

Report

Dokka Seethamma

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

(For Intermediate Students)





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(10th March – 2025)





REPORT ON DOKKA SEETHAMMA MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

(For Inter Students)

The Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, envisioned as a robust initiative to provide nutritious meals to intermediate students, has encountered significant challenges in its implementation. Despite the government's intentions and the extensive framework laid out on paper, ground realities paint a different picture, with issues ranging from inadequate funding and poor meal quality to lack of consistent monitoring and community involvement.

Insights gathered from the People's Pulse survey indicate that students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders are dissatisfied with the scheme's current state. Financial constraints, inferior meal quality, inconsistent monitoring, and lack of accountability have undermined the scheme's potential to positively impact student health and nutrition.

To ensure the success and sustainability of the mid-day meal program, it is crucial for the government to adopt a more holistic and community-driven approach. Implementing transparent monitoring mechanisms, revising financial allocations, improving food quality, and ensuring the welfare of cooking staff are essential steps in this direction. Involving local communities, donors, and public representatives can further enhance accountability and foster a sense of collective responsibility.

The ultimate goal of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme should be to nurture students' well-being and support their educational journey through consistent and quality nutrition. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the proposed recommendations, the government can revitalize the scheme and restore confidence among students and stakeholders alike.

Fuelling the Future:

Intermediate education is a crucial turning point in a student's career, laying the foundation for their future. It's often emphasized that success in Intermediate studies can lead to good job opportunities and the ability to support one's family. However, for many underprivileged students, the first hurdle to education is hunger. Without proper nutrition, focusing on studies becomes a daunting task. Recognizing that a lack of food was causing a decline in attendance at government junior colleges, the Andhra Pradesh government launched the **“Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme.”** This initiative addresses the impact of poverty and hunger on education, ensuring that students receive nutritious meals to help them concentrate and thrive academically.

Objectives of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme are:

1. To increase attendance and eliminate dropouts.
2. To make students more interested in studies and improve their health.
3. To strengthen intermediate education.
4. To satisfy the hunger of poor students.
5. To provide social equality among students.

Are the goals expected by the government being achieved through this scheme? To find out what changes have been brought about by this scheme, People's Pulse Research team visited several colleges across the state and conducted an in-depth study. Researchers from People's Pulse visited 48 government junior colleges across various mandals, spanning from Rayalaseema to Uttarandhra, to assess the quality, hygiene, and infrastructure of the meals provided under the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The study also gathered opinions from students regarding the scheme. As part of this comprehensive evaluation, a total of 1,200 samples were collected, with 25 samples taken from each college. The study meticulously examined the shortcomings of the scheme in detail.

During the research process, the researchers spent a minimum of four hours at each college, engaging in face-to-face interactions with students benefiting from the scheme, as well as with teachers, kitchen staff, and parents, to gather extensive and accurate information. This field study was conducted from 15 February to 7 March 2025. The survey was led by People's Pulse Director R. Dilip Reddy and supervised at the field level by researchers Jagadish, Sridhar, and Nutalapati Ravikanth. The report was prepared by Ganesh Thanda, Lakshmi, G. Murali Krishna, Pradeep, Prashanth, Jampala Praveen, and I.V. Murali Krishna Sharma.

The field survey conducted on the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme primarily focused on the following key issues and gathered feedback from students, teachers, student unions, cooks, and social workers:

- A. Has the number of students attending colleges increased after the introduction of the midday meal?
- B. How is the quality and cleanliness of the food?
- C. Are the ingredients in accordance with the prescribed menu?
- D. Do students find the menu satisfactory, or do they suggest any changes?
- E. What are the current shortcomings of the scheme?
- F. Are the staff punctual, and what challenges do they face?
- G. Is there an issue with the availability of drinking water?
- H. Are inspections conducted regularly, and by whom?
- I. What are the perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and cooks regarding the scheme?

Based on the feedback and insights gathered, we have compiled comprehensive information from relevant experts to enhance the effective implementation of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme in government junior colleges, which is presented in this report.

Background of the Scheme:

The Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme is named after “Dokka Seethamma,” revered as the daily breadwinner and Annapurna of the Godavari districts. Initially implemented for schools, the scheme has now been extended to intermediate colleges as well. On January 4, 2025, the Minister Shri Nara Lokesh, inaugurated the scheme at Payakapuram Government Junior College, Vijayawada, while ministers, public representatives, and officials simultaneously launched the scheme in other parts of the state.

Students from remote villages attend government colleges located in mandal Centers, and many of these students come from weaker sections of society. Due to financial constraints and other reasons, many of them are unable to bring lunch boxes to college. Observing a decline in attendance rates, the Telugu Desam government introduced the mid-day meal scheme for intermediate students in August 2018. However, when the YSRCP government assumed power in 2019, the scheme was discontinued. Later, when the TDP coalition government returned to power in 2024, the scheme was reintroduced to support students' nutritional needs and encourage regular attendance.

Implementation in 475 Colleges:

Currently, 1,48,419 students across 475 government junior colleges in the state are benefiting from the “Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme”. As part of the implementation, 398 colleges have been linked to nearby government schools to facilitate meal distribution, while the remaining 77 colleges have been connected to centralized kitchens. The government has allocated a budget of Rs. 29.39 crore for the scheme from January to March this year, and orders have been issued to allocate Rs. 85.84 crore for the next financial year.

Defective GO 40:

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued GO 40 to implement the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme. However, the lack of clarity in the guidelines outlined in this GO has led to numerous challenges in implementing the scheme, making it inherently defective.

- Meals are being prepared in government schools and transported to colleges. However, the GO does not provide clear guidelines regarding transportation expenses. Although it states that principals can settle bills within the budget, it does not specify the amount allocated for this purpose.
- The GO lacks clarity on critical aspects such as the number of grams of rice to be served per plate, the nutritional content required, and other food items that should be included in the meal.
- GO No. 40 does not specify the allocation per student for meals, the nutritional standards to be met, or the quantity of food and curry to be served.

- While the GO mandates that meals be served to students within four hours of cooking, food transported from centralized kitchens in the morning is often served only after four hours, resulting in the meals becoming cold.
- According to the data collected, the government allocates only Rs. 14.50 per student for meals, but this figure is not explicitly mentioned in GO 40.
- The state government provides only Rs. 14.50 per student for meals prepared by Akshaya Patra, NGOs, and Dwakra women.
- The government supplies only ration rice, chicken eggs, and chickpeas. However, Dwakra women, Akshaya Patra, and NGOs are responsible for procuring vegetables, gas cylinders, firewood, oil, salt, chilies, turmeric, and other cooking essentials within the Rs. 14.50 provided.
- Cooking staff receive a meager salary of Rs. 3,000 per month. Additionally, they must purchase gas cylinders at their own expense, often resulting in vegetables being cooked inadequately, resembling watery preparations.
- Although the GO mentions that the Director of Intermediate Education will oversee the implementation and management of the scheme, it does not clearly outline the responsibilities or the inspection system.

Bread as Much as Flour:

As the saying goes, it is not possible to achieve the desired goals without allocating adequate funds to the scheme. Proper funding is crucial for the successful implementation of any program. Unfortunately, due to the lack of sufficient funds for the “Dokka Seethamma” meal scheme, it is not possible to provide quality meals to students.

Currently, the cost of vegetables is no less than Rs. 40 per kg, while a liter of quality cooking oil costs around Rs. 130. With the government allocating only Rs. 14.50 per student, it is impractical to provide nutritious and high-quality food. The limited funds are directly impacting the quality of vegetables and other food items used in the meals. As a result, students face several difficulties in consuming the food provided under the mid-day meal scheme and are often reluctant to eat it.

A teacher from Kurnool (who wished to remain anonymous) remarked, "The responsibility of providing quality meals lies with the government." This statement clearly reflects the need for a more sincere and committed approach from the authorities to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to recognize that increasing the funding allocation is essential to the scheme's success. By allotting at least Rs. 30 per meal per student, the government can ensure the provision of quality and nutritious food to the students.

Survey Initiated from Payakapuram:

People's Pulse initiated the survey from Payakapuram Government Junior College in Vijayawada, where Minister Nara Lokesh launched the scheme. According to students and parents, while there was considerable enthusiasm from public representatives and officials on the first day, no follow-up inspections were carried out afterward. This lack of continued oversight indicates a lack of sincerity from both the government and the officials in implementing the scheme.

Students expressed concerns that quality food was served only during visits by public representatives and officials, but substandard food was served on regular days. As per the menu, Ragi Java should be served; however, several colleges have yet to receive it. At Payakapuram College, where Akshaya Patra Sanstha is responsible for food supply, discrepancies in the menu were observed. For instance, on a day designated for Egg Curry, Aloo Tomato Curry was served instead. Additionally, although Buttermilk is not part of the menu, it was still being served. People's Pulse has documented numerous such instances across various colleges where the prescribed menu was not being followed, highlighting significant inconsistencies in the scheme's implementation.

Scheme to Satisfy Hunger of Poor and Vulnerable:

When asked whether they consume the mid-day meal provided by the government, 61.2 percent of students responded positively, while 32.5 percent said they eat it occasionally, and 1.3 percent stated they do not consume it at all. In urban areas such as Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Guntur, Vijayawada, and Kurnool, only 50 percent of students eat the mid-day meal, with the remainder either bringing meals from home or eating at home.

During interactions with students, some expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of food served. Aishwarya, a student from Kakinada, remarked, "My home-cooked rice is better than watery curries and soft rice. That is why I bring a box every day, as before."

The consumption rate of mid-day meals varies significantly across different colleges. In Narasannapet, 400 out of 450 students are eating the meals, while in Kakinada College, only 420 out of 690 students are consuming them. In Samarlakota College, 250 out of 400 students are eating, and in Palakonda, 300 out of 400 students are participating. However, the situation is different at Gollaprolu College, where only 60 to 70 out of 250 students eat the meals, and at Pithapuram College, where only 130 to 150 out of 700 students consume them. Many students opt to eat at welfare hostels or their homes instead, and due to inadequate quality and cleanliness at those places as well, some students merely take eggs and chickpeas without eating the rest of the meal. If teachers and principals take the initiative and enhance supervision in such areas, the number of students availing of mid-day meals is likely to increase.

A significant proportion of students in government junior colleges belong to marginalized social groups, including 60 percent from Backward Classes (BC), 22 percent from Scheduled Castes (SC), 6 percent from Scheduled Tribes (ST), and 12 percent from Other Castes (OC). Most of their parents are farmers, daily wage workers, private employees, and laborers. These students often leave their villages as early as 8 am and travel long distances to reach junior colleges at mandal centers, making it difficult to bring lunch from home and leaving them to study on an empty stomach. The introduction of the "Dokka Seethamma Midday Meal Scheme" is a commendable effort to address this challenge. However, it is crucial for the government to strengthen the scheme by ensuring the provision of nutritious and quality meals to truly benefit future generations.

Menu:

According to the menu released by the government, the following items are to be served:

- Monday: Rice, green gram, boiled egg, chickpeas.
- Tuesday: Rice, chicken curry, lentil, rasam, ragi java.
- Wednesday: Veg pulao, aloo kurma, boiled egg, chickpeas.
- Thursday: Rice, chicken curry, sambar, ragi java.
- Friday: Pulihara, gongura or vegetable chutney, boiled egg, chickpeas.
- Saturday: Rice, vegetable curry, rasam, and Pongal sweet.

Menu needs change:

During inspections conducted by People's Pulse, it was observed that menu boards were absent in the colleges surveyed. When researchers inquired whether the food items matched the prescribed menu, 76.7 percent of students responded affirmatively, 20.8 percent noted some discrepancies, and 2.5 percent stated that the items did not match the menu. Furthermore, when asked if they were satisfied with the existing menu or desired changes, 29.7 percent of students expressed their satisfaction, while 3.8 percent stated they did not like it, and a significant 66.5 percent suggested improvements. Venkateshwarlu, a first-year Intermediate student from Guntur, remarked, "It would be better if chicken eggs were served three or four days a week instead of every day, and it would be preferable to include some fruit as an alternative to chicken eggs."

Similar opinions were recorded across the state, indicating a collective desire for a more diverse and balanced menu. It would be prudent for the government to consider these opinions to further enhance the quality and appeal of the mid-day meal scheme.

Students' Opinion on Food:

When asked about the mid-day meal scheme, 23.3 percent of students stated that it was good, while 49.7 percent said it was not satisfactory, and 27 percent expressed dissatisfaction. When questioned whether the mid-day meal was preferable to receiving mess charges directly, 83 percent favored the mid-day meal. This clearly indicates that students expect better quality food from the government. During a visit to Penumaka Girls' College in Guntur, where Akshaya Patra supplies food, it was observed that the students left without eating. Since the food arrives at 10:30 in the morning and is consumed around noon, it often becomes cold and unappealing. This issue is prevalent in other colleges where private organizations supply food.

Women's Groups Are Better:

When asked about the source of their mid-day meal, 65 percent of students responded that it is cooked on-site at the college, 7.6 percent mentioned it is supplied from a centralized kitchen, 1.9 percent said it comes from NGOs, and 25.5 percent were unsure. A majority of students stated that the food prepared by women's groups is more flavorfull, with the right balance of salt and spices. In contrast, food from private institutions is often bland and lacks taste. Additionally, boiled eggs are not provided directly and are brought from outside.

It was noted that mid-day meals in colleges are not prepared locally but are supplied by Akshaya Patra and some voluntary organizations. For instance, in Jaggampet, Kirlampudi, and Karapa colleges, food is cooked at nearby government schools and transported to the colleges. In contrast, Kakinada College receives its food from Akshaya Patra, while Samarlakota, Pithapuram, and Gollaprolu colleges receive meals from the Alluri Seetharama Raju Trust in Bendapudi. When asked whether the food served is hot, 58 percent of students mentioned that it is only sometimes warm. In some colleges, hot boxes provided by donors help maintain the temperature, but in others, where ordinary containers are used, the food cools down quickly, leading to dissatisfaction among students.

Is there a wastage?

When asked about wastage in the mid-day meal scheme, 34.8 percent of students stated that wastage occurs when the rice is not cooked properly, 18.4 percent attributed it to unappetizing curries, and 14.6 percent cited a lack of taste in the ingredients. Meanwhile, 32.2 percent of students reported no wastage. Rice is often regarded as the embodiment of Brahma, and although it is served in adequate quantities, students express dissatisfaction with the lack of complementary curries. Food that is locally cooked tends to be relatively better. However, meals brought from distant locations often become mushy by the time they reach the college, resulting in reduced consumption and increased wastage.

The People's Pulse survey found that students tend to consume more food on days when veg pulao is served. However, on days when pulihara is offered, the number of students eating decreases significantly as it often becomes mushy and unpalatable. Food supplied by private organizations tends to lose its texture after being stored in containers for extended periods, causing it to become overly soft and less appealing. To address this issue, it is essential to establish a system of cooking and serving food directly at the college. This approach would help maintain food quality and reduce wastage, thereby ensuring that students receive nutritious and appetizing meals.

Lack of Cleanliness:

Maintaining cleanliness in the cooking and dining areas is crucial to ensuring a hygienic mid-day meal experience. When students were asked whether the plates and glasses provided for the mid-day meal were clean, 56.1 percent responded positively, 17.6 percent said they were not clean, and 26.3 percent stated they were only sometimes clean. Furthermore, when asked about the cleanliness of the food serving area, 50.5 percent of students said it was clean, 32.6 percent said it was not clean, and 16.9 percent reported it was only sometimes clean. To uphold hygiene standards, it is imperative that the concerned authorities conduct frequent surprise inspections to monitor and address cleanliness issues.

As per Government Order No. 40, college principals are entrusted with the responsibility of closely supervising the mid-day meal scheme. However, in many institutions, principals find it challenging to focus on this task due to their involvement in other duties. Notably, the proportion of students utilizing the mid-day meal scheme is significantly higher in colleges where principals actively monitor the program.

In such colleges, the quality of food is notably better, and the cleanliness of plates and glasses is well-maintained. For instance, in colleges like Jaggampet, Karapa (Velangi), Polaki, Kotabommaly, and Aamudala migrant colleges inspected by the People's Pulse team, almost 95 percent of students are benefiting from the scheme due to the principals' dedicated attention to its implementation.

No Inspections:

When students were asked whether anyone comes to inspect the proper serving of the mid-day meal, an overwhelming 79.8 percent stated that no inspections take place. Even in the absence of officials and public representatives, it is essential to have at least some level of supervision by teachers. However, teachers express their inability to effectively oversee the meal service due to their numerous responsibilities.

Given this situation, it is crucial to conduct regular surprise inspections to monitor both the quality of the meals and the overall implementation of the scheme. Such measures will help ensure that the mid-day meal scheme is executed more effectively, ultimately benefiting the students and promoting a healthier, more satisfactory dining experience.

Absence of Grievance Redressal Mechanism:

To enhance the quality of service and food under the mid-day meal scheme, there must be a robust system in place to receive and resolve complaints. Unfortunately, the absence of such a mechanism has emerged as a significant issue for students. An overwhelming 81.8 percent of students reported that there is no facility to lodge complaints regarding mid-day meal problems. Moreover, there is a widespread perception that officials and public representatives are neglecting this aspect.

Some students mentioned that even when they bring their concerns to the attention of the principal or teachers, no changes are made, leaving them feeling unheard. It is imperative for the government to take this issue seriously by establishing a dedicated helpline or feedback system that ensures prompt resolution of grievances. Additionally, a monthly review of officials' performance should be mandated to assess the effectiveness of the scheme and respond to students' complaints. Principals and teachers should be entrusted with specific responsibilities to ensure swift and effective action. If students' concerns are not addressed, the fundamental purpose of the mid-day meal scheme risks being undermined.

Inadequate Drinking Water Facilities:

Access to clean drinking water is crucial, especially before meals. Just as we offer clean water to guests at home, it is essential to ensure that students have access to safe drinking water before consuming their mid-day meals. However, the People's Pulse survey has revealed that many schools are struggling with inadequate drinking water facilities, causing significant inconvenience to students.

When asked whether they receive drinking water during meals, 57.3 percent of students responded positively, while 31.4 percent said they do not, and 11.3 percent mentioned that they bring their own bottles. One student, Somasekar from Anantapur, remarked, "If there is not enough water to drink, I do not feel like eating. That is why I eat only when I am hungry." This clearly indicates that the lack of drinking water is affecting students' willingness to consume meals.

The government must take prompt action to address this fundamental issue by ensuring that colleges are equipped with adequate drinking water facilities. Prioritizing this basic necessity will not only enhance the effectiveness of the mid-day meal scheme but also promote better health and well-being among students.

Improper Dining Facilities:

Although meals are served on time in colleges, the lack of adequate dining facilities has become a significant challenge for students. When asked whether there is a seating facility during meals, 45.3 percent of students said yes, 32 percent said no, and 22.7 percent mentioned that they manage to find a place somewhere. The People's Pulse team observed that, in many colleges, most students are eating under trees or sitting outside due to the absence of dining halls. As a result, the mid-day meal experience resembles a charity event rather than a structured mealtime.

However, one noteworthy aspect that emerged from the survey is the admirable sense of unity and human values exhibited by the students. Despite the lack of proper facilities, students are not influenced by caste or religious differences propagated by some politicians.

When asked whether they sit with others during lunch, 90 percent of students affirmed that they eat together, reflecting a spirit of harmony and inclusiveness. It is not only the government's responsibility to provide nutritious meals but also to ensure that students can enjoy their food in a comfortable and pleasant environment. Establishing dedicated dining halls would greatly enhance the mid-day meal experience and foster a sense of dignity among students.

Failure of Student Unions:

The People's Pulse study has brought to light the lack of support from student unions for those facing challenges with the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme. When students were asked whether student unions are addressing the issues related to this scheme, it became evident that none of the unions are actively involved in highlighting or resolving the shortcomings.

There are growing allegations that student unions have shifted their focus away from student welfare and are instead preoccupied with securing free admissions for their relatives at private educational institutions and engaging in settlements. Even student unions affiliated with communist parties, including the opposition YSRCP student union, have remained silent on the issues surrounding the mid-day meal scheme. It is disheartening to witness unions that were originally formed to safeguard the interests of students now prioritizing personal gains over collective welfare. Student unions should take the initiative to identify flaws in government policies and proactively fight for solutions rather than indulging in activities that serve their own interests.

Leaders and Media Limited to Propaganda:

Our study has revealed that political leaders and the media have largely overlooked the shortcomings of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, despite showing initial enthusiasm. When students were asked whether local leaders were actively monitoring the implementation of the scheme, the overwhelming response was negative. It appears that once the scheme was launched, leaders did not make consistent efforts to ensure its proper execution. Similarly, the media, which initially covered the scheme with vigor, has since shown minimal interest in following up on its progress. Apart from sporadic reporting when issues arise, there has been a lack of consistent coverage or investigative journalism to assess its ongoing implementation.

A Missed Opportunity for Lasting Impact:

Providing nutritious meals to intermediate students not only contributes to their well-being but also has the potential to enhance public support for the government. Once students complete their intermediate education, they become eligible to vote. Offering quality food during this crucial period could leave a lasting impression, potentially translating into electoral support in the future. Therefore, the scheme should not be treated as a mere publicity stunt or a temporary gimmick. Instead, it should be viewed as a strategic investment in the youth—an opportunity to build a healthier and more supportive future generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE SCHEME

Based on a comprehensive survey conducted by People's Pulse, which included feedback from students, parents, teachers, NGO representatives, mid-day meal staff, and student unions, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the scheme's effectiveness:

Enhanced Monitoring and Social Audits

The government's reliance on IVRS surveys creates a false impression of smooth implementation, while ground realities suggest otherwise. Conducting social audits regularly would offer a transparent assessment of the scheme's effectiveness and expose any instances of corruption, such as the past irregularities in chickpea supply.

Revising Financial Allocations

Currently, the government allocates just ₹14.50 per meal per student, which is grossly inadequate. Considering the rising costs and the need for quality nutrition, this amount should be increased to at least ₹30 per meal. In comparison, Anna Canteen meals cost ₹27 per plate (₹22 from the government and ₹5 from the beneficiary), emphasizing the need for parity and fair budgeting in the mid-day meal scheme.

Improving Quality of food

The menu designed by the government appears promising on paper, but practical implementation falls short, as quality meals cannot be provided at the existing budget. Additionally, the food prepared by Akshaya Patra and other private agencies often lacks the desired taste and freshness, as meals cooked in the morning tend to spoil by noon.

Cooking quality, particularly the softness and flavor of rice, has been a recurring issue, with 34.8% of students reporting dissatisfaction with undercooked and spoiled rice. Moreover, the usage of inferior-quality rice (Doddu rice) should be replaced with fine rice to enhance acceptability.

Customization of Food Preparation

Although Akshaya Patra is a reputed organization, students often find the meals unpalatable due to differing taste preferences. Assigning meal preparation responsibilities to women's associations in each college, as practiced in schools, could significantly improve food quality and taste, catering to local preferences.

Clarification on Nutrition Standards

The government must issue clear and comprehensive guidelines on the nutritional standards of mid-day meals, including precise details on the quantity and quality of food to be provided. This clarity will ensure uniformity and help stakeholders understand the scheme's actual objectives.

Monitoring and Community Participation

To ensure the successful implementation of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, it is essential to establish a structured and transparent monitoring mechanism. Based on inputs from various stakeholders and insights from the People's Pulse Research survey, the following recommendations are proposed:

Establish a Dedicated Monitoring Corporation

A special corporation should be established to manage and oversee the mid-day meal scheme. This corporation should be headed by a competent leader or public representative, with the appointment of a special officer to ensure accountability. The corporation's governing body should include the college principal, representatives from voluntary organizations, social workers, student union leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. This multi-faceted approach will promote transparency and ensure collective responsibility. The government should continuously monitor the functioning and effectiveness of this corporation.

Strengthening review mechanism at the District Level

Although the Government Order mandates the collector to monitor the scheme, in reality, inspections have been inconsistent and sporadic, with officials making only initial visits on the scheme's launch day. To maintain accountability, it is crucial to conduct regular surprise inspections at the ground level. Frequent and unannounced visits by ministers, district in-charge ministers, local public representatives, and senior officials will significantly enhance the scheme's effectiveness.

Such proactive measures will also instill confidence among students and ensure the smooth implementation of the scheme.

Form Advisory Committees

The government should appoint an official advisory committee at the state level to monitor the mid-day meal scheme's implementation. This committee should comprise public representatives, teachers' MLCs, student union leaders, and members of voluntary organizations. To ensure effective oversight, the committee should convene meetings every 15 days to assess progress and address any shortcomings.

Additionally, at the college level, advisory committees should include representatives from voluntary organizations, parents, and government officials. These localized committees will play a vital role in day-to-day monitoring and feedback collection.

Public Representatives to Conduct Inspections

Public representatives who aim to highlight the scheme's importance and success in their campaigns should actively participate in frequent surprise inspections. Such inspections not only uphold the spirit of public service but also reinforce the scheme's credibility. The survey revealed that 79.8% of students reported a lack of inspections, leading to complacency among staff. Therefore, regular, unannounced inspections by both public representatives and higher officials are essential to maintain high standards.

Mobilizing Community and Corporate Support

To alleviate the financial burden on the government and further enhance the quality of meals, the involvement of donors and industrialists should be encouraged. Setting up a dedicated trust to coordinate donations would be beneficial. Moreover, acknowledging donors through display boards at colleges, featuring their names and contributions, would encourage continued participation and foster a sense of pride and community involvement. Local leaders should actively promote this initiative, which will not only improve meal quality but also enhance the government's reputation for inclusive and collaborative governance.

Ensuring Cleanliness and Hygiene

Drinking water facilities and cleanliness must be prioritized in all participating institutions. The cooking and serving staff should be strictly instructed to maintain hygiene, including washing plates and utensils thoroughly. Strict action should be taken against those who violate government directives regarding cleanliness and hygiene standards. Some students have expressed reluctance to consume meals due to unhygienic practices by the cooking staff. To address this, a special training program should be conducted to educate cooking staff on hygiene practices, especially those mandated during the government-imposed lockdown. Staff should be provided with clean uniforms, aprons, gloves, and masks to maintain personal hygiene while handling food.

Creating a Grievance Redressal Mechanism

There is currently no structured system for students to report issues related to food quality, staff behavior, or cleanliness. To bridge this gap, a toll-free helpline number or a suggestion box should be installed in every college to receive and address complaints and suggestions in a timely manner.

Cooking Staff Ignored

The salaries offered to cooking staff are significantly lower than the prevailing rates in the open market, where skilled cooks earn between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 per day. Considering the rise in living costs, the government should implement a minimum wage policy to ensure fair compensation for mid-day meal staff.

Furthermore, the cooking staff often faces delayed payments, sometimes waiting up to five or six months for their dues. This forces them to incur debts to continue cooking for students. The government should introduce a Green Channel Payment System to ensure timely monthly payments, reducing financial stress on the staff. To reduce the financial burden on the scheme, free gas cylinders should be provided to all participating institutions.

Improving Infrastructure and Facilities

Many colleges lack essential infrastructure like cooking sheds, dining rooms, and adequate water supply, which compromises the health and safety of students. The government should prioritize creating these facilities, and donors should be encouraged to participate in their establishment.

Female students, in particular, have shown reluctance to utilize the mid-day meal scheme, preferring to bring their own lunch boxes. To encourage participation, efforts should be made to provide high-quality food and a clean, comfortable dining environment that meets their expectations.

Fostering a Sense of Community

To improve meal quality and build confidence in the scheme, lecturers and staff should be encouraged to dine with students under the mid-day meal program. This practice will enhance accountability and create a sense of unity among the college community.

Extend the Scheme Duration

As per the survey, 86.2% of students expressed a desire for the scheme to operate year-round. The government should consider implementing this extension to ensure consistent nutritional support throughout the year. To ensure continuous oversight, one of the village secretariat staff members should be designated as the supervisor of the mid-day meal scheme at the local level. High-level reviews should be conducted at least once a month by the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary, and District Collectors to assess the scheme's performance and address issues promptly. In areas where cooking is currently done in schools, steps should be taken to transfer cooking activities to the respective colleges by the next academic year, fostering local management and accountability.

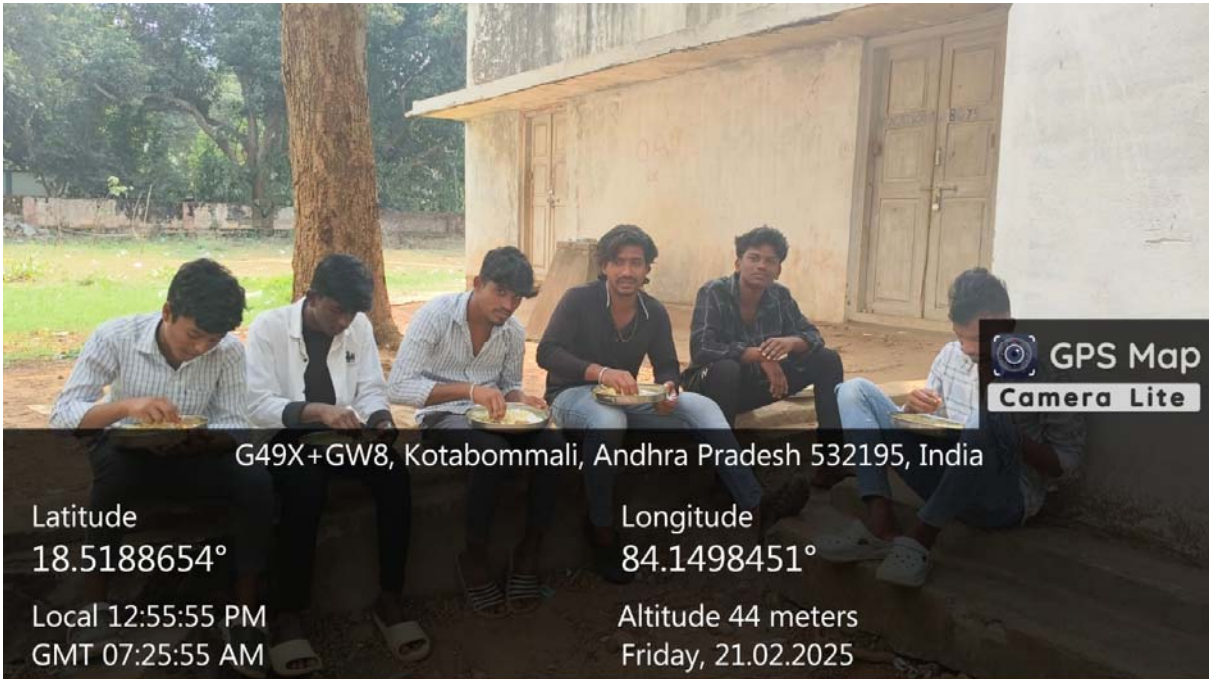
Realigning Government Perception and Reality

While the government may believe that the scheme is running smoothly, survey data indicates otherwise. Only 23.3% of students rated the scheme as good, while 49.7% expressed dissatisfaction. This disparity highlights the need for substantial improvements to meet students' expectations and nutritional needs. The government should take decisive steps to address existing shortcomings and ensure that the next academic year sees a revamped and efficiently managed mid-day meal scheme.

By implementing these comprehensive recommendations, the government can significantly enhance the effectiveness and public perception of the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, fostering long-term nutritional and educational benefits for students.









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