
Mid-Day Meal Programme in Sikkim: The Overall Impact on Education and Society

Dr. Tej Kumar Siwakoti* & Dr. M. C. Pant**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Sikkim Government Law College, Burtuk Gangtok East Sikkim*

***Associate Professor, Department of Economics, D. S. B Campus Kumaon University, Nainital*

ABSTRACT:

Feeding programmes in schools holds long history around the world. The importance of these programmes reflects on the significant gains in schooling and nutritional outcomes of the school going children in developing countries particularly. Naturally school meal programmes is an important and powerful instrument that surely increases children participation in school. Additionally it is also believed that indirectly this programme will definitely improve learning levels through various channels such as boosting attendance, reducing classroom hunger and improving overall levels of nutrition. While in India, where maximum number of people are living in rural village in extremely poor condition and problem related to health especially in children is high such as malnutrition, under weight and undeveloped children due to absence of iodine and so on, creates big problem in the way of overall development of the country. So to solve these problems from the ground level the Government of India introduces the scheme called Mid-Day Meal Programme in Government Schools. In this context researcher try to analyzed all the positive and negative impacts of it on school environment, school children behavior, enrolment rate, dropout rate and learning process of school going children in Sikkim. In this study researchers found that, the overall impact on education is positive and this programme work in a right way. After implementation of this programme enrolment of students in primary level is increase along with the decrease in dropout out rates and this is a direct effect of the Mid-Day Meal Programme. On the other hand those families who live Below Poverty Line appreciate the programme, which give them a real hope regarding nutritional development of their children. Further researchers found that, Mid-Day Meal has also developed the social bond among the people. The social disparities based on caste, religion, sex, rich and poor are totally absent in Sikkim.

Keywords: Rural, Urban, Social Development, Programme, Above Poverty Line and Below Poverty Line families.

India comes with the twin objectives of improving health and education of the poor children to fight against the problems related to health and low participation of children in school education from poor families. So for the improvement of health and education of the poor children under one umbrella, Government of India implemented the programme called National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) in 1995. Later on in 2004 the programme was revised and is now popularly known as the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDM) (Satish, Sweta, Ramani and Dileep 2010). To make it real and effective the Government of India chooses Schools (Government Schools) as a medium, where the maximum numbers of children are engaged (enrolled). The prime objective of this

programme is to enhance enrollment, attendance, decrease dropout rates and improve nutritional level among school going children (Misra and Puri 2012). According to the Programme, on every school day all students in primary classes are to be provided a cooked meal consisting of no less than 300 kcal and 8-12 grams of protein to all children studying in Classes I-V in all Government, local body and Government aided schools and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative Innovation Education (AIE) (Sikligar, 2011). In the early days of 1923 the provision of Mid-Day Meal was there in Tamil Nadu for the disadvantaged children in Madras Municipality Corporation but due to some reason it was closed. Later on in 1960 it was restored by Chief Minister, K. Kamraj in some selected areas of the state. Further in 1982 when some major trust came, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. M. G. Ramahandran decided to universalize the programme for all children in Government schools of primary classes. The popularity of the programme creates its importance on education system and has become part of it, which extends the programme from rural to urban areas. The major change on the ground reality and generate a lot of action among all concerned resulting in the widening of implementation of programme occurs only when the Supreme Court of India directed all states to provide a cooked meal for children in 2001 (Govinda (edited) (2011)). In the initial stage (1995-96) the Mid-Day Meal Programme covered 378 districts, 225000 schools and 33.5 million children with an expenditure of Rs 4,412 million (Pathania, 2006) and in 2011-12, about 10.54 crore school children out of which 7.18 crore in primary and 3.36 crore in upper-primary stages were benefited under the programme with the budget allocation of Rs 10,380 crore against which the total expenditure incurred was Rs 9901.91 crore (Economic Survey 2012-13) and it became the largest school feeding programme in the world. India is not the only country who feeds its school children in the worldwide scenario, countries like Brazil where 47 million children come under the school meals programme, the United States of America where number of beneficiaries are 45 million and China where the total number of 26 million children come under the same programme and there are at least 43 countries where the number of beneficiaries is more than one million children. The popularity of school feeding programme in South Asia holds the largest number of beneficiaries followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (State of School Feeding Worldwide, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

In this research researcher used survey method to collect primary data through direct interview, while secondary data is also used to generalize the study. To fill the questionnaire researchers randomly selected 32 schools which included 8 schools from each district that is 4 from rural place of each district and 4 from urban place of each district. Further within these 32 schools, two sample teachers, 10 sample students and parents of those sample students of each sample schools were also selected for direct interview and to fill the questionnaires separately. Further researchers also selected cooks and helpers of each sample school to verify the ground level reality of the programme in Sikkim. To analyze the collected data researcher employed simple statistical techniques like percentage etc.

Like any other state or Union Territory of India, Sikkim also started providing cooked meals in 2002 (Hand Book of Mid-Day Meal Programme in Sikkim 2010), before the provision of National scheme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal (Garg and Mandal 2013), the tiny hilly state provides raw food grain to school children of primary level @ 3kg/child/day (Hand Book of Mid-Day Meal

Programme in Sikkim 2010). “In initial phase the hot cooked meals served to primary level (Class I-V) and after 2008, students of upper-primary classes also being provided. The mid-day meal programme covers all the Government Schools, Sanskrit Pathshalas, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Schools and Education Guarantee Scheme Centers of the state.” “In Sikkim, food grain (rice) is supplied by the Food Corporation of India as per the enrolment of all schools at the rate of 100gm/child/day for class I-V and 150gm/child/day for Class VI-VIII. The food grains thus lifted is stored in the principal distribution centers. In Sikkim, two principal distribution centers (Rangpo and Jorethang) are distributing the food grains to the four districts, Rangpo is the centre for North and East District and Jorethang is for South and West District. The District transport the food grains to their respective headquarters, from there it is distributed to schools” (*Sikkim-hrdd, gov.in/mid_day_meal.htm#personpower*).

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SIKKIM TO MONITOR MID-DAY MEAL PROGRAMME

In Sikkim, the implementation process of the Mid-Day Meal programme is ruled by the Human Resource Development Department Government of Sikkim. The administrative mechanism of the state is well sketched by the ministry, where Director of the School Education is the State Project Director, in second position Additional Director (School Education) Mid-day Meal Cell, in third position Joint Director Mid-Day Meal Cell, in fourth position Deputy Director Mid-Day Meal Cell and Assistance Project Coordinator Mid-Day Meal Cell, they all are responsible in state level activities. The Parallel monitoring mechanism in District level and Block level paint successful picture in the ground level. While in District level, the District Collector posted as a Chairperson or President of the Mid-Day Meal programme, in second position the District Joint Director (Human Resource Development Department, District Headquarter work as a Project In-charge, Deputy Director Works as Project Coordinator and Assistant Director works as Transportation and Monitoring In-charge. While the Assistant Directors of all Block Administrative Centers works as Monitoring In-charge of respective jurisdictions (Hand Book of Mid-Day Meal Programme in Sikkim 2010). While in School level, appointment of Mid-Day In-charge supervised Mid-Day Meal Programme implementation process. Further the involvement of the Parents and local bodies such as Panchayats, Zilla Panchayat etc. in School Development and management Committee and Parents Teacher Association also supervise the Programme in School level (*mdm.nic.in/Files/PAB/PAB2012-13/Sikkim/writeup_awpb12-13*). As a result of this tied administrative mechanism regarding implementation of this programme no such cases were register till the date which misbalance the implementation process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Sample details of the study

Districts	No. of sample Schools			No. of Students from Each sample school	No. of sample Households	No. of sample Teachers from Each sample school
	Rural	Urban	Total			
East	04	04	08	10x8=80	80	02x8=16
West	04	04	08	10x8=80	80	02x8=16
North	04	04	08	10x8=80	80	02x8=16

South	04	04	08	10x8=80	80	02x8=16
total	16	16	32	10x32=320	320	02x32=64

Sample details (Made by researcher himself)

Note: Only class V students were selected for this study from all sample schools and only two teachers of class V from each sample schools were selected. Regarding household survey researcher visited each and every sample student's households to know the ground reality of Mid-Day Meal Programme.

Economic condition of the sample Household:

Table No.1 Distribution of sample household on the basis of Below Poverty Line and Above Poverty Line in Rural and Urban areas of different districts

District	Rural			Urban		
	Number of BPL Sample students	Number of APL Sample Students	Total	Number of BPL Sample students	Number of APL Sample Students	Total
East	12 (30%)	28 (70%)	40	14 (35%)	26 (65%)	40
West	07 (17%)	33 (83%)	40	11 (27%)	29 (73%)	40
North	09 (22%)	31 (78%)	40	06 (15%)	34 (85%)	40
South	04 (10%)	36 (64%)	40	07(17%)	33 (83%)	40
Total	32 (20%)	128 (80%)	160	38 (23%)	122 (77%)	160

Source: Field survey 2015

In this study researchers found that, majority of the sample students belongs to Below Poverty Line families lives in east district where 30% in rural areas and 35% in urban area. The massive immigration in search of employment from different region as a push factor and transfers in organized sector, better schooling facilities are the pull factors which increase both APL and BPL families in east district especially in urban area. Further only 10% sample students in rural areas and 15% in urban areas belongs to BPL families which is minimum in this study. Further in the same district researchers found that, 85% of BPL households are casual labours in urban area where as in rural area 95% are settled in the other's land on yearly rent basic, and they belongs to other than Bhutia community. Generally in north district the maximum number of habitants belongs to Bhutia community who are rich from the time of early days of kingship. They hold maximum size of land as compare to other communities (*Nepali and Lepcha*) even today also. That is why only 15% of sample households in urban areas and 05% in rural areas belongs to BPL category. The slow urbanization and low employment opportunities in west as well as south district as compare to east district shows the presence of APL and BPL category in both rural and urban areas. In total 20% of sample students in rural and 23% in urban areas belongs to BPL families. In this study researcher observe that migration with the family on the basis of seasonal migration (in and out), transfer of government servant, permanent migration (in and out), and casual

migration creates variation in number of BPL and APL families in urban areas. While the variation and effects of in-migration are comparatively low in rural areas as in urban areas.

Table No. 2 *Category wise distribution of the sample students in rural urban sample schools of different districts*

District	Area	SC	ST	OBC	General	Total
East	Rural	11	06	09	14	40
	Urban	09	08	06	17	40
West	Rural	13	06	04	17	40
	Urban	06	06	09	19	40
North	Rural	04	30	02	04	40
	Urban	01	31	03	05	40
South	Rural	04	05	13	18	40
	Urban	08	06	11	15	40
Total	Total	56(17%)	98 (31%)	57 (18%)	109 (34%)	320 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2015

In this study researcher found that, 17%, 31%, 18% and 34% sample students belongs to SC, ST, OBC and General category respectively. As mention earlier most of ST people (Bhutia and Lepcha communities) live in north district because it is restricted for other communities for permanent residence. It is reserve for tribal community of the state called Bhutia and Lepcha that is why ST Population of sample students in same district is higher than other district. In urban areas the factors like in and out migration with families etc, which mentioned earlier are responsible for the fluctuation of ST, SC, OBC and General population. While the trend of mixing settlement of the different communities in a same village and districts gives difference in the population of SC, ST, OBC and General in both rural and urban areas as well and it is a natural phenomenon. So, on this mixing picture researchers found that discrimination based on caste, sex, religion and even rich and poor is not practice in schools and even in social events. In this regard 100% schools headmaster, schools In-charge, teachers, parents and even Mid-Day Meal In-charge of the sample schools informed that they did not witness such cases which lead to social disorder in long run.

In every school researcher found that the Mid-Day Meal not only fills empty stomach of the children but it also provides social education through seating together while eating Mid-Day Meal in school. Further researcher found that, parents are also co-operating in this manner and they are interested on who sits with whom during Mid-Day Meal period and even in class room as well. In Sikkim north district is reserve for ST community (Bhutia and Lepcha people) of the state other communities are not allowed in North District for permanent residence. Due to which ST category school going children are maximum in north district. Mobilization of human resources in organized and unorganized sector provides temporary residence only in north district that is why some margin number of school going children of other category are also presents in same district.

STUDENTS AND MID-DAY MEAL

Students Response about Mid-Day Meal Programme

During survey researchers found that all sample students are familiar with Mid-Day Meal Programme in all sample schools. It indicates that the participation of the students is 100% in the Sample schools of both the blocks. The percentage of students who went to home at the time of meal and who denied to take mid-day meal in school is zero in all the sample schools. It implies that the state is able to maintain quality, implementation procedure, hygienic cooking process, timely supply of food grain and provide basic needs to the schools for the betterment of students.

Mid-day meal and Social Education

During survey researchers observed that, the facility of Mid-Day Meal Programme were able to organize the new generation children in such a manner where the social discrimination based on caste, religion, sex, rich and poor is totally absent. While findings of the study also conclude that all the sample students in rural and urban areas were actively participating in school feeding programme. On the other end their parents, schools development committees of the sample schools, Mid-Day Meal in-charge in school level, block level and village level also agreed that Mid-Day Meal Programme surely help to change the social structure of the society in near future.

Quality of the food grain

The next factor which manipulates the attendance as well as enrolment in schools is, the Quality of the Mid day Meal. After survey results show that, in rural block 93.85% and 92.57% students in urban block have admitted that the quality of the meal is very good. While some margin percentage of sample students in rural and urban areas opined that the quality is poor which is negligible. But to justify and maintain the quality of the grain central and state government should inspect the food stores frequently. On the other side, all the sample respondents excluding students agreed that the food grain of the Meal is good and eatable, but sometime food grain are damaged by rain as well as stored in un-hygienic environment. Regarding this they informed that they usually return the damaged grain. So it's a responsibility of the transport authority and Food Co-operation of India to supply best quality of grain in each and every school for the betterment of students.

Attraction ability of the Mid-Day Meal Programme

In this study researchers found that, the opinion of the 78.33% sample students (Combine percentage of sample students of rural and urban block) is positive regarding students attraction ability of the Programme toward schools. It shows that the Programme is able to boost the non-school going children to join the school. They further express that, the Programme is good and one time supportive meal/ day with full of nutrition for the slum's children of the urban area and children of the economically backward families in rural area. They believed that Mid-Day Meal Programme justifies the needs of the children on the basis of nutrition value and inadequate diet. Whereas 18% of student in rural block and 25.33% in urban block believed that, the Programme is not able to attract those children who are not

enrolled in school. They further express that over age, distance of school, basic facilities within the school premises, illiteracy of the parent and economic condition of the family play an important role instead of Mid-Day Meal Programme.

Regarding distraction of students while cooking process of meal in school researchers found that, 96.67% of students in rural block schools and 95.33% of students in urban block schools say that their attention towards study has not declined due to the cooking process of mid-day meal and it will not affect the academic environment of the study as well. While, during survey researcher have observed that in most of the sample schools of both the blocks where the kitchen shed was constructed behind the schools buildings and they were not visible from the classrooms. Whereas 3.33% of students in rural block schools and 4.67% students in urban block schools express that their attention is being diverted from the study because of the mid-day meal programme due to open cooking process. Further during survey researchers found that, in some schools of rural as well as urban areas the ongoing construction of kitchen shed force them to use any open space to cook meal like school ground, corridors etc. On the other end 88% of sample respondents other than sample students also informed that school open cooking process directly affect the learning environment in school. So on this regard school development committees and school education department must fixe it for the development of children.

Participation of the students for the preparation of mid day meal menu

During the field survey of the Mid-Day Meal, the in-charge have brought into attention that the students are not allowed to participate in the preparation of the mid day meal menu. In every sample schools researcher found that the Mid-Day Meal in-charge prepares the menu on daily basis so that students can enjoy the meal with different taste. Sikkim is a hilly state where every single person enjoys the 'Rice' instead of 'Roti'. So every sample schools serve cooked rice with vegetables and 'Dal'. Further all the sample schools serve dry fruits and seasonal fruits once in a week and eggs for non-vegetarians and 'Khir'(porridge)for every vegetarian once in a week. It was informed by the cook and Mid-Day Meal in-charge of the sample schools of rural block that, they used to purchase the vegetables from nearby villages, because in rural area farmer used to follow the system of organic farming which is good for health.

Opinion of the Parents about effect of the Mid-Day Meal Programme on Enrolment, Attendance and Dropout

In this study researcher found that, 94% of parents in rural and 92% in urban blocks agreed that the impact of Mid-Day Meal Programme on enrolment is positive. On their view, the Mid-Day Meal Programme reduce the burden of day time cooking for those mothers' who work on the basis of daily wages labour. They further expressed that the Programme is good for those families who are economically un-sound. Only 6% parents in rural and 8% in urban block were not agreed with that. According to them primary education is an important platform for future development and it is responsibility of the individual to send their children to schools in the absence of such Programme. In general the study found that 93% of parents were agree that this scheme is good in both the aspects nutrition value and enrolment, but only 7% of parents are not agree with this, which is ignorable.

The opinion of the parents regarding effects of Mid-Day Meal on attendance also reflects the same as mentioned in effects of Mid-Day Meal Programme in enrolment of the student. During survey 93.33% parents in rural block and 90% in urban block expressed that the Mid-Day Meal Programme is able to increase the attendance. The good quality meal, environment of the school during meal time and nutritional value of the meal along with the good taste attracts the children in school. In total 91.67% of parents agreed that it will improve the attendance of the students in school, but, 8.33% of parents express that the attendance of the students is not increase or decrease by the Mid-Day Meal Programme. According to them, the attendance of the students is highly fluctuate in rural area during cropping and harvesting season, because due to the shortage of labour, involvement of children in mentioned practices is highly appreciated by elders because of their illiteracy. So in this ground the importance of education and Value of Mid-Day Meal is not considered by them.

Regarding effect of Mid-Day Meal on Dropout, 95.67% of parents in total are positive which confirm that the Mid-Day Meal Programme helps in reducing the dropout rates in primary level. They further express that, the mass media, changing societies and developmental activities of the government increase the consciousness among illiterate people regarding importance of education in today's world, which helps the stats to produce maximum number of educated persons because the economic development of states or country depends on human resources. Whereas 4.33% of parents in total (3.33% parents in rural and 5.33%) in urban area express that the Programme is not able to control the dropout rates in primary level. According to them, the seasonal migration of the parents along with their children and permanent shift from one place to another are the important factors which directly affects the dropout rates in primary level.

Opinion of the Parents regarding continuity of the Programme in future

The researcher found that 86% in rural and 78.67% of parents in urban wants that the government should continue the programme in future, whereas 14% in rural and 21.33% in urban feels that instead of Mid-Day Meal Programme in School, 'Ready to Eat' food should be provided by the government in future in order to maintain the teaching hours and to avoid the indiscipline caused by the Mid-Day Meal Programme in school premises. While in general 82.33% of parents express that government should continue the programme to fight against malnutrition problem among the schools going children. Whereas 17.67% of parents out of 300 samples size gives negative response regarding continuity of the programme in future.

CONCLUSION

The Mid-Day Meal Programme is being implemented in Sikkim from 2002, which covers primary level only in initial stage. In initial phase the hot cooked meal were served to primary level (Class I-V) and after 2008, students of upper-primary classes are being provided with the same. The mid-day meal programme covers all the Government Schools, Sanskrit Pathshalas, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Schools and Education Guarantee Scheme Centers of the state. In Sikkim, the administrative section along with the monitoring system is well managed by the state government, for the smooth functioning of the Mid-Day Meal Cell. The important achievement of Mid-Day Meal Programme in Sikkim is that, it has been able to

incorporate those children who belong to the lower strata of the Sikkimese society. Apart from providing one meal a day to a student, the Programme has remained successful in raising the literacy rate of the state. The situation of illiteracy among the children, that was prevalent twenty years before the implementation of the Programme, is on the verge of decay.

The success of the Mid-Day Meal Programme in Sikkim is highly accredited with the participation of school management committee, monitoring committee as well as the active role played by the concerned officials. The role played by the teachers in various sample areas deserves applause. Similarly, the role of the ward and Zilla Panchayats, in the rural areas for the proper execution of the Programme cannot be overlooked. Likewise, the members of the Municipal Committee play a pivotal role for the smooth functioning of the Mid-Day Meal Programme in the major towns of the state. Both the Panchayats and the Members of the Municipal Committee make their visits during the school hours to examine the mode of the Programme. Auxiliary, the members of Zilla Panchayats and ward Panchayats are the ex-officio members of the school Management Committee that naturally lead to the smooth functioning.

It is important to mention here that, the programme has not only provided one time meal to a child belonging to Below Poverty Line, but, it has also provided healthy and nutritious food. This has resulted in the declining of malnutrition among the children of Sikkim. It is further important to state that the Mid-Day Meal Programme is world's largest School Feeding Programme funded by the Union Government to every states of India. The Programme not only provides hot meal to the students but, it also teaches the students to practice a hygienic life. Further, the Programme has also been able to attract the children of economically backward families to go to school. Children of such families have been going to a nearby school with ensnare of food. Likewise, the programme has also been able to deprecate the traditional caste practices in the state. It is important to note here that the Programme has been highly successful in curtailing casteism at least among the children by allowing inter dining. Above all, the parents belonging Below Poverty Line comprised of the daily wage labours, craftsmen, and artisans so on. Therefore, every single working hour for them is important as it counts for their salary. During their hectic working hours it is not possible for them to come back to their places to serve food or meal to their children leaving their work unfinished. The Programme has also been able to reach to the door steps of these working people, as they don't have to come back to their houses to serve food to their children during mid hour of their works.

It appears that the Mid-Day Meal Programme in Sikkim has been able to synchronize the rural society by eliminating the social and economic inequalities. It comes into surface that the urban children belonging to Above Poverty Line are usually admitted in the private schools. However the rural children due to the lack of some good private institutions are being admitted in the government schools. In this case, children belonging to both the lines consume the Mid-Day Meal in the institutions they are enrolled in. In the case of the former government school with Mid-Day Meal Programme can be regarded as a precursor for the slums children as they are availing both their rights that is food and education.

As far as the hygiene is concern the state of Sikkim has been able to set an example among all other states of the Union of India. So far none of a case has been registered against the poor supply of edibles in the schools. Further there is no report of illness as we have seen in other states of the country among the children of Sikkim. Likewise before the execution of the order of the Hon'ble of Supreme Court in 2002, dry food grain, like rice was distributed among the students. However after the said order the students are served with hot cooked meal that directly reaches to the students who are in need of a proper diet. In the former case there were maximum chances of consumption of the dry food grains by the other members of their family. Likewise, it appears that, the Mid-Day Meal Programme is moving ahead with success and it is evident from the enrolment of the students in the Primary Schools of Sikkim. However, the increase in the enrolment is not merely due to the Mid-Day Meal Programme but the consciousness of the people regarding education and its importance cannot be underestimated.

It is indeed a good achievement for the state of Sikkim that it lacks mal-practices in the fund allocated for the Mid-Day Meal Programme. The field report suggests that not a single case has been registered against the concerned people for siphoning the allocated amount meant for the children. In all probabilities the programme does not have a centralized kitchen on which various Non Government Organizations and Self Help Groups make their affiliation. The Programme of Mid-Day Meal has been monitored by the Mid-Day Cell under the supervision of Human Resources Development Department Government of Sikkim. Therefore there is a minimum chance of corruption and leakage in the channel. Similarly, the field survey hints that the Mid Day meal is not prepare in the School Kitchen. Therefore, the leftover raw food grains are also distributed among the students before the commencement of their vacation with a view of supplying of healthy and nutritious food stuffs among them during their off days.

The guidelines of the scheme are properly followed in the surveyed areas of Sikkim. The menu of food items are pasted on a notice board of the schools to let the children know about the food items that are being served to them during their lunch hour. Similarly, the quantity of food being used for the day on the basis of presence of the students along with the expenditure for the day has also been publicized through the notice board. The notices also contain, the food served throughout the weeks and projects a bright features of serving healthy food items like eggs, *Khir*, dry fruit items like cashew, nuts, almond and peanuts. The schools serve these items through the routines maintained by the concerned school. Further, in the school level, the Mid-Day in-charge keeps the record of monthly expenditure, total quantity of food grain, which leads to the transparency of the budget.

It is noteworthy that, the State of Sikkim is only a cent percent organic State in the Country and most of the rural Schools usually buy vegetables from the village farms. This not only provides a healthy stuff to a child, but, also boosts the economy of a farmer through selling of such vegetables to the schools. In this context, the rural schools are also playing a part of a small market to sell organic vegetables for the villages. The facility of organic consumption among the urban children through Mid-Day Meal Programme is not a popular phenomenon due to its farness from the villages.

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