



SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS IN IBSA COUNTRIES: A REVIEW

Sarbjit Kaur

Assistant Professor in Education, DIPS College of Education, Rarra-Morr- Jalalpur, Tanda, Distt. -
Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India

ABSTRACT

The IBSA forum is an important collaboration of India-Brazil-South Africa to address the social developmental challenges of developing countries through South-South Cooperation. All three countries share same colonial history and at present have developing economies and struggling to provide best public services to their citizens through the appropriate policy planning and introduction of welfare schemes. In the field of education, all these countries are facing problem in the expansion of access of education for all due to the challenges such as high number of out of school children, high drop-out rate, high repetition rates etc. To tackle these problems, appropriate education policies on free and compulsory education have been implemented in these countries. Besides these education policies, these countries have started many compensatory programmes to address the major challenges in the goal of universal elementary education. One of the most important compensatory programmes in these countries is school meal programme. In all the three countries, school meal programmes have been started with dual purpose of keeping the children in the school and improving their nutritional status. This paper is an attempt to review the school meal programmes of IBSA countries to highlight their impact on the health and educational attainment of children especially children from the disadvantaged sections of the society.

Keywords: Education for all, school meals, nutrition, drop-out, disadvantaged children, repetition rates, social welfare schemes, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Education confers a spectrum of benefits on individuals, families, societies and countries. It provides the freedom to understand the world, to lead an informed life and to communicate well with others. It is recognized across the world for its intrinsic value in enriching the lives of individuals and as a powerful and indispensable tool to enhance the process of human development and social progress. The economic conditions of an individual as well as of countries improve with achievement of education as education has a positive and crucial relationship with economic growth. Parallel to it, education is critical for functioning of the democratic society as education provides political voice and social empowerment to the people. It empowers people and strengthens nations. Besides having direct benefits on the lives of individuals and society, education has some indirect benefits such as the role of basic education is also instrumental for displacing the negative process of child labor (UNESCO, 2002; Dreze and Sen, 2013).

Beginning with the realization of education as a fundamental right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948,

the issue of elementary education has continued to dominate the various international treaties as well as international development discourse. Under the influence of globalization and due to the economic benefits of education, various global goals regarding the goal of universal elementary education have been formulated from time to time. The initiatives for international cooperation for education got momentum in 1980s mainly due to the emergence of democratic regimes, rising globalization and ending of Cold War. The major effort in this direction was Jomtien Conference held in 1990, this conference considered education a fundamental human right and it was resolved that basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults. After a decade from this conference, the next effort in this direction is 'World Conference on Education', held in Dakar, to reaffirm the 'Education for All' agenda. The World Education Conference in Dakar chose six main goals as the following-up to the Education for All 2000 Assessment. The Dakar Framework has been linked with Millennium Development Goals.

The unfinished Millennium Development Goals are not being transformed in to Sustainable Development Goal and out of

17 Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4 emphasizes the inclusive and quality education for all. This global policy agenda set out the requirement that the countries should develop national education policies or modify their existing policy planning in the light of these international goals (UNESCO, 2002). Even after the strong emphasis of developing countries on the increasing the access of schooling for all, the goal of education for all is still elusive for many developing countries. No doubt, expansion in the access of schooling has been observed in all the countries, but the problem of out of school children especially children from the disadvantaged sections of the society is quite significant for the all the countries. It has been reported that besides, low completion rates, low quality of education and poor learning outcomes, the most significant problem in the universalization of elementary education in developing countries is high number of out of school children and this number remain unchanged since 2007 (UNESCO, 2018).

India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) is a distinctive forum, formalized by Brasilia Declaration in 2003, which brings together three large democracies aimed to address the social developmental challenges of developing countries through South-South Cooperation. All the three countries in this forum are developing economies, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious nations which have adopted the global policies of education imposed by international organizations. The IBSA countries are emerging economies and also very proactive in addressing past inequalities prevalent in these countries. With the cooperation of international organization, national policy planning and other initiatives, these countries have performed quite well in the educational attainment. But even today, these countries have not achieved the goal of quality education for all. The poor learning outcomes of school students from these countries were highlighted by World Development Report 2018, and besides the low quality of public education system, these countries are also

suffering from the challenges of high illiteracy rates, high number of out of school children, high drop-out rates, low enrolment rates in lower secondary education, high enrolment rates in private institution etc. (World Bank, 2018). These countries are also suffering from the challenges of high illiteracy rates in India, high number of out of school children, high drop-out rates in India, high repetition rates in Brazil and South Africa, low enrolment rates in lower secondary education all these countries, high enrolment rates in private institution etc. (Pandey, 2018)

Due to the above-mentioned issues and problems, a dominant priority is given to free and compulsory elementary education in the policy planning of these countries. Besides this, the IBSA countries have started many compensatory programmes to increase the access of education especially among the most disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society. The compensatory programmes for the improving the enrolment and retention rates of students have been started by all the chosen countries with the help of external aid. These programmes include free school feeding programmes, free school uniforms, free textbooks etc. The school meal programme for students enrolled in public education has been started with dual objective of retaining the students in the education system and also for improving their health by providing nutritious food. The school feeding programmes of Brazil and India have been praised for their contribution in combating marginalization (UNESCO, 2010). These meals are considered as a long-term investment that any government can make. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these programmes have witnessed a major setback due to the closure of schools. Even at present, millions of disadvantaged children are missing the most important meal of their day due to closure of the various educational institutes (World Food Programme, 2020). And so, the efforts should be directed to ensure that all children must have access to school meals. In the light of this, knowledge of the successful practices of these developing countries in ensuring school

meals to the majority of the children can prove useful for other countries. This paper is an attempt to review the school feeding programs of the IBSA countries to highlight their impact on the education of the children from the marginalized sections of the society. The paper is based on the review of relevant government documents related to school meals programmes among these countries, international reports regarding these programmes and related research articles.

2. School Feeding Programmes in IBSA Countries

India is the second most populous country having 29 States and 7 Union Territories. The Gross and Net Enrolment Ratio in primary education during 2015-16 was 92.8 and 88.31 percent respectively. The literacy rate for the population age 15 and above was 69.3 percent with gender gap of 19.5 percent in 2011 and the literacy rate for SC and ST was 60.4 and 51.9 percent respectively for the same period (GOI, 2014). The education at Primary and Upper Primary level also known as primary education is free and compulsory for the children aged between 6-14 years. It is mandated by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Program of India and Mid-day Meal scheme is appreciated for their contribution in increasing the access to education among the children of disadvantaged sections of the society (Pandey, 2018).

Brazil is the fifth most populated country in the world with a population of 206.1 million. In 2007, the access to Universal Primary education in Brazil was almost universal but there were high repetition and drop-out rates in the country. Education is free and compulsory for the children aged between 7 to 14 years. The access of primary education has been increased but there were great disparities in the access of secondary education due to region and socio-economic background. Besides this, the expected average completion rates have slumped from 2000 to 2007 with an increase in the timeframe from 13.9 to 14 years. The indicators such as

increased drop-out rates, high repetition rates, reduction in average expected timeframe for staying in the school etc. have connected with the decline in the quality of education in the country (Neri & Buchmann, 2008). After the implementation of New Constitution in 1988, Brazil has started many social protection schemes and many studies have claimed that these schemes have a positive impact on the education of children from the disadvantaged sections of the society. Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes and other compensatory programmes such as school nutrition, school transportation etc. have been started by the government to keep the students in the schools. The National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE), created by the government, is an independent body linked to Ministry of Education (MEC) and it manages the allocation of resources to the education. These resources finance various programmes such as National School Nutrition Program, National Textbook Program, National School Transportation Program etc. These programmes have designed to correct the effects of the big social and economic based inequalities in the Brazilian society (MEC, 2014).

South Africa is a multi-ethnic country divided into nine provinces. It is considered economically the most dominant country in the region having population of approximately 57.73 million. Primary Education includes Grade R to Grade 9 and education from Grade 1 to Grade 9 is compulsory for the children aged between 7 to 15 years as per the South African Schools Act 1996. South Africa is one of the four countries in which EFA process has no impact on the primary school enrolment and even the progress is reversed (UNESCO, 2015: 225). The school nutrition programme in South Africa has been introduced to improve the health and education of the children coming from poor backgrounds (Mawela & Berg, 2018). The collaboration of these three countries in IBSA forum has revitalized the emphasis on social policies among the developing countries of the world and to build a consensus on the issue of international

importance. In this forum, dominant attention is being paid to the promotion of social equity and inclusive growth. To fight hunger and poverty in these countries, a number of social welfare policies have been implemented in these countries. The forum is giving due importance to the social sector development by implementing a number of policies in poverty reduction, increasing access to health care and education. Among the different welfare schemes started by the governments of these countries, school meal programmes of these countries received more appreciation as these programmes serve double purpose- improving the health of the children and also increasing the access of education. A review of school meal programmes of these countries is presented below:

I. MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME, 1995 OF INDIA

The scheme of National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NPSE) commonly known as Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDM) was formally launched on 15th August, 1995 to boost the universalization of primary education by increasing enrolment and retaining students in the government schools. The scheme has the goals to increase the attendance of the students and also to improve the nutritional status of children in primary education. The MDM is based on the idea that sound health is a precursor to provide education and so under this scheme, cooked meals with the minimum content of 300 calories of energy per day are served to all the students up to elementary level for atleast 200 days a year. The meal is prepared in the school under hygienic conditions. The scheme was revised several times and the scope of the scheme has been expanded to upper primary classes and also by including different types of schools in it from time to time, it also covers children studying in EGS Centres and madrasah. It has been considered as the world's largest feeding programme of school children. The number of children covered under this scheme has increased from 3.34 crore in 1995 to 12 crores in 2007 (GOI, 2008 pp: 7-8). It has been considered as world's

largest school feeding programme (World Food Programme, 2020).

The scheme had a positive effect on school attendance and nutritional status of the children. It has catered to the nutritional needs of children from low income families in both rural and urban areas. It has been observed that the MDM has led to increase in the enrolment of children in primary school especially the enrolment of girls, it also had a positive impact on enrolment of children from the disadvantaged sections of the society. The good practices in this scheme make the school environment more inviting for the students, but good MDM require sound infrastructure, proper storage and cooking facilities etc. Many of the state governments have provided the facilities required for MDM and besides these many states also provide de-worming medicines and micronutrients to the children with mid-day meal. However, some challenges such as discrimination of children on the basis of caste or socio-economic status require immediate attention from the authorities. Besides improving the enrolment ratio in elementary education, it has other benefits also like increasing the attendance of the students in the school, improving their nutritional status and socialization benefits (Khera, 2006). The EFA Report 2015 also pointed out that this scheme improved the enrolment of girls in rural areas (UNESCO, 2015 pp: 89). Due to the closure of schools as a precautionary measure to protect children from current pandemic, the central government advised the state governments to provide food security allowances to every child for as long as schools are closed (World Food Programme, 2020).

II. NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMME (PNAE) OF BRAZIL

The Brazilian School Nutrition Programme (PNAE) or popularly known as School Meal was started in 1955 to fight undernutrition and low levels of education. The main objectives of the programme are the development of students by meeting their nutritional needs and also enhancing the educational achievement of students by their healthy bio-psychosocial

development. Besides this, the programme supports development of healthy habits among students through food and nutrition education and also supports local family farming. In Brazil, the school nutrition is universal right of students in public basic education and it is duty of state granted by the Constitution. The 1988 Constitution ensured the right of free school feeding of students enrolled in public primary schools and the after that the scope of the programme has been expanded by 2009 Law to include all students enrolled in basic education from the age of six months. At present the programme covers all public and community schools in basic education including day care, kindergarten, elementary schools, high school to education to young adults. The school feeding programme is the responsibility of the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE), it is an independent agency and linked to Ministry of Education. The programme has been considered as an example of integration of education, agriculture, health and social protection (Sidaner, Balaban & Burlandy, 2012)

It is considered as one of the largest and comprehensive programs in the world with the budget of program for 2014 was R\$3.5 billion and it benefits approximately 43 million students in the country. The embryonic form of this program was started in 1955 with the creation of the Brazilian School Snack Campaign. The major expansion of the program has occurred between 2003 to 2012 and at present the coverage of the program was nearly universal and it has been operated in approximately all the schools of rural and urban areas of the country. With this program, there is increase in the equal opportunities for the vulnerable sections of the society to stay in the school and obtain education. The program involves the transfer of financial resources from the Union to the States, the Federal Districts and the municipalities for the purchase of the food and it is compulsory that 30 percent of this program's budget be used to purchase food directly from family farms. The food is acquired from family based agricultural

ventures and this helps to promote sustainable economic development of rural communities (MEC, 2014: 84-85).

III. THE NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITION POLICY OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Primary School Nutrition Programme, started in 1994, was replaced by School Nutrition Programme and it was a part of the National School Nutrition Policy. This policy is based on the principle that food should be directly provided in the primary schools to reduce hunger and to improve the learning of the students by regularizing their attendance in the school. Besides this, in South Africa, many children are suffering from diseases due to the lack of proper nutrition. Malnutrition and other diseases related to hunger such as stunting and anemia are quite common in the country. All these diseases affect the learning of the students in the schools and also their productivity in the adult life. The School Nutrition Programme has been started with the purpose of improving learning outcomes of the students and also to involve the school community in the delivery of the food to the children. The targeting of the programme has two stages: first the whole school are selected and second few learners from selected school have been identified for receiving the food (OECD, 2008:163-64).

The main purpose of the programme is to improve the access of education in the country and also to improve the nutrition of the children. It has been reported that the program has positive impact on increasing the enrolment of students coming from the poor families especially from those families which cannot provide proper lunch box to their children. Besides improving the enrolment of students, the program has improved the pass rates of these students and overall health of the children (Mawela & Berg, 2018). The three pillars of this programme include school feeding, Nutrition education and deworming and Sustainable food production and these pillars fulfils the main objectives of these programmes such as to enhance learning capacity of the learners by providing nutritious food, to strengthen nutrition education in

schools and communities and to promote and support food production to ensure food securities in the school communities. The programme is an important social protection instrument but it receives less attention than child support grant. School attendance rates has been increased after the introduction of this feeding programme in the country, but the quality of education remains poor. The programme has both positive and negative impacts on the education of the children but it faces a lot of challenges such as poor quality of food, food not served to eligible learners, poor transportation facilities to supply food in rural areas etc. But despite all the shortcomings and challenges, it proves to be a social protection schemes critical for expanding the educational access in the country (Devereux et al., 2018).

3. Conclusion

Education is recognized as a basic human right since 1948 due to its intrinsic value in enriching the lives of individuals. It contributes to equality in the society as it is considered as a main vehicle for social mobility. Due to these benefits of education, all the countries put special emphasis on the universalization of elementary education and with the help of international organizations and consistent national efforts. These countries are continuously working towards the achievement of the goal of universal elementary education for all. Despite of all the efforts, in many countries such as the IBSA countries are still grappling with the goal of universal elementary education of all. However, all the three countries are quite proactive in expanding the access of education through appropriate educational policy planning and compensatory programmes. These compensatory programmes especially the school meal programs have been started with the special focus of including the children of disadvantaged sections of the society in formal education and also for improving their health through proper nutrition. From the study of school meal programmes of IBSA countries, it can be concluded that these programs are quite important for improving

the health and education attainment of children from the marginalized sections of the society. Besides these benefits, the programmes are also critical for promoting sustainable development by integrating education, agriculture and social protection schemes. However, due to pandemic, these programmes need serious interventions and modifications to ensure food for all children especially the most vulnerable. The national governments can adopt a number of options such as providing cash as school meal replacement or home delivery of food and many such measures to ensure nutrition and education for all children.

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