Context

Hunger is a stumbling block for education for poor children and locks them into a vicious cycle: hunger and poverty obstruct education as they are forced to drop out of school and take up menial jobs. Lack of education curtails opportunities for development. Since they are not able to develop themselves, they remain hungry and poor. But hunger obstructs education in yet another way by affecting clear thinking and productive working in children. Dr. J. Larry Brown, Tufts University, has most succinctly described this:

"By subjecting children to hunger, we rob them of their God-given potential. We then deliver them to the schools with one arm tied behind their backs and expect teachers to perform an often-impossible task. This, in turn, results in the waste of billions of dollars we invest in the education of our children because hunger prevents them from getting full value of their educational experience." Children who are hungry or undernourished also have more difficulty in fighting infection. Therefore, they are more likely to become sick, miss school, and fall behind in class.

Issues

In India, 21 percent of the population is suffering from hunger and undernourishment. Due to poverty, out of children in the 6-13 age groups, 194 million are out of school. Of those children not in school, 68.3% have never been to a school. 31.7% are dropouts after one or more years of schooling, the danger zone being Class II-V. More girls than boys are out of school (6.18% of boys and 7.92% of girls).

Since independence in India, both government and non-governmental organizations (NGO) are experimenting many programmes for eradicating hunger and promotion of the education among underprivileged section of the society both in urban and rural India. Among the several schemes initiated by NGOs with help of Government to motivate the children below the age 16 to go to schools, mid day meal programme has been proved as a powerful incentive for children to come to schools and retain them in the school for effective learning.

The Akshaya Pathra Foundation - a largest NGO in the world is offering mid meal programmes to all most a million underprivileged children below the age of 16 years studying in 4,700 schools in 16 different locations in India.

The Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF), was set up in the year 2000 at Bangalore under the aegis of International Society for Krishna consciousness (ISCON) with a vision "No child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger" At present Akshaya Patra is one of the biggest initiative in the world to solve the two most serious problems of hunger & education.

Objectives and methods

Several NGOs with help of Government departments/agencies and corporate sector are working in the area of promotion of education by eradicating hunger. But most of them are working only in local areas with limited financial and human resources.
Akshaya Patra foundation, is the only NGO operating in the National level by making best use of latest technology and management to reach out millions of underprivileged children in India. This research paper attempts to understand the operations of “Aksha pathra” scheme and evaluates its impact on promotion of education among underprivileged children. So the present study intends to study the role of TAPF in the promotion of health and education by eradicating hunger. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. understand the organizational characteristics of The Akshaya patra
2. analyze the process of providing mid day meals by the sample NGO
3. assess the impact of Mid-day meal programme on education and health
4. suggest the measures to improve the present system

The secondary data for the present study is collected from, annual reports, websites and promotional materials of Akshaypathra and primary data is collected from the discussions and interviews with executives and officers who are involved in the operation of this scheme.

Contribution

The results of the study clearly shows that unlimited free food provided to school children by TAPF has increased the school enrollment, drop out and enhanced their overall personality development.