



# The **Mid-Day Meal** Scheme in India



KAILASH SATYARTHI CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

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# 1. Introduction

The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme is a centrally sponsored school-based feeding programme of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, to enhance enrolment, retention, and attendance while simultaneously improving nutritional levels of school children nationwide<sup>1, 2</sup>. The programme supplies free lunches on working days for children in primary and upper primary classes in Government, and Government aided, local body, Education Guarantee Scheme/ Alternative Inclusive Education centres (including Madarsas and Maqtabas) supported under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan<sup>3</sup>, and National Child Labour Project schools run by the Ministry of Labour<sup>4</sup>. Launched as the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) in 1995 initially in 2408 blocks of India, and covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013, today the scheme covers all blocks of the country, serving 11.80 crore children in 11.2 lakh institutions<sup>5</sup>. This makes the scheme the largest of its kind in the world. However, COVID-19 and the continued closure of schools in most states have also taken the wind out of the sails of India's MDM scheme. Though the Government issued guidelines to states to provide food to all eligible children during the pandemic, implementation has been lax.

MDM is served on all working days in the school. There is, however, provision to provide MDM to children in summer vacations in drought affected areas. Provisions have also been made for pulses oil, etc. (equivalent to cooked food) as Food Security Allowance (FSA) along with foodgrains to eligible children during the COVID situation in summer months<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://mdm.nic.in/mdm\\_website/aboutus.html](http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/aboutus.html)

<sup>2</sup> <http://home.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/newsroom/wfp207424.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Previously called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

<sup>4</sup> [http://mdm.nic.in/mdm\\_website/aboutus.html](http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/aboutus.html)

<sup>5</sup> Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No.1093, answered on 08.02.2021

<sup>6</sup> [http://mdm.nic.in/mdm\\_website/Files/OrderCirculars/2020/JS\\_DO-Letters/D.O.%20letter%20\(FSA\)-7-09-2020.pdf](http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/Files/OrderCirculars/2020/JS_DO-Letters/D.O.%20letter%20(FSA)-7-09-2020.pdf)

## 1.1. Objective, Data Sources and Methodology

The objective of this paper is to study the current status of the MDM scheme in terms of state-wise allocation and expenditure/utilisation trends, provisioning during the pandemic, including additional funding during the summer months; details of children enrolled under the scheme covered; and key challenges to its implementation. The paper also aims at estimating the minimum cost per meal under the MDM scheme based on the current market price of food items.

This paper is based on an analysis of the secondary data collected from the website of various ministries, Government of India and Lok Sabha questions & answers in recent years.

## 2. Children Enrolled

MDM covers all Government, local bodies, government-aided primary and upper primary schools, and the Education Guarantee Scheme/Alternate Inclusive Education centres, including Madarsas and Maqtabas across the country. In 2019-20, 11.8 Cr. children were enrolled under the MDM scheme.

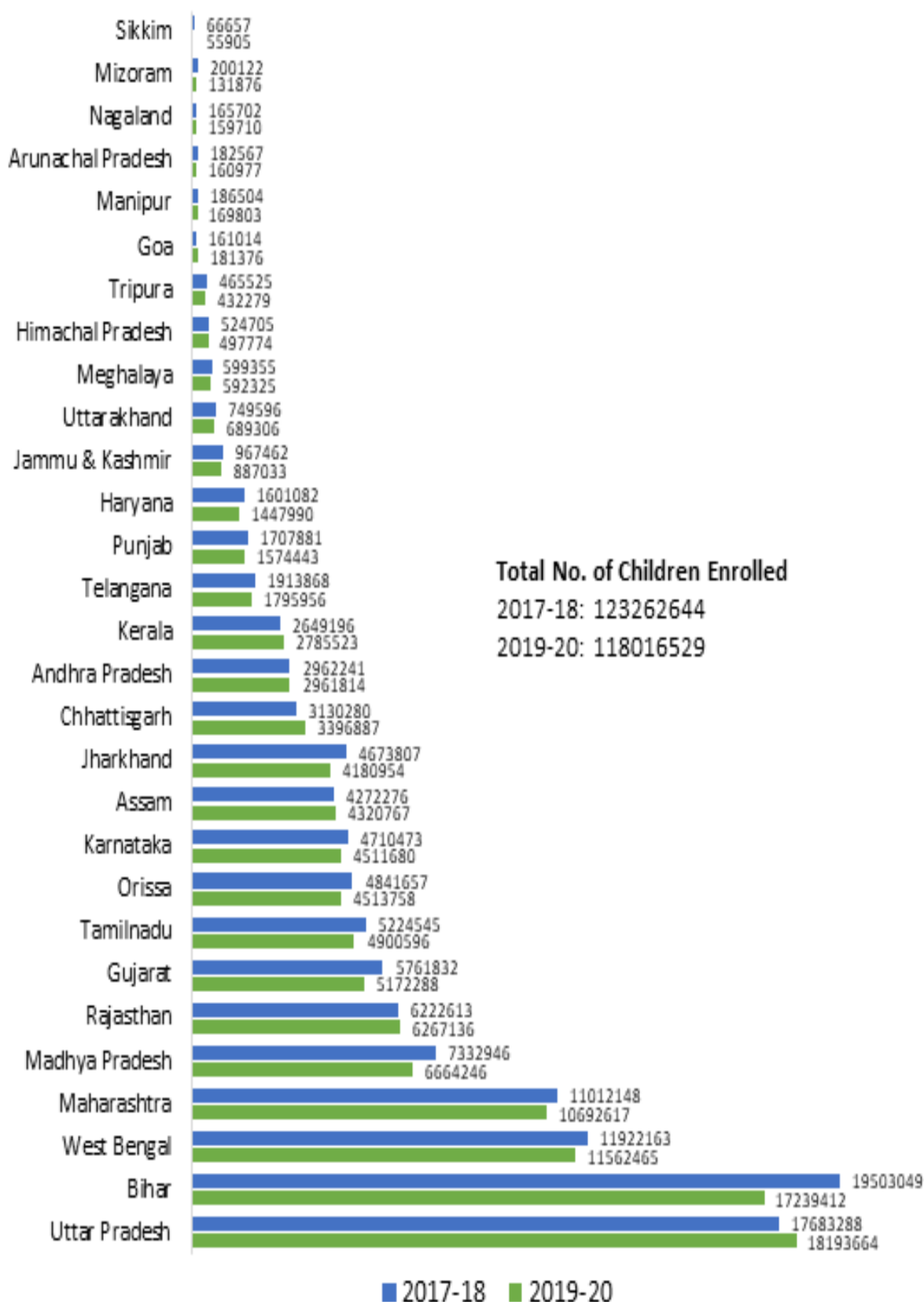
In 2019-20, most states registered an overall decline in the number of children covered under the scheme as compared to the children enrolled under the scheme in 2017-18. North-eastern states like Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur also registered a decrease in the total number of children enrolled under MDM. While the decrease in children enrolled puts a question mark on the implementation of MDM, the Ministry of Education attributes the deficit to children shifting from government schools to private English medium schools after Class 3-4<sup>7</sup>.

However, some states like Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Kerala, Assam, and others showed a marginal increase in the number of children covered under the scheme.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://theprint.in/india/mid-day-meal-coverage-sees-a-dip-govt-says-students-are-shifting-to-private-schools/333210/>

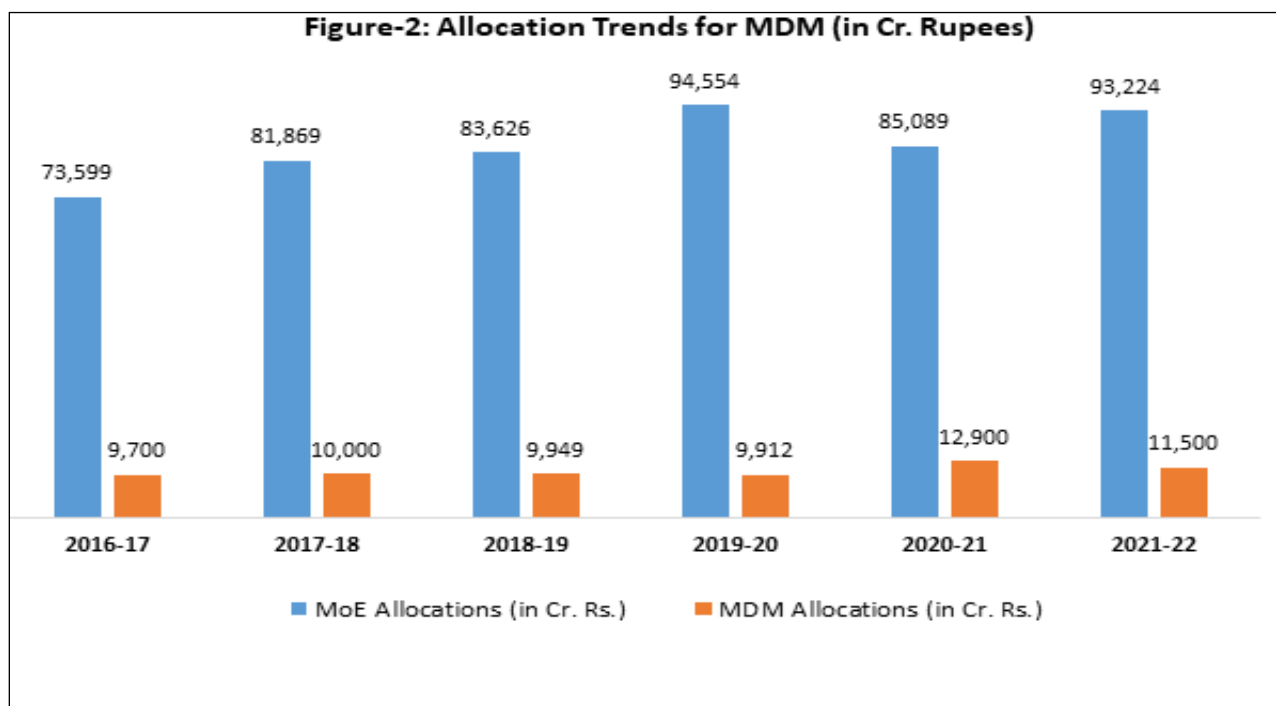
**Figure-1: State-wise Number of Children Enrolled under MDM (2017-18 and 2019-20)**



Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No.1093, answered on 08.02.2021

### 3. Funds Allocation Trends

MDM is one of the largest schemes of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Yet, allocations for the scheme have remained relatively stagnant over the past few years. The budget allocation for the financial year 2021-22 stood at Rs.11,500 crore, accounting for 12 per cent of the Ministry's allocation. It represents an 11 per cent decline from the previous year's Revised Estimate (RE) and a 5% increase from Budget Estimate (BE) (Figure-2).



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a direct impact on the scheme's delivery. The closure of schools due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown led to the non-supply of MDM in many states. In March 2020, the Supreme Court of India instructed states to provide Food Security Allowance (FSA) comprising foodgrains, pulses, oil, etc., equivalent to the cooking cost or hot-cooked meals to children's home.

Consequently, allocations were increased to Rs.13,400 crore in 2020-21. This included an additional allocation of Rs.1,600 crore for providing MDM during the summer months, and Rs.800 crore to meet the enhanced expenses of cooking cost. Despite this announcement, REs for 2020-21 were actually 4 per cent lower and stood at Rs.12,900 crore.

MDM allocations have also remained lower than those demanded by the Ministry of Education even prior to the pandemic. In 2018-19, while the Ministry had requested Rs.12,147 crore for MDM, revised allocations stood at Rs.9,949 crore or Rs.2,198 crore less than the demand. Similarly, in 2019-20, revised allocations were 18 per cent less than the Ministry's demand of Rs.12,054 crore.

### 3.1. State-wise Allocations and Utilisations

Allocation/release of funds for MDM is based on plans submitted by states estimating the number of children likely to avail MDM and approved cost norms<sup>8</sup>. After discussions and negotiations with individual state governments, budgets proposed by states are approved by the Programme Approval Board (PAB) for MDM under the Ministry of Education. Total approved budgets for a state include both state and Government of India (GoI) shares for the specific financial year and the unutilised amount from the previous year. Once approved, both GoI and states release funds as per their fund sharing ratio.

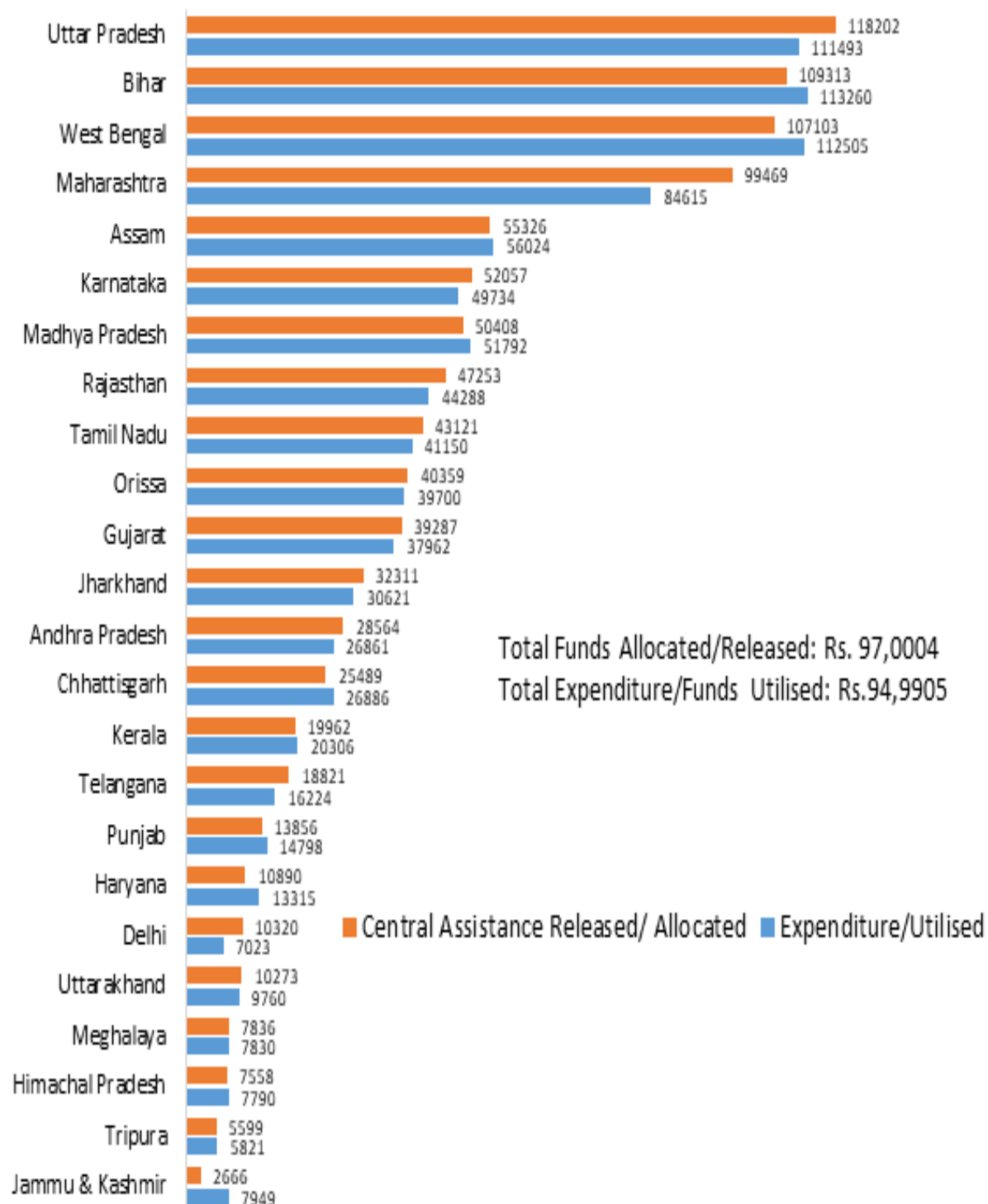
To understand the utilisation of funds under the scheme, a look at state-wise funds released vis-à-vis the expenditure is helpful (Annexure-1). However, a state-wise snapshot of the allocated funds and utilised under the scheme during 2019-20 is presented in Figure-3. The utilisation in a year is more than funds released for some states (e.g., Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, etc.) since the unspent balance from the previous financial year was spent 2019-20.

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Assam were the top five states with the highest allocation and utilisation funds during 2019-2020. However, the percentage utilisation of allocated funds were highest in Jammu & Kashmir (298%), (Haryana (122%), Punjab (107%), Chhattisgarh (105%), Tripura (104%, and Bihar (104%) (Figure-4). Nagaland (2%), Maharashtra (85%), Telangana (86%), Goa (91%), and Mizoram (91%), on the other hand, were the states with the lowest percentage utilisation of funds allocated under the scheme during 2018-20.

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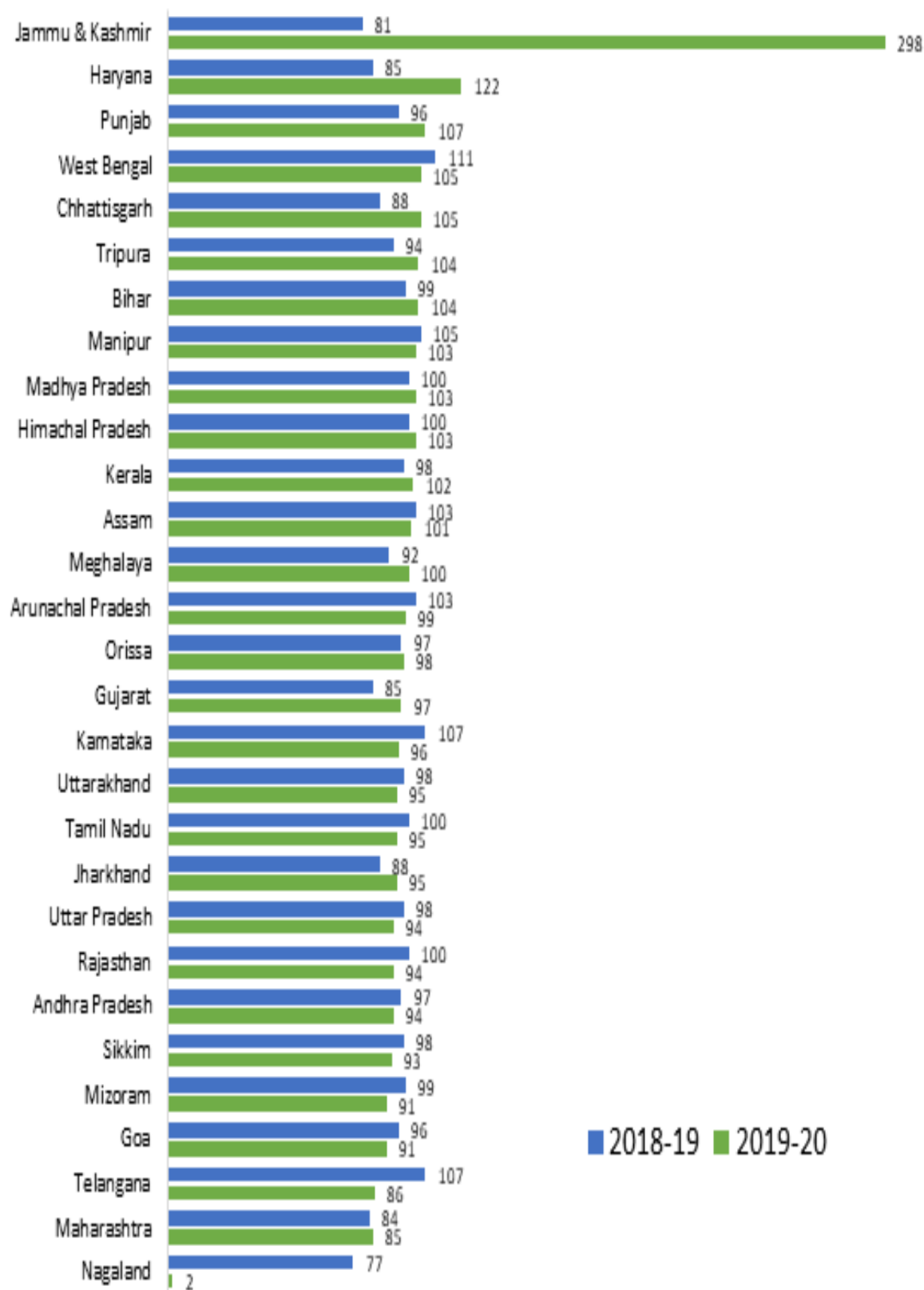
<sup>8</sup> [http://mdm.nic.in/mdm\\_website/](http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/)

**Figure-3: State-wise Funds Allocated and Utilised Under MDMS (2019-20) (in Rs.lakh)**





**Figure-4: State-wise Percentage Utilisation of Funds Allocated in 2018-19 and 2019-20**

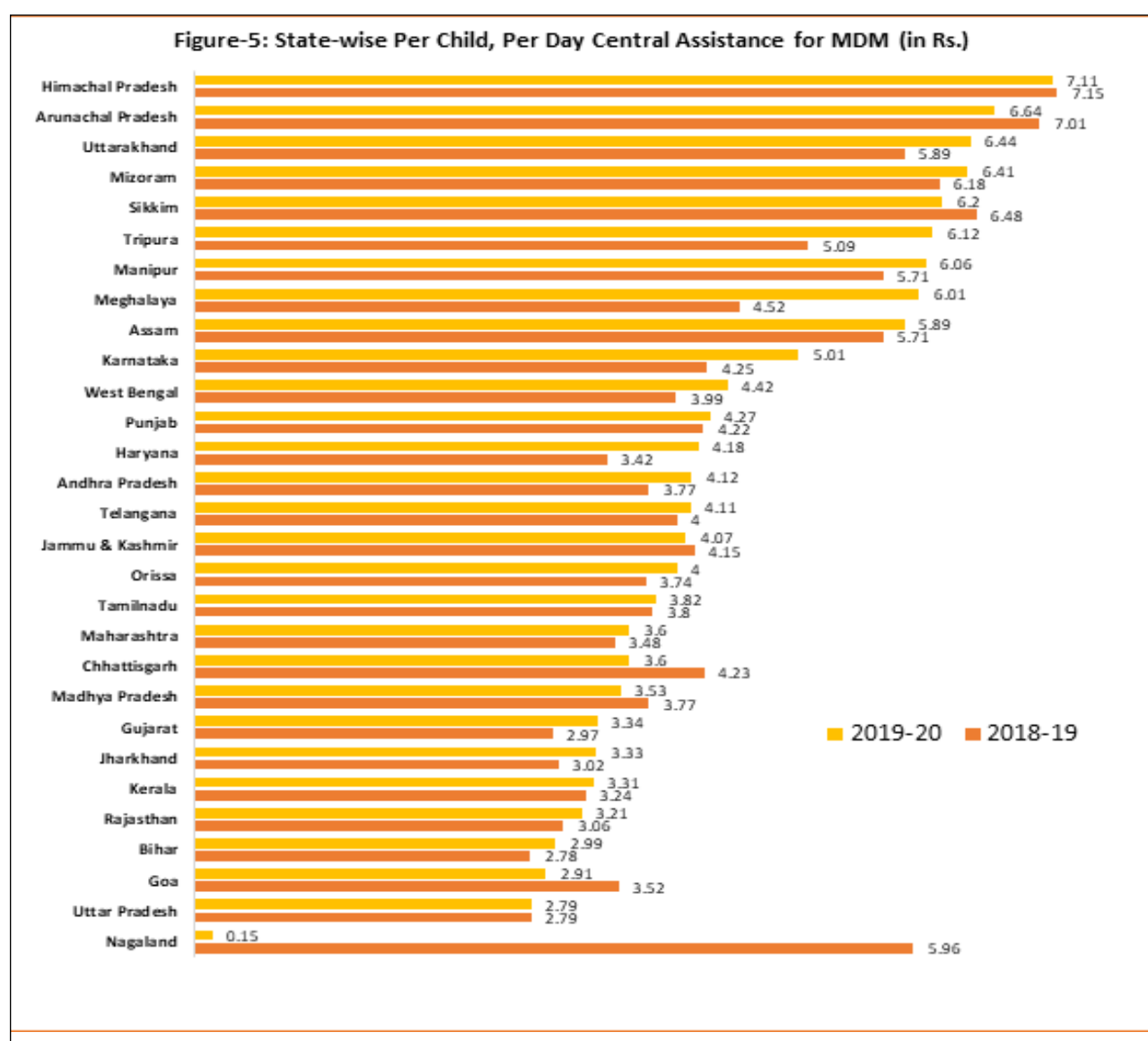


Note: Calculated from data as presented in Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No.71, answered on 03.02.2020

## 4. Per Child, Per Day Cost

Cost of MDM includes several costs - cost on foodgrains, cooking cost, transport assistance cost, honorarium to cook-cum-helpers, management and monitoring & evaluation cost, etc. The costs are shared between the Government of India and the state/UT governments in a 60:40 ratio. However, in states from the North Eastern Region (NER) and Himalayan region Government of India bears 90% of the cost. In the case of UTs without legislature, the Government of India bears the entire cost<sup>9</sup>.

Assuming the average working days in schools in each state as 220, a rough estimate of the state-wise Per Child, Per day Central Assistance for the MDM scheme during 2019-19 and 2019-20 is presented in Figure-5.



<sup>9</sup> Revision\_of\_CC\_Dec-2015.pdf (mdm.nic.in)

The Per Child, Per Day central assistance for MDM was highest in Himachal Pradesh (Rs.7.11 in 2018-19 and Rs.7.15 in 2019-20), Arunachal Pradesh (Rs.6.64 in 2018-19 and Rs.7.01 in 2019-20), Uttarakhand (Rs.6.44 in 2018-19 and Rs.5.89 in 2019-20), Mizoram (Rs.6.41 in 2018-19 and Rs.6.18 in 2019-20), and Sikkim (Rs.6.20 in 2018-19 and Rs.6.48 in 2019-20). This is natural because these are either states from North Eastern Region or Himalayan states, where costs are shared between the Government of India and the state governments in a 90:10 ratio. Among non-NER and non-Himalayan states, where costs are shared between the Government of India and the state governments in a 60:40 ratio, the states with the highest Per child, Per Day central assistance were Karnataka (Rs.5.01 in 2018-19 and Rs.4.25 in 2019-20) and West Bengal (Rs.4.42 in 2018-19 and Rs.3.99 in 2019-20). Bihar (Rs.2.99 in 2018-19 and Rs.2.78 in 2019-20) and Uttar Pradesh (Rs.2.79 both in 2018-19 and 2019-20) with sizeable school children lie at the bottom.

Significantly, while in NER and Himalayan states, the Per child, Per Day central assistance for MDM has shown as general increase between 2018-19 and 2019-20, it has declined in most other states. However, Jammu & Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Goa stand out as exceptions with a marginal increase in Per child, Per Day central assistance during this period (Figure-5).

#### Estimation of Per Child Per day Cost as per the current Commodity Price

The data presented in the previous section indicates an approximate cost of the meal under the MDM scheme as of 2019-20 across states. Hence, in this paper, an attempt has been made to estimate the per child per day meal cost as per the current commodity price.

The Ministry of Education, Government of India, has prescribed the types and quantity of food items to be provided to the primary and upper primary stage children under the MDM scheme. The same was used as the base for estimating the cost of a meal. Since the quantity of food for children at the primary and upper primary stages differs, separate estimates have been made for both stages. To estimate the minimum cost per meal under the MDM scheme, the following assumptions have been made.

- The average wholesale price of commodities as of 26th August 2021 stands constant for all States/UTs.
- The lowest cost commodity in respective categories (Foodgrain, Pulses, Vegetables, Oil, etc.) will be procured and used to prepare the meal.
- The cost of the meal excludes costs for transportation of food grains, cooking and honorarium to cook-cum-helpers.

Table 1 below presents the detailed estimation of the current meal cost per child per day under the MDM scheme. The minimum average cost of mid day meals for children of primary stage and upper primary stage has been estimated to be INR 5.72 and INR 8.58, respectively. Any alteration or change in the type of commodity will increase the estimated cost.

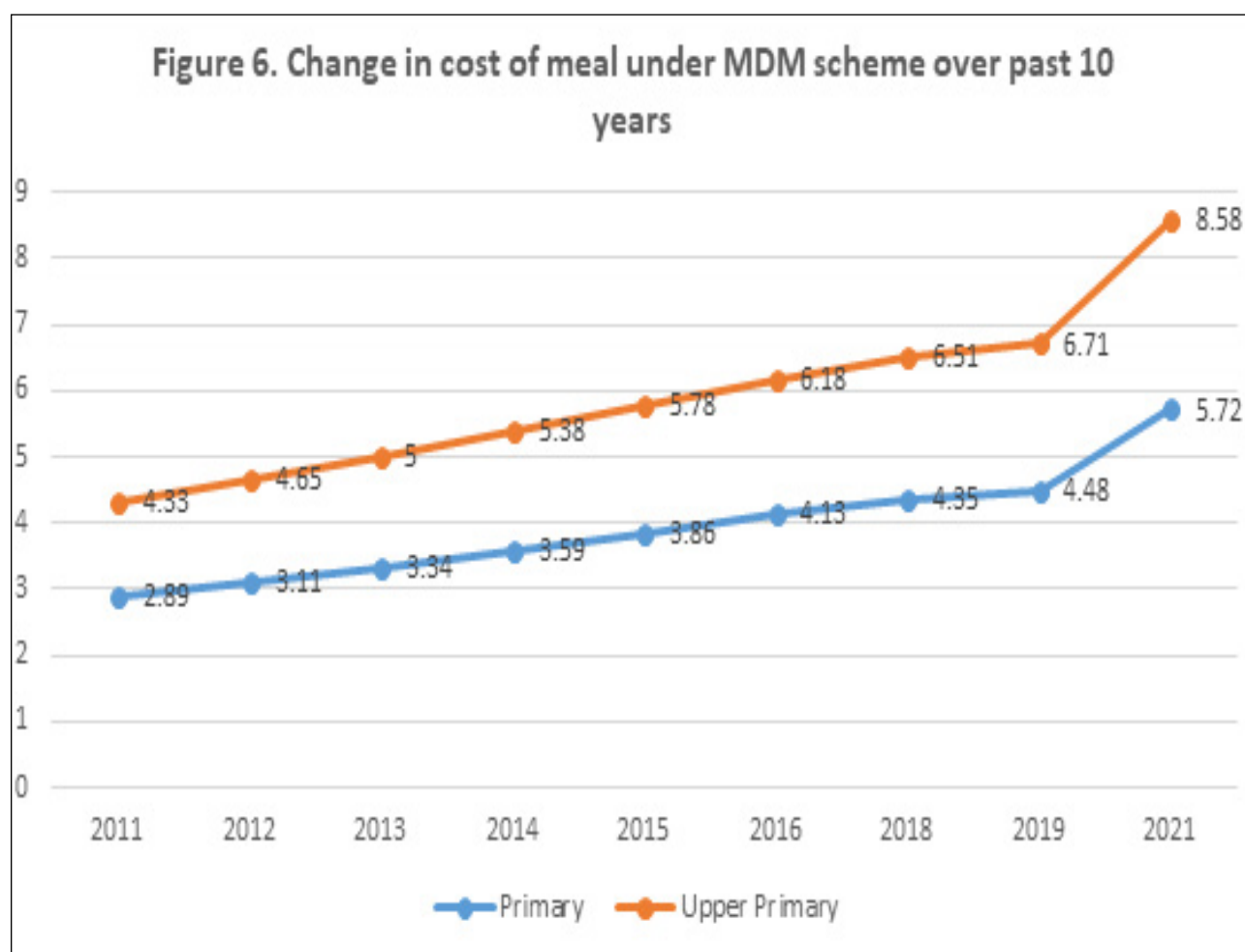
**Table 1 Estimation of cost of meal under MDM scheme as per current commodity price**

S. No.	Food Items	Prescribed Quantity per day/ Child*		Lowest Cost Commodity considered for Cost estimation#	Average Wholesale Price of Commodities (in INR)		Cost of MDM per Child per day (in INR)	
		Primary	Upper Primary		Rate per quintal#	Price per gram	Primary	Upper Primary
1	Foodgrains	100 gms	150 gms	Rice	2988.14	0.0299	2.99	4.48
2	Pulses	20 gms	30 gms	Gram dal	6754.45	0.0675	1.35	2.03
3	Vegetables (leafy also)	50 gms	75 gms	Patato	1495.12	0.0150	0.75	1.12
4	Oil & fat	5 gms	7.5 gms	Palm oil	12471.87	0.1247	0.62	0.94
5	Salt & condiments	As per need	As per need	Salt	1470.36	0.0147	0.01	0.01
<b>Estimated Cost of a Meal (2021)</b>							<b>5.72</b>	<b>8.58</b>

**Source: \*Mid Day Meal Scheme (mdm.nic.in), Mid day Meal Scheme, Ministry of Education, Government of India**

**#Daily Wholesale Prices of Essential Commodities dt. 26/08/2021, Department of Consumer Affairs (Price Monitoring Division), Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India**

In the past ten years, the meal cost under the MDM scheme for children has increased substantially. Comparison of values presented in Figure 6 suggests that from 2012 to 2016, the average meal cost increased by 7%-8% every year compared to the previous year. However, after 2016 the rate of increase was slowed down. In 2018 the average cost of the meal was increased by five percent as compared to 2016. In 2019 the average cost of the meal was increased by a mere three percent compared to 2018. The comparison of the estimated cost of the meal as of 2021 indicates that the average cost per child per day increased significantly by 28% compared to the 2019 cost. The trend of increase in the cost of the meal per child in primary and upper primary stage per day remains almost the same.

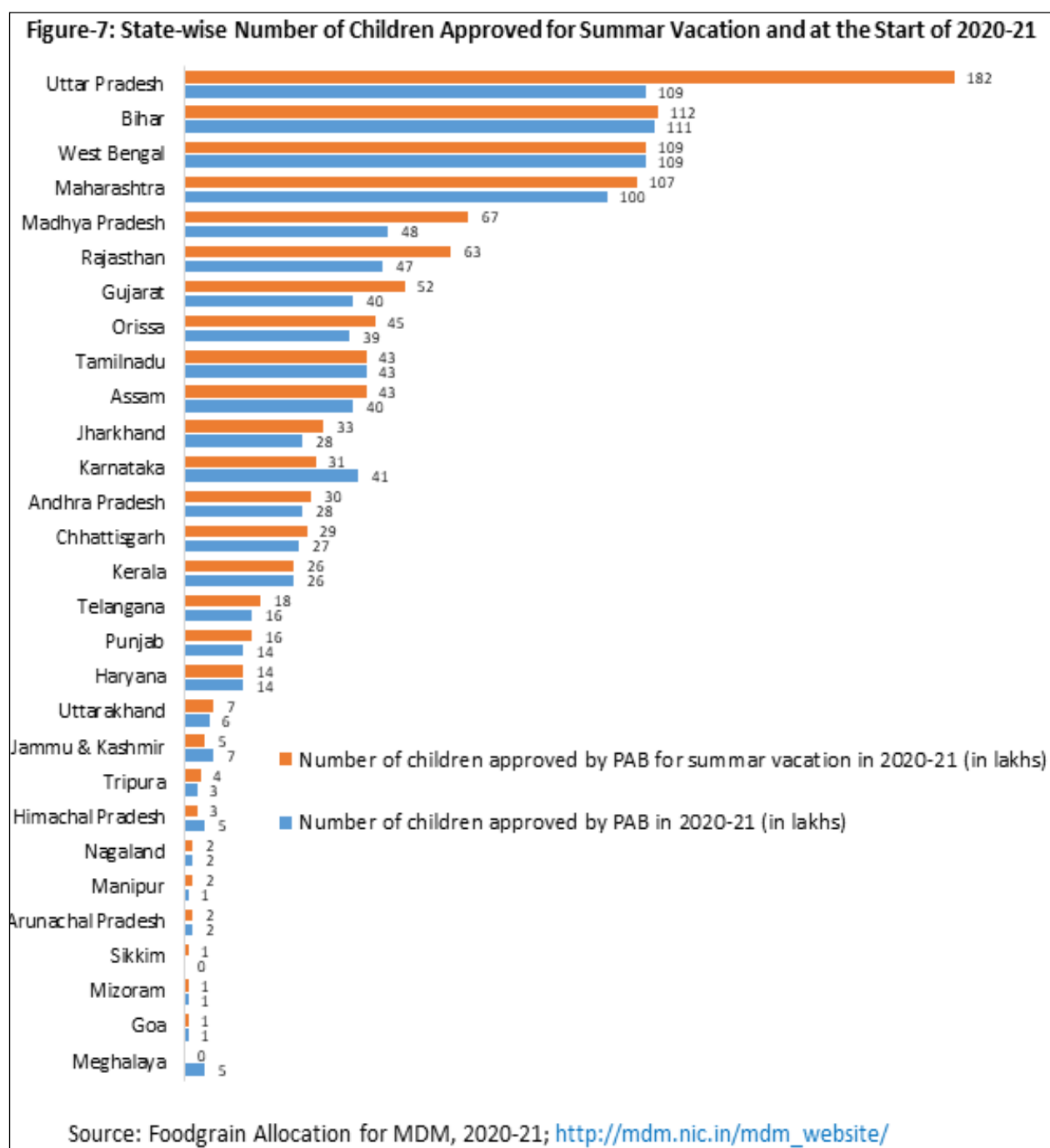


**Note: Cost of meals from 2011 to 2019 was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Government of India, which was compared with the estimates made for the year 2021**

Although the minimum cost of meals under the MDM scheme has gone up by 28% between 2019 to 2021, the union budget estimate suggests an increase of only five percent during this period. The total budget allocated for implementation of the National Programme of Mid Day Meals in Schools in 2019-20 was INR 11,000 Cr which was increased to INR 11,500 Cr. in 2021-22.

## 5. Coverage During Summer Vacation

The number of children approved to receive MDM for the summer vacation months was higher than those initially approved in the PAB at the start of 2020-21 (Figure-7). For instance, while 9.25 crore children were approved by PAB at the start of 2020-21, the provision of MDM during the summer vacation was approved for 10.65 crore children. Part of this increase could be due to the return of migrant worker families following the nationwide lockdown announced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



## 6. Challenges to Effective Implementation

Despite the existence of the MDM scheme over two decades and initiatives of the Government in making several improvements in the contents of the scheme over the years, the actual implementation of the scheme suffers from various shortcomings and lapses across the board<sup>11</sup>.

The performance audit of the scheme raised many red flags such as over-reporting of enrolment figures, cases of leakages, financial indiscipline, poor quality of meals and inadequate monitoring etc., which still persist.

- **Enrolment dips in MDM covered schools:** The performance audit report on the MDM scheme published in 2015 notes that the enrolment of children in the MDM scheme covered schools registered a consistent decline over the years from 14.69 crore children in 2009-10 to 13.87 crore children in 2013-14. The report also makes a point that while enrolment of children in the MDM scheme registered an overall decline, in contrast, the enrolment of children in private schools witnessed an increase of 38 percent from 4.02 crore to 5.53 crore during the same period indicating that MDM itself was not a sufficient condition to retain children in schools and that there is a growing section of society seeking better quality in education. This finding is still valid for the years after 2013-14.
- **Data on children availing MDM compromised:** The mechanism in place for assimilating data on the number of children availing MDM scheme is seriously compromised<sup>12</sup>. The percentage of the actual number of children availing MDM scheme as gathered from various sources was consistently lower than that furnished by the states to the Ministry for claiming the cost of food grains and cooking cost. Audit evidenced an institutionalised exaggeration of figures regarding students availing MDMs, irregular diversion or theft of food grains, submission of inflated transportation costs, fudging of data pertaining to the supply of food grains, all pointing to widespread leakages and defalcations, leading to losses and misappropriations in the scheme.
- **Children provided MDM often differ PAB approved children:** There are differences in the proportion of children provided MDM out of those approved as per the PAB<sup>13</sup>. For instance, in 2018-19, while proportions exceeded approvals in West Bengal and Rajasthan, it was low in Haryana (85%) and Jharkhand (84%). Differences increase when compared with the number of students enrolled as per PAB. Thus, while over 102% of PAB-approved children were provided MDM in West Bengal, as a proportion of PAB enrolment it was 94 percent. Similarly, in Rajasthan, while as a proportion of approvals, the students provided MDM in 2018-19 stood at 101%, it decreased to 74% when compared with PAB enrolment figures. Differences were among the highest in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

<sup>11</sup> [https://cag.gov.in/cag\\_old/content/report-no-36-2015-performance-audit-mid-day-meal-union-government-ministry-human-resource](https://cag.gov.in/cag_old/content/report-no-36-2015-performance-audit-mid-day-meal-union-government-ministry-human-resource)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> <https://factly.in/mid-day-meal-scheme-an-overview-of-enrolment-under-the-scheme-and-fund-utilisation/>

## 7. Conclusion

For children from lower-income families, having meals from school feeding programmes such as the MDM scheme is not an option but a means of survival. Malnutrition, undernutrition and dietary requirements of crores of school children from the disadvantaged section of the society has been effectively addressed via the MDM scheme in India<sup>14</sup>. The New Education Policy, 2020 also recognises that children are unable to learn optimally when they are malnourished or unwell. Hence, the nutrition and health of children have to be addressed through healthy meals into the schooling system. It also proposes that MDMs to school children be supplemented by breakfast<sup>15</sup>.

Despite the criticality of the MDM and a massive increase in the average cost of a meal per child per day, budget allocation and expenditure/ fund utilisation trends show that the Government is somewhat oblivious of the facts and apathetic toward growing malnutrition among children, especially at a time when it should be actively taking giant measures to improve the situation. Then there are concerns over over-reporting of enrolment figures, cases of leakages, financial indiscipline, poor quality of meals, and inadequate monitoring, which the performance audit reports of the scheme have consistently been red-flagging.

Nevertheless, the way to is forward and not backward. With adequate resources and quality safeguards, MDMs can play a major role in recuperating school attendance, reducing classroom hunger and fostering child nutrition. The pandemic should not derail the progress made over the years in nutrition programming and delivery to the most vulnerable. Having such a perspective is crucial for ensuring a healthy future for our children.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://poshan.outlookindia.com/story/poshan-news-india-faces-nutritional-crisis-for-school-children-dependent-entirely-on-midday-meals-amid-covid-19/360433>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)



# Annexure-1

The State and UT-wise Details of Funds allocated and Utilised under the MDM Scheme during the Last Three Years

States/UTs	Central Assistance Released/ Allocated	Expenditure/ Utilised	Central Assistance Released/ Allocated	Expenditure/ Utilised	Central Assistance Released/ Allocated	Expenditure/ Utilised
	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
A.P.	25714	25039	25748	24891	28564	26861
Arunachal	2552	2584	2506	2585	2368	2353
Assam	52903	52453	51982	53532	55326	56024
Bihar	97872	116750	112449	110855	109313	113260
Chhattisgarh	27683	26411	32086	28309	25489	26886
Goa	1231	1242	1309	1252	1276	1161
Gujarat	40430	38956	42352	35898	39287	37962
Haryana	9954	12178	13219	11222	10890	13315
Himachal	8684	7966	8021	8019	7558	7790
J & K	6329	8479	10666	8599	2666	7949
Jharkhand	30333	30289	33243	29287	32311	30621
Karnataka	44789	43549	40708	43359	52057	49734
Kerala	32978	18974	19857	19478	19962	20306
M.P.	58099	52691	56192	56435	50408	51792
Maharashtra	80311	81652	98185	82534	99469	84615
Manipur	2480	2201	2051	2151	2192	2262
Meghalaya	6487	6755	7734	7120	7836	7830
Mizoram	2018	1896	1889	1863	2048	1859
Nagaland	1776	2101	2862	2209	2279	51
Orissa	41927	39698	39557	38229	40359	39700
Punjab	14331	14302	15250	14605	13856	14798
Rajasthan	41107	41853	42043	42136	47253	44288
Sikkim	881	867	881	865	817	762
Tamil Nadu	42506	42238	42055	41860	43121	41150
Telangana	15495	15900	15757	16834	18821	16224
Tripura	5119	5164	5339	4999WW	5599	5821
Uttarakhand	9714	9652	9478	9291	10273	9760
U.P.	100475	99654	112772	110737	118202	111493
West Bengal	97146	97730	91710	101761	107103	112505
A&N Islands	389	374	585	376	755	354
Chandigarh	669	655	1063	653	884	722
D&N Haveli	538	528	933	563	573	546
Daman & Diu	332	263	304	284	258	230
Delhi	5295	6060	9808	9470	10320	7023
Lakshadweep	118	90	125	98	99	93
Ladakh					122	253
Puducherry	402	384	516	395	290	451
<b>TOTAL (in Lakhs)</b>	<b>909068</b>	<b>907576</b>	<b>951235</b>	<b>922752</b>	<b>970004</b>	<b>948805</b>

Source: Lok Sabha Unanswered Question No.71, answered on 03.02.2020

# Annexure-2

**State/UT-wise Details of Number of Children Enrolled and Institutions Covered under the MDM Scheme during the Last Three Years**

S.N	States/UTs	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
		Enrolment	Institutions	Enrolment	Institutions	Enrolment	Institutions
1	Andhra Pradesh	2962241	45505	3003654	45583	2961814	45484
2	Arunachal	182567	2934	167565	2934	160977	2780
3	Assam	4272276	57092	4263752	57103	4320767	53427
4	Bihar	19503049	70295	18095158	69513	17239412	70180
5	Chhattisgarh	3130280	44833	3041123	44838	3396887	44986
6	Goa	161014	1479	161693	1473	181376	1468
7	Gujarat	5761832	34307	5488319	34644	5172288	34788
8	Haryana	1601082	14990	1491169	14391	1447990	14397
9	Himachal	524705	15494	509804	15504	497774	15513
10	Jammu & Kashmir	967462	23130	941554	23120	887033	22205
11	Jharkhand	4673807	39722	4402797	39717	4180954	35773
12	Karnataka	4710473	54837	4632909	54830	4511680	54359
13	Kerala	2649196	12327	2728751	12341	2785523	12324
14	Madhya Pradesh	7332946	113621	6809497	113621	6664246	112908
15	Maharashtra	11012148	86583	10788967	86744	10692617	86499
16	Manipur	186504	3442	171169	3481	169803	3476
17	Meghalaya	599355	11597	716078	11659	592325	11678
18	Mizoram	200122	2532	136951	2525	131876	2511
19	Nagaland	165702	2076	168338	2099	159710	2067
20	Orissa	4841657	58784	4641593	57590	4513758	55525
21	Punjab	1707881	20157	1574441	20157	1574443	19735
22	Rajasthan	6222613	66506	6265346	66506	6267136	66341
23	Sikkim	66657	868	60691	867	55905	868
24	Tamilnadu	5224545	43205	5010783	43283	4900596	43246
25	Telangana	1913868	27896	1913868	28586	1795956	27329
26	Tripura	465525	6568	446226	6529	432279	6524
27	Uttarakhand	749596	17664	716910	17339	689306	17045
28	Uttar Pradesh	17683288	167845	18019846	169232	18193664	167193
29	West Bengal	11922163	83690	11579246	84171	11562465	83945
30	A&N Isls	32337	332	32337	338	31115	332
31	Chandigarh	98754	123	95334	123	93762	122
32	D&N Haveli	42381	280	42867	280		
33	Daman & Diu	18467	96	18827	92		
34	Delhi	1612295	2973	1626379	2975	1604505	3046
35	Lakshadweep	6957	39	7481	39	7290	39
36	Ladakh	–	–	–	–	16577	817
37	Puducherry	56899	431	56516	428	48427	426
	<b>Total</b>	<b>123262644</b>	<b>1134253</b>	<b>119827939</b>	<b>1134655</b>	<b>118016529</b>	<b>1119724</b>

Source: Lok Sabha Unanswered Question No.1093, answered on 08.02.2021

