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SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY SERIES
SOUTH ASIA SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Social accountability refers to a broad range of actions and mechanisms that citizens, communities, independent media, and civil society organizations use to hold public officials and public servants accountable. Social accountability tools include participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, citizen report cards, community score cards, social audits, citizen charters, people's estimates, and so forth. These mechanisms are being increasingly recognized world-wide as a means of enhancing democratic governance, improving service delivery, and empowering the poor.

CASE STUDY 3

Rajasthan, India: An Assessment of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in Chittorgarh District

BACKGROUND

Food insecurity poses a threat to the health, education, and overall development of children and is of critical concern to governments in developing countries. Governments have addressed this fundamental problem by implementing school meal programs that provide children with at least one nutritionally adequate meal a day. These programs are known to lead to higher attention spans, better concentration, and improved class performance. School meal programs also provide parents with a strong incentive to send children to school, thereby encouraging enrollment and reducing absenteeism and dropout rates. School meal programs support health, nutrition, and education goals and consequently have a multi-pronged impact on a nation's overall social and economic development.

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), was launched in India in August 1995. The MDMS covers all students in primary schools[1] run or funded by the government[2] throughout the country. While initially the MDMS provided 3 kilograms of food grain per student per month, on November 28 2001, India's apex court, the Supreme Court, directed all state governments to provide cooked mid-day meals instead of raw food grains. The State of Rajasthan began implementing the MDMS throughout the state in July 2002. In 2005-06 the Government of Rajasthan provided mid-day meals to approximately 10.2 million children enrolled in 75,000 primary schools in Rajasthan.[3] Initially, students were distributed boiled wheat supplemented with groundnut and jaggery (*Gur*). Since April 2005, cooked meals according to a menu based on children's preferences and local availability of raw materials, and decided by a district level committee, have been given to students.

Under this scheme the central government provides 100 grams food grain[4] (wheat or rice) per child per school day, free

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The current initiative was one of six pilot projects launched by the South Asia Sustainable Development Department (SASSD) of the World Bank aimed at the application of specific social accountability tools in different contexts of service delivery through the Trust Fund for *"Capacity Building and Piloting of Social Accountability Initiatives for Community Driven Development in South Asia."* This note summarizes the findings, processes, concerns, and lessons learned from the Rajasthan pilot.

1. A primary school covers Classes I to V.

2. All schools run by urban and rural local bodies are also included in the MDMS.

3. http://pib.nic.in/archieve/others/2006/may2006/upa_gov_20060521/Rajasthan.pdf.

4. The MDMS is supposed to provide a minimum of 300 calories and 8–12 grams of protein per child per school day, for a minimum of 200 days annually in regions where cooked meals are provided, and 3 kilograms per student per month, for 9-11 months in a year, in regions where food grain is distributed.

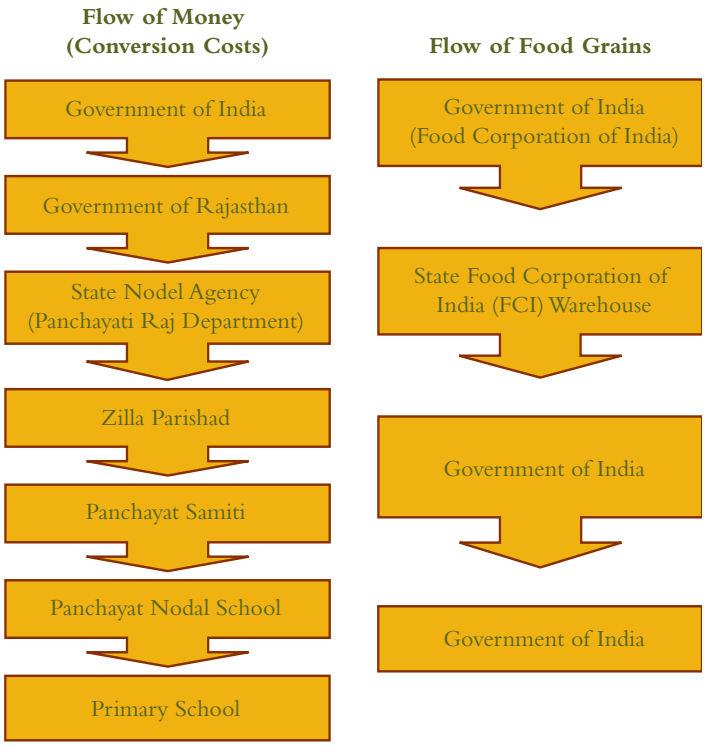
of charge, and Rs. 1.00[5] per student per day toward cooking conversion costs. The state government also contributes Rs. 1.00 per student per day toward cooking conversion charges. The infrastructure for the MDMS is supposed to be developed by the state government from funds available under other schemes.

The MDMS is also being used to support administration of six monthly doses of de-worming medication and Vitamin A supplementation, weekly doses of iron and folic acid supplements, and other micronutrients depending on common deficiencies found in the local area.

Food Grain Supply Chain. The Panchayati Raj Department, after collecting information from the districts, sends the state's requirement of food grains (including an estimate for the anticipated enrollment for the next academic session) to the Food Ministry of the Government of India by January 31 of each year. The Food Ministry then conveys the district wise allocations of food grains to the Panchayati Raj Department and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) by February 28. The Panchayati Raj Department further conveys the district wise allocations to the Zilla Parishads, who in turn sub-allocate food grains to each school in their district and inform the FCI. The allocated food grains are then lifted from the FCI warehouses by contracted transport agencies and delivered to schools as per the monthly allocation schedule. The flow of money and food grains is depicted in Figure 1.

Accountability Context. In Rajasthan, the Panchayati Raj Department is responsible for the overall implementation of the MDMS. At the state level, the Mid-Day Meal Commissioner[6] monitors and supervises implementation of the scheme. At the district level, the Zilla Parishad[7] implements the MDMS. At the district level, the MME (Management, Monitoring and Evaluation) Committee oversees implementation of the MDMS. A village-level MME committee, formed by the Gram Panchayat, comprising of a male and female ward member, a school headmaster, two representatives from parents, the local auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM),[8] and the secretary of the Gram Sabha, is responsible for monitoring and supervising implementation of the MDMS in the village. The meal is supposed to be prepared and served in the presence of at least three members of the committee. A monthly target-based approach is predominantly used to measure the impact of the MDMS with quantitative indicators such as quantity of food grains lifted from the warehouses, quantity delivered to schools, attendance, increase in enrollment, and so forth. There is an absence of indicators to measure the quality of service

Figure 1: Flow of Money and Food Grains



delivery. In addition to the committees described above, a School Management and Development Committee (SMDC) is responsible for overall management of school activities, including MDMS.

The CUTS Center for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CART) undertook a pilot project to evaluate implementation of the MDMS in 211 schools in the Chittorgarh District of Rajasthan. The pilot was also expected to develop and test a methodology that could provide regular user feedback to service providers which would be useful in better implementation of the MDMS in the State. A total of 2,110 students, 2,110 parents, 422 teachers and 211 cooks were

5. This share was Rs 0.50 earlier but was increased to Rs. 1.00 from the Financial Year 2006-07.

6. The office of the Mid-Day Meal Commissioner was established in November 2005.

7. India has adopted a three-tier model of democratic decentralization, with the Gram Panchayat at the village level, the Panchayat Samiti or Block Panchayat at the block level, and the Zilla Parishad at the district level.

8. The ANM is a female health worker who is attached to the Primary Health Center or Sub-Center and visits villages in connection with health outreach programs.

The ***Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey*** is a quantitative exercise that traces the flow of resources from the origin to the destination and determines the location and magnitude of any leakages in service delivery. PETS not only highlights the use and misuse of public money, but also gives insight into cost efficiency, decentralization, consumer perceptions, and accountability issues.

The ***Citizen Report Card*** is a commonly used tool for participatory impact evaluation. The CRC is a survey instrument that taps information on users' awareness, access to, and satisfaction with publicly provided services. It contains information about the key constraints the poor face in assessing public services, their views about the quality of services, and their experiences in interacting with public officials.

interviewed during the pilot study. CART also tracked the release of funds and food grains across four tiers, i.e. state, district, block and village levels, to assess timeliness and efficiency of the MDMS.

PROCESS

Methodology. The pilot study broadly contained the following seven steps: (i) Project scoping through village visits and stakeholder discussions (including a workshop); (ii) developing, field testing, and finalizing survey instruments; (iii) conducting the actual surveys and participatory expenditure tracking; (iv) collecting secondary data on budget allocations, utilizations, and fund flows; (v) analyzing data; (vi) conducting stakeholders workshops to discuss and finalize results; and (vii) finalizing the report and disseminating results.

Scoping and School Selection. Field visits to two nearby villages helped define the scope of the pilot and identify the key issues faced by primary schools and stakeholders. Two hundred eleven primary government-run or -aided schools were selected from all 14 blocks (15 schools each from 13 blocks, and 16 schools from 1 block) of Chittorgarh district. The schools were selected on the basis of parameters such as size, access by road, remoteness and urban/rural settings to ensure that the sample was representative.

Survey Instruments. A combination of two social accountability tools, namely the Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) and the Citizen Report Card (CRC) were used in this study. The PETS was used to gather information regarding budget allocations, budget transfers, and expenditure, while the CRC was used to generate citizen satisfaction scores on the management and delivery of the MDMS in schools. Schoolchildren and their parents were surveyed for this purpose. Other stakeholders like teachers, cooks, and local government officials were also engaged to collect relevant information. Separate questionnaires specially designed for the survey covering all aspects of the MDMS were used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data through detailed semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection & Analysis. After the schools were selected, visits to all selected schools were conducted to observe meal preparation and distribution. Two teachers (the headmaster and the teacher in charge of MDMS), a cook, ten students (five female and male each,) and ten parents (five female and male each) from each school were interviewed for collection of primary data. Two experienced surveyors per block were appointed for the purposes of data collection. Questions were asked in a non-suggestive manner. Wherever possible, data were triangulated by repeating the same question to different stakeholders, to minimize errors in data collection. The program executing authorities were also taken into confidence. They were explained that the exercise was being conducted to improve implementation of the MDMS and not to find mistakes or scapegoats. Government officials and community stakeholders were involved during the survey exercise to get their cooperation, suggestions, and guidance. For the PETS, data were collected at four different tiers - the state, district, block, and school levels. In the PETS the release of funds and food grains across various tiers was tracked along with the timeliness and quality of such releases. Secondary data for the pilot such as information on allotment, receipt, and utilization of funds and food grains were gathered at all four levels. After data collection, the primary and secondary data were cleaned, corroborated, and analyzed.

Finalizing and Disseminating Results. Recommendations that emerged from the analysis and discussions were documented and presented to the Zilla Parishad, the state government, and other interested parties through district- and state-level dissemination meetings. The state government is currently deliberating over the findings from the pilot and is considering scaling up the exercise to cover all schools in the state.

RESULTS

The surveys resulted in a massive amount of data that yielded numerous interesting insights and observations. The key observations have been broadly grouped into three categories, namely, MDMS Implementation, Education, and Health & Nutrition, and are discussed below.

MDMS Implementation

Mid-Day Meal Delivery. Most parents and students appeared to be satisfied with the implementation of the MDMS and appreciated the government's efforts in running the scheme. Some illustrative responses are: (i) 9 percent of the interviewed parents accepted that their children received the mid-day meal every day (Figure 2); (ii) 95 percent of the parents, 91 percent of the students, and 99 percent of the teachers reported that the children were indeed getting different menus on different days as mandated; and (iii) 90-95 percent of interviewees accepted that the children consumed the mid-day meal at school and did not take it home. Another question to students on the quality of the mid-day meal revealed that 97 percent rated the meal to be average or above average. Twenty seven percent of the parents and 11 percent of the students said that the mid-day meal was insufficient for a growing child; the remaining opined that the meal was sufficient for one person.

Unutilized/Unspent Balances. The PETS revealed that the unutilized quantity of food grains is increasing over the years, while the quantity being lifted and utilized by the state is declining (Figure 3). One possible reason for this could be an overestimation of student enrollment and attendance. Additional reasons need to be ascertained. In the Chittorgarh District, the percentage of quantity of wheat and rice lifted to the quantity allotted between the years 2003-04 and 2005-06 ranged from 23-34 percent and 34-60 percent, respectively. The quantity of food grains lifted by all Panchayat Samitis was 74 percent of the total amount sanctioned in 2004-05 and approximately 62 percent in 2005-06, implying that student attendance was much lower than enrollment.

Untimely Receipt of Conversion Costs.[9] Each school is required to send a monthly report along with a monthly expenditure statement and vouchers for the cook's wages to the Panchayat Samiti, which is supposed to reimburse the amount within 15 days of submission. The study revealed that there was an irregularity in the reimbursement of conversion costs, which in turn affected implementation of the MDMS.

Figure 2: Mid-Day Meal Delivery—Response of Parents

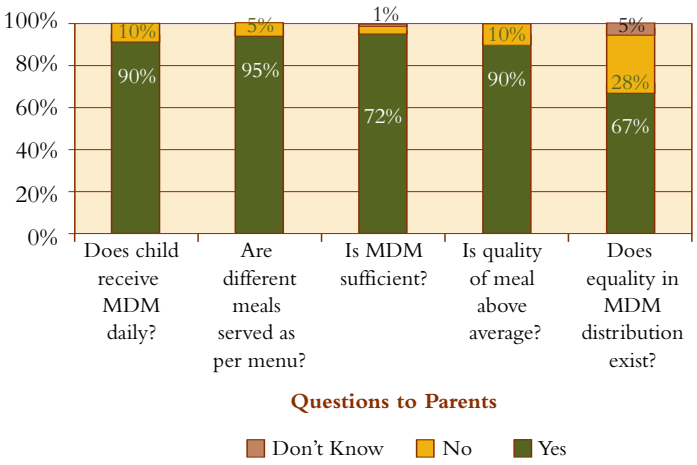
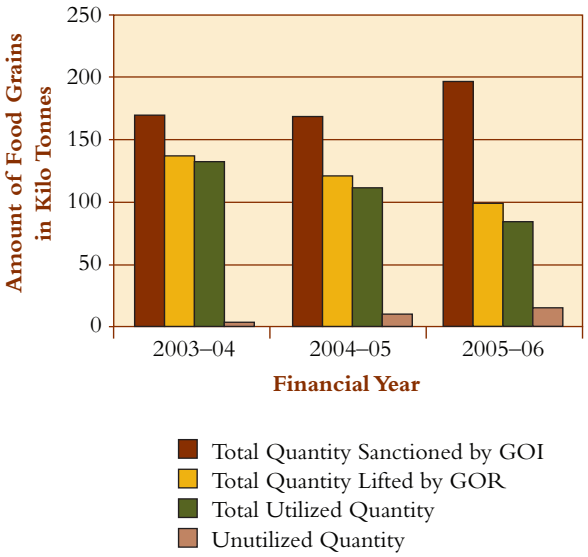


Figure 3: Food Grains, Sanctioned, Lifted and Utilized in MDMS



Only 21 percent of the schools received the funds every month in time. The remaining schools received funds with delays ranging from 2 to 6 months (12 percent once in 6 months, 47 percent once in 3 months, 18 percent once in 2 months). In contrast, 67-80 percent of the funds transferred to the Zilla Parishad for meeting conversion costs remained unutilized at the district level in the last two years. This dichotomy needs to be resolved.

9. The conversion cost is the amount required to convert raw material such as rice, wheat, pulses, and so forth into meals. This covers the cost of fuel, cooking, and ingredients such as cooking oil and salt that are used to make the meals nutritious and tasty.

Quality, Quantity and Receipt of Food Grains. Ninety-seven percent of the teachers reported receiving acceptable to good quality of food grains. Only 23 percent of the schools were able to receive food grains after getting them weighed before delivery. The absence of a weighing mechanism in most schools makes it difficult to measure the quantity of food grains delivered, implying that the problem of underweight bags may be a serious problem. Eighty-nine percent of the selected schools received food grains on time, while there was a delay of more than 15 days in 4 percent and a delay of 6-15 days in 7 percent of the schools. It was also observed that 5 schools (out of the 211 schools surveyed) did not have food grain stocks, as a result of which the mid-day meal was not being cooked.

Basic Cooking and Storage Infrastructure. Most schools lack adequate cooking and storage facilities; 95 percent of the schools do not have a kitchen shed, and only 36 percent have a separate store room. Many teachers reported that they stored food in classrooms, further reducing the already limited space available for classroom activities. Of the cooks interviewed, 62 percent said that the mid-day meal was cooked in the open, which is unhygienic, while others cooked meals in verandahs, classrooms, or their own houses. Only 83 percent of the cooks confirmed that they have sufficient utensils for mid-day meal preparation.

Fuel Supply. As per the MDMS guidelines fuel (kerosene/firewood/charcoal/LPG) should be stored safely to avoid mishaps. The use of smokeless *chulhas*[10] should be encouraged, while the use of firewood should be discouraged to reduce environmental pollution. The survey revealed that 76 percent of the cooks used firewood or *kanda*,[11] 14 percent used gas, and 10 percent used kerosene for cooking meals. Both wood and kanda produce huge quantities of smoke and ash, which are hazardous for health. Surprisingly, 8 percent of the cooks claimed that there were not provided fuel and made their own arrangements.

Alternate Service Providers. In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the MDMS delivery, the state government has tried to rope in well established NGOs and charities, such as the Nandi Foundation, Akshay Patra, ISKCON, and Sanwalia Trust. The government provides grants to these organizations to set up modern kitchens to cook, pack, and deliver hygienic and nutritious meals. A comparison of the two service providers provides some interesting observations,[12] which are given in Table 1.

Education

Enrollment and Retention. One of the key objectives of the MDMS is to increase student enrollment and retention in primary schools. Seventy-two percent of the parents were of the opinion that both student attendance and the quality of education had improved as a result of the MDMS (Figure 4). Enrollment and retention figures of surveyed schools over the last three years reveal that enrollment and retention had increased in 64 percent of the schools but had not shown any significant improvement in 25 percent of the schools (the remaining 11 percent could not submit data). However,

10. An open fireplace used for cooking.

11. Dried cow dung cakes.

Table 1: Comparison of Mid-Day Meal Service Providers

Alternate service providers (NGOs)	Regular service providers (teachers)
• Accountable only for single activity	• Accountable for multiple activities
• Benefit from economies of scale in operations and professional support	• No such benefit and no support
• Have access to timely resources (government grants or own funds)	• Do not have access to timely resources; have to manage somehow
• Incentives from government exist	• No performance incentives exist
• Currently operating in pockets usually close to urban/industrial areas	• Spread across all areas of the state

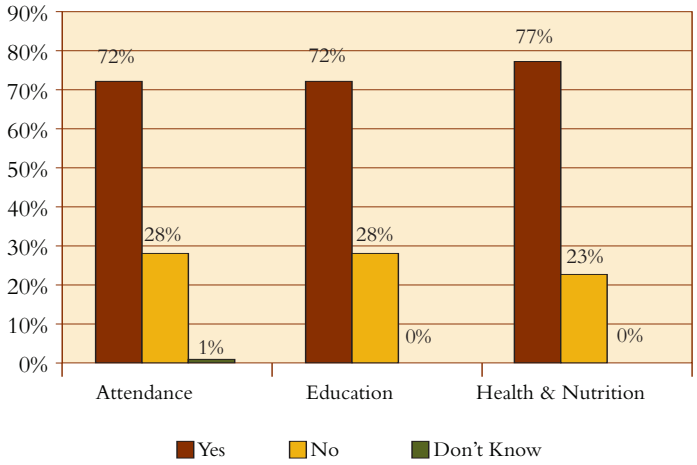
enrollment of girls has increased in only 58 percent of the surveyed schools. Some interviewees, however, opined that the increase in enrollment was below their expectations. Interestingly enough, while many parents agreed that enrollment improved because of the MDMS, 98 percent of parents opined that they would regularly send their children to the schools even if there were no MDMS.

Time Spent on Management of MDMS. The MDMS guidelines state that the teaching process should not be affected by the MDMS. Out of a total of 6 hours for which schools are open, 30 minutes are allotted for a lunch break. This is highly insufficient for distributing the mid-day meal to all students. In reality, mid-day meal distribution takes up to two hours. Moreover, teachers assist in the preparation and distribution of meals. Some of the teachers exclaimed that "preparing and distributing the mid-day meal to about 60-100 children is like managing a wedding lunch every day." The study reveals that 68 percent of the total teachers spend more than one hour, or more than 17 percent of their allotted teaching time, in MDMS activities. Besides, teachers are also made to spend time on other activities like conducting surveys and maintaining records and accounts, which further limit the time available for teaching. Both these factors impact overall teaching quality.

Quality of Education. In order to assess the quality of education, the students were asked to read simple sentences and write simple words and sentences. It was observed that 53 percent of the students were able to write and 48 percent were able to read correctly, while 15 percent were not able to write and 18 percent were not able to read at all (Figure 5). The remaining students were able to read and write but not satisfactorily. While the study did not have access to data regarding the quality of education before the mid-day meal was initiated, it is important to note that slightly more than half the children were not able to read and write properly. This was a serious cause of concern.

Institutional Responsibilities. The Gram Panchayats, through its committees, are responsible for implementation of the mid-day meal. The survey revealed that a 85 percent of the Gram Panchayats were not involved in the management of the mid-day meal. In fact, the teachers emerged as the de facto managers of the mid-day meal. The role of other institutions such as Village Education Committees and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) was also minimal. The survey revealed that 84 percent of the parents were not involved in the activities of the MDMS in any way. In fact, 72 percent of the parents

Figure 4: Positive Impact of MDMS—Response of Parents



claimed that there was no PTA in the village, while 6 percent claimed to have no knowledge about the PTA. The survey revealed that the PTA was only formed in 30 of the selected 211 villages.

Health and Hygiene

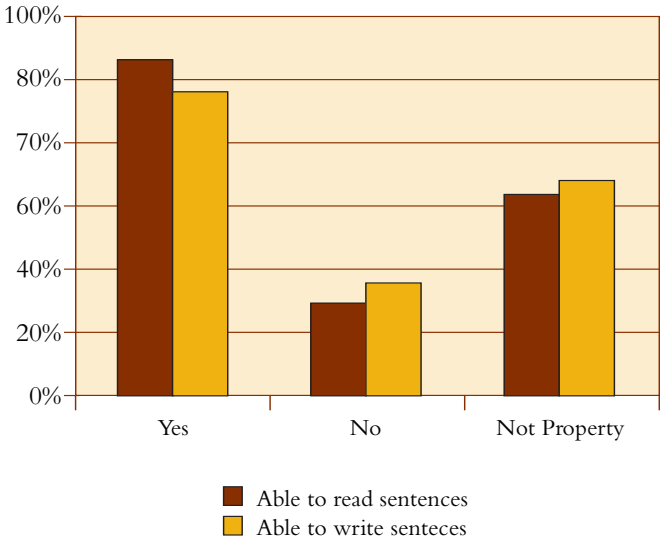
Health. The students were asked about doctor/nurse visits for health checkups in the last six months; 88 percent of respondents stated that the doctor or nurse has visited their school, and 90 percent said that they were given supplementary vitamin/iron pills regularly (interestingly, 0.5 percent of the respondents confessed to throwing away the pills!). Seventy-seven percent of parents and thirty-eight percent of teachers confirmed improvements in health and nutrition of children as a result of the MDMS.[13]

Hygiene. It was found that 5.5 percent of students do not wash hands before having the mid-day meal at all, and 86 percent wash their hands with only water. It was also found that 95 percent of students do not cut their nails often enough.

12. It should be noted that this study did not get users' perceptions on the service delivery by NGOs.

13. These statements are based on user perceptions and not any scientific basis, since the study was confined to user perceptions.

Figure 5: Quality of Education



KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS[14]

The study revealed that cooked mid-day meals have now become integral to the daily school routine in the Chittorgarh District. The MDMS has had an impact on student enrollment, retention and attendance. Most of the parents and students interviewed approved of the taste and quality of the mid-day meal. They also felt that education quality, health, and nutrition of children had improved because of the MDMS, though it was difficult to measure this scientifically in the current study. On the whole, parents and students were satisfied with implementation of the MDMS. From the study it also appears that the state government is interested in increasing funding and food quality standards for the MDMS. Despite these positive signs, there were certain shortcomings that need to be addressed. Some of the key concerns that have policy implications are addressed below:

- ***Delays in some schools in receiving budget and food grain allocations*** indicate that the budgeting, accounting, and monitoring system is poor and needs to be improved. Less than a quarter of the surveyed schools receive financial reimbursements on time. During the survey many teachers informally stated that they either take credit from the local vendors or spend from their own pockets to ensure that meals are delivered on time. The quantity of food grain delivered to each school needs to be weighed to ensure that there are no leakages.

- ***Huge unspent conversion cost and unutilized food grain balances*** are a major cause of concern. While the unspent conversion cost balances at the district level are increasing year after year, at the block level funds have been over utilized, leading to negative balances. Steps to ensure timely financial disbursements need to be taken.

- ***Schools lack basic infrastructure*** to implement the MDMS effectively. Almost all schools lack kitchens and food grain storerooms. Drinking water supply facilities in schools are more the exception than the rule. Funds need to be allocated to provide these facilities.

- ***Teachers appear to spend considerable time and energy*** on implementation of the MDMS. This affects the quality of teaching. The ***conversion costs are inadequate.*** There is a need for the state government to not only increase the cost per meal but also allocate grants for hiring local youth and self-help groups at the village level to decrease the burden of the MDMS on teachers. This will further enhance the quality of the MDMS.

- Even though Gram Panchayats have been entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the MDMS, in reality, ***GPs are playing a marginal role. The same is true for Parent Teacher Associations.*** Performance-based incentives and award competitions need to be instituted to encourage and build capacities of these institutions so that they can play a vital role in the education and overall development of their children.

- Even though many ***NGOs and private trusts*** have come forward to implement the MDMS in a few districts, their ***participation is limited in terms of area and coverage***. They together cover an insignificant number of schools. The possibility of engaging more NGOs and civil society organizations as alternative MDMS providers may also be explored.

- The ***increase in rate of enrollment of girls in primary schools is much lower than the increase in rate of enrollment of boys.*** This is so despite the fact that enrollment of girls is much lower than that of boys. Efforts to address this gender inequality need to be made.

14. The concerns and recommendations made are based on the pilot study of the Chittorgarh District. This analysis does not reflect the situation across the entire state. A statewide study is recommended to get a more accurate picture of the implementation of the MDMS throughout the state.

- Finally and most important, a large ***part of the child (especially girl child) population in the state is still deprived of primary education.*** These children are deprived of the benefits of the MDMS. Concentrated efforts to achieve 100 percent enrollment through the active involvement of the government, non-government, and private sectors need to be made to bring all out-of-school children into the fold of the MDMS.

It is evident from the above that teachers work under major systemic shortcomings and are trying their best to ensure timely delivery of mid-day meals in most schools. This was echoed by parents and teachers in the survey results as well.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS ON PERFORMANCE

The dissemination of the pilot findings has resulted in a number of changes in the implementation of the MDMS. Some of the more prominent ones are described below.[15]

- ***Timely Transfer of Funds.*** Arrangements to release funds to schools three months in advance have been made. The funds are transferred in to the account of School Development Management Committee. This has reduced the number of complaints regarding poor implementation of the scheme because of lack of funds.

- ***Improvement in Quality of Food Grains.*** The quality of food grains supplied to schools is thoroughly checked to ensure good quality mid-day meals. Schools are being supplied with adequate food grains on time after proper weighing. All kinds of complaints regarding the MDMS are attended to immediately.

- ***Improvement in Basic Infrastructure.*** Attempts are being made to address the problem of kitchens, storage rooms, utensils, and so forth in schools. Zilla Parishads have been provided additional funds under the School Facility Grant. The state government has agreed to build hi-tech kitchens through public-private partnerships. Plans for a hi-tech kitchen for seven schools in the district have been made.

- ***Increased Involvement of Teachers and Parents.*** Teachers are paying more attention to teaching, and children are not being engaged in cooking. Parents/guardians of children have started visiting schools to observe meal preparation.

The pilot study was initiated to design and test CRC and PETS as tools of social accountability. It succeeded in establishing that not only do these tools used in tandem provide a deep understanding of a range of issues, but also can successfully engage the community and provide policy implications that, if implemented, can go a long way in improving service delivery.

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15. These actions are based on the discussions that the CART team had with officers responsible for implementing the MDMS at the district level and are not validated by any field survey.

This note was prepared by George Cheriyan and K.C. Sharma of the CUTS Center for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CART), J.V.R. Murty of the Water and Sanitation Program, and Sanjay Agarwal and Parmesh Shah of the South Asia Sustainable Development Department at the World Bank as a case study for the workshop on "Application of Social Accountability Mechanisms in CDD and Decentralization Programs in South Asia: Experiences from Pilot Projects" in Hyderabad, India, in March 2007. The authors would like to express their gratitude to the Governments of Norway and Finland for supporting this initiative through the Trust Fund for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (TFESSD). The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this note are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed in any manner to the World Bank, its affiliated organizations, or members of its Board of Executive Directors or the countries they represent.