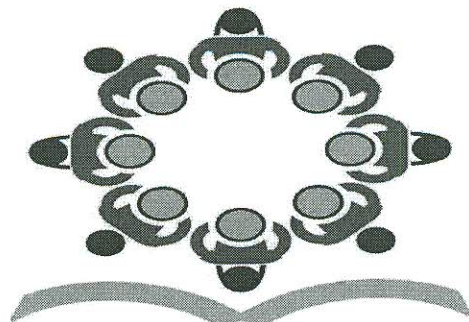


**Government of India
Ministry of Human Resource
Development
Department of School Education &
Literacy**

MID DAY MEAL SCHEME



**मध्याह्न भोजन योजना
Mid Day Meal Scheme**

**First Review Mission on Mid Day Meal Scheme
1st – 8th February 2010
State : Assam**

Review Mission on Mid Day Meal Scheme

State Report : ASSAM

Ist – 8th February 2010



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First Review Mission on Mid Day Meal Programme

State Report : Assam

Period : 1st – 8th February 2010

Mission Members

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INTRODUCTION

The Mission

This first Review Mission is one of the four teams visiting Assam, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. The team has visited district Darrang, identified by the State Government and District Nalbari selected by the team.

In all the team has been able to cover seven schools, including one AIE centre, in Darrang district and five schools in Nalbari district including a Government aided madarssa. Besides this another four schools were visited in Nalbari district. Care was taken to visit schools in Muslim minority dominated areas, SC and general areas that are located in remote parts of the district. One single teacher school was also visited. The team made surprise visits besides visiting schools that had been selected by the district team.

The Mission Objectives:

1. Review the system of fund flow from the State Level to School/cooking agency level and the time taken in this process
2. Review the management and monitoring system and its performance from State to school level
3. Review the progress of the programme during 2009-10 with respect to availability of food grains and funds at school/cooking agency level, quality and regularity in serving the meal in the selected schools and districts, transparency in implementation, role of teachers, involvement of community, convergence with school health programme for supplementation of micro nutrients and health check ups, etc
4. Assess the satisfaction of the children, parents and teachers about the implementation and impact of the scheme
5. Review the maintenance of records at school/cooking agency level
6. Review the availability of infrastructure, its adequacy and source of funding
7. Suggestions for the implementation of the programme.

Persons Met

The Mission met with the following :

State	Commissioner, Education, Government of Assam
	Deputy Director (MDM & Planning), Elementary Education
	Research Officer (MDM), Directorate of elementary Education
	General Manager, FCI
	Manager, Commercial, FCI
	Manager, Movement, FCI
	Joint Secretary, Health, Government of Assam

District Deputy Commissioner, Darrang district
ADC (MDM), Darrang and Nalbari
SDO (Civil Supplies), Darrang and Nalbari
District Elementary Education Officer – Darrang and Nalbari
District Inspector, Darrang and Nalbari
Block Elementary Education Officers - – Darrang and Nalbari
Supply Inspectors - – Darrang and Nalbari
DPM, NRHM - Darrang
DME, NRHM – Darrang
Joint Director Health, Darrang
SDM & HO – Nalbari
School Inspector – Darrang
Secretary, GPSS – Darrang and Nalbari
SMC members
Head Teachers, teachers, cooks
Parents, children, community members.

1.1. State Profile

Assam is located in the northeastern part of the country and has an area of 30,285 square miles (78,438 square kilometers). It is bound on the north by Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh; on the east by the states of Nagaland and Manipur; to the south by the states of Mizoram and Tripura; and to the west by the state of Meghalaya, Bangladesh, and the state of West Bengal. The Brahmaputra River enters Assam near Sadiya in the extreme northeast and runs westward across the length of Assam for nearly 450 miles before entering the plains of Bangladesh.

The population of Assam is 2,66,55,528 according to Census 2001. Assam has 27 districts (including 4 new districts of BTAD). There are 219 development blocks, 2,489 Gaon Panchayats and 26,312 revenue villages (Census 2001).

The State has the highest population density among NE states, of 339 persons per sq. km. As against decadal growth rate of 21.54% at the national level, the population of the State has grown by 18.92% over the period 1991-2001. The sex ratio of Assam at 935 females to 1000 males is higher than the national average of 933. Female literacy of the State rose to 54.61% from 43.03% in 1991. There are many major tribes and a number of sub-tribes inhabiting the area.

1.2. Status of Elementary Education in Assam

The overall literacy rate of Assam is 63.25%, where the literacy rate of male is 71.28% and female 54.61%. Elementary education in Assam includes Classes 1-4 at the lower primary stage and Classes 5-7 at the upper primary level. Very recently Class 8 has also been brought within the ambit of elementary education though they continue to be with the Directorate of Secondary Education.

1.2 Implementation of the Midday Meal Programme

As per the approval of PAB 2009-10 there are 24, 27,900 children at the primary level and 13,50,000 children at the upper primary level. The State Government had, however, projected enrolment of 31,02,131 at primary and 17,75,502 at the upper primary based on enrolment on 30 September 2008.

Presently the mid day meal programme reaches out to children in Primary and Upper primary schools, Class 8 in High schools, EGS/AIE Centers, Government aided venture schools including maktabas and madarssas, and the Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya.

Fund Flow

State Nodal Officer (Director of Elementary Education, Assam) releases the fund under cooking cost and Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (MME) for implementation of the programme directly to the District Nodal Officer (Deputy Commissioner). The District Nodal Officer releases the funds to the SMC of the schools either through electronic transfers or by A/c payee cheque in favour of the President and Secretary of the SMC of the school concerned. (Office Memorandum PMA/MDM Cell/7/2006 dated 14 August 2006).

Allocation of Food Grains

The State Nodal Officer, Assam makes district wise allocations of foodgrain based on the number of eligible children to the District Nodal Officer. The DNO allocates food grains to Gaon panchayat level cooperative societies (Gaon Panchayat Samabay Samitis – GPSS), who also handle food grains under PDS, Antodaya etc. Accordingly, the GPS collect their quota of food grain from FCI godowns and distribute to fair price shops (FPS) and the schools enlisted by the BEEO collect the food grain from their respective FPS. The concerned schools is expected to maintain the accounts of food grains and cooking cost in separate registers (Office Memorandum PMA/MDM Cell/7/2006 dated 14 August 2006).

Programme Management

The District Nodal Officer may use the services of Village Education Committee/ Parent-Teacher Association/NGO /SMC of the schools for ground level implementations. Deputy Commissioner will be the District Nodal Officer for the proper implementation of the programme at district level and entrust one ADC to supervise and monitor the programme at district level and entrust one EAC for the Sub-Division.

SMCs of schools keep account of food grains received and utilized cost incurred for cooking etc., by maintaining daily attendance / records, etc. The cooks and helpers are engaged by the SMCs of the schools. SMC is empowered to engage Mothers Group, Self Help groups for procuring the cooking ingredients. Mothers groups are expected to supervise, the preparation of cooked meal and distribution of meal to children. Teaching staff of the school are not to involve themselves with the activities related to cooking purpose. (Office Memorandum PMA/MDM Cell/7/2006 dated 14 August 2006).

Menu of Mid-Day Meal

Weekly Menu of rice, dal, vegetables is expected to be displayed by SMC of school. Varied and nutritious menu is also to be planned in consultation with nutrition experts like staff of Home Science Colleges and Officers of Food and Nutritious Board of the Government of India posted in the State. Local Community, Mothers Group, PTA, Women's Self Help Groups are also to be consulted. (Office Memorandum PMA/MDM Cell/7/2006 dated 14 August 2006).

Inspection

Monthly targets for inspection of Mid-Day Meal served in schools (Government/ Provincial and Government aided schools) is fixed by the Deputy Commissioner in respect of officers of District, Sub-Divisional, Circle level belonging to Departments – (1) Revenue / General Administration, officials of Education Department at Block Level, Sub-divisional Level (2) Rural Development / Urban Administration (3) Health & Family Welfare Department, (4) Food & Civil Supply Department, (5) Social Welfare Department.

Suitable Inspection Rosters are to be prepared for every block/town to ensure that all Primary Schools and EGS/AIE centers are inspected at least once every year. About 25% of the Primary Schools and EGS/AIE centers are to be inspected in every quarter.

Besides regular monitoring there is a provision for external evaluation (Office Memorandum PMA/MDM Cell/7/2006 dated 14 August 2006). Evaluation of the MDM has been carried out across the State by the Assam Mahila Samata Society (AMSS) and ACE Institute. The evaluation report of the AMSS (9 districts) and the summary report of ACE Institute (18 districts) has been obtained by the team.

Findings and Observations

A. Fund Flow from State Level to School Level and time taken in this process

The funds available with the State and releases made to the districts are as follows :

Year of Fund Received	Source of Fund	Amount (Rs in crores)	Present Status
2008	GOI (Pri + UP)	46	With districts
March 2009	GOI - Primary	85.99	Released to districts in May 2009
	GOA - Primary	10	
	GOI – Up Primary	71.24	
	GOA – Up Primary	7.56	
	Sub Total	220.79	
June 2009	GOI (Adhoc) - Primary	23.52	Released to districts on 23 December 2009
	GOA - Primary	12.71	
	GOI (Adhoc) – Up Primary	16.70	
	GOA - Primary	9.82	
	Sub Total	62.75	
2009-10	Total Fund with GOA	142.24	

Source : Directorate of EE, Government of Assam

From the above table it is seen that

1. considerable time has been spent in transferring funds from the State to the districts
2. of the Rs 220.79 crores released to the districts in 2008 and May 2009 an amount of Rs 141.30 crores (64%) has been utilised.
3. the funds available with GOA are Rs 142.24 crores
4. The State share has been released in accordance with the 90:10 centre-state sharing pattern each time GOI funds have been received.

The time taken in transferring funds to the district, especially the funds received in June 2009, would certainly impact the implementation rate of the MDM programme in the State.

The State Government is urged to expedite expenditure and submit UCs to GOI for further release of funds.

I. Cooking Cost

1. As per the approval of Programme Approval Board for the FY 2009-10, the State Govt. receives fund from Govt. of India. From the State the fund goes to Directorate of Elementary Education, Govt. of Assam, who in turn releases the fund to the district nodal officer based on the enrolment of the children in the schools. It was informed by GOA officials at the State that the procedures for transferring funds to the Directorate of EE is itself a time consuming affair that slows the process of fund release. It was also informed that release of funds at the district level is often delayed despite funds being available.
2. Modalities of fund flow from district to school Management Committees are determined by the District Nodal Officer (DNO). Electronic transfer of funds has been introduced in some of the districts. Darrang is one such district where majority of the SMCs are receiving funds through electronic transfers and in these cases fund transfer does not take time. However, where banks do not have core banking facilities there are delays reported as a minimum of 3-4 weeks is required for the amount to be credited to the SMC bank accounts. The AIE centre, Nabajyoti Jyoti Kendra (Darrang District) was experiencing such delays because the WEC has its account with a bank that does not have core banking facilities.

On the day of visit the schools had sufficient cash in hand towards cooking cost in Darrang district with the exception of one school. This single teacher school had not received funds since February 2008 because of some wrong entry of the name of the bank in the records at the DEEO's Office. However, it was found that Kapatil Balika Prathamik Bidyalaya (Darrang District) was unable to provide MDM during August and September 2009 because of no funds towards cooking cost.

In Nalbari district four of the five schools visited did not have cooking cost with them as the last instalment of cooking cost was received by the schools in the month of October. One of these schools had provided uncooked food items such as bread, buns, biscuits, fruits during this period. It was learnt from the District Administration that funds up to January are being processed for release to the SMCs. The team was also informed about the delays resulting from the time taken for cheque encashment by the banks.

The systems of fund flow are apparently varied in the districts as is seen from the two districts visited. In this context, it is recommended that separate bank accounts be opened at the earliest by the SMCs and electronic banks transfers introduced wherever core banking facilities are available. It may be mentioned that the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the State has commenced electronic transfers to SMC accounts. For those SMCs with accounts in non-CBS banks, the DNO may issue demand drafts payable in the bank where the SMCs have their accounts. Even this can be done electronically.

II. Transportation Assistance :

1. The responsibility of transporting the food grains to the school lies with the Gram Panchayat Level Cooperative Society (GPSS) and their corresponding dealers (FPS) @ Rs.125/- per Quintal food grain that is reportedly shared on a 70:30 ratio by the GPSS and dealers respectively in Darrang district. In the case of Nalbari district the sharing pattern of transportation cost per quintal is : Rs 80/- to the GPSS, Rs 30/- to the FPS and Rs 15/- to SMC. However, none of the schools visited in Nalbari district were getting doorstep delivery of the food grains. The team, in fact, met three SMC members in one GPSS while collecting food grains. None of the schools received the earmarked Rs 15/- per quintal towards transportation costs. They were either carrying the grains on their bicycles from distances as far as 2-3 kms or paying for the transportation out of the cooking cost.
2. Interacting with the Secretary of Kalyan Gaon Panchayat Samabay Samiti, Darrang district, it was learnt that they have received a transportation charges @ Rs.100/ Quintal only for October and November 2007 and January and February 2008. As of date the society is yet to receive around Rs. 7 lakhs for the period of January to September 2007 and June 2008 –January 2010. They have already submitted their bills to the district nodal officer. Responding to this, Director (EE), Govt. of Assam, clarified that funds have been released to the district nodal officer for the period October 2007 to up to June 2009. Arrear payment for the period January to September 2007 is being processed for release at the Directorate. Similarly, funds for the period July- November 2009 are also being processed for release at the Directorate.

Fund flow towards transportation assistance appears to be both varied and irregular as the GPSSs visited had not received payments. This is the finding from visits to two districts and may not represent the practices throughout the State. As such long delays in reimbursing such large amounts to the GPSSs reduce their accountability. The Mission learnt that the reimbursement of many GPSSs has been held up because some of the GPSSs are still to submit their bills. **It is recommended that dues of the GPSSs that have submitted their bills may be cleared forthwith. In this way, their motivation levels will be restored and expenditure levels of the state will cross the 64% mark.**

Even though steps have been reportedly taken to regularise the fund flow system, the Mission recommends close monitoring of fund flow at the district level to streamline the system across the State. The State Nodal Office would have to play a leadership role in this regard to minimise delays at the school level.

3. The time taken in the process of reaching the food grain to the school level from the FCI depots was tracked in the case of one GPSS. The table below gives the details.

Date of Allotment by DNO	Quantity of Allotment	Date of Lifting	Date of Distribution to Dealers	No of Dealers
12 June 2009	281.8 Quintal for Primary and 31.95 Quintal for Upper Primary	17 June 2009	27 June 2009	4
			29 June 2009	3
			1 July 2009	1
			3 July 2009	3
			4 July 2009	1
			6 July 2009	1
			7 July 2009	4
			9 July 2009	1
			10 July 2009	1
			14 July 2009	3
			16 July 2009	3
			17 July 2009	1
			18 July 2009	1
			3 August 2009	1
			13 August 2009	1
			17 August 2009	1
			18 August 2009	1
			20 August 2009	2
			24 August 2009	2
			25 August 2009	1
			15 September	1

In this case, the time taken between the allotment of food grains for distribution to dealers has been three months. The dealers would have supplied rice to the schools after this. The long drawn process has been an impediment to the programme. **The Mission is of the view that the State may review the present multi-level food grain distribution system in place to reduce the number of levels from the existing four levels to three levels by entrusting the distribution of food grains to the schools directly by the GPSS.** The other reason for making this recommendation is based on the fact that schools visited have reported receipt of food grains lesser than the quantity allotted to the school and even written on the receipt from the dealer/FPS. As the GPSS lifts the grains as per the allotted quantity by weighing the trucks at the FCI depot, chances of loss of grains at this level are minimal. If the distribution to schools is made the responsibility of the GPSS, it is likely that

schools will actually receive their full quota of food grains. Payment of transportation assistance will be reduced to one point instead of two or three. As this appears to be the crux of the problem, the Mission recommends active engagement of the concerned departments to work to deadlines in the delivery of food grains to enhance the efficiency of the MDM scheme to meet its objectives.

When the issue of reducing levels in the delivery system was discussed with DNO Darrang, the suggestion was taken positively. In Nalbari the Supply Inspectors were apprehensive about introducing such a change in the distribution system but it was agreed to try it out.

III. MME

Mission was unable to obtain the complete picture of release and utilisation of MME funds. The proportion of funds distributed among the State, District, Block and School was as per the scheme. Accordingly, 50% of funds received from GOI are transferred to the DNO for onward disbursement to the schools. 15% is retained at the SNO level towards external evaluation costs. The balance 35% is shared in the following proportions between the DNO (Rs 10,000/-), DEEO (Rs 10,000/-), BEEO and DI (Rs 5,000/- each).

However, at Darrang the team was given to understand that two instalments of MME funds were released in 2009-10. The break up of the MME funds has been as follows :

Recipient	Amount	Purpose
Deputy Commissioner's Office	25,000	School visits, meetings, office expenses, provision of record registers
DEEO Office	10,000	School visits, meetings, office expenses
BEEO Office	1,500	School visits

The balance amount has been distributed equally to the schools but this is a very meagre amount (which was not specified). In the meanwhile, steps have been taken to procure weighing machines for schools for monitoring the weight of children in a phased manner. A committee has been constituted by the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang comprising the Treasury officer, FAO, DEEO, ADC (MDM) to facilitate purchase of the weighing machines.

The schools were not able to furnish details of the MME funds received by them. Their records did not reflect this.

Management and Monitoring system from State to School Level:

State/District/Block level Steering –cum –Monitoring Committees constituted or not and its role

As per the briefing of the Mission a notification was issued by the GOA to constitute Steering cum Monitoring Committees at State and district levels. The Mission was informed that a District level Steering cum Monitoring Committee had recently been constituted in Nalbari but has not yet met. The functioning of these committees could not be assessed.

Processes of Review

Irrespective of the above, at the District level there are regular monthly review meetings convened by the district nodal officer where major issues pertaining to the implementation of MDM are reviewed. As this is a convergent meeting some of issues involving different departments are jointly shared and discussed.

Functionaries of the education department are assigned monthly monitoring responsibilities as follows:

District Elementary Education Officer	15 Elementary schools
DI	20 schools
BEEO	25 schools
SI	40 schools.

A format for the inspection of MDM has been provided by the Directorate of Elementary Education (this format has been recently revised). Presently the format looks into the following key aspects;

1. Total enrolment and number of children present on the day of inspection
2. Weekly menu
3. Timely release of payment to Cook
4. Food grain stock
5. Cash available
6. Availability of kitchen sheds
7. Community participation

There was little evidence of action taken on these inspection reports.

It may be mentioned that there are many posts of SIs lying vacant in the State. In Darrang District, of the 13 posts sanctioned only three posts are filled and out of these three two are holding charge of blocks. Effectively there is one full fledged SI. This has affected the monitoring mechanism.

Food Quality

In Darrang district the Mission team discovered that the food Inspectors of Health Department had been inspecting and analysing the food grains in schools at different levels. Some of these inspections had taken place at the behest of Education Department itself. A quick analysis of the reports as tabulated and given to the mission shows that only 5 schools of 20 schools were found to be of good quality and allowed for consumption. For the others, the quality of food grains was found to have deteriorated enough to prevent consumption. Some of the latter samples were also send for analysis and most of them very declared unfit for human consumption. However when interviewed most of the education department people and teachers denied any reports of bad quality of food grains during the Financial year. In Nalbari district it was reported that food inspector had transferred out a year back and hence no inspections had been carried out in the district.

However, the foodgrains inspected by the team both at school and GPSS levels were reasonably good quality. Only two schools in Nalbari , the quality of food grians stored at school level was found to be not up to the mark.

Though stipulated the food grains lifted from the FCI depot were not done in the presence of any nominee of the DC, District panchayat. There is no joint inspection when the GPSS collects the grains at the FCI Depot.

Review of progress of the programme during 2009-10

Availability of food grains and funds at the school/cooking agency level/

The present stock of food grains and funds available with the schools visited by the team were found to be as follows:

Name of the School	Food grains (In Kgs)	Funds Available (In Rs.)
District - Darrang		
Nabajyoti Jyoti Kendra (AIE)	Nil	6,042
2 No Sikonmati Nimoni Buniyadi Bidyalaya	237 Kg	18,291
Kapati Balika Bidyalaya		
Hirapara LPS	35 Kg	7,300
Kuruwa ME School	150 Kg	20,174
Kuruwa High School		
Paramartha Primary School (single teacher)	30 Kg	Nil
District- Nalbari		
Betkata Anchalik ME Madarssa (Govt. aided)	1050 Kg	7,000

Amayapur Prathamik Bidyalaya	10 Kg	Nil
920 No Nandagaon Prathamik Bidyalaya	20 Kg	Nil
Balabari LP School	100 Kg	Nil
Baghmare LP School	500 Kg	Nil

The stock of food grains in the schools on the day of visit was found to be different. The supply pattern (both quantity and periodicity of supply) of food grains and the number of diets/meals served in the schools have determined the present stock. As per record shared with the team MDM has been served for 168 days on an average in the State.

The problem that came to the fore is lack of coordination in supply of food grains and release of cooking costs. As there is no coordination the schools often face problems arising out of lack of food grains and funds towards of cooking cost. In the absence of the later the stocks pile up and tend to spoil unless the HT is enterprising enough to arrange credit facilities from local shops or is able to mobilise funds.

The supply of food grains and release of cooking costs must be done in synchrony so that provision of meals is not affected as it has been found in the course of the Mission's visit to the schools. This will require strengthening of the monitoring system such that the school based reports are analysed and acted upon in time.

Flow of Information of release of food grains and cooking cost must be ensured through the education department to the teachers. At present it is lacking.

Quality and regularity in serving the meal in selected schools

No. of Days MDM served since April 2009 – January 2010

Name of the School	No of Days MDM Served	Period When Served
District - Darrang		
Nabajyoti Jyoti Kendra (AIE)	89	August, September, October, Nov, December
2 No Sikonmati Nimoni Buniyadi Bidyalaya	123	April, May, June, August, October, November, December
Kapati Balika Bidyalaya	80	April, May, June, October, November, December, January
Hirapara LPS	44	August, September, November, December, February
Kuruwa ME School	58	August, September, October,

		November, February
Kuruwa High School	58	August, September, October, November, February
Paramartha Primary School (single teacher)		
District- Nalbari		
Batkata Anchalik ME Madarssa (Govt. aided)	40	October, November
Amayapur Prathamik Bidyalaya	NA	
920 No Nandagaon Prathamik Bidyalaya	NA	
Balabari LP School	88	April, August, September, October, November, January
Baghmare LP School	64	June, August, September, October, November

It was reported that as a policy MDM is not served during months of July (summer vacation) and December (annual examinations). **It was observed from the two districts that in majority of the schools MDM was not served in the months of the December 2009.** They had also not served the meals in January 2010 as the attendance was low and because there are important festivals in January and classes are not held regularly. It is important to note that some of the schools visited have enrolment figures below 30 and if children are absent, cooking becomes a non-viable activity particularly in light of the payment due to the cooks. As a policy MDM is served only on 5 days of the week. Meals are not served on Saturday due to half day school. In the Madarssa, the team was informed that no meals are served on Fridays because the prayer and meal time coincide.

The State of Assam needs to ensure enhanced number of days to 200 when MDM is served to the children in school.

From the records checked by the Mission team at the school level, the rice provided /child/day is always much below the recommended norms. The enrolment of the children projected by the Govt. of Assam is much higher than the children approved by the PAB during 2009-10. The State Government is allocating the food grains on the basis of the enrolment reported due to which there is shortage of rice at the school level and the children of the pre-primary classes are also served MDM along with the primary children whereas they are often not accounted for in the figures approved.

A pre-primary class, *ka-sreni*, is a regular feature of all provincialised lower primary schools in Assam. Recognising the fact that it is difficult to deny these young children who are enrolled in a LPS the mid day meal when the other children in the same school are served the meals, the Mission would like the GOI to consider their inclusion in the enrolment which forms the basis for deciding the MDM plan outlay for Assam.

Satisfaction of children/ parents/teachers about the implementation and impact of the scheme

The few children that the team members could interact with revealed a general satisfaction with the MDM served in the school. They said that they liked the food and got 'sufficient food'. One of the teachers from an upper primary school told the team that after the introduction of the MDM the attendance became regular and stabilised. Very few children remain absent. Of the meals served children seem to prefer rice, lentils, and vegetables to khichdi. Kheer that was served as a meal has mixed response from the children. Some enjoy it while others seem to prefer a regular meal.

It was not possible to meet with many parents and the team was able to interact with a few parents in just 3-4 schools. In one school the parents had received dry ration and in another the teacher confessed to have distributed 3 quintals of rice as dry ration as it was getting too old. Among all the schools there was just one school where the community and parents were actively involved in the delivery of the MDM and they were all praise for the Head Teacher and the meals provided.

Role of teachers Involvement of community

All the records related to the implementation of MDM in schools are maintained by the Head teacher of the school. The HT also makes the purchase of items for providing the hot cooked meals, either on a daily or weekly basis through the local vendors. In one school in Nalbari the community was helping out in procuring the cooking ingredients. The responsibilities were generally not found to be shared with other teachers, cooks or SMC members.

For obvious reasons the MDM has amounted to added work load for the Head teacher. Two of the HTs of large schools (enrolment nearly 300) found it difficult to maintain the detailed records.

As a school based programme the MDM initiative must be able to draw wide community participation for transparency in management of the programme and ensuring quality of the food provided. This area would require activation of the SMCs and motivation of the community including parents.

Engagement of Cooks

Cooks were found in place in all the schools visited by the Mission where MDM was being served on the day of visit. They were paid a daily wage rate but there were instances of lump sum payment. But, most were not paying as per the present norms prescribed in the scheme. The monthly compensation of the cooks ranged from Rs 7/- a day to Rs 50/- a day.

State Government officials expressed apprehension that the changes the honorarium of cooks from a daily wage rate to a monthly remuneration of o Rs 1000/- raises the following questions:

1. will the honorarium be paid for all the 12 months in the year (Assam does not serve MDM during July and December) ?
2. will the cook receive the monthly honorarium even when the MDM is not being prepared due to various reasons?

The officials maintained that a per diem payment system is better, as a monthly honorarium raises the hopes of regularisation among the cooks as in the case of other frontline workers. **Given the above, the Mission suggests that the changed payment norms for cooks be reviewed by GOI. The GOI may consider a daily wage rate that is equal to 50% of the skilled workers minimum wages for the State.**

Convergence with SHP for supplementation of micro nutrients and health check-ups.

None of the selected sample schools from both districts were found to be providing micro nutrients to the children. The Mission was informed at a district level meeting that the NRHM is presently covering 500 schools under its School Health Programme. Also the regular health check ups of school children by the PHC were also not in operation. As a part of the mandated requirement of the MDM scheme there is no convergence with either the health department or the NRHM to provide regular health check ups. **The Mission recommends that this aspect be given due attention. In contravention with the provision of the MDM scheme there is no convergence with the Health Department or NRHM in conducting periodic height-weight recordings and health check ups to monitor nutritional outcomes of the MDM and provide micro-nutrient supplementation.**

Maintenance of records at schools/cooking agency level

The Directorate of EE has provided four formats for record keeping at the school level. The team found four registers for maintaining records in these formats. The regularity and quality of records maintained varied from school to school. There were a few HTs who had maintained records to the last detail while there were other who could not provide information from the registers. This certainly affects the transparency in the management of the programme at the school level.

In one school the Head Teacher was unable to update the team regarding the fund position. The last entry in the bank passbook was dated October 2009. When this was checked with the bank it was found that there were further transactions in the account of that SMC. This is a case of poor maintenance of records.

All stakeholders must be provided user friendly guidelines on MDM supported by appropriate training. This must cover the community and their representatives as well

Availability of infrastructure, its adequacy and source of funding

Of the 12 schools visited five schools do not have kitchen sheds. And two of them being upper primary schools are yet to be sanctioned kitchens. Another is an AIE centre and the fourth is a Government aided school that are not eligible for kitchen sheds. The observation related to kitchen sheds are as follows :

1. The prescribed dimensions of the kitchen are reportedly not suited for schools with high enrolment as in the case of Kapati Balika Prathamik Bidyalaya. The school is not using the kitchen shed constructed from MDM funds. It has mobilised funds from the community to make alternative arrangements that offers more space.
2. Location of the kitchen was found to be too close to the school building and smoke from the kitchen was affecting the classrooms (Amayapur prathamik Bidyalaya, 920 Nandagaon Prathamik Bidyalaya, Nalbari district)
3. None of the kitchens constructed with MDM funds were being used for storage. The firewood used as fuel along with the food grains was stored in the HT's room or in another room.
4. Children were found to be bringing their plates from homes for MDM in almost all the schools in the both the districts, even though some of the schools received kitchen devices.
5. For kitchen devices Rs 8.83 crores was received from GOI. With this fund Assam Government Marketing Corporation and Assam Small Scale Industries Development Corporation have supplied the devices to 17,666 schools. No funds have been received since then and request for funds will be made in the 2010-11 annual plan of GOA.
6. The discussions with the state officials revealed that due to high prices, the agency was unable to accommodate all the required kitchen utensils and plates within Rs. 5,000/- per school provided by the GoI. As the GOI provides the assistance for kitchen devices @Rs.5000/school irrespective of strength of the children which is not sufficient to procure the utensils as per requirement of the school strength. Schools that have not received kitchen devices

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The State Government is urged to expedite expenditure and submit expenditure statements to GOI for further release of funds.
2. For kitchen devices Rs 8.83 crores was received from GOI. With this fund AGMC and ASIDC have supplied the devices to 17,666 schools. No funds have been received since then and request for funds will be made in the 2010-11 annual plan of GOA.
3. The systems of fund flow are apparently varied in the districts as is seen from the two districts visited. In this context, **it is recommended that separate bank accounts be opened at the earliest by the SMCs and electronic bank transfers introduced wherever core banking facilities are available.** It may be mentioned that the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the State has commenced electronic transfers to SMC accounts.
4. Fund flow towards transportation assistance appears to be both varied and irregular. This is the finding from visits to two districts and does not shed light on the practises throughout the State. **Even though steps have been reportedly taken to regularise the fund flow system, the Mission recommends close monitoring of fund flow to streamline the system across the State.**
5. **The Mission is of the view that the State may review the present multi-level food grain distribution system in place, to reduce the number of levels from the existing four levels to three levels by entrusting the distribution of food grains to the schools directly by the GPSS. The other reason for making this recommendation is based on the fact that schools visited have reported receipt of food grains lesser than the quantity allotted to the school and even written so on the receipt from the dealer. As the GPSS lifts the grains as per the allotted quantity by weighing the trucks at the FCI depot, chances of loss of grains at this level are minimal. If the distribution to schools is made the responsibility to the GPSS, it is likely that schools will actually receive their full quota of food grains. Payment of transportation assistance will be reduced to one point instead of two or three.**
6. Mission was unable to obtain the complete picture of release and utilisation of MME funds. The proportion of funds distributed among the State, District, Block and School was not clear. The schools were not able to furnish details of the MME funds received by them. Their records did not reflect this.
7. The Steering cum Monitoring Committees at different levels are not yet functional.

8. It may be mentioned that there are many posts of SIs lying vacant in the State. In Darrang District, of the 13 posts sanctioned only three posts are filled and out of these three, two are holding charge of blocks. Effectively there is one full fledged SI. This has affected the monitoring mechanism.
9. Though stipulated, the food grains lifted from the FCI depot was not done in the presence of any nominee of the DC, District panchayat. There is no joint inspection when the GPSS collects the grains.
- 10. The supply of food grains and release of cooking costs must be done in synergy so that provision of meals is not affected as it has been found in the course of the Mission's visit to the schools. This will require strengthening of the monitoring system such that the school based reports are analysed and acted upon in time.**
- 11. The State of Assam needs to enhance the number of working days to a minimum of 200 when MDM is served to the children in school.**
12. Though it is a mandated requirement of the MDM scheme, there is no convergence with either the health department or the NRHM to provide regular health check ups. **The Mission recommends that this aspect be given due attention and health check ups are regularly held in schools to guide the process of micro-nutrient supplementation.**
13. **All stakeholders must be provided user friendly guidelines on MDM supported by appropriate training. This must cover the community and their representatives as well.**
14. The cooks are not being paid as per prescribed norms. This is particularly true of those schools with small enrolment as the daily wage works out to so little that they are unable to get suitable persons for the job.
15. Menu was not decided and displayed in any of the schools visited. In some schools most of the day's khichidi, rice, dal and very few vegetables are being served. Kheer is being provided in lieu of cooked meals.
16. Due to lack of cooking cost available at the school, bread, buns, biscuits are being served instead of cooked meals in some schools. Also, accumulated rice is distributed to the children as dry ration, which is in contravention of the MDM guidelines.