

Mid-Day Meals boost participation in schools

Evaluation of the impact of the Mid-Day Meal Programme in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh shows positive results

Research recently completed into the impact of the **Mid-Day Meal Programme*** on the enrolment, attendance and retention of students in government schools found that the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) was a key incentive, along with a school's standard of education and number of facilities, for parents to enrol their children.

The programme is implemented by The Akshaya Patra Foundation with funding from Kusuma, in Nayagarh, Orissa and Medak, Andhra Pradesh.

The evaluation also found that as a result of the meals there was higher attendance and lower absenteeism from sickness, and the meals were cited as providing stamina and increasing the physical strength and concentration of students. Teachers also reported a positive change in students' attitude to studies and extracurricular activities, and an improvement in grades.

Three other positive outcomes of the programme include the enhancement of students' communication skills, improved social confidence and an increased awareness of health and hygiene.

The evaluation is based on survey data collected between January and February 2012, and included interviews, observations and discussions with students, mothers, teachers, Principals, Village Council members and the teams of women who manage the preparation and distribution of the meals.

The evaluation includes recommendations on improving the MDM scheme.

*Mid-Day Meal Programme Key Facts

- Free, nutritious and cooked mid-day meals
- 14,000 children fed every school day
- In 219 schools
- In Nayagarh, Orissa and Medak, Andhra Pradesh



School children eating at the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in Andhra Pradesh. Photo: Sam Strickland



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The strength of the model, according to the teachers and headmasters, lies in using a teaching method that facilitates the process of learning using experiments, which are simple and easy for children to grasp. It helps children understand, remember and conceptualise. It encourages students who are below average to perform better in examinations by making science interesting.

From the review of the Mobile Science Laboratory project in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh

Science project reviewed

A review of the **Mobile Science Laboratory** (MSL) project** in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, was completed in May. It involved in-depth interviews with students, Science teachers and Headmasters in 20 schools and compared the progress of students in MSL schools with those in non-MSL schools.

The review found that over three years the difference in examination grades between the two groups of schools was negligible, but that MSL students could understand and conceptualise ideas more readily than their non-MSL peers. While the project is popular with the teachers and students who participated, there is a need to advocate for and establish laboratories in government schools and train teachers to conduct experiments in schools.

In July, the findings will be discussed at a consultation with key stakeholders and possibly other agencies working on Science teaching to understand how Science teaching can be strengthened in schools.



Students conducting a Science experiment at a Government High School in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Photo: Project 511

**The MSL project aims to improve the knowledge and academic performance of students studying Science subjects in Classes 6 to 10 in middle and secondary schools in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. It began in 2008 and has covered 70 schools and benefited over 25,000 students.

New education grant

In May, The Trust approved a one-year grant to promote Science teaching and learning in 25 government secondary schools in Sambalpur, Orissa. The project aims to improve academic performance in Science subjects and strengthen the quality of teaching. The project will be implemented by the NGO, Agraneer Jana Kalya Anusthan (AJKA), and will create Science laboratories in the schools. Eklavya, another NGO, will work in partnership with AJKA and provide 400 low cost Science kits and train 50 teachers of Classes 8 to 10. The project will start in July.

Further training for government workers

Senior State Government officials in Andhra Pradesh have requested the NGO, Sadhana, which implements the **Saarathi** project that delivers training to government workers on how to support children at-risk, to develop a six-month plan to train personnel from the State's Women and Child Development and Police Departments. The request is a result of a meeting held on 8 May between the District Collector, Additional Joint Collector, District Education Officer, Juvenile Justice Board members and staff from the District Child Protection Unit and Integrated Child Protection Scheme.

Kusuma scholar secures employment

Surya Prakash Mahapatra, a **Kusuma Ratna Fellow***** since 2009, from Rairakhol village in Sambalpur district, Orissa, completed his Bachelor of Science in Information Systems and Telecommunications from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, Orissa. In May he received employment offers from three major Indian corporations, WIPRO, JINDAL and Kingfisher Airlines. He says that because the Fellowship provided him with financial support, mentoring and communication skills, he was able to secure these job placement offers and is immensely grateful for the opportunities afforded by the Fellowship.



Other News

The CEO has been invited to attend the UNESCO World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress from 21 to 22 June in Paris. The Congress aims to showcase the world's best practices in OER initiatives and encourage governments to adopt OER policies across the Ministries of Education and Human Resource Development.

***The Kusuma Ratna Fellowship provides a stipend and academic support to three cohorts of 100 students each. A fourth cohort is to be inducted in 2012.