

Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Mid-day Meals in MP

This first-ever report, based on a survey in Madhya Pradesh, on the functioning of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana reveals that the scheme has made a significant contribution to the survival of families on the verge of destitution. However, with the poor outreach of the public distribution system in the tribal areas and the insufficient coverage of the AAY within each village, the yojana fails to make the difference it potentially can to the food security of the poorest of the poor. This article also evaluates the “ruchikar” (relishing) mid-day meal programme of the MP government as a result of which enrolment in schools has dramatically increased despite the poor meal quality and inadequate infrastructure. But the absence of a separate administration for meal management has placed an enormous burden on teachers, which poses a danger of further compromising the already very poor quality of primary education.

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Point of Departure

With 74 per cent of India's under-three children being officially declared as anaemic and 50 per cent of them suffering from moderate to severe malnourishment, 87 per cent of our pregnant women anaemic and scores of starvation deaths across the country, we could be said to be passing through a “nutritional emergency”. More than 25 lakh children die in India every year. One in every five children who die the world over is an Indian. Infant mortality rates in India are now even higher than in Bangladesh [UNDP 2005]. It has been claimed on the basis of latest unpublished NSS data that “half our rural population or over 350 million people are below the average food energy intake of sub-Saharan Africa countries” [Patnaik 2005]. The recent deaths of thousands of children in Maharashtra have only served to highlight the depth of the problem. It has for long been recognised in India that growth by itself is taking impossibly long to “trickle-down” to quench hunger and improve nutrition.¹ The need for direct state provisioning of food and nutritional supplements is widely acknowledged. But there appears to be a complete breakdown of official machinery meant to deal with this problem. In April 2001, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (Rajasthan) filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court pointing to the bitter contrast between millions of tonnes of foodgrain then rotting in the godowns of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and widespread hunger in the country. This petition is a part of the larger, loosely-networked campaign for the Right to Food, being carried out by grassroot activists, lawyers, academics and concerned citizens. The Supreme Court has responded to the petition with a series of landmark interim orders in the ongoing case.²

This article presents the results of a survey carried out in 70 villages (10 randomly selected villages each in seven blocks of seven districts in Madhya Pradesh)³ during December 2004-January 2005. The overall aim of the survey was to assess whether two schemes of the government of India – the mid-day meal scheme and the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) – intended to address this problem, are functioning as per the official guidelines and the interim orders of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food

case. To the best of our knowledge this is the first survey of its kind on the functioning of the AAY anywhere in India.⁴ It is also one of the most comprehensive micro-surveys of the mid-day meal, covering almost every aspect of the scheme.

Selection of Blocks and Villages

The districts selected for survey belong to diverse cultural regions in MP. To the west, Khandwa and the block in Dewas selected for survey are part of the Nimar region in the Narmada valley. Shivpuri and Tikamgarh are northern districts in the “dacoit zone” — the former is part of the Chambal valley and the latter belongs to the Bundelkhand region, bordering Uttar Pradesh. Sidhi (part of Rewanchal) and Anuppur lie in the east, bordering Chhattisgarh. Mandla is in the south-east, a region under rising Naxalite influence. A brief socio-economic profile of the blocks selected for survey within these districts is presented in Table 1. These are some of the most neglected and under-developed areas of the country. They have a high proportion of scheduled tribe (ST) and scheduled caste (SC) population. Their backwardness is in line with the conditions found in the areas of high SC/ST concentration throughout the country.⁵ Literacy and worker participation rates are low. Infrastructure, industry, education, health and irrigation development are limited. Student-teacher ratios are higher than the national norm of 40 in most blocks, being as high as 113 in Bichhia block of Mandla district. They are part of poor districts, ranking very low on the Human Development Index in MP.⁶ Shivpuri is home to the Sahariya primitive tribe group (PTG) and Mandla has a high proportion of the Baiga primitive tribes.⁷

The selection of blocks also reflects the presence of grassroot community-based organisations that have been working as part of the Right to Food campaign in MP. Teams from these partner agencies conducted the actual surveys. It was felt that their understanding of the issues, their experience and familiarity with the local context would greatly improve the quality of the survey. Also many of their investigators were from the local dalit and adivasi communities themselves. One woman was invariably part of each team of surveyors. We strongly believed that this would

Table 1: Development Profile of Blocks Surveyed

Block	Kotma	Khalwa	Bagli	Bichhia	Sidhi	Pohri	Prithvipur
District	Anuppur	Khandwa	Dewas	Mandla	Sidhi	Shivpuri	Tikamgarh
SC (per cent)	11	7	17	8	13	20	21
ST (per cent)	42	60	33	53	31	16	6
Female literacy rate (per cent)	51	44	36	40	45	33	40
Student-teacher ratio (pre-primary and primary)	51	58	41	113	44	53	50
Gender ratio	950	928	948	1001	914	856	887
Worker participation rate (per cent)	39	39	41	46	34	38	37
Industrial workforce (per 1,00,000)	121	139	99	56	50	84	150
Gross irrigated area/gross sown area (per cent)	1	22	28	6	12	19	68
Level of groundwater development (per cent)	1	41	43	4	4	30	73
Telephone connections per 1,00,000 population	295	250	816	142	630	513	121
Pucca road length (km) per 100 sq km	70	43	17	26	34	9	30
Villages connected by all-weather roads (per cent)	83	16	26	21	73	31	22
Per capita consumption of electricity (kwh)	400	218	440	121	157	239	71
Government hospital beds per 1,00,000 population	92	20	5	27	125	22	6
Government doctors per 1,00,000 population	24	8	7	10	27	5	9
Poverty rate (district) (per cent)	33	50	27	54	54	16	21
HDI (district rank out of 45)	31	21	10	16	25	40	42

Note: All data except poverty rate and HDI are for the block.

Sources: (1) Blockwise Important Development Indicators of Madhya Pradesh 1998-99 (in Hindi), Department of Economics and Statistics, GoMP.
(2) Human Development Report of MP 2002, GoMP.

facilitate a much more free, comfortable and authentic response from women, dalit and adivasi respondents.⁸ Of course, even while incorporating their insights, it was greatly emphasised that they must make every effort to maintain objectivity and not let their own prior perceptions cloud the responses of the people surveyed. This effort is reflected in the careful wording of the questionnaires used and also in a painstaking training and orientation effort undertaken with the surveyors before the actual survey and a lot of cross-checking built into the survey methodology.⁹

Ten villages in each of the selected blocks were shortlisted for survey through random sampling. The average population size of the 70 villages surveyed is 969. Most of the villages are fairly remote. The average distance of the villages from the block headquarters is 20 km and from the district is 52 km. The average distance from a metalled road is 4 km. The closest primary health centre is at an average distance of 5 km and the ration shop is 3 km away. Eighty per cent of the villages could not access telephone connections. Safe drinking water was not available in 64 per cent villages and 27 per cent did not have electricity while 24 per cent were without any Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres.¹⁰

Objectives of the AAY Survey

The AAY commenced in the year 2001 to provide food security to the poorest of the poor. From the initial provision of one crore families, the coverage under the scheme had been doubled by 2004, largely under pressure from the Supreme Court. The selection of families in each village is to be done by gram sabhas. The selected families are given a special Antyodaya card, with which they can claim grain from the fair price shops (FPS) or ration shops, the local outlet of the public distribution system (PDS). This card entitles the selected family to 35 kgs of grains each month at Rs 2/kg for wheat and Rs 3/kg for rice.¹¹ The combination of rice and wheat provided is meant to vary from region to region, even district to district, depending on local diet propensities.

The specific objectives of the AAY survey were to: (a) profile the beneficiaries of the scheme in order to assess whether it is genuinely targeted at the poorest of the poor, (b) assess if the beneficiaries really get what they are meant to receive

under the scheme, (c) gauge how important the scheme is for the AAY families, (d) ascertain whether other entitled families are getting excluded from the benefits of the scheme, (e) study the problems that may be coming up in the functioning of the scheme, (f) understand the scheme also from the viewpoint of those running the fair price shops, (g) bring out inter-district variations in the functioning of the AAY in MP, and (h) suggest improvements that may enable the AAY to better fulfil its objectives.

Profile of AAY Families

Overall SCs, STs and PTGs constitute about half the population (51 per cent) in the villages surveyed. Their percentage varied from 29 in the Tikamgarh villages to 72 in Khandwa.

In each village the AAY families were selected through stratified random sampling. From the list of AAY families in the village, we selected the first SC/ST/PTG family, then the first "other community" family, then the second SC/ST/PTG family and then the second "other community" family. In this way four families were selected in each village.¹² A total of 269 families were surveyed in 70 villages.¹³ The interesting fact is that even though we attempted to survey 50 per cent SC/ST/PTG households and 50 per cent "other communities", as many as 76 per cent of the AAY families surveyed belong to the SC/ST/PTG categories. This is despite the fact that overall only 51 per cent of the population of the villages surveyed belong to SC/ST/PTGs. Given our expectation, based on all available data, of a relatively higher incidence of poverty among these groups, this is in itself a preliminary indication that the AAY has been fairly well-directed at genuinely poorer households.¹⁴ The most striking example is from Tikamgarh, where these communities are only 29 per cent of the village population but as many as 82 per cent of the AAY families surveyed were from these groups. One more striking finding relates to the fact that though primitive tribes are only 2 per cent of the population in these villages, they were as much as 12 per cent of the AAY families we interviewed.¹⁵ This is a clear indicator of the impact of the interim order of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food case that makes every primitive tribe family in India entitled to an AAY card.



That the selection of AAY families has been generally fair also becomes evident from their socio-economic profile. Sixty two per cent of the AAY families surveyed were landless. The percentage was as high as 95 per cent in Khandwa. The 38 per cent families with land had an average landholding size of just 0.75 ha. It is no surprise, therefore, that 77 per cent of the families relied on casual labour for their livelihood. Just 13 per cent earned their main income from agriculture. Even some of the marginal landholders had to rely on labour for survival. Two per cent of the families were beggars and another 2 per cent were widows or handicapped people unable to work. Sixty-three per cent of AAY families surveyed said that there were days in the last one year when they did not know where their evening meal would come from. In such situations, 42 per cent families said they had to borrow money from moneylenders, often at exorbitant interest rates ranging from 5-10 per cent per month. So they get caught in a vicious cycle of debt from which escape is virtually impossible. Hunger forced many of them to draw upon the natural resource base of the adjoining forest.¹⁶ Those who were not fortunate enough to be helped out by family or neighbours, even resorted to begging. Or they simply went hungry. The desperate condition of the AAY families was also reflected in the state of their houses. Ninety-three per cent families did not have a single pucca room in their house. Seventy-two per cent of the houses could not be locked. Eighty-six per cent of the houses were in need of repair. Eighty-one per cent of houses were not secure against rain. Sixty-five per cent did not have an electricity connection and 95 per cent did not have a fan.

Table 2: Communitywise Distribution of Village Population and AAY Families Surveyed

District	ST		SC		PTG		SC+ST+PTG		Others	
	Percentage of Population Surveyed	Percentage of AAY Families	Percentage of Population Surveyed	Percentage of AAY Families	Percentage of Population Surveyed	Percentage of AAY Families	Percentage of Population Surveyed	Percentage of AAY Families	Percentage of Population Surveyed	Percentage of AAY Families
Anuppur	39	43	13	19	2	8	54	70	46	30
Dewas	40	55	16	27	0	0	56	82	44	18
Khandwa	66	82	6	6	0	0	72	88	28	12
Mandla	42	38	12	8	5	28	59	72	41	28
Shivpuri	2	22	24	16	12	46	38	84	62	16
Sidhi	48	63	17	21	0	0	65	84	35	16
Tikamgarh	5	40	24	43	0	0	29	82	71	18
All districts	32	46	17	19	2	12	51	76	49	24

We surveyed 70 ration shops. These serve 334 villages. Only 8 per cent of the cards issued were AAY cards. The AAY cards as a proportion of BPL cards were 16 per cent, which is less than the government's stipulated minimum of 23 per cent (the poorest 23 per cent BPL families are entitled to AAY).¹⁷ In Tikamgarh this proportion was as low as 6 per cent. It had only 2 per cent AAY cards. By contrast, the AAY/BPL percentage is as high as 61 in Shivpuri and 31 in Mandla (both home to PTGs), presumably reflecting the impact of the SC order making a special provision for primitive tribes. As many as 43 per cent AAY families said they were getting less than their monthly entitlement of grain. The figure was very high in Sidhi (63 per cent) and Shivpuri (61 per cent). An exhaustive compilation of the entries made during August-October 2004 in each AAY card, reveals a 17 per cent shortfall in the grain received by AAY families, when compared to their entitlements.¹⁸ The AAY families received 87 kg of grain on an average in these three months as against their entitlement of 105 kg. The deficit ranged from nine kg in Tikamgarh to 28 kg in Anuppur. This data is based on entries in the AAY card, which are made by the FPS shopkeeper. The actual grain given will certainly not be more than what is recorded and is likely to be less if anything. As many as 28 per cent AAY families, when told of the entries on their AAY cards, refused to agree with them. Since they were generally not literate they had not realised that false entries had been made on their cards.¹⁹ The figure of those disputing the entries on the card was as high as 60 per cent in Anuppur.

Our attempt to understand why they got less than their monthly quota was greatly enriched by responses of the AAY families themselves (summarised in Table 4).

Table 3: Percentage of AAY Cards in Fair Price Shops

District	Per Cent of AAY Cards of Total Cards in the Shop	AAY Cards as Per Cent of BPL Cards in the Shop
Anuppur	6	11
Dewas	6	14
Khandwa	4	10
Mandla	19	31
Shivpuri	22	61
Sidhi	16	21
Tikamgarh	2	6
All districts	8	16

Table 4: Reasons for Lower Drawal of Monthly Quota (Per cent)

We did not have money when there was grain in the shop	49
When we had money, there was no grain in the shop	38
Shop was not open, when we went there	9
When there was grain in the shop, we did not want to buy it	4

To understand this fully we first need to recognise that the density of fair price shops in these areas is very low. The average number of villages catered to by each shop is five. The figure is as high as seven in Dewas. What is worse, 54 per cent shopkeepers run more than one shop. The figure is as high as 90 per cent in Sidhi and 70 per cent in Anuppur. To begin with, this is a reflection of the unique demography of tribal India. Tribal pockets in India are generally characterised by relatively high land-man ratios and widely spread out villages, with each village comprising dispersed settlements (tolas/phalias/majras) at a fair distance from each other. The number of shops in a tribal pocket tends to be low in density per sq km. This compounds the problems of these already poverty-ridden areas. The poorer and less densely populated you are, the less your access to facilities such as fair price shops.

This is because the profitability of the FPS hinges on offtake, which is governed by the incomes of the buyers at these shops, as also the number of buyers. To understand the position of the cooperative societies that run these shops, let us take a quick look at the way grain moves to these shops in Madhya Pradesh. Grain moves from 39 godowns of the FCI to 184 godowns of the civil supplies corporation, which supplies grain to 347 lead cooperative societies who finally move the grain to 4,778 FPSs.²⁰ The cooperative societies that run the shops earn a commission on the grain they sell. The commission is the same for both wheat and rice. It ranges from Rs 6-20 per quintal. This commission is the margin on which the society has to survive. The more it sells, the more commission it earns. In order to survive in a sparsely populated and poor region, therefore, the society is forced to ask one shopkeeper to run more than one FPS. Also it has to make one FPS cater to more than one village.

We asked the shopkeepers who run a second FPS, how many days the second shop is open in a week. The average number of days was three. So it is clear that the shopkeeper runs one shop for half the week and the other shop on the other days of the week. Clearly the shops do not open every day of the week. Even if we go by what the shopkeepers say and not by what the AAY families complain about, we find that shops, on an average, open only three days a week.²¹ This is not only a serious violation of the orders of the Supreme Court,²² it makes it impossible for sustained food security to be ensured through the PDS. What is worse, the shops open, on an average, for just five to six hours even on the days they are open.

When we add the infrequent opening of the shops to the fact that people have to travel long distances on poor quality roads, with little assurance of transport, to reach the shops, the problem becomes starkly clear. The ration shops are on an average located 2.77 km from the villages they serve. The distance is more than four km in Dewas and Mandla. The average time taken by an AAY family to go to the shop, buy ration and come back is estimated at three hours. That shopkeepers do not generally live in the villages where they run the shop compounds the problem. One of the major reasons why people have "hit and miss" problems in getting grain when they reach a PDS outlet is that most shopkeepers travel long distances every day to reach the shop they manage. The average distance travelled is five km. In Anuppur and Dewas the distance is more than seven km. Overall, 60 per cent shopkeepers travel more than three km daily to reach their shop. This implies that the hours they open their shops get restricted, making it very difficult for people travelling long distances to be sure that the shop will

be open when they get there. The problem gets even more serious when people do not have proper and reliable information about opening of shops. Seventy per cent families in Anuppur face this problem.²³

The Supreme Court has ordered (May 2, 2003) that people be allowed to buy grain in parts from PDS outlets. This is especially because AAY families do not always have the money required to buy their full monthly quota at one go. It has apparently been the practice for PDS shopkeepers to insist that people buy their monthly quota in one shot. This is confirmed by our survey results. Only 13 per cent families said they had been allowed to buy their monthly quota of grain in parts. The pattern was uniform across districts. Families plead with shopkeepers to let them buy as much grain as they can afford to at that time, and permit them to buy the rest at a later date. The shopkeeper invariably does not allow this. As a result, families either buy whatever for the money they have or return empty-handed after taking all the trouble to go to the shop. They then try to borrow money and come back to the shop to get their full quota. Of course, this is not always possible. Not allowing people to buy their monthly quota of grain in parts is a clear violation of Supreme Court orders and probably one of the main reasons why AAY families do not get their full quota of grain in a month. In as many as 78 per cent cases grain was not reaching PDS outlets, as it should, in the first week of the month. This could be an additional reason why families are not able to get their full quota of grain.

We got an interesting response to our question "If the ration shop opened every day and grain was available all the time, would you buy your full monthly quota of 35 kgs in one go or in parts?" We were not surprised that an overwhelming majority of people in Khandwa, Mandla and Anuppur said that they would want to buy grain in parts. It is clear that lack of ready cash is a major reason why people everywhere cannot afford to buy grain in one go. But the fact that 89 per cent people in Shivpuri and a majority in Sidhi (63 per cent), Tikamgarh (57 per cent) and Dewas (53 per cent) said they would prefer buying it in one shot was a surprise. On closer questioning it became clear that the great difficulty, including distance and inaccessibility, of repeatedly going to the shop, not being certain whether it would at all be open, losing their daily wage in the process, were the main reasons for people saying they would want to buy grain in one go.

Qualitative Aspects

As many as 42 per cent AAY families felt that the quality of grain they got was good, 48 per cent felt that grain was of average quality and only 6 per cent felt the quality of the grain was bad. Just 11 per cent families felt that the AAY grain was worse than BPL grain. It can probably be safely said that at least in the perception of the AAY families themselves, the quality of grain does not appear to be a major issue. Even in Sidhi where only 13 per cent families felt that AAY grain was of good quality, the percentage of those saying that it was bad was just 10. Curiously, PDS shopkeepers took a more bleak view of the quality of AAY grain than the AAY families themselves. Clearly the expectations of AAY families are already so low that they put up with whatever they get. One of the determinants of the quality of grain is the condition of the shop where it is stored. The state of the shops surveyed left a lot to be desired. Ninety per cent were not secure against rain; 30 per cent of them had a serious rat problem; 12-14 per cent of the shops were in need of repair,

had damp walls or floor and were not airy. But there are no reports of anyone falling ill after eating AAY grain. The monthly grain entitlements of AAY families in each district reveal a curious "wheat bias". Even in the rice-eating districts of Anuppur, Sidhi and Mandla, wheat is a high proportion (43-71 per cent) of entitlements. But no one seems to be complaining about the quality of grain but there are some complaints about the attitude of shopkeepers. Most of them pertain to rude behaviour following the demand of AAY families for buying only as much grain as they could afford to in each instalment. Most shopkeepers do not allow this.²⁴ However, as many as 75 per cent families said they found the attitude of PDS shopkeepers cooperative. It also appeared to us through out the survey that AAY families view the scheme as so important for their survival that they were inclined to be less critical of it.

When we see things from the perspective of the shopkeeper, some aspects of their bad behaviour and possible corruption become clear. The salaries they are paid by the cooperative society are appallingly low. In Sidhi shopkeepers are paid just Rs 300 per month. At the shops themselves, people are hampered by a lack of information. We found that the orders of the Supreme Court have been displayed only in seven shops out of the 70 surveyed. In Anuppur, Dewas, Khandwa, Mandla and Sidhi they are not displayed in any of the shops.²⁵ Most shops do not display the lists of families being serviced by the shop. Shops do appear to generally display information on stocks. However, Anuppur and Sidhi were strong exceptions to this where 100 per cent and 70 per cent of the shops respectively did not display the information. Of course, there is also the question of the veracity and updatedness of the information being displayed. In response to the question "did you have to pay any kind of bribe to anyone to get your AAY card?" as many as 33 per cent families said "yes". The figure was more than 50 per cent in Khandwa, Dewas and Sidhi. We have 40 documented cases from all 10 villages in Khandwa and nine villages in Sidhi of people who have paid bribes to the sarpanch or the panchayat secretary to get their AAY cards. About 72 per cent families felt it was easy to get the AAY card. But 56 per cent families in Tikamgarh and 44 per cent families in Khandwa found it difficult to get it.

Whatever may have been the difficulties in getting an AAY card and the problems in receiving the full quota of grain each month, 99 per cent AAY cardholders said the scheme is important (38 per cent) or very important (61 per cent) for their families. The pattern was uniform across districts. About 94 per cent of the shopkeepers echoed this view saying that all things considered AAY is a good scheme.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main findings of the AAY survey may be briefly summarised as follows:

(1) An overwhelming majority of AAY families were found deserving of this benefit. They were among the poorest families of the villages surveyed. (2) The AAY has made an important contribution to tiding over food security crises for these families, who were generally on the verge of destitution. (3) Ninety nine per cent families regard AAY as important or very important for them. (4) While the above indicates good targeting of the scheme, it is also clear that there are a very large number of families equally deserving the benefit who have not yet been covered under the scheme. They AAY cards as a proportion of BPL cards are well

below the stipulated 23 per cent in all districts. (5) We also found that the AAY families are not able to get their full monthly entitlement of grain. If the system worked better it could make an even greater contribution to their food security. (6) The main reasons for AAY families not getting their full monthly quota are:

- lack of purchasing power of AAY families
 - insistence by PDS shopkeepers that AAY families buy their full monthly quota of 35kgs of grain in one go (in violation of the Supreme Court order allowing purchase in instalments)
 - low density of PDS outlets, which means that each shop caters to a large number of villages. This typically also means that each shopkeeper runs more than one shop. All told this implies that shops open only a few hours on few days a week (again violating Supreme Court orders). When an AAY family reaches the shop after traveling long distances, it is invariably found closed
 - grain does not reach shops by the first week of every month.
- (7) Primitive tribe groups have benefited from the Supreme Court order entitling them to AAY cards. However, there is great scope for further coverage of these communities in order to ensure total compliance with Supreme Court orders. (8) The AAY families feel the quality of the grain they get is quite alright. There is no report of any major illness after consuming AAY grain. But the condition of the PDS shops where this grain is stored leaves a lot to be desired. Loss in quality due to these precarious conditions is an ever-present danger. (9) Shopkeepers are paid a pittance by the cooperative societies running FPS shops. (10) Very few PDS outlets display the Supreme Court orders in the Right to Food case or the lists of BPL and AAY families serviced by them. (11) Although 72 per cent AAY families felt it was easy to get the card, 33 per cent families did say that they had to pay a bribe to get it. On the basis of the findings of the survey and our understanding of the operation of the PDS and AAY, we make the following recommendations that could also be applicable to other parts of India, especially tribal regions:

The density of PDS outlets in tribal areas has to be increased. We cannot penalise people living in sparsely populated regions and spread-out settlements. These are already the poorest regions of the country that do not find a place on India's development map. All steps must be taken that increase the offtake from fair price shops. Only then will it be possible to increase their density, especially in sparsely populated areas. To increase offtake the following steps need to be urgently considered:

- create fresh employment opportunities for the poor that would generate purchasing power so that they are able to buy the grain²⁶
- return to a universal PDS in place of the current targeted PDS. The use of the dubious APL-BPL distinction in quantities and prices, as also the move from a per capita to a family norm, reduces the potential offtake.²⁷
- lower the prices of both BPL and AAY grain
- enforce the Supreme Court order allowing purchase of grain in instalments
- enforce the Supreme Court order entitling all members of primitive tribe group to get AAY cards
- expand the coverage of the AAY to enable inclusion of millions of deserving families who have been left out of its ambit at present
- enforce the Supreme Court order dated April 20, 2004 which stipulates that holding a BPL card should not be a pre-condition for getting an AAY card. This has been a factor restricting the expansion of the AAY to all deserving families (given the well-known irregularities in the BPL survey that has left out so many of the deserving poor)

– ensure that the full monthly quota of grain reaches the FPS in the first week of every month.

The present practice of PDS outlets is to maintain a stock roughly equivalent to the offtake in the past few months. If this practice continues, it would be almost impossible to follow the orders of the Supreme Court that require that shops be kept open every day and that families be allowed to buy grain in parts. It is clear that if serious efforts are to be made to raise offtake, shops will have to stock grain, which the entire BPL/AAVY population (that the shop caters to) is entitled to in a month. Setting up effective gram sabha-based monitoring committees that are authorised to oversee the functioning of the fair price shops in order to check corrupt practices. The grassroot community based organisations will have to play a vital role in empowering these committees and ensuring that they function as effective watchdogs. Vigorous efforts need to be made, especially by grassroot organisations, to spread greater awareness of Supreme Court orders in the Right to Food case. These orders have opened up an unprecedented window of opportunity to promote food security for the poorest in India.²⁸

Mid-day Meal Survey

The National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education (or the mid-day meal scheme) was started by the government of India in 1995.²⁹ The aim of the programme was to introduce cooked mid-day meals in all government primary schools within two years. Since many states have been very lax in this regard, the Supreme Court has been pushing them to make sure that they all provide these meals. In an order dated April 20, 2004, the Court directed that in appointment of cooks and helpers, preference shall be given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The order goes on to direct the central government to make provisions for construction of kitchen sheds and allocate funds to meet the conversion costs of foodgrains into cooked mid-day meals. It insists that attempts be made for better infrastructure, improved facilities (like safe drinking water), closer monitoring and regular inspection. The April 20, 2004 order adds that in drought-affected areas, mid-day meals shall now be supplied even during summer vacations.

Madhya Pradesh became one of the first states to initiate the mid-day meal in 1995. But after a pilot beginning in a few blocks, the programme was discontinued in 1997 in non-tribal blocks. Even the programme in tribal blocks floundered and remained largely on paper till 2002. In most schools raw grains were provided in this period.³⁰ Following pressure from the Supreme Court, between 2002 and 2004 cooked 'daliya/thuli' (porridge)³¹ was gradually extended to cover the whole state. One of the first decisions of the short-lived Uma Bharti government was to introduce the Ruchikar ("Relishing") Mid-day Meal Scheme (RMDMS) in primary schools. The RMDMS was launched in 120 identified backward blocks on February 1, 2004 on a pilot basis. The scheme was quickly extended to cover the rest of the state from July 1, 2004 onwards. The RMDMS replaced daliya by roti/rice along with dal and vegetables.

Our survey was aimed at assessing the performance of the RMDMS in Madhya Pradesh after 6-12 months of the scheme's introduction. The specific objectives of the mid-day meal survey were to assess: (a) whether the meal is being provided regularly, (b) whether the meal is as per the stipulations of the scheme and the interim orders of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food

case, (c) the actual quantity and quality of the meal being provided, (d) what parents, teachers, cooks, PTAs and children think of different aspects of the meal, (e) whether the financial provision for the meal is adequate to providing a good quality meal, (f) whether the infrastructural and institutional arrangements for the meal are in place and whether they are adequate to providing a high quality meal, (g) the impact of the scheme on enrolment, attendance and teaching, (h) to what extent there is evidence of caste, or any other form of social, discrimination in the functioning of the scheme, (i) study inter-district variations in the performance of the scheme across MP, (j) make suggestions for improvement in its functioning.

Basic Information on Parents and Schools

A total of 279 parents, 70 presidents of the parent teacher association (PTA), 69 teachers and 70 cooks were interviewed in 70 villages (10 in each of the seven blocks profiled in Table 1) during the survey. Special questionnaires were also canvassed with groups of children in each school. Parents were selected through a process of stratified random sampling. From the school enrolment register for the first standard, we chose the first SC/ST/PTG girl, then the first non-SC/ST/PTG girl, then the first SC/ST/PTG boy and then the first non-SC/ST/PTG boy. In this way four families were chosen in each of the 70 schools surveyed.³²

The average size of landholding of surveyed parents was 1.2 ha. According to our investigators, nearly two-thirds of the households surveyed were among the poorer families in the village. About 42 per cent of the surveyed parents were adivasis and 19 per cent were dalits.³³ Of the 70 primary schools surveyed, 69 are government schools³⁴ and one is a government-aided school.

Nineteen per cent of the schools have one room or less for teaching purposes. The average number of rooms per school is two. Twenty eight per cent of them were one-teacher schools. The average number of teachers in the surveyed schools is also two. Thus, on an average, two teachers use two rooms to teach all subjects for all the five classes. The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is 51 for all districts put together and is as high as 73 in Khandwa and 68 in Shivpuri, as against the national norm of 40.³⁵ Even in the five districts where the PTR norm is more or less being adhered to, it is applied in a very loose manner by adding up students across classes and then expecting the same 1-2 teachers to teach students in all five classes in 1-2 classrooms. If this is

Table 5: Profile of Parents Surveyed for the RMDMS
(In percentage)

Farmers	Main Occupations				Communities			
	Casual Labour	Self-employed (Other than Agriculture)	Salaried Employee	Others	SC	ST	PTG	Others
55	35	5	3	2	19	39	3	38

Table 6: Percentage of Schools with Teachers and Rooms

	Zero	One	Two	Three	More than Three
Rooms	3	16	35	38	9
Teachers	0	28	59	9	4

the kind of foundation being laid for education in Madhya Pradesh, it is no surprise that the pass percentage of students in the class 10 board exam is barely 30 in the state!³⁶

Most respondents (including parents and teachers) indicate that the schools surveyed do remain open for the full working year, around 230 days. However, it is also clear that where teachers are short, if they do not come for some reason, schools remain closed even on working days. This can happen when teachers are ill or when they have to carry out a range of other duties, at times totally unrelated to education. Some of the teachers we interviewed provided us an indicative list – in September there is a ‘Ma-Beti Sammelan’ (mother-daughter get-together) in which girl children are motivated to study. Preparation for the programme takes about 7-8 days and the programme itself is held at 4-5 different levels (from village to Jan Shiksha Kendra to cluster to block to district). It takes about 2-3 days at each level. Monitoring of Padhna-Badhna Programme (Library) for people in the age group 15-35 is done 2-3 times in a month. Teachers also have to participate in the pulse polio programme. There are monthly meetings held at the Jan Shiksha Kendra or at the cluster level, which have to be attended by one teacher at least. They also have to attend monthly meetings of the PTA. Teachers present monthly reports on disabled children, dropouts and children not admitted to school. They have to keep track of the further education of those children who have finished their primary schooling. This also involves regular meetings with the parents whose children have discontinued their studies. Apart from these regular activities the teachers have to participate in BPL surveys, census surveys and discharge election duties whenever required. We describe the full range of their responsibilities as far as the mid-day meal is concerned in a later section. The problem is really acute in schools that have only one teacher. In such schools every now and then schools may be closed because the teacher is otherwise engaged for any reason.³⁷

Meal Regularity, Quantity and Quality

The RMDMS was started in Anuppur, Khandwa, Mandla and Shivpuri in February 2004. In Dewas, Tikamgarh and Sidhi it was supposed to start from July 1, 2004. But in Sidhi it took four months to cover our 10 surveyed schools and in Tikamgarh it has still not been started in one of the schools at the time of our survey. Only daliya was being given to children there. By October 2004, the scheme was in place in all the schools we surveyed (except this one in Tikamgarh). We asked parents, teachers and cooks if meals are being provided daily.³⁸ Around 90 per cent teachers and cooks said, “yes”. The percentage was slightly lower for parents. The picture becomes clearer when we look at the inter-district variations. It is clear that in Mandla, Shivpuri, Khandwa and Dewas meals are being provided with fair regularity. But there is a very serious problem in Anuppur as also (even if to a lesser extent) in Sidhi and Shivpuri. Half the parents in Anuppur complain of irregular provision of meals, while 20-32 per cent do so in Tikamgarh and Sidhi.

In four districts Shivpuri, Dewas, Khandwa and Tikamgarh either dal-roti or vegetable-roti are to be given as the mid-day meal on alternate/equal number of days. In the other three districts Anuppur, Sidhi and Mandla either dal-rice or dal-rice-vegetable are to be given alternately.

Only 10 per cent parents found the meal bad or very bad; 60 per cent felt it was good or very good. It is also generally gratifying

that no teacher, cook or parent complained about any serious illness suffered by children after eating the mid-day meal. This is a great improvement over the daliya period when there were a regular series of complaints about meal quality and illness in children. The media would carry horrifying reports of bits of snakes and insects being found in the meal at regular intervals. A survey conducted as in 2004 reported serious problems of quality in the daliya meal in MP [Afridi 2005].³⁹ The RMDMS has meant a great improvement in the overall picture. But this should not be an argument against the need to improve quality. Our survey revealed a number of problems. There are very significant inter-district variations. In Tikamgarh 45 per cent of the parents felt the meal was bad or very bad. In Anuppur only 28 per cent parents felt it was good or very good. Poor quality of ingredients, watery food, bad cooking, lack of variety and paucity of vegetables were the main complaints.⁴⁰ Vegetables are very rarely given in most schools. One look at the financial allocations for the meal makes it clear why this is inevitably the case.

The tables reveal a very strange aspect of the allocations. The per day allotment per child is lower on days when vegetables are to be given. In roti-serving districts the dal-roti rate is Rs 1.30 per child per day while the vegetable-roti rate is Rs 1.25 per child per day. In rice-serving districts, the dal-rice rate is Rs 1.23 per

Table 7: Parents' View of the Mid-day Meal
(In percentage)

District	Good/Very Good	Average	Bad/Very Bad	No Reply
Anuppur	28	25	8	38
Dewas	88	8	0	5
Khandwa	88	8	3	0
Mandla	78	23	0	0
Shivpuri	78	23	0	0
Sidhi	48	35	13	5
Tikamgarh	15	35	45	3
All districts	60	22	10	7

Table 8: Cost Norms for Mid-day Meal per 100 Children per day
(Roti-Serving Districts)

No	Dal-Roti		Vegetable-Roti	
	Description	Amount (Rs)	Description	Amount (Rs)
1	Flour milling	10	Flour milling	10
2	Dal 2 kgs	50	Vegetables 6 kgs	30
3	Oil 100 gms	5	Oil 300 gms	15
4	Salt and spices	15	Salt and spices	20
5	Cooking fuel	10	Cooking fuel	10
6	Labour payment (two persons)	40	Labour payment (two persons)	40
	Total "conversion costs"	130	Total "conversion costs"	125

Note: Wheat and rice are provided free of charge by the government of India.

Table 9: Cost Norms for Mid-day Meal per 100 Children per Day
(Rice-Serving Districts)

No	Dal-Rice		Dal-Vegetable-Rice	
	Description	Amount (Rs)	No Description	Amount (Rs)
1	Dal 2.5 kgs	68	(1) Dal 1 kg	25
2	Oil 200 gms	10	(2) Oil 300 gms	15
3	Salt and spices	15	(3) Salt and spices	15
4	Cooking fuel	10	(4) Cooking fuel	10
5	Labour (1 cook)	20	(5) Labour (1 cook)	20
			(6) Vegetables 4 kgs	20
	Total "conversion costs"	123	Total "conversion costs"	105

Note: Wheat and rice are provided free of charge by the government of India.

child and the vegetable-dal-rice rate is only Rs 1.05 per child per day. The quantity of dal provided on days when vegetables are to be given is reduced from 2.5 kg to 1 kg per 100 children in the rice-serving districts, while it is not given at all in the roti-serving districts. Absurd assumptions have been made regarding the prices of dal and vegetables. Vegetables are assumed to cost Rs 5/kg. Dal is supposed to be Rs 25/kg. Considering that in most villages vegetables are not locally grown, it is difficult to imagine vegetables being available so cheap. In the market only onions, potatoes, pumpkin and a few gourds could come within this range and that too only for a very brief period. Market prices of vegetables range from Rs 6-20/kg and tuar, the main dal grown and eaten in MP costs Rs 30-35/kg. The net result is a serious deterioration in the quantity and quality of the meal being served. Vegetables are given rarely in most of the schools. Rarely more than once or twice a week. Sometimes just a few days a month. Typically what happens is that children are served watery vegetables and dal. There is a clear case for raising the allocation as also introducing greater variety. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala and West Bengal all provide around Rs 2 as conversion costs. In Karnataka, where the per child per day norm is Rs 1.70, a weekly menu with a deliciously different meal is served each day [Afridi 2005]. In Tamil Nadu, rice and sambhar are supplemented with different vegetables each day [Dreze and Goyal 2003].

We also tried to assess the nutritional content of the meals being provided. According to the official guidelines, the meal must provide 300 calories and 18-20 gms of protein. While the calorie requirement seems to have been met, there appears to be a definite shortfall in the protein content. According to our estimate, children would generally be getting less than half the proteins they are officially entitled to. Each child is supposed to get 100 gms of wheat flour or rice and 10-25 gms of dal. At best this would give around 10 gms of protein. On days they are served vegetables, children in the rice-serving areas get only 10 gms of dal and in wheat areas, they get no dal at all. On these days the protein content of the meal would definitely be below 10 gms.⁴¹

Quantity apparently is also an issue. About 40 per cent cooks themselves said that the quantity of food served is inadequate. In Tikamgarh 70 per cent of the cooks feel this way. In all the villages in Khandwa the cooks find the quantity insufficient, saying that it is not enough for adivasi children. Other cooks say it is certainly less for the older children.⁴²

Poor Infrastructure/Systems and their Impact on the Meal

There are no kitchens in schools in Anuppur, Dewas, Khandwa and Shivpuri. Overall just 7 per cent schools surveyed have a proper kitchen.⁴³ In most schools cooking is done in a temporary shed or an open space inside the school compound or in the cook's house. Both cleanliness and accountability are compromised in the process. This is also a clear violation of the Supreme Court order in the Right to Food case. Fifty per cent of the schools serve the meal in the open. Availability of safe and secure drinking water is also a concern in at least a third of the schools surveyed. In Dewas 60 per cent schools have no source of drinking water located in the school.⁴⁴ Overall, nearly 50 per cent of the schools need to supplement water from nearby sources. Much of the time it is brought from there by the children themselves.

Utensils required for cooking, storage and serving are also inadequate.⁴⁵ Each school on an average has just one cooking utensil. In schools where vegetable and dal have to be cooked in the same meal, at least two cooking utensils must be provided. Something as basic as a knife for chopping of vegetables is there in 51 per cent schools only. It was also found that while children in all schools eat in proper utensils, in more than 70 per cent cases children had to bring their own utensils from home.⁴⁶ In 86 per cent schools most raw materials are stored in the school. Given the already acute shortage of rooms for teaching the absence of a separate facility dedicated to storing cooking materials further squeezes teaching space. In 14 per cent schools, cooking raw materials are stored in the cook's house and as many as 10 per cent teachers store some of the food items in their own houses. In Khandwa 50 per cent teachers store some raw material or the other. In Khandwa 50 per cent schools also do not have a container for storage of flour.

There is also a great sloppiness in norms for determining the quantities to be cooked. For one, just 16 per cent schools have a proper system of weighing cooking materials. In 61 per cent schools, the quantity of food is determined by the daily attendance and in the remaining schools it is made, in a fixed quantity daily, irrespective of the number of students present. In schools where fixed quantity is made the cook assumes a certain daily attendance based on experience. While the discrepancy in the actual and the assumed figures may not be huge, the point remains that there is looseness in following the norms. This is why there is either shortage or excess food on different days. Thirty four per cent schools experience shortage of food sometimes during distribution. On the other hand, 60 per cent of the cooks surveyed felt that there were days when food was left over. Forty per cent of the schools in Dewas and Anuppur said that this happened almost every day. Mean while 34 per cent cooks said that they took away the leftover food. Although the mid-day meal was meant only for the children, 57 per cent of the teachers said they had eaten the meal, one day or the other and 10 per cent of them had eaten it every day. According to the cooks, 80 per cent teachers ate the meal in Khandwa and 70 per cent in Shivpuri and Mandla, even though the amount was not enough for the children themselves.⁴⁷

Actual payment to cooks is on the basis of attendance (20p per day per child who attended) and is not a fixed monthly or even daily wage. Sixty nine per cent of the cooks surveyed spoke of salary arrears that remained to be paid to them. Cooks work for an average of about four hours in a day. Apart from cooking, most cooks have to carry out various allied activities like cleaning of grain, pounding of wheat, fetching of grain and some raw materials and arranging for firewood. Firewood is the main fuel used (96 per cent cases), 51 per cent cooks collect the firewood themselves.

Seventy one per cent schools have just one cook. There is an average of 1.3 cooks per school. The official norm is of one cook per 100 children for rice-based meals and 2 cooks per 100 children for roti-based meals. We conducted a little exercise to see whether the number of cooks employed is as per the norm. We found that in the rice-serving schools, cooks are enough. But there is a real shortage of cooks in the roti-serving schools. The shortage averages 27 per cent in these schools and is as high as 41 per cent in Khandwa where the shortage has become more acute because of the tremendous rise in enrolment of children in 2004-05.

Caste Discrimination

Despite a shortage of cooks, there seems to be a great reluctance to employ dalit cooks.⁴⁸ There are no dalit cooks whatsoever in Anuppur, Khandwa, Mandla and Tikamgarh. The most shocking case is of Tikamgarh where dalits form 24 per cent of the population of these villages and there is a 33 per cent shortage of cooks in these schools. Even so, not a single dalit has been appointed cook. In all districts, the percentage of dalit cooks is much lower than their share in the population. Overall, in the 70 schools surveyed there are a total of 92 cooks of which only five are dalits. Clearly, a feeling of caste discrimination persists, especially in a matter like eating food cooked by a dalit. A glaring instance of this is reported from Jaria Kalan village in Shivpuri where a dalit cook was replaced in February 2003 because upper caste children refused to eat food cooked by a dalit. Instances of "upper caste" children objecting to eating meals cooked by a dalit or being seated separately from other children while being served the meal, were discovered in seven schools.⁴⁹ One must, of course, bear in mind that we are mainly dealing with Adivasi villages. The caste discrimination in 10 per cent of the schools surveyed is insignificant. Especially, when put together with the strong discrimination against dalits in the appointment of cooks.

Rousing Approval of Stakeholders

Despite real issues of quality and caste problems, 96 per cent of the parents feel that the scheme should be continued. The only opposition comes from Anuppur and Tikamgarh where a few of the parents strongly object to both the poor quantity and quality of the meal. As many as 80 per cent of the parents felt that it has become easier to send children to school after the RMDMS was introduced. Only in Anuppur 65 per cent parents felt it has made no difference – a loud and clear comment on the problems of the scheme there. Sixty three per cent of parents felt their children's interest in studies has increased as a result of the RMDMS. The figure was only 23 per cent in Anuppur. Clearly the quality of the meal is an important consideration. In Tikamgarh despite questions of quality, 68 per cent parents felt their children take their studies more seriously now. Seventy four per cent of the teachers feel that scheme has brought about many positive changes with children taking greater interest in their studies. Ninety three per cent teachers feel that the scheme should be continued as it has led to improvement in enrolment, attendance and retention and it is particularly convenient for poorer parents who have to go out for work. It has provided food to poor children, who may have otherwise gone hungry.⁵⁰ This emerged as a major reason for parents sending their children to school. Children, too, appear to give a thumbs-up to the ruchi meal compared to the earlier thuli, even though they have a long wish-list of what else they would like to be served.⁵¹ We checked whether it happens that children eat the meal and then go back home. This was generally not found to be the case. Indeed, our respondents confirm the observation of Dreze and Goyal (2003) that the meal improves retention of children in school who might otherwise have not come back in case they needed to go (to their, at times, distant) homes for lunch.

Data in Table 11 corroborate what parents and teachers told us. All schools put together registered a stunning 36 per cent increase in enrolment in class I following the introduction of the RMDMS. The rise for girls was even higher at 38 per cent. The increase was even more significant for SC/ST children –

43 per cent more SC/ST children and 41 per cent more SC/ST girls enrolled after the new meal was introduced. All schools put together registered a 15 per cent increase in enrolment of children in class 1-5. The rise for girls was even higher at 19 per cent and even more significant for SC/ST girls (21 per cent).

Our fairly dramatic results confirm findings of earlier studies but take them much further. Dreze and Goyal (2003) report an 11-18 per cent rise in enrolment in class 1 following the introduction of mid-day meals in Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Rajasthan between 2001-02 and 2002-03. The higher increase for girls in our data would support their conclusion that "female education is particularly responsive to school incentives" (p 4675). But the increases we are reporting are three times higher than found by Dreze and Goyal. There are significant and instructive inter-district and inter-community variations. The rise in enrolment was most dramatic (41 per cent) for SC/ST children. This appears to reflect both the lower initial base that SC/STs start from and the fact that the meal matters so much more to those suffering relatively greater deprivation. The inter-district variations highlight the critical significance of meal regularity and quality. The rise in enrolment is lowest in the districts (Anuppur and Tikamgarh) where the meal is not doing so well, as also in Mandla where there appear to be other factors relating to the quality of education itself. Indeed, it is vitally important that in our enthusiasm for the positive impact of the mid-day meal on enrolment, we do not lose track of the issues of quality in education. As we show in the next section, given that no proper arrangement has been made for the implementation of the scheme in MP, the meal appears to have placed an undue burden on teachers and poses the serious danger of compromising even further the already very poor quality of primary education in the state.

Burden on Teachers

A major new feature of the RMDMS introduced in MP is the fact that the responsibility of implementing the scheme has been given to parent-teacher associations (PTAs) rather than the gram

Table 10: Discrimination against Dalits in Appointment of Cooks
(In per cent)

	ST		SC		PTG		Others	
	Total Population	Cooks	Total Population	Cooks	Total Population	Cooks	Total Population	Cooks
Anuppur	39	17	13	0	2	0	46	83
Dewas	40	67	16	8	0	0	44	25
Khandwa	66	84	6	0	0	0	28	16
Mandla	42	50	12	0	5	10	41	40
Shivpuri	2	6	24	18	12	12	62	65
Sidhi	48	70	17	10	0	0	35	20
Tikamgarh	5	0	24	0	0	0	71	100
All districts	32	42	17	5	2	3	49	49

Table 11: Percentage Change in Enrolment of Students in Class I after Introduction of RMDMS

	SC/ST	SC/ST	All SC/ST	All Boys	All Girls	All
	Boys	Girls				
Anuppur	39	15	26	25	12	18
Dewas	60	64	62	51	43	47
Khandwa	41	53	45	36	47	40
Mandla	21	42	33	13	25	20
Shivpuri	54	38	45	36	49	42
Sidhi	67	15	37	47	37	42
Tikamgarh	22	41	28	28	32	30
All districts	44	41	43	35	38	36

panchayats (GPs). When the scheme was introduced, the sarpanches were asked to hand over responsibility to the PTA.⁵² Funds relating to the scheme are kept in a bank/post office account to be jointly administered by the non-official head of the PTA and the teacher-in-charge of the school. A committee is to be formed to oversee the daily running and management of the scheme. Elaborate protocols of inspection and monitoring have also been stipulated.⁵³ The empowerment of the PTAs appears to be very positive step forward. It is yet another illustration of the fact that for panchayat raj to be effective it needs to be supported by people's institutions at the village level that can handle each of the functions devolved to the GP. A concrete illustration of this is provided in our survey through the relatively negative experience of Tikamgarh where the GP continues to run the MDM rather than the PTA. The PTA is defunct here. In one school the RMDMS has not even started. The absence of monitoring by parents and teachers has proved a very negative factor. Meals for several schools are being cooked together with no check on quality as also exploitation of cooks.

Of course, the effectiveness of the PTA depends critically on how actively parents participate in it. The picture in this respect leaves a lot to be desired. While in Anuppur, Shivpuri and Tikamgarh, PTA meetings are held regularly in all schools, they are not so regular in Dewas, Khandwa, Mandla and Sidhi. Only 35 per cent of parents surveyed are members of the PTA.⁵⁴ The situation is particularly bad in Dewas, where just 15 per cent parents are members. In no district is the percentage more than 50.. There are other problems too. In nearly a third of the schools grain does not always reach on time. In more than half the schools money does not reach on time. In Khandwa in all the schools and in Anuppur in 90 per cent schools money doesn't reach on time. Teachers in 25 per cent schools reported that there had been no inspection of the MDM in the current academic session. The percentage of schools not inspected is as high as 50 in Sidhi and 44 in Mandla.

Because the system does not work well, the already understaffed and overburdened teachers have to spend a lot of their time on these kinds of details. In the absence of an active PTA, teachers have to shoulder almost the entire responsibility, as a result of which children's studies get neglected. That purchase of vegetables and provisions as also drawing money from the bank is no mean task and can be extremely time-consuming is evident from the accounts of the teachers themselves. In Sevanya Khurd (Dewas) just to present the demand for funds, the teacher had to go for 8-10 days to the Panchayat office. In Budda (Shivpuri) and Mahigaon and Mawdipura (Dewas) money is not deposited in the account on time thereby delaying withdrawals. In Dagarkot the school remains shut on the day of the withdrawal as there is only one teacher in the school.⁵⁵ In Gyara Dongri (Mandla) due to delays in release of funds, provisions have to be bought on credit. But this proves very difficult as shopkeepers keep refusing.⁵⁶ In Udiapur Maljhi (Khandwa), the teacher has to go by walking to fetch various provisions. For grain she has to walk eight kms and for dal and vegetables 14 kms. The bank is 15 kms away and there also she has to go by walk. Even if she goes, some times she cannot withdraw money due to some other reason. In Aswaya (Shivpuri) teachers also have to go out to get 'atta' (wheat flour) as there is no flour mill in the village. In Sutaripura (Dewas) the PDS outlet that supplies grain is about three kms away. The teacher himself goes, every now and then, to fetch grain from the PDS outlet. In Guwadi (Dewas) the market

for vegetables is 10-21 kms away. Most of the time this means that children do not get vegetables to eat.⁵⁷

Based on the accounts of all the teachers in the survey, we have tried to make an estimate of the number of hours they typically spend in work related to the mid-day meal:

- Presenting a demand for grain to GP/FPS every month (one hour per month)
- Getting the cheque signed by the PTA president for withdrawal of money (availability of the PTA president at the time required can be an issue) and then drawing money from the PTA account (once or twice a month, other than infructuous visits when they find that the money has not been transferred into the account) (eight hours a month)
- Informing the cook of the number of children present on the day
- Giving cooking provisions in the correct measure to the cook every day (five hours a month)
- Supervising serving of food (24 hours a month per teacher)
- Maintaining record of stocks and daily expenditure (12 hours a month)
- At least one meeting of the PTA per month (four hours per month)
- In some cases the teacher has to fetch the grain himself (six hours per month)
- In many cases, buying of cooking provisions (flour, dal, oil, masalas, etc) (3-4 hours a month)
- In many cases, buying vegetables 2-3 times a week (12 hours a month)⁵⁸

This comes to nearly 76 person-hours a month, say an average of around three person-hours per day. Given that schools have an average of just two teachers, this is a major drawdown on the teaching time available. The concentration of teachers is also heavily diverted from teaching to administrative matters concerning the mid-day meal, further compromising the already poor quality of teaching. There is an urgent need, therefore, to follow the example of Tamil Nadu where each school has an "organiser" who looks after administration and accounts [Rajivan 2005]. Without such a provision, we could be in a situation where mid-day meals do improve enrolment but at the same time seriously undermine the quality of education provided by primary schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations from the RMDMS Survey

The shift to a *ruchikar* (relishing) mid-day meal in Madhya Pradesh in 2004 marks a dramatic improvement over the earlier *daliya*-based meal. The *ruchikar* meal is being provided with fair regularity in most schools across the state. Considering that as many as 45 per cent of India's children still do not get the mid-day meals they are entitled to [NAC 2004], this is no mean achievement for a state like Madhya Pradesh. No parent, teacher or cook complained about any serious illness suffered by children after eating the meal. The meal is an immense contribution to overcoming classroom hunger for millions of children whose families may have been unable to provide them food. Sixty per cent of the parents surveyed feel that the meal is of good or very good quality; 96 per cent of parents and 93 per cent teachers feel that the scheme should be continued as it positively influences attendance besides providing food to poor children, who may have otherwise gone hungry. Wherever the meal is running well, parents feel their children's interest in studies has increased

and it has become easier to send them to school. Teachers also say that it has led to an improvement in enrolment, attendance and retention and it is particularly convenient for poorer parents who have to go out for work.

However, everywhere there were concerns regarding poor quality of ingredients, watery food, bad cooking, lack of variety and paucity of vegetables. There is also a widespread perception that the quantity of food served in the meal is not adequate, especially for the upper primary children. It is clear that the allocation made for the meal is very low. This has meant that vegetables are rarely provided in most schools. On the days vegetables are provided, no dal is given in the roti-serving schools and very little dal is provided in the rice-serving schools. Infrastructure supporting the meal is very poorly developed – absence of proper kitchens, drinking water facilities and utensils for cooking, serving, eating and storage are widely reported. The number of cooks employed in roti-serving schools is far below the prescribed cooks/child norm. Despite this shortage there is a marked reluctance to employ dalit cooks. Even in a block like Prithvipur of Tikamgarh district, where the proportion of dalits in the total population of the villages surveyed is 24 per cent, there are no dalit cooks at all in any of the schools. Clearly, a feeling of caste discrimination persists, especially in eating food cooked by a dalit.

Enrolment of children in Class 1 increased dramatically by 36 per cent following the introduction of the RMDMS. The rise for girls was even higher at 38 per cent. It was even more significant for SC/ST children – 43 per cent more SC/ST children and 41 per cent more SC/ST girls enrolled after the new meal was introduced. However, the absence of a separate arrangement for meal management has placed an undue burden on the teachers. On an average, teachers spend around three person-hours a day on work related to the mid-day meal. Put together with the fact that the average number of teachers in the primary schools surveyed is only two, this burden could worsen the already low quality of teaching imparted in these schools. A rise in the enrolment and improved motivation levels of parents and children, are a necessary but certainly not a sufficient condition for better quality of education.

On the basis of the findings of the survey, we would make the following recommendations for an improved mid-day meal in MP. These could also be of relevance in other parts of India, especially in the Hindi heartland:

- (1) The allocation of Rs 1.05 to Rs 1.30 for the meal per child per day is too low. This must be raised to at least Rs 2 as recommended by the National Advisory Council and being already implemented by a few states. This is especially because the government of India is already providing Re 1 for the meal. This would help raise the quantity and quality of the meal being served, both of which are inadequate at present
- (2) The protein content of the meal needs to be increased. On days when vegetables are given in the roti-serving areas, dal must also be provided. Protein content can also be improved by mixing besan (gram flour) in the rotis and by following the traditional practice of mixing various dals in vegetable preparations. Children would also enjoy roasted gram that could be provided as a supplement, especially if dal is not being served.
- (3) The meal must be supplemented with micro-nutrients such as Vitamin A, iron and iodine. Chronic respiratory and stomach infections undermine efficiency of nutrient absorption and utilisation. Which, in turn, increases vulnerability to infection.

Recognising this synergy between health and nutrition, school health programmes should be integrated with the mid-day meal.

(4) Given the great difficulties in buying vegetables from the market and the time and money spent on this as also the shortage of water, each school should be equipped with their own kitchen garden for vegetables, roof water harvesting and drip irrigation system. One person should be specially employed to supervise and manage this system. The total expense of the system (including this person's wage) can be covered under the new National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in districts where it exists. Elsewhere special provision can be made under the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY).

(5) Regular provision of different vegetables will also help introduce greater variety into the meal as in the southern states.

(6) Safe drinking water must be assured in all schools.

(7) All schools must have proper kitchens as per the orders of the Supreme Court. They must also be equipped with requisite utensils for cooking, serving, storage and eating. A special enclosure must be created in each school for serving the meal that is secure from both sun and rain.

(8) Official norms of cooks/child must be strictly adhered to. More cooks should be urgently appointed especially in the roti-serving schools where there is an acute shortage of cooks.

(9) In appointing fresh cooks, highest priority must be given to dalits, in line with the order of the Supreme Court

(10) Cooks must be paid a fixed wage, based on the statutory minimum wage (taking into account their hours of work). All salary arrears of cooks must be paid forthwith.

(11) Teachers must be relieved of the burden of administering the meal. One person must be appointed for looking after all aspects of the management of the mid-day meal, as in the southern states.

(12) Even other than the burden of the mid-day meal, more teachers need to be appointed and more classrooms built so that the national norm for students/teacher ratio (applied to each class and not across classes) and classrooms are strictly adhered to.

With these changes in place, the mid-day meal can become a powerful element in ensuring a sound foundation for the nation's future – by improving the health and education of the poorest of our children. **END**

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Notes

[This paper is an abridged version of a report prepared for an ongoing ICSSR project on the Right to Food in India. We would like to pay tribute to the enormous effort put in by teams of the partner organisations who conducted the survey – Gram Sudhar Samiti, HARD, Nirmaan, Parhit, Sambhav, Spandan and Samaj Pragati Sahayog. We would also like to thank Pramathesh Ambasta, Smita Aggarwal, Debashis Banerji, Sumit Bose, Jean Dreze, M Kumaran, Harsh Mander, Vandana Prasad and P S Vijay Shankar for their inputs and feedback to an earlier version of the paper.]

- 1 Agricultural growth in the 1990s has, of course, itself been in the doldrums.
- 2 PUCI vs UOI and Ors Writ Petition (Civil) No 196 of 2001 has popularly come to be known as the Right to Food case. The Supreme Court has sought to put pressure on the centre and states to radically improve the implementation of nine food-related government schemes. It has set up a new monitoring mechanism involving a national commissioner (a kind of amicus curiae for the court), who is in turn supported by a network of advisers, one in each state.
- 3 According to the National Family Health Survey, malnourishment in

- children is most severe in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. According to the UNDP, 50 per cent of child deaths are accounted for by MP, Bihar, Rajasthan and UP. MP is ranked 12th in the Human Development Index of 15 states prepared by the Planning Commission.
- 4 In a personal communication, Jean Dreze informed us of an earlier survey conducted by the Centre for Development Economics and the Centre for Equity Studies in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in 2002. The report of that survey has not yet been published but its findings, according to Dreze, are "broadly consistent" with those reported by us.
 - 5 In an all-India study of the 1990s, Sundaram and Tendulkar (2003) find that, among all social groups, SC/ST households are the ones most vulnerable to poverty.
 - 6 The only exception to this overall pattern of ethnic composition and irrigation development is Prithvipur block in Tikamgarh district (home district of former chief minister of MP Uma Bharati). The proportion of STs here is very low. Although there is a very high proportion of irrigated area based on groundwater development, its human development indicators are very poor. It ranks 42nd among 45 districts of MP in terms of the HDI. While Dewas ranks 10th in the HDI, Bagli is one of the most backward blocks within Dewas.
 - 7 We were especially interested in assessing how far the Supreme Court's order of May 2, 2003, entitling all primitive tribes to AAY benefits, has been adhered to.
 - 8 See Lee and Thorat (2004) for the need to be especially sensitive to this while conducting such surveys. Many surveys conducted by external agencies have failed to pick up on sensitive ethnic discrimination issues.
 - 9 It is probably some measure of the success of this effort that many of the findings of the survey turned out to be contrary to the perceptions of our partners prior to the survey.
 - 10 That 24 per cent villages do not have ICDS centres is truly shocking. On October 7, 2004, the Supreme Court directed in the Right to Food case that "efforts shall be made that all SC/ST hamlets/habitations in the country have anganwadi (ICDS) centres as early as possible". Typically in adivasi villages there are three to four hamlets. Our survey reveals that even whole villages still do not have anganwadis, let alone hamlets.
 - 11 These are lower than the BPL rates of Rs 5/kg for wheat and Rs 6.50/kg for rice.
 - 12 If the number of AAY families was less than four, then all of them were surveyed. If there were no "other community" AAY families in the village then all four families were taken from SC/ST/PTG. The attempt as far as possible was to definitely try and get answers from women members of the household.
 - 13 We also interviewed 70 PDS shopkeepers and 70 sarpanches during the survey.
 - 14 This tallies with the view of 97 per cent of our surveyors who felt that the distribution of AAY cards had been fair. The pattern was uniform across districts. This was also the opinion of 92 per cent PDS shopkeepers. A slightly lower 77 per cent shopkeepers felt that the distribution of AAY cards had not been unfair. The main reason for this lower percentage is the widespread feeling that while most families who have the AAY benefit, deserve it. But many equally deserving families have been left out who would benefit greatly if they too were to be included.
 - 15 In the 10 Shivpuri villages, even though the Sahariya primitive tribe is just 2 per cent of the population, as many as 46 per cent of the AAY families we surveyed are Sahariyas. Similarly, in the Mandla villages though the Baiga PTG families are just 5 per cent of the population, they constitute 28 per cent of the AAY families we interviewed.
 - 16 They ate chirotia leaves (which our surveyors found so smelly that it was difficult to even stand near them, let alone eat them), bamboo pulp, mahua, roots like gathalu and kanda, gum, honey, sarai seed, chironji, bhelua fruit, and various other leaves (phang, chaulai, pamar).
 - 17 In any case, following the Supreme Court order of April 20, 2004, it is no longer necessary for a family to be a BPL cardholder for it to be entitled to an AAY card. The court issued this direction after complaints by the Right to Food campaign that the court's order of May 2003, entitling all primitive tribes and other special categories of destitutes, to AAY cards was not being implemented in many cases on the ground that they were not BPL cardholders.
 - 18 Jean Dreze informs us that this is broadly consistent with the findings of his own survey mentioned earlier.
 - 19 An overwhelming majority of respondents were aware of their entitlements under AAY.
 - 20 The district cooperative banks provide loans to both cooperative societies and FPSs for purchase of grain.
 - 21 Both families and shopkeepers in Anuppur, Dewas and Tikamgarh agreed that shops do not open for more than two days a week.
 - 22 Interim order dated May 2, 2003 in the Right to Food case directs that PDS outlets must be kept open throughout the month and permit families to buy ration in instalments.
 - 23 On the whole, though, 71 per cent AAY families said that they had enough information about days and timings when PDS shops open.
 - 24 It is a matter of speculation why shopkeepers do not permit this. One view among our surveyors is that this allows shopkeepers greater scope for black-marketing of this grain by making false entries in the AAY cards and then selling off the grain in the open market.
 - 25 The seven shops are in Tikamgarh and Shivpuri where grassroot CBOs have been working hard to spread awareness about and facilitate implementation of the interim orders of the Supreme Court.
 - 26 The proposed National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should be a major positive initiative in this direction.
 - 27 See M Swaminathan (2000) for an illuminating discussion on the problems caused by targeting. The government of India's high-level committee on Long-Term Grain Policy finds that two-thirds of the food subsidy comprises carrying cost of grain. This would be reduced if there were greater offtake.
 - 28 As an adviser (Madhya Pradesh) to the national commissioner appointed for the Right to Food case by the Supreme Court, I (Mihir Shah) observed that many district collectors have responded very positively to pressure brought upon them by civil society organisations. There have been the odd recalcitrant collectors too but pressure from the Supreme Court has had a salutary impact on them as also their counterparts in other districts.
 - 29 MGR pioneered the scheme in Tamil Nadu in 1982, although on a smaller scale in that state it dates as far back as 1956 when it started with 10 paise per child per day [Rajivan 2005].
 - 30 Some schools even provided biscuits or the local "sev-parmal" (fried gram flour crispies with puffed rice)
 - 31 To call it porridge would not be exactly right, of course. This daliya had no milk, just some jaggery at best.
 - 32 In case a child's family had already got covered, we went on in this sequence to the next child.
 - 33 That the SC/ST/PTG proportion is more than the 50 per cent targeted, reflects the fact that some of the surveyed villages were 100 per cent adivasi villages.
 - 34 These include three Education Guarantee Scheme shalas, three government pre-middle schools and two Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission schools.
 - 35 In a personal communication Smita Aggarwal, who worked for years in the district primary education programme (DPEP), informs us that when the programme was launched in the early 1990s, a condition for accessing DPEP funds was a PTR of 40:1. DPEP funds were to be used to fund additional teacher posts necessitated by the rise in enrolment. As data in Table 1 shows this has not been adhered to even after a decade of DPEP.
 - 36 Despite this kind of data emerging from all parts of the country (especially north and central India), there are those who continue to argue against increasing budgetary allocation to primary education on the grounds that the problem is not the lack of money but the motivation levels of our teachers!
 - 37 That this can become serious is evident from Bageha Tola village in Kotma block of Anuppur district where the primary school once remained closed for 15-20 days at a stretch for such reasons. There is also the case of remote and inaccessible villages (such as Boranya village in the Bagli tehsil of Dewas district) that shut down when they get cut off during the rain.
 - 38 Unlike Tamil Nadu where meals are provided every single day of the year, including holidays, mid-day meals in MP are provided only on working days in schools. The April 2004 Supreme Court order mandating provision of mid-day meals during summer vacations in drought-affected areas has not yet been implemented in MP (except in a few schools on a few days, where it was reported that children were not coming for the meal).
 - 39 Such complaints persist about the daliya being served under the ICDS programme. The government seriously needs to consider moving on to a ruchikar meal even under the ICDS. Tamil Nadu began to gradually

- cover all its under-5 children through the Noon Meal Programme from 1982 itself [Rajivan 2005].
- 40 We also cross-checked with cooks and teachers to see what they felt about the meal and interestingly although they generally took a better view of the meal, than the parents, the inter-district variations in their replies fit very well with the views of the parents. We also found that only in 50 per cent of the schools does a system exists of tasting the meal prior to serving it to the children. This again reflects a lack of concern for quality.
 - 41 Good quality of wheat and rice would yield 7-10 gms each of protein for every 100 gms of wheat flour or rice. 20 gms of good quality dal would yield around three gms of protein [Oser (ed) 1965]. Protein content can be improved easily by mixing besan (gram flour) in the rotis as also by following the traditional practice of mixing various dals with different vegetables. Children would also enjoy roasted gram if provided as a supplement.
 - 42 In a survey of mid-day meals in 41 villages in the Chhindwara district of MP in 2004, Afridi (2005) found that nearly two-thirds of the 19 per cent respondents who were dissatisfied with the ruchi meal, cited quantity as an issue, while 87 per cent had problems with quality.
 - 43 In her survey, Afridi (2005) found that "of all the schools surveyed, not one had a separate kitchen or a shed for cooking the meals" (p 1532). Dreze and Goyal (2003) also reported that only 7 per cent schools in Rajasthan and 18 per cent in Chhattisgarh had a pucca kitchen.
 - 44 The ministry of water resources, GoI, has initiated a new programme of roof water harvesting in schools through CBOs that could make a big difference here. In Dewas, as part of this programme, where Samaj Pragati Sahayog has set up this facility in schools, the harvested water proves a great boon to the children, as also to cooks for cooking and cleaning dishes for the mid-day meal.
 - 45 The requirements we have listed are the most basic, the absence of which can seriously compromise the quality of the meal.
 - 46 Fortunately though in most districts we did not come across many instances of children being refused a meal if they did not bring their own utensils. However, in Anuppur 38 per cent of parents did complain that their children were deprived of the meal if they did not carry their own utensils.
 - 47 Sixty three per cent of the cooks said that in most schools the food is given sometimes even to those children who are not enrolled in school even though in several schools the quantity of food falls short.
 - 48 We may note that this is a clear violation of the Supreme Court direction that preference be given to dalits in the appointment of cooks. See Lee and Thorat (2004) for a detailed account of discrimination against dalits in the mid-day meal scheme and PDS in five states.
 - 49 These were reported from Lasudiya Lad and Mansinghpura (Dewas), Rajoura (Shivpuri), Ramhepur (Mandla), Bageha Tola (Anuppur), Dagarkot and Devli Kalan (Khandwa). The fact that there is no instance from Tikamgarh is most striking. Since no dalit cook has been appointed there, the "problem" appears to have been forestalled, so to speak.
 - 50 This overwhelming vote for continuing the scheme by parents (96 per cent) and teachers (93 per cent) tallies well with the findings of Dreze and Goyal (2003) in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka. They found 91 per cent parents and 84 per cent teachers in favour of continuing the meal.
 - 51 A unique feature of our survey was the questionnaire we canvassed with groups of children in each school on every aspect of the meal.
 - 52 Strict orders were issued in each district that any attempt to violate this provision would be treated as financial impropriety and irregularity on the part of the GP. The GP and the PTA were also asked to coordinate with each other while appointing the cook.
 - 53 Responsibility of monthly monitoring has been entrusted to the block coordinator (at least 50 schools), inspector, MDM (at least five schools per day in each block), block education officer (at least 30 schools), assistant project administrator/district organiser (at least 15 schools) and assistant commissioner/project administrator (at least five schools). The inspection roster is to be made in such a way that each officer inspects different schools.
 - 54 The communitywise distribution of PTA members fairly accurately mirrors their proportions in the village population in all districts. On an average, 25 per cent of the members are women.
 - 55 Similarly, in Mairani (Khandwa) the PTA president is not available on time so withdrawals get delayed as a result of which the teacher has to manage things on his own. In Dewli Kalan (Khandwa) sometimes

after reaching the bank it is discovered that the money has not been deposited in the account. In Malwari (Sidhi) whenever the teacher asks for money the sarpanch says that he hasn't got the money yet. In Mugwari (Sidhi) the cheque takes time to get credited which leads to problems. In Nebuha east (Sidhi), no money had been released from July till December 2004.

- 56 Similar problems arise in Changeri and Khamroth (Anuppur).
- 57 Similarly, in Kewlari Rayyat (Mandla) the teacher has to go 4 km to buy vegetables. In Dagarkot (Khandwa), vegetables have to be got from a distance of 15 kms. Wherever the PTA is not active as in Ramhepur (Mandla) teachers have to arrange for all raw materials for cooking. In Dhulha (Anuppur) vegetables and dal are not available in the village so they have to buy it from outside.
- 58 Happily, very few instances of students or teachers being involved in the cooking have been reported. At times some help is rendered by teachers and students in some of the schools. In Dhulah (Anuppur) the teacher helps with the chopping of vegetables, in Boraniya (Dewas) girl children make rotis and dal whenever the cook is absent; in Ramhepur (Mandla) also children assist in cooking at times.

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