain to school children. The number of states providing cooked meals rose sharply from early 2002 onwards, after a Supreme Court order (dated 28 November 2001) directed all State Governments to introduce cooked mid-day meals in primary schools.¹

2. Today, twenty-three out of thirty-five States and UTs have achieved full coverage of primary schools under the cooked mid-day meal programme (see Annexure 1). The defaulters include some of the larger states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. As a result, only 55 % of all children entitled to cooked meals are covered today.

3. Recent evidence suggests that mid-day meals have made a promising start in many states. However, quality issues need urgent attention if the programme is to achieve its full potential. The quality of the mid-day meal programme varies widely across states due to differences in financial allocations, administrative arrangements, infrastructural facilities, etc.

4. Expenditure on “conversion costs” has a strong bearing on the quality of mid-day meals.² This varies from 50 paise per child per day in Rajasthan and Maharashtra to Rs. 8.50 in Goa

¹ The order reads: “We direct the State Governments/ Union Territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary Schools with a prepared mid day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days”. In a follow-up order dated 20 April 2004, the Supreme Court directed all States/UTs to comply with the order of 28 November 2001 by 1 September 2004 at the latest. This order also states that “... the Central Government shall make provisions for construction of kitchen sheds and shall also allocate funds to meet with the conversion costs of food-grains into cooked mid-day meals.”

² “Conversion costs” refer to recurrent costs other than grain (mainly ingredients and salaries of cooking staff). Grain for the mid-day meal scheme is provided free of cost by the Centre.

(see Annexure 1). On average, state governments spend Re. 1.17 per child per day on conversion costs. The quality of mid-day meal programmes could be drastically enhanced by introducing a minimum norm of Rs. 2 per child per day everywhere. States with a strong commitment to mid-day meals (such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala) are already spending approximately Rs 2 per child per day on conversion costs.

2. Recent developments³

1. The budget allocation for mid-day meals in 2004-5 is Rs. 1,675 crores (up from Rs 1,375 in 2003-4 [RE]).⁴ This allocation was the same in the "interim budget" and the final budget. It covers the provision of grain for mid-day meal programmes but not "conversion costs".

2. A proposal for central assistance for mid-day meals has been prepared by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD). This involves assistance for conversion costs (one rupee per child per day) up to Class 5 from 1 September 2004, and extension to Class 8 from 14 November 2004. Estimated cost: Rs 1,860 crores over and above the amount (Rs 1, 675 crores) already available to the Ministry.

3. This proposal, costing Rs 1,860 crores, appears to have been "cleared" by the Expenditure Finance Committee. Meanwhile, however, the Planning Commission has made an additional provision of only Rs 1,232 crores for mid-day meals, out of the Rs 10,000 crores allocated to it in the 2004-5 budget for the purpose of implementing the Common Minimum Programme. It is not clear where the balance is supposed to come from.

4. The additional amount of Rs 1,232 crores allocated for mid-day meals by the Planning Commission comes under the "State Plan" portion of this fund of Rs 10,000 crores. This appears to be linked with a proposal to "transfer" the mid-day meal scheme to the States from next year onwards. This proposal is quite alarming as some state governments may be tempted to "divert" mid-day meal allocations for other purposes.

³ Based on recent discussions with senior officials of the MoHRD and Planning Commission.

⁴ Further limited funds are available for other inputs (e.g. to build cooking sheds) under centrally-sponsored schemes such as SGRY and PMGY.

5. Education Cess: The Central Government plans to allocate a significant part of the Education Cess to mid-day meals and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. But the fate of the Education Cess is not clear. The proceeds of the Cess are to be paid into the Consolidated Fund of the Government of India, and the MoHRD fears that they may be used for purposes other than elementary education. The Standing Committee on Finance has recommended that the proceeds should be kept in a dedicated non-lapsable account similar to the central road fund.

3. Recommendations for immediate action

1. A minimum norm of Rs 2 per child per day for “conversion costs” should be introduced all over the country.

2. Adequate resources should be made available (from the Education Cess or elsewhere) to enable the Ministry of Human Resource Development to implement its proposal for central assistance to mid-day meals, i.e. one rupee per child per day up to Class 5 from 1 September 2004, one rupee per child per day up to Class 8 from 14 November 2004, and related support.

3. Strict instructions should be issued to the effect that central assistance for mid-day meals is intended as a supplement to the resources already provided by state governments, and not as a substitute for them.

4. In the case of states that have not achieved full coverage or adequate quality standards up to Class 5, funds allocated by the Central Government for extension of mid-day meals up to Class 8 from 14 November 2004 should be available for consolidation of the mid-day meal scheme at the primary level if the state government considers this preferable. However, all states should extend mid-day meals to Class 8 from 1 July 2005 at the latest.

5. The arrangement whereby grain is provided free of cost to state governments through the FCI should continue. This responsibility should not be “transferred” to the state governments.

6. A high-level Expert Group should be formed to review the “National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education” (NPNSPE) in the light of Supreme Court orders,

the Common Minimum Programme, and recent experiences in different states. The responsibilities of this Expert Group should include:

- (i) Defining minimum quality norms for all mid-day meal schemes in the country (see Annexure 2 for a preliminary list of norms).
- (ii) Preparing updated guidelines for NPNSPE to ensure minimum quality norms, compliance with Supreme Court orders, effective monitoring arrangements, health safeguards, linking of mid-day meals with an active school health programme, etc.
- (iii) Conducting or commissioning an expert assessment of the nutritional value of mid-day meals in different states, and suggesting improvements wherever necessary.

7. Assistance for mid-day meal infrastructure (cooking sheds, drinking water, storage space, etc.) should be made available either in the form of direct central assistance under the MoHRD or through other schemes such as SGRY, PMGY, SSA, etc. Proactive efforts should be made to ensure that every school has the requisite infrastructure.

8. All cooks and helpers to be appointed henceforth should be women, and preference should be given to Dalits.

9. From 1 July 2005, all mid-day meal schemes should include a component of “micronutrient supplementation”, covering essential micronutrients such as Vitamin A, iron and iodine. Central assistance should be available for this component of the mid-day meal schemes and the necessary financial allocations should be made in the 2005-6 budget.

10. “School health” programmes should be revived around the country and integrated with mid-day meal schemes.

STATUS OF MID-DAY MEALS AND PROVISION FOR CONVERSION COSTS
(as on 27 August 2004)

State / UT	Proportion of children covered by cooked mid-day meal scheme (%) ^a	Provision for conversion costs
Andhra Pradesh	100	Rs. 1.5-2
Chhattisgarh	100	Re. 1
Delhi	100	Rs. 1.5 – 2
Gujarat	100	More than Rs. 2
Haryana	100	Rs. 1.5 – 2
Karnataka	100	Re. 1
Kerala	100	Rs. 1.5 – 2
Madhya Pradesh	100	Rs. 1.5 – 2
Maharashtra	100	Less than Re. 1
Meghalaya	100	Not known
Mizoram	100	Not known
Nagaland	100	Not known
Rajasthan	100	Less than Re. 1
Sikkim	100	More than Rs. 2
Tamil Nadu	100	More than Rs. 2
Tripura	100	More than Rs. 2
Uttaranchal	100	Re. 1
Union Territories	100	Not known
Orissa	41	Less than Re. 1
Goa	20	More than Rs. 2
Jharkhand	13	More than Rs. 2
Punjab	12	Rs. 1.5 – 2
West Bengal	10	Re. 1
Bihar	5	Re. 1
Himachal Pradesh	3	Rs. 1.5 – 2
Arunachal Pradesh	0	Zero
Assam	0	Zero
Jammu & Kashmir	0	Zero
Manipur	0	Zero
Uttar Pradesh	0	Zero
INDIA^b	55	Rs. 1.17

^a Children receiving cooked mid-day meal as a proportion of all children attending government primary schools.

^b Approximate figures (weighted averages of state-specific figures).

Source: MoHRD for coverage; Planning Commission for conversion costs.

Essential quality norms for mid-day meal programmes

In this note, it is recommended that minimum quality norms for mid-day meals should apply throughout the country. A preliminary list of possible quality norms is given below.

- (1) **Nutritious hot cooked meal:** Nutritious, cooked meals should be provided throughout the year. The menu should offer variety to sustain the interest of children and to enhance the nutritional value of the meal.
- (2) **Micronutrient supplementation:** All mid-day meal programmes should include a "micronutrient supplementation" component (as well as mass deworming if needed), to address common micronutrient deficiencies among children.
- (3) **Adequate manpower:** Every school should have trained staff to provide mid-day meals with no interference to the normal school routine. Each school should have at least a cook and a helper. All cooks should undergo training on nutrition, hygiene, maintenance of accounts, and other essential skills.
- (4) **Adequate utensils:** Each school should have the necessary utensils including vessels for cooking, water, and plates.
- (5) **Drinking water:** Each school should have a reliable supply of clean drinking water within the premises.
- (6) **Kitchen and storage:** Each school should have adequate infrastructure for mid-day meals, including a kitchen and separate storage space.
- (7) **Logistics management:** Reliable arrangements for timely delivery of grain and other supplies should be in place everywhere.
- (8) **Supervision and monitoring:** Effective arrangements should be made for close supervision and monitoring of mid-day meal programmes, and prompt action in the event of lapses such as food poisoning, disruption in food supply, social discrimination, etc.
- (9) **Social equity:** All cooking staff should be women and preference should be given to Dalits. There should be no discrimination in the mid-day meal process based on the social background of children or cooking staff.
- (10) **School health programme:** The mid-day meal programme should be linked with an active school health programme.