

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (PPP) MODEL FOR MID DAY MEAL PROGRAMME: AKSHAYA PATRA

NEHA SINGH

Research Scholar, Department, of Extension and Communication Management, College of Home Science,
Swami Keshwanand Rajasthan Agriculture University, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

Education helps in preserving, enriching and refining intellectual systems. Government of India has taken a policy initiative for universalisation of primary education, which is known as Mid Day Meal Program. This policy initiative is helpful for those children, who belonged to poor socioeconomic background, such as those parents are engaged in farming, a Labor occupation. Within the PPP model of implementation of the Mid Day Meal Program, the largest partner of the Indian Government is the Akshaya Patra Foundation, a not-for-profit trust of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), Bangalore. The Akshaya Patra midday meal program started in the year 2000 in Bangalore, by serving 1500 children in 5 schools, across the city. The program soon scaled up across different states, in partnership with an invitation, from respective State Governments. The broad objective of the Akshaya Patra mission is that, “no child in India will be deprived of education, because of hunger”, the basic aim of the program is that, children should attend school. Akshaya Patra, in association with Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), initiated trainings on food safety, quality and personal hygiene, for midday meal cooks-cum helpers. The incentive of a guaranteed meal under the Akshaya Patra midday meal program has been able to bring children back to school. This is the most significant impact of the program. As students’ enrollment and attendance increase, so do their educational levels. The Akshaya Patra Program demonstrates a success story, in the field of Public Private Partnership in India’s Midday Meal Scheme. It has set an example on, how a well-implemented program can effectively address the issue of hunger and malnutrition in the country.

KEYWORDS: Akshaya Patra, ISKCON, PPP, Mid Day Meal, Malnutrition, Hunger

INTRODUCTION

Education helps in preserving, enriching and refining intellectual systems. Education through which the standard of living of the people, their prosperity and security can be considerably improved is regarded as a potent instrument of rapid and effective development of a Nation. According to Millennium Development Goals, the universalization of elementary education was nationally accepted as an important aspect of the overall effort to make education a tool for socioeconomic transformation. Government of India has taken a policy initiative for universalisation of primary education, which is known as Mid Day Meal Program. This policy initiative is helpful for those children, who belonged to poor socioeconomic background, such as those parents are engaged in farming, a Labor occupation.

Midday meal program (National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education) was launched, as a centrally sponsored flagship program on 15th August 1995. Its objective was to boost universalization of primary education and to improve the nutritional status of children, by the food being given to them at the school. Without a healthy

body, the mind does not develop without good food. It is, therefore, become more essential to have a good and nutritious food, for our growing children. The mid day meal program was introduced primarily, to protect the nutritional as well as the educational rights of the children.

Thus, initiating this kind of meal program, Government of India aimed at helping the children, especially belong to the poor socioeconomic background, to attend school and to have at least Mid Day Meal, through which their education as well as food related issues could be tackled. Significantly, the program was intended for the tribal areas of various states in the country where, the level of food insecurity and starvation is much higher and children are sold, due to acute poverty of the parents.

Public Private Partnership (PPP)

A public private partnership can be defined as a co-operation and coordination, between the public and private sector, in which the government and private sector carry out a project together, on the basis of an agreed division of tasks and risks, each party retaining its own identity and responsibilities.

Within the PPP model of implementation of the Mid Day Meal Program, the largest partner of the Indian Government is the Akshaya Patra Foundation, a not-for-profit trust of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), Bangalore and this model has proved that nothing is impossible if it is for a noble cause.

Why PPP?

- Value for money from both public and private parties
- Risk transfer and sharing
- Better evaluation and monitoring from both sectors (public and private)

Akshaya Patra: Innovative PPP Model

“Akshaya Patra is a model of cooperation and scale that you have accomplished and demonstrated. It is better than any other model in the world”

US Congressman Joseph Kennedy

Starting Point

The Akshaya Patra midday meal program started in the year 2000 in Bangalore, by serving 1500 children in 5 schools, across the city. This was an ISKCON Bangalore pilot, following which Akshaya Patra was instituted into a Foundation in October 2001. The program soon scaled up across different states in partnership with an invitation from respective State Governments.

Bold Infrastructure

The Akshaya Patra midday meal program is present in 9 states, and operates 20 centralized and 2 decentralized kitchens and serves 1.39 million children every day, across India (Akshya Patra Newsletter 2014).

OBJECTIVE

The broad objective of the Akshaya Patra mission is that, “no child in India will be deprived of education because of hunger”, the basic aim of the program is that, children should come to school. But, with more pressing concerns of hunger and poverty, education inevitably takes a back seat. As per the RTE Act report of 2011, 8.1 million children are out of school in India, largely to be able to earn a meal a day.

Akshaya Patra intends to address this vicious cycle of poverty, hunger and lack of education, through its midday meal program. Food - being the most basic of all human needs - if this is taken care of, other endeavors become easier.

The program approaches the issue of children dropping out of school, by assuring them a well-cooked, nutritious and good to eat a meal every single day, so they come to school. In the long run, the expectation is that, children who attend the school will have a fair chance to improve their life standards, and thus, escape the loop of poverty and hunger.

Centralized Distribution Model

The centralized kitchen model had the benefits of scale and the best promise of being able to feed the large number of children for the lowest cost. Akshaya Patra achieved much success, through the centralized model, and had recently invested in a new centralized state-of-the-art kitchen in Hubli. However, they still faced many challenges, including distribution issues, maintaining continual improvement, and creating a flexible, standardized model, while also allowing for local customization of labor needs and food preferences. Worker retention was low in some cities, as workers trained in their kitchens were often recruited to work in high-end hotels, where they would receive a better wage. In addition, as plans for the construction of new kitchens developed, they needed a replicable model, while also allowing room for improvement. Akshaya Patra also considered future capacity needs and wondered if they should build each kitchen, for the current capacity allotted, or with room for increased capacity, on the assumption of additional funding in the future.

Decentralized Distribution Model

The rural areas were better targeted through the decentralized model, but Akshaya Patra questioned whether they could achieve the necessary scale, to make a difference in these areas.

Employee recruitment, particularly of trusted supervisors who would not fall prey to the corruption schemes, that were so prevalent in India, was a further limiting factor. Furthermore, localized training of village women was extremely labor intensive. The trustees considered expanding to a training based model, where Akshaya Patra would host 50,100 rural women in a central training location, for a 15-day intensive instruction course in proper food preparation, hygiene, and accounting. This option had the benefits of being able to reach more people, but did not solve the problems of quality assurance, corruption and theft.

Training

Akshaya Patra, in association with Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), initiated trainings on food safety, quality and personal hygiene for midday meal cooks-cum helpers, in 2013. From August – December 2013, the organization has trained over 1,075 cooks in 7 states – Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura. In its second leg of trainings, 400 cooks cum helpers have been trained during the first quarter of 2014, covering

Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana. The third phase is expected to train 900 more. The participants are given study materials, with easy to understand pictorial depictions of process, for better understanding.

Impact

The incentive of a guaranteed meal, under the Akshaya Patra midday meal program has been able to bring children back to school. This is the most significant impact of the program. As students' enrollment and attendance increase, so do their educational levels. The meal program thus, reinforces the Government's Right to Education Act. In the long term, it is expected that, children with the benefits of education, would eventually be able to lift themselves out of poverty.

CONCLUSIONS

The Akshaya Patra Program demonstrates a success story, in the field of Public Private Partnership in India's Midday Meal Scheme. It has set an example, on how a well-implemented program can effectively address the issue of hunger and malnutrition in the country. In doing so, the Akshaya Patra Program is also reinforcing the Right to Education Act, by ensuring that, children doesn't only come to school, but more importantly stay in school.

The unique aspect of this intervention is that, the program has been able to take a massive initiative to scale, while keeping its high quality and delivery standards integral. In this respect it stands as a best practice, and offers value in being replicated across the country. Furthermore, the impacts are verifiable clearly, which lends credibility to the intervention, and has definitely helped build a multi-stakeholder partnership, around the program.

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