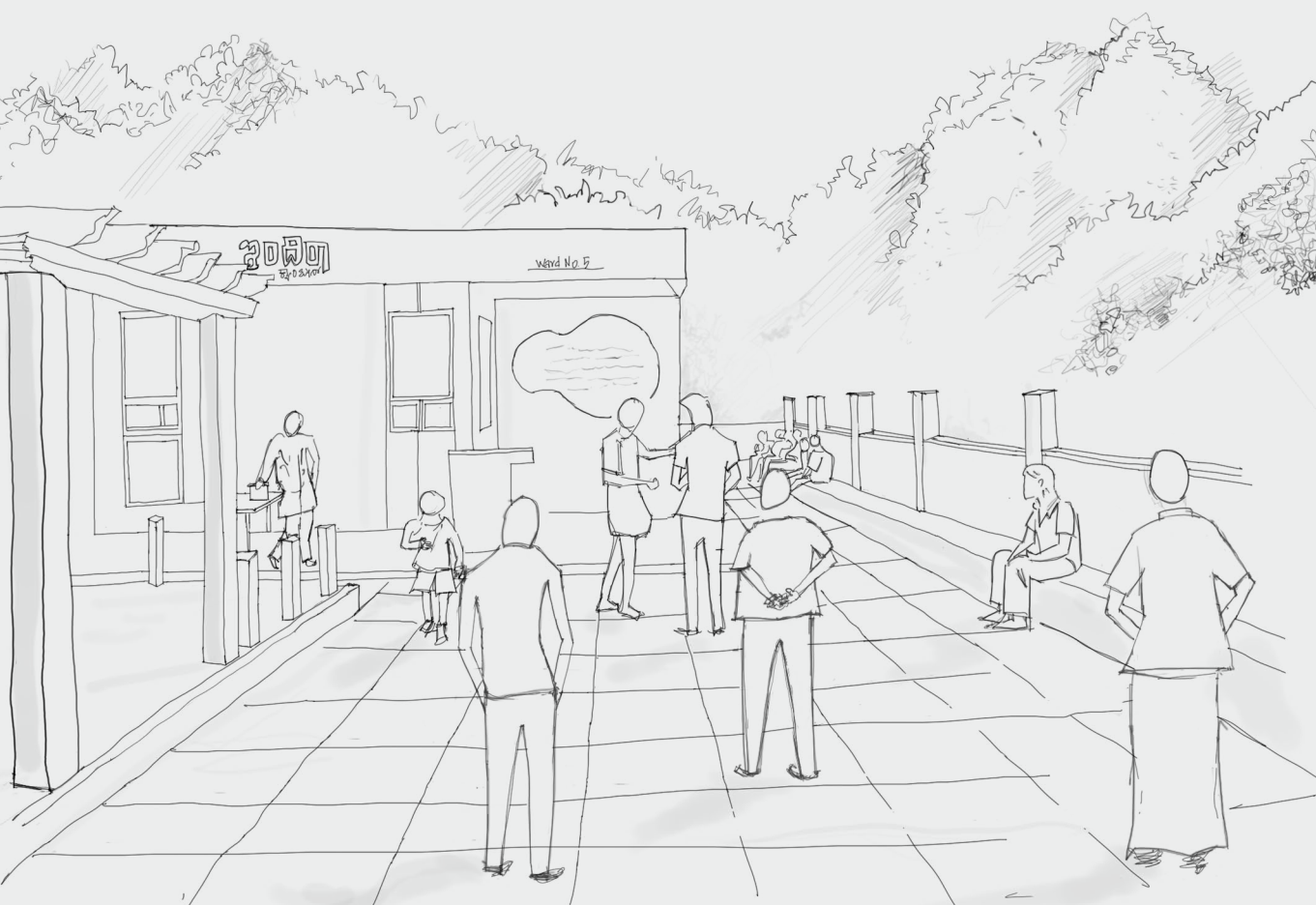


FOOD FOR ALL

**The Role of *Urban Canteens* in
Nourishing Communities**

Edited by
Gummadi Sridevi & Amalendu Jyotishi



FOOD FOR ALL

The Role of *Urban Canteens* in
Nourishing Communities

“The first essential component of social justice is adequate food for all mankind. Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world.”

~ Norman Borlaug, Biologist & Humanitarian

Edited by
Gummadi Sridevi & Amalendu Jyotishi

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January 2025

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Sridevi and Amal

01.

Introduction

Gummadi Sridevi [1] and Amalendu Jyotishi [2]

Food security subsists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996). The important six dimensions of the food security are availability, accessibility, utilisation, stability, agency, and sustainability help the nations to be adequately secured in terms of food. The production of food including grains, pulses, cereals, oil, milk and meat functions as the availability aspect. Prices, wages, land holding, expenditure, income, number of days employed, and indebtedness both in urban and rural areas intersected with social norms and identities functions as economic accessibility. Drinking water, sanitation, healthcare, maternal and child morbidity and mortality, and nutrition practices reflects on the utilisation aspect. Public Distribution System (PDS), Anganwadi centers, mid-day meal scheme, markets, MGNREGA, ICDS scheme and other institutions can be considered as ‘agency’ in provisioning economic access to food. With these four dimensions, the other two indicators namely, stability and sustainability mark the sufficiency of food and nutrition security in the short-term and long-term.

In recent years, malnutrition has risen significantly in India, particularly among women and children under five years of age. Research on the prevalence and causes of hunger remains limited; however, available studies highlight a precarious situation, with many individuals and households experiencing hunger intermittently. Data from NFHS 4 and 5 reports reveal concerning trends, such as an increase in anaemia, overweight children, and severe wasting among children under five years old (Jyotishi and Sridevi, 2021). Furthermore, a persistent caste-based disparity is evident, with stunting among children disproportionately affecting marginalised communities—a gap that either remains constant or widens as children age. This affects

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the children in their education, cognition and other skills and impacts the future income and lifestyle of the child (Deshpande and Ramachandran, 2020). As a result, the government's involvement in ensuring food security and nutritional sufficiency becomes crucial. Since independence, the government has implemented several programmes, such as the PDS, ICDS, Targeted PDS, mid-day meal programmes to name a few. These initiatives are part of the government's ongoing efforts to reduce food insecurity and improve the nutritional status of its citizens. However, India continues to struggle with issues like hunger, malnutrition, stunting and overweight children, which raises concerns about the effectiveness of the policies and their ability to meet requirements and address nutritional concerns.

In June 2021, NITI Aayog released a report highlighting that 11 states, including some of the most populous ones, scored below 50 out of 100 in their efforts to achieve zero hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic has further jeopardised India's food security across four critical dimensions: availability, access, stability, and utilisation of resources (Gummadi et al., 2021). This has raised concerns about the stability and sustainability of the nation's food systems, potentially exacerbating malnutrition among women and children.

According to NFHS-5 fact sheets for 22 states and Union Territories (UTs), chronic undernutrition has increased in 13 states/UTs, and the prevalence of underweight individuals has risen in 16 states/UTs, despite the implementation of state-supported programs like *Poshan Abhiyaan*. Alarming trends of underweight and anaemia among vulnerable populations have persisted across NFHS-3, NFHS-4, and NFHS-5.

NFHS-5 data reveals varying levels of nutritional insecurity across

states: Tamil Nadu exhibits relatively low levels of nutritional insecurity for wasting and stunting (≤ 30 percent), whereas Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh show moderate levels (31–40 percent). Gujarat, however, reports high nutritional insecurity in wasting (≥ 25 percent) and moderate levels in stunting (31–40 percent).

Additionally, Body Mass Index (BMI) is declining across several states, yet anaemia among women aged 15–49 years and infants remains a critical issue. Furthermore, obesity is notably increasing among urban adults compared to their rural counterparts, adding another layer of complexity to the nutritional challenges faced by the country.

The grim reality of malnutrition indicators in India highlights significant food insecurity challenges, particularly among urban populations. Many urban residents struggle to access adequate food due to poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and poor economic conditions. Urban migration, driven by poverty among rural marginal farmers and limited rural opportunities, has further intensified this issue. Migrants often join the unorganised workforce and settle in urban slums, where resource mobilisation to access food becomes a daily struggle.

According to the 2011 Census, approximately 377 million people—31.16 percent of India's population—live in urban areas (Office of the Registrar and Census Commissioner of India 2011a, b), marking an increase from 27.81 percent in 2001. Meanwhile, the rural population proportion declined from 72.19 percent to 68.84 percent (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India 2011b). Among the urban population, nearly 14 percent live below the poverty line. Projections suggest that India's urban population will exceed 550 million by 2030

(Gupta et al., 2009). However, access to public services remains a significant challenge for those residing in non-notified slums*, compounding the problem of malnutrition. Without targeted interventions, food insecurity in urban slums is expected to worsen as urban migration continues to rise.

Despite the rapid pace of urbanisation, research on food insecurity in urban areas remains sparse (Tacoli, 2019). Malnutrition levels among children in urban slums are alarmingly high, often exceeding those of rural children. Nutritional deficiencies such as protein-energy malnutrition (PEM), anaemia, and vitamin A deficiency persist in these populations (Ghosh and Shah, 2004; UHRC, 2008). Urban residents rely heavily on food purchases (Parra et al., 2015), yet the informal nature of much of the urban workforce, with its low and irregular wages, limits their purchasing power.

Additionally, nearly half of urban slums are non-notified, leaving their residents excluded from essential government schemes like the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) (Upadhyay and Palanivel, 2011). Poorer urban residents also face heightened risks of food-borne illnesses due to limited access to clean water and constrained choices for food sourcing. Addressing these systemic issues is critical to mitigating malnutrition and food insecurity in urban India.

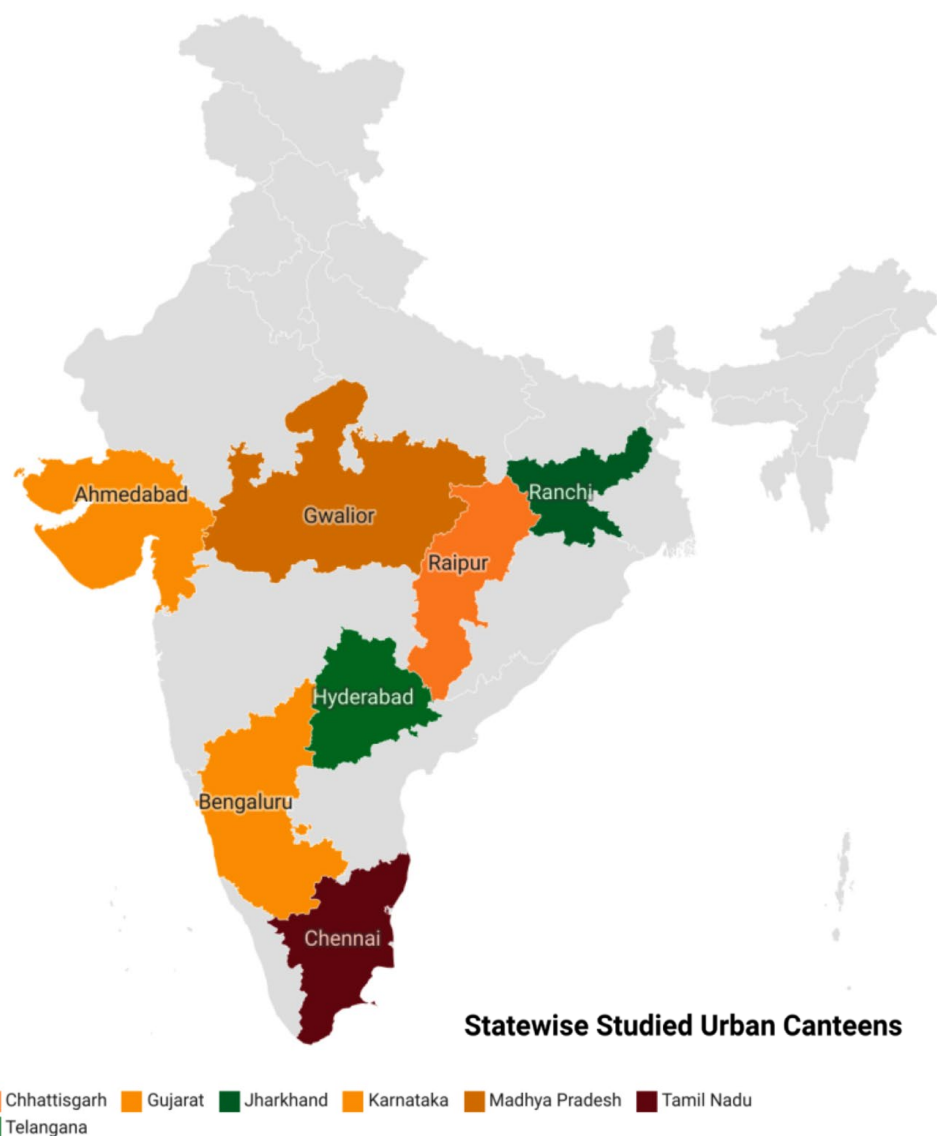
Many urban poor in India are excluded from basic government nutrition and health services, often because they reside in unauthorised settlements (Agarwal and Taneja, 2005). For instance, only 29 percent of India's urban poor possess Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards, which are essential for accessing subsidised food and other commodities through the Targeted Public Distribution System (PDS) (Press Information Bureau,

Government of India, 2007). Additionally, only 53.3 percent of urban poor children under six years of age live in areas served by Anganwadis, which are key grassroots providers of nutrition and health services under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program (Urban Health Resource Center, 2008).

Household food insecurity arises when a lack of financial resources leads to limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the inability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways. This encompasses undernutrition, hunger, perceptions of inadequate food quantity and quality, uncertainty in food supply, and experiences of going hungry (Carlson et al., 1999). When food insecurity becomes severe or prolonged, hunger is often a direct outcome (Coates et al., 2006).

In this context, we sought to understand the role of urban canteens in addressing food insecurity. Our study, conducted in Hyderabad (Telangana), Bengaluru (Karnataka), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh), Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Ahmedabad (Gujarat), and Ranchi (Jharkhand), reveals that urban canteens play a vital role in alleviating hunger and meeting the food needs of urban residents. The study reveals that these canteens serve as an essential safety net, especially for vulnerable populations, by providing affordable and accessible meals in urban areas.

During the initial phase of the pandemic lockdown in 2020, urban canteens emerged as critical sources of food for vulnerable groups. Our study examined various urban canteens across multiple cities, engaging with food providers, managers, and customers to understand the significance of these canteens in addressing urban food insecurity. We also observed their locations and footfall, noting how they cater to diverse groups such as students, informal workers, taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers,

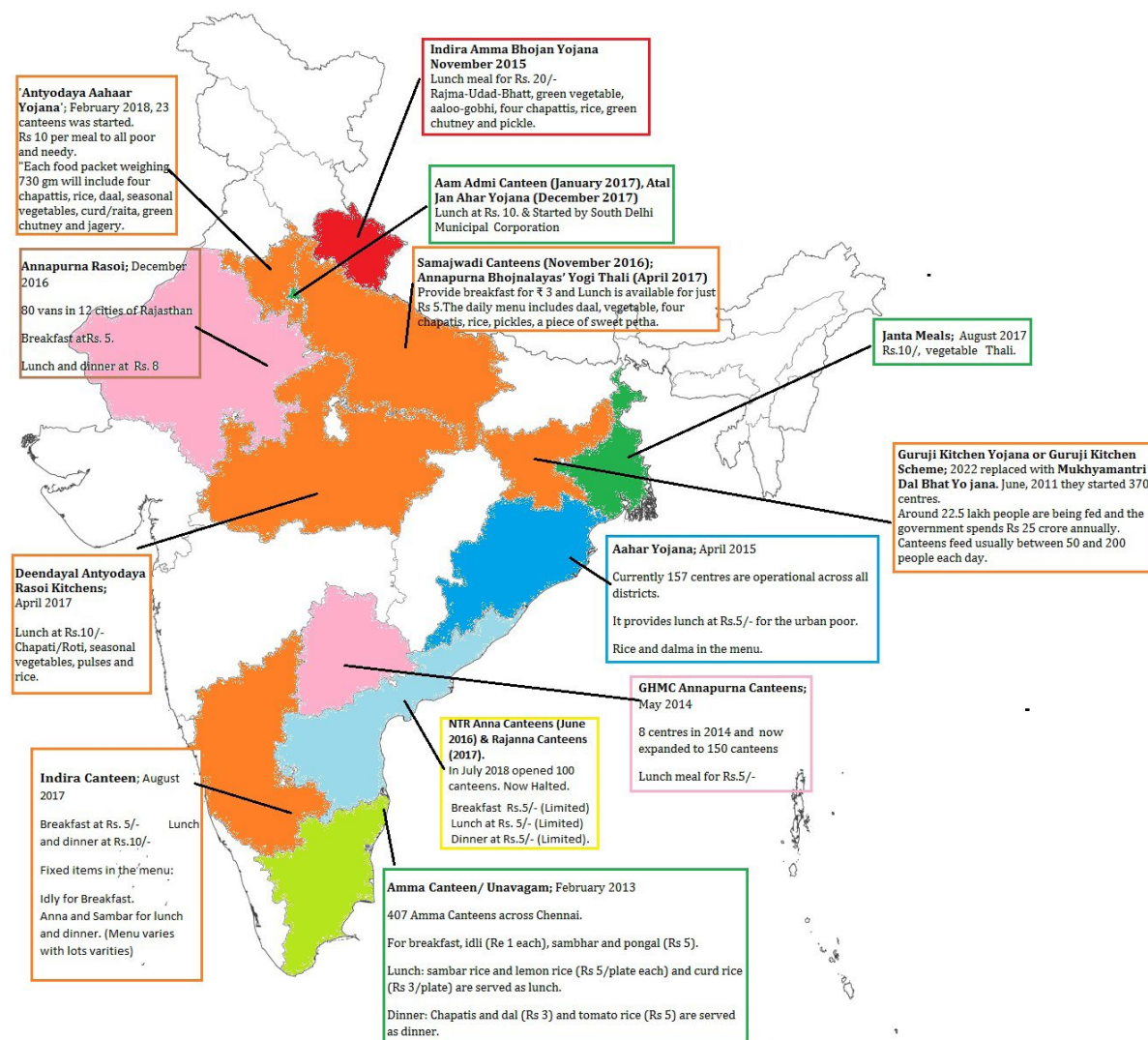


security guards, and others. Canteens situated near bus stops, hospitals, IT corridors, railway stations, slums, and factories were included in the study.

This book serves as a comprehensive collection of case studies from urban canteens in different cities and states. It aims to lay the groundwork for developing a robust policy framework to enhance food and nutrition security for the urban poor.

The chapters are structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1** introduces the concept of urban food security, outlining its complexities and emphasizing the need for community kitchens.
- **Chapter 2** examines Hyderabad's GHMC Annapurna Canteens, operated by the Hare Krishna Movement Charitable Foundation and the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). These canteens provide affordable meals in urban scape.
- **Chapter 3** focuses on Bengaluru's Indira Canteens, which offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner at subsidised rates.
- **Chapter 4** highlights Chennai's Amma Unavagams, a network of subsidised eateries that employ women from marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds while offering reasonably priced meals.
- **Chapter 5** explores the Deendayal Antyodaya Rasoi Scheme in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, which provides low-cost, nutritious meals.
- **Chapter 6** discusses the Shram Anna Kendra (formerly Annapurna Dal Bhat Scheme) in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, which serves subsidized meals to the urban workforce.
- **Chapter 7** examines Ahmedabad's Shramik Annapurna Yojana, a program by the Gujarat Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board that offers discounted, wholesome meals to registered construction workers.



Various Urban Canteens in India

Source: Designed by Author from respective state government website

- **Chapter 8** delves into the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana in Ranchi, Jharkhand, highlighting its successes, inefficiencies, and limitations while underscoring the need for community kitchens.
- **Chapter 9** spotlights the efforts of two civil society initiatives: the Thavamozhi Foundation in Coimbatore and Buvva Bandi in Hyderabad, both of which provide millet-based meals at their own expense.
- **Chapter 10** concludes with policy recommendations for improving urban canteens and addressing urban food and nutrition insecurity.

This compilation aims to shed light on the indispensable role of urban canteens in mitigating hunger and malnutrition in urban areas, offering insights into their potential to bring about sustainable change in food security frameworks.

02.

Annapurna Canteen

Hyderabad, Telangana

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[5] This chapter has also been published in *TheNewsMinute*. "Affordable food: Can Annapurna canteens in Telangana do better?", *The News Minute*, August 07, 2022.

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/affordable-food-can-annapurna-canteens-telangana-do-better-166606>

Affordable food: Can Annapurna canteens in Telangana do better? [5]

These canteens are not exclusively for the economically poor. The basic intent of these canteens is to see that no human should live in hunger or lead a food insecure existence.

The emerging concerns of urban food insecurity are acknowledged, yet its nuanced dimensions remain insufficiently explored. Higher urban economic growth need not by itself imply improved food access for all the segments of population. Recent challenges particularly, the pandemic and escalating food prices along with the decline in employment in urban India, have further aggravated the food insecurity. For the urban poor, access to food is predominantly dependent on monetary transactions, a reliance further strained by the predominance of unorganised and informal sector employment, that fetches low and irregular income.

This study aims to explore the role of the state-supported urban canteens towards enhancing food security in Hyderabad. While food production and market dynamics are well discussed in various forums, there is very little knowledge on how food ultimately reaches the plate. What constrains to individuals face in availing and accessing at least one meal per day? What role do the state and other institutions play in addressing food insecurity? This questions form the core of the study.

Annapurna canteens and urban food security

Telangana State Government introduced Annapurna canteens in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) in the year 2014. GHMC, in collaboration with the Hare Krishna Charities provides hygienic and safe food at ₹5 per meal. Popularly known

as the ‘Five rupees meal programme,’ it was officially termed as ‘Annapurna’ by the state government. The scheme had started at eight centres in 2014 and has now expanded to 150 centres serving approximately 25,000 meals a day. In this scheme, ₹5 is paid by the beneficiary and GHMC subsidises the remaining amount to the Hare Krishna Movement Charitable Foundation. The Hare Krishna Charity Kitchens serve around 6,750 kgs of rice, 5,265 litres of lentils and 4,500 kgs of curry, every single day.

These canteens are not exclusively for the economically poor. The basic intent of these canteens is to ensure that no human suffers from hunger or faces challenges of food insecurity. Located across Hyderabad these canteens serve a vast variety of population belonging to different economic, occupation, ethnic, religious, and gender identities. This study seeks to examine and understand how inclusive these canteens are in provisioning of food to various segments of the society and how exclusion manifests in various forms.

GHMC Telangana canteens provide only lunch for approximately four hours. We went to the canteens located across diverse demographic locations including the canteens near the bus stops, hospitals, IT corridor, and railway station. The food provided by each canteen varies every day. However, rice and sambar are a consistent in the menu.

Each canteen attracts a different composition of customers including the homeless on one end of the spectrum and junior doctors on the other. The supply volume differs across canteens depending upon the demand for the food. The canteen’s ambience varies across locations and the surrounding environment. While customers prefer to have a shelter and a place to sit and have

food at every canteen, these facilities however are available only in Hitech City, and Kukatpally Zonal Commissioner’s office. Canteens at Goods shed, Moosapet; Yellammabanda, Kukatpally and Yousufguda are poorly maintained despite attracting numerous customers. Several customers we interacted with, had complaints on the supply of water packets, lack of variety of vegetables in the menu, long queue, and unhygienic surroundings.

Location of the canteens matters in accessing them

Observations at the sales points revealed that the locations with high concentration of working urban population and bus stops had more sales. Canteens located at KPHB Metro Station and HiTech City Metro Station catered to a large number of consumers (approximately 700) during the lunch hours. The composition of the customers generally include low-income groups.

“If I have to eat in a hotel in this area, it would cost me around ₹100 per plate and here it is just ₹5. I can save more money eating here rather than eating in any hotel,” said one of the respondents availing the facility of the canteen at HiTech City, Madhapur canteen.

The number of rice cans supplied is also an indicator of food demand in each canteen. For example, canteens at HiTech City are supplied with 11 cans (approximately 25 kgs per can) of rice. These other canteens with a high supply of cans are on KPHB and Miyapur X Road and in Osmania General Hospital. In contrast, Moosapet Goods Shed and Nampally Station canteens sell about two rice cans each. The canteen at Hitech City attracts consumers ranging from homeless to the junior doctors who are working in the vicinity. Good ambience and aesthetic of the canteen is one of the important attractions across social and economic groups.



Canteen at HiTech City,
Hyderabad

“This canteen is well maintained. Only this canteen has seating arrangements among all canteens in Hyderabad. I have eaten in many canteens. But I like to have food in this canteen, because of the good ambience and it is hygienic,”* said one of the customers at HiTech City canteen.

Some canteens open at 10:30 am and close at 3:30 pm while some others open at 11:30 am and close by 1:30 pm. The functioning of the canteens also depends upon the demand and the perception of the respective canteen supervisor.

“I open this canteen at 10:30 am by seeing the public in front of the canteen for food. They work as maids, municipality women who sweep the roads, and slum population who live nearby,” said the canteen’s supervisor at Yellammabanda.

Proximity of the Canteen directly proportional to the number of customers

The canteens’ locality and the running time are major factors for some of the customers to utilise the canteen for their food needs.

Some localities have more than one canteen nearby while some do not have any. Lingampally has three canteens in close proximity and function around the same schedule. Nampally Gandhi Bhavan, Koti, MGBS, Patancheru, Beeramguda have proximity features. Others like Uppal, HiTech City and Osmania General Hospital do not have these features. Availability of canteens in close proximity helps the customers to avail the low-priced food provided by the Annapurna canteen.

“I have gone to Beeramguda canteen, it was closed, so I came here to have food as this canteen runs for longer time than that canteen,” said a customer at Patancheru Bus Stand canteen.

The respective canteens’ supervisors have varied opinions on the functioning of the canteen based upon the composition of the customers and location. At HiTech City, Miyapur X Roads, and Yousufguda canteens, the supervisors opine that the canteen benefits the homeless more and it is providing good food at cheaper price. The remuneration is based upon the sale of rice cans each day and is fixed at ₹1.10 paise per customer. On an



Canteen at Moosapet,
Hyderabad

average, they earn ₹7,000 per month. Most of the supervisors across the canteens in Hyderabad are male. The Patancheru and KP Zonal Commissioner's Office, Moosapet are the only exceptions having female supervisors.

In some canteens, management has hired employees to serve food on a part-time basis. They serve the food in the stipulated functioning time and get back to another work.

"I have been working here since the inception of the canteen. I see a variety of people coming here. Ranging from beggars, students, to auto drivers, labours and even drunkards. Some people ask for more food, and more water packets, but I cannot give, since it is fixed for one person. They eat and wash their hands here only. Some people put the plates in the dustbin and some throw and make this place dirty," said a canteen supervisor near the Patancheru Bus Stand.

Food quality better in Hyderabad area

Composition of the customers of the canteens vary across the locations of the city. In the Secunderabad area, the majority of the customers include construction workers, daily wage earners, vegetable sellers, auto drivers, and a good number of homeless. Whilst, in the Hyderabad area, the composition of the customers included food and other delivery boys, taxi drivers, entry level IT professionals, hospital employees, and GHMC workers. Our interactions revealed that the perception of food quality varies across the locations. One of the determining factors could be the composition of the customers. Food quality was found to be low in Secunderabad areas compared to Hyderabad areas.



A person with a walker at Osmania Hospital, Afzalgunj



Customer complaining at a canteen in Secunderabad

"I know that we do not get food anywhere at this rate but see this curry, the potato is unpeeled, rice is not cooked properly and it is hard, they have added flour in sambar for its thickness. I appreciate the government's idea to give food to us at cheaper rates but if they can also look into the quality, we will be very happy," said a mason at Chilakalaguda canteen in Secunderabad.

"Rice is not cooked and curry is bad. If I want to eat at a hotel I can, but I have to save money, so I come to this canteen to have food at a cheaper rate. Government has to look into this issue and provide us with a good quality of food," said a person who works as a security guard at the same canteen.

But the views have been found to be varying customer to customer. While a few people found the food quality to be bad, Taxi, auto, and truck drivers found the canteen's food quality to be adequately good. These people travel through the city and avail services of various canteens whereas the first set of customers work near a particular canteen and eat food from the same canteen on a regular basis.

The composition of the canteen's supervisor varies across the canteens and depending on the situation can make them vulnerable to various threats.

"I have been working here since the lockdown. I have been verbally abused by the customers if I do not give extra water packets, food quality is found to be bad. I complained to the concerned people, but received no help, instead they said, it will be like that only and I have to manage the situation. It is becoming very difficult for me to

serve food,” said the female supervisor at one of the canteens.

During lockdown the government kept the canteens open and provided free meals through a chain of 250 canteens in their respective geographical boundaries, with a sole purpose of serving the needy. Patient attendees, daily wage workers, hawkers, people living in shelter homes, and others have availed the service of these canteens during the lockdown.

Hygiene and ambience of the surrounding is one of the neglected areas across most of the canteens. Interestingly, recently GHMC had initiated to serve the food in a thin paper plate kept over a plastic plate. Each canteen was given approximately 60 plastic plates. Customers were expected to consume the food in the green thin plate, put the plastic plate as a base and should return the plastic plate after their consumption. But supervisors across canteens had complained that many customers were not returning the plastic plates. It is difficult for them to chase the customers for not returning the plastic plates.

Need to make the canteens more customer friendly

Making the canteens accessible, hygienic, and providing basic infrastructure and proper seating arrangements can attract various segments of the population who are hungry and looking for affordable good quality food. It is equally important to make these canteens accessible to various strata of the society including women and children. For this, the place needs to be felt safe for the canteen supervisors and customers alike. Having women serve the role of canteen service provision can help in making the canteens more accessible for the women customers as observed in Amma's canteens in Tamil Nadu.

Branding the canteens for the poor may be counterproductive.

Along with food, affordable safe drinking water is another challenge the city dwellers face. Integrating adequate drinking water provision in these canteen premises would be always be a plus. Furthermore, women self-help groups (SHGs) can play an important role in such basic food provisioning services. This requires the state's willingness and proactiveness in engaging them in this service. It will not only be useful towards addressing food security, but also livelihood security of the women engaged in the services. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise urban food insecurity is a glaring issue that needs urgent and large-scale intervention by the state in provisioning affordable nutritious food. These should go beyond a few cities as examples and reach to the urban-scape of the entire nation.

Indira Canteen

Bengaluru, Karnataka

Gummadi Sridevi [1] Amalendu Jyotishi [2]

Vijaya Priya S. [6] and Malavika KS. [7]

Food security: Why Karnataka's Indira Canteens need revival? [8]

After COVID-19, the lack of funding, unchanged menu and sidelining of the initiative had led to the decline of customers to Indira Canteens.

The 2022 Global Hunger Index report has ranked India 106 out of 121 countries. With a score of 29.1, India is stratified as an economy under the serious category stage. With rapid urbanisation, the epicentre of hunger and food insecurity is rapidly shifting towards the urban region. Karnataka's poverty rate in the urban area stands at 15.25 percent, which is higher than the national average of 13.7 percent. Bengaluru's rapid wealth creation is evidenced by the fact that it contributes 36 percent of the state's GDP on its own, but this has no discernible impact on the plight of those living in poverty here.

We look at Karnataka's Indira Canteens that went through a dormant phase and will be revived now. The canteens began

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[8] This chapter has also been published in *TheNewsMinute*. "Affordable food: Can Annapurna canteens in Telangana do better?", *The News Minute*, August 07, 2022.

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/affordable-food-can-annapurna-canteens-telangana-do-better-166606>



Canteen at Jeevan Bhima Nagar

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
BREAKFAST ₹5/-	Idli OR Puliyogare	Idli OR Kharabath	Idli OR Pongal	Idli OR Rava Khichidi	Idli OR Chitranna	Idli OR Vangibath	Idli OR Kharabath & Kesribath
LUNCH/DINNER ₹10/-	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Tomato Bath & Curd Rice	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Chitranna & Curd Rice	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Vangibath & Curd Rice	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Bisi Bele Bath & Curd Rice	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Menthya Pulao & Curd Rice	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Puliyogare & Curd Rice	White Rice Veg Sambar & Curd Rice OR Pulao & Curd Rice

Canteen food menu and price list

service on August 16, 2017. There are now over 101 canteens across Bengaluru. The purpose of these canteens were to provide affordable, hygienic and quality meals to the hungry. Indira canteen provides three-time meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The breakfast includes puliyogare, kharabath, pongal and rava khichadi. Lunch is mostly sambar, curd rice, and at times kheer along with pickle. The dinner menu includes tomato bath, vegetable bath, bisi bele bath and curd rice. The canteens open for each meal and close down after the stipulated time. The timing for canteens for breakfast, lunch, and dinner are from 7:30 am-10 am, 12:30 pm- 3 pm, and 7:30 pm- 9 pm, respectively.

The canteens provide hygienic, nutritious food at ₹5 for breakfast and ₹10 for meals. We surveyed and interacted with 100 customers in 25 canteens across Bengaluru between December 2022 and March 2023. We observed that Indira Canteens were accessed by students, UPSC aspirants, auto drivers, hospital staff, construction workers, other daily wage workers, and many more categories of people.

Attracting cross-section of people

The canteens attract people of various ages and work cultures including students as well as construction workers and other individuals engaged in informal employment. A significant number of students and paramedics were observed visiting the canteen near the KC General Hospital in ward 71 (Dattatreya Temple) during the survey. Canteens located near metro stations and along the main roads, like the one in Ward 105, Agrahara Dasarahalli near Kuvempu metro station were observed to be filled with students from the nearby PU college and workers. There was a canteen in Attiguppe situated close to several UPSC coaching institutes, where civil service aspirants were regular visitors as they found it affordable.

Very popular with the student community

In general, Indira Canteens are visited by the student community, especially the college and PU students. The reasons for relying on Indira Canteens can be various, such as lunch not being provided at homes, affordability and accessibility.

“The food is fine. I have it whenever I can. Sometimes the menu gets too repetitive that I choose to have it from another place though it will not be as economical as here,” says Vishnu, a student who visits the Indira canteen in Madivala.

The canteen menu has been prepared according to the daily nutritional requirement. But as stated by Vishnu, many beneficiaries put forth the need for a change in the food items provided in the canteen rather than being repetitive. They say this will help increase the number of beneficiaries accessing the canteens. Some of the supervisors claimed that after the 2018 election, and especially after 2019, the canteens received less attention. The change in contractors during this period also led to changes in the food menu.

“The rates are the key attraction for people coming to the canteens,” said Manjunath, a graduate, who was accompanied by his friends in the Adugodi canteen. Among the hundred respondents, when asked about the main reason to visit the canteens, all of them unanimously voted for affordability. The price at which food is provided is affordable, which makes people access the canteen service whereas ‘having a meal from a hotel would cost around a minimum of Rs 100 said one of the respondents. The food menu and quality across different canteens were the same.

Most canteens were visited by auto drivers, students and construction workers. Even the supervisors of most of the canteens stated that there were comparatively fewer female customers. Kannadiga visitors frequented the canteens more than migrant populations from other states. Out of 100 customers we interacted with, 72 were Kannadigas and 28 were from outside the state. We also found that the canteens were accessed by a majorly by the male population. It is, therefore, important to make the canteen more accessible to the female and other genders.

Customer satisfaction linked to their income levels

We found that beneficiaries’ satisfaction levels were negatively correlated with their income levels. Beneficiaries with lower incomes are more satisfied with the canteen services than those in the higher income brackets. Regarding the level of income and frequency of visits by the beneficiaries to the canteen, our results show that the beneficiary with a higher income visits the canteen fewer times than the beneficiary with a lower income. This also indicates that the canteen services are utilised more by the people who are in need and depend on this affordable canteen to address their hunger and food insecurity. However, there is a danger in branding these canteens for poor or low-income groups as it may

prevent a genuinely hungry person from accessing affordable food. After all, food security, by definition, is the availability and access to food to everyone at all times.

When it came to infrastructure, out of twenty-five canteens visited, most of them were surrounded by trees making it possible for the visitors to have food outdoors even during a hot summer afternoon. All the Indira Canteens have both indoor and outdoor facilities to have food but there are no seating facilities. Canteens look the same in terms of structural attributes (grey-coloured walls and green gates) making them easy to spot. There are handwash facilities and drinking water cans provided in the canteen premises. Most of the customers wanted the canteen to be more hygienic, especially the drinking water provision. It was seen in earlier times, the canteen staff and workers were in uniforms and caps. During the COVID-19 period, they followed necessary precautions such as wearing masks, caps, gloves, etc. However, none of the practices were followed throughout our visits to the canteens.

No food wastage, but low footfall a problem

As per the Annual Administration Report of the Directorate of Municipal Administration, there are 248 Indira Canteens, out of which 171 canteens have kitchens and 77 as canteen outlets. There are 15 master kitchens. Some of the canteens we visited were serving food delivered from the master kitchens located in Kempegowda Nagar and TC Palya.

None of the canteens we visited reported food wastage as a problem. The problem they face now though is low footfall. Some of the supervisors of the canteens also mentioned that post-COVID, the canteens are seeing a huge decline in customers. Higher footfall and timely release of funds would make the



Canteen at Vidyaranyapura

canteens a viable option for the contractors.

The location of the canteens too, play an important role in the footfall at the canteen. The Indira Canteens in Vasanth Nagar are always seen crowded for breakfast. The canteen in Hoodi was filled with construction workers and students during lunchtime. At the same time, canteens like the one in ward 51, Vignanapura, situated a bit far from the main roads and bus stops, were found to be empty.

Effect of funding crunch on the canteens

Indira Canteens was a success in the initial years of its implementation when people used to wait for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, queuing in front of the canteens just before their opening time. But after the change in regime in 2019, it saw neglect and political blame games about the quality of the food served. In the fiscal years 2017–18 and 2018–19, the canteens were supported with funding of ₹100 and ₹45 crores, respectively. No funds for the Indira Canteens scheme were released in 2020-

21 and 2021-22, resulting in a fund crunch to run the canteens. For the year 2022-23, the BBMP budget allocation for Indira canteen was only ₹60 crores without any additional budgetary allocation from the state government, a substantial decrease from the initial allocation, given for the operation of the canteens in the years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

The effects of reduced fund allocations were observed in delayed bill payments, non-payment of wages, and closure of several canteens. Many contractors claimed they had not been paid in full, leaving some canteens without access to water, electricity, and other necessities. Several canteens were left without water due to a payment dispute with the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), rendering those canteens unable to function effectively.

Why fewer women are accessing the canteens

The canteen supervisors have been appointed by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the workers, appointed by various service providers on a contract basis. The workers were mostly men and women were seen in only a few canteens engaged in cleaning activities. This is also one important consideration as to why there is less footfall of female customers in these canteens.

“Before COVID-19, there were six workers in the canteen including me, two for serving, two for cleaning, one cashier, and a Marshall, but post-COVID, the number of workers in the canteen have drastically scaled down to two and three,” says one of the Marshalls at a canteen. One of the canteens in Marathahalli when visited was functioning from a truck as there was ongoing construction where the canteen was earlier situated. The truck was crowded with people all around and there were only two

workers, making it difficult for the functioning of the canteen.

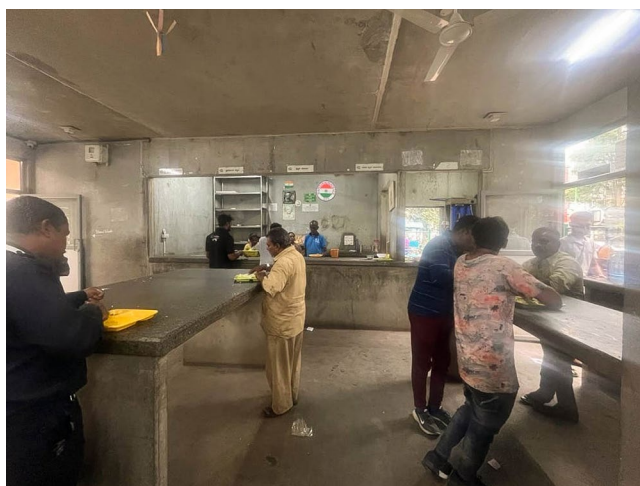
“It has been months since the workers in the canteens have received their wages. They are not even able to leave their job and go as they have to receive a pending salary of 3-4 months. Amma (cleaning staff) is working here for months without getting her wages. I feel bad about them. They are really poor and work on a contract basis under a company,” said a Marshall at one of the canteens.

Out of 100 beneficiaries who interacted during the survey, 62 percent were male and just 38 percent were females. According to the supervisors, most of the canteens were also visited by men more than women and there wasn't a single canteen that was said to be visited by women more than men.

Most women opted to go to the canteen only when they didn't bring their food or when the canteen was near their workspace. Some would occasionally stop by the nearest Indira Canteens while on their way to some other place rather than specifically intending to have a meal there.

Most of the canteens have male workers and supervisors. On our visits to canteens, only one canteen in ward 51, Vijanapura, was found to have a female supervisor and workers, or the others had just one cleaning staff as female.

It is essential to understand this gap and make efforts to increase the female population's access to the service. One of the main ways to achieve this will



Mild crowd at Jeevan Bhima Nagar

be the employment of more females into supervisor posts and the incorporation of females in the workforce. This will attract more women and girls to access the service. It is also essential to focus on creating awareness about the canteens and their latest changes, such as changes in the menu and giving more emphasis on cleanliness and proper infrastructure will increase the number of people visiting the canteens in general and also will help in increasing female participation.

The Indira Canteens play an important role in providing affordable food to address the hunger of people from various walks of life. The second observation is that the canteens are unable to attract women customers. The location of these canteens needs to be perceived safe for the women customers. The current structure of the contracts reinforces male dominance in managing the canteens. A proactive structural change to prioritise women like giving the contract to women Self Help Groups (SHGs), as in the case of Tamil Nadu, or to Kudumbashree in Kerala, could help to make the canteens' perception safer for women and provide additional livelihood to the women SHGs.

Hunger is not something to trifle with. Addressing food insecurity and hunger in urban areas requires strong political will and proactive state intervention. These efforts must go beyond merely ensuring food security to also tackling nutrition insecurity, with a focus on expansion, improved timing, and enhanced quality. There is a pressing need to extend the reach of these canteens beyond Bengaluru to other urban regions of Karnataka.

Amma Canteen

Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Ganga S. [9] and Gummadi Sridevi [1]

Utilisation and Impact of Amma Unavagams [10]

Amma Unavagams, commonly referred to as Amma Canteens, are a well-known example of food security initiatives in Tamil Nadu. These canteens provide affordable meals, significantly benefiting underprivileged communities. Beyond addressing food security, they also contribute to women's empowerment and livelihood security by creating employment opportunities. Additionally, civil society organisations in Chennai play a crucial role in complementing government efforts to tackle urban food insecurity through awareness campaigns and support initiatives. By examining these components, we can better understand the multifaceted issues of food security and the value of teamwork in finding long-term solutions.

Examining the role of Amma canteens in enhancing food security

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the role of Amma Canteens in enhancing food security. The following sections present data and insights on the socio-economic profiles of customers, reasons for their preference for Amma Canteens, and the frequency of visits. Additionally, the study explores customers' experiences of food insecurity using a standardised scale, complemented by field observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these canteens.

The table below depicts the socio-economic demography of customers visiting Amma canteens. Over 85 percent of the respondents were men and the rest 15 percent are women. In some canteens among the 15 canteens visited, there were no single women who came to eat. Women customers who come to eat, majorly fall under the sanitation work or the security workers. And some women among them were home makers.

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[10] This study has been submitted as a part of MA project dissertation titled, "Role Of Amma Canteens In Providing Urban Food Security And Women Empowerment - A Study Focused On Chennai"

Socio-Economic conditions of customers visiting the canteen

Source: Primary Survey, 2024

S No	Socio Economic Indicators	Percentage
01.	Gender	
	i. Male	85
	ii. Female	15
02.	Age Group	
	i. 20- 30	23.61
	ii. 31- 40	29.86
	iii. 41- 50	25
	iv. 51- 60	12.5
	v. 61- 70	7.64
	vi. 71- 80	1.39
03.	Religion	
	i. Hindu	86.11
	ii. Christian	12.5
	iii. Muslim	1.39
04.	Social Community	
	i. FC	3.47
	ii. OBC	52.08
	iii. SC	38.89
	iv. ST	2.78
	v. Not willing to say	2.78
05.	Education	
	i. Illiterate	13.19
	ii. Primary and Upper Primary	39.94
	iii. Secondary	18.06
	iv. Higher Secondary	13.19
	v. Graduation	6.94
	vi. Technical Education	16.67

06.	Employment	
	i. Daily wage	38.2
	ii. Self employed	7.6
	iii. Convenience workers	11.1
	iv. Student	3.5
	v. Unemployed	2.1
	vi. Home makers	3.5
	vii. Private employees	15.3
	viii. Retail industry workers	18.8
07.	Income	
	i. Below and equal to ₹2000	4.17
	ii. ₹2001- ₹5000	5.56
	iii. ₹5001- ₹10000	22.92
	iv. ₹10001- ₹15000	35.42
	v. ₹15001- ₹20000	13.89
	vi. ₹20001- ₹25000	9.72
	vii. ₹25001- ₹30000	3.47
	viii. Above ₹35000	2.78

Though working women visit the canteen, it is not very often. And women in majority cases will cook for their husbands and children and they will take that packed food to their workspace. From the observation few working women stated that if they skip cooking then they will eat in the canteen which is rare or sometimes. Also once their working hours are done women prefer to go home quickly other than staying up late outside and eating food in the nearby working area. At night time most of the canteens which are visited didn't have the arrival of working women consumers to the canteen but homemakers who stay in the same locality were visiting in few canteens. The canteens are

located in various parts of Chennai which includes hospitals, industrial areas, markets and the other public spaces. Men make up the majority of the workforce participation in these localities compared to women. This might be one of the reasons for the lower number of women visiting the canteens.

The data indicates that visitors to Amma Canteen span a wide age range, suggesting that the site appeals to a diverse variety of demographics. The age range of 31 to 40 is the highest, followed by 41 to 50 and 20 to 30. These three age groups make up the third largest group of canteen beneficiaries. The canteen may be regularly used by working professionals or those nearing the top of their professions with respect to age, as evidenced by the high representation of the 31- 40 and 41- 50 age groups. For convenient, reasonably priced meals during working hours or while, these groups may depend on Amma Canteen. With 22.61 percent of the population in the 20–30 age range, Amma Canteen is also frequented by younger adults and those in the early stages of their careers. Convenience and affordability may



Amma Canteen in Chennai

draw this demographic, particularly if they're on a tight budget or reside in adjacent cities. From the observation from this age group samples, two bachelors stated that tea itself is enough for them if they don't have enough money they can survive with tea. Amma canteens play a vital role in enhancing urban food security in this way also we can say. Instead of drinking tea by giving 10 rupees one can eat 2 meals in this canteen.

The data depicts the minor representation of senior age group people, there is a decline in representation as the age of consumers increases. This trend also might reflect the lower level of workforce participation when the age increases.

The table depicts the religious percentage of customer respondents visiting the canteen. Around 86 percent respondents were from the Hindu background followed by the minorities such as Christians with 12.5 percent and Muslims with 1.39 percent. The proportion is broadly representative of the population proportion across religions.

Forward castes often represent higher socio-economic status. Only 3.47 percent people from the forward castes visiting the urban canteens in Chennai. From the data it is clear that Amma Canteens align with its objectives by providing food at affordable price which creates an easy accessibility to people who are hungry, across the spectrum of class, caste, and religion. Around 52 percent of customer respondents are from other backward castes and the second highest is followed by the scheduled caste respondents with 38 percent. ST respondents contributed the lowest percentage which is 2.78 percent who were less in terms of population as well. The remaining 2.78 percent of the respondents stated that they are not willing to reveal their social group. The graph depicts that the people from other background classes are

likely to get more benefit out of the canteens.

The data collected for the educational attainment shows that 13.19 percent of consumers were illiterate, according to the data; 31.94 percent had completed elementary or upper primary school; 18.06 percent had completed secondary school; 13.19 percent had completed higher secondary school; 6.94 percent had earned a degree; and 16.67 percent had received technical education and training. These results imply that the customer base served by Amma Canteens is varied in terms of their level of education. The comparatively high percentage of customers with lower education levels (45.13 percent with only primary or higher primary education) suggests that Amma Canteens are significantly improving food security for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, as technical education can result in better career possibilities, the significant percentage of Amma Canteens' customers (16.67 percent) may potentially have an impact on availability of food and livelihood stability.

Given that a significant percentage of Amma Canteens' customers are self-employed (7.6 percent), private employees (15.3 percent), and convenience store personnel (11.1 percent) indicates that their customer base is more varied than simply the urban poor. This suggests that, in line with the first goal, the canteens are contributing more broadly to address hunger and improving food security for all socioeconomic categories in the urban area. 3.5 percent of consumers who are women who stay at home have informed us about the impact of Amma Canteen on women's security of income and empowerment. Amma Canteens may be allowing these women to focus more of their time and energy on other useful tasks instead of only cooking by offering affordable and healthy alternatives to food. However, the data also reveals that daily wage workers (3.2 percent) and the jobless



A female employee in the canteen

(2.1 percent) make up a significant portion of the customers. This implies that Amma Canteens are, in fact, providing assistance to vulnerable and impoverished urban communities, which is essential to improving food security.

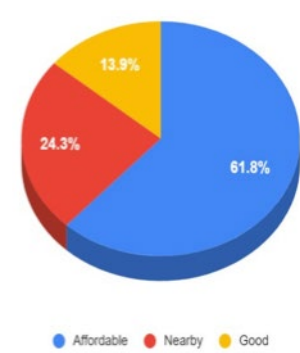
With an emphasis on the urban lower-middle and middle-income sectors, the income data from the above table 4.1 for income range customers, shows that Amma Canteens are catering to a wide range of customers, which is essential for improving food security.

It appears that the majority of Amma Canteens' customers are urban lower-middle-class and middle-class individuals, as indicated by the high percentage of consumers (67.65 percent) who make between ₹5,001 and ₹15,000 per month. This is in keeping with the goal of investigating how Amma Canteens can improve food security because individuals in these economic groups are more likely to experience food insecurity. The fact that

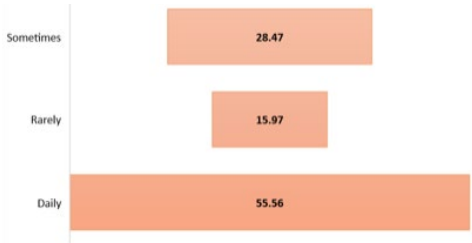
9.73 percent of customers make between ₹20,001 and ₹25,000 per month and 5.55 percent make ₹25,001 or more suggests that Amma Canteens also serve higher-class customers. The program's wider reach across socioeconomic groups may have an impact on women's empowerment and livelihood stability because it offers reasonably priced and nutrient-dense food options to homes with different income levels. But the programme may not be reaching the urban extreme poor to the full extent, though, given that only 4.17 percent of consumers make ₹2,000 or less a month.

Affordability, a major objective of Amma Canteens became real. It can be seen from the figure that, major chunk of the respondents, which is around 61 percent, stated that they visit the canteen instead of other street fast food shops or street stalls. It is true that we couldn't find any street food stalls nearby the amma canteens when the scheme got implemented. They faced huge losses due to this scheme. Then again after some years they started giving entry in the market. Around 13.9 percent stated that the food provided in the canteen is good and healthy compared to other hotels where for profit adulteration will take place. The remaining 24.3 percent stated that the canteen is nearby and accessible from the work place. For example, from the observed canteen location let us take the Industrial area in Ambattur where there are no private restaurants, hotels and street food stalls. To get food itself the workers of industrial areas have to walk more outside. The Amma canteens' arrival and its affordability as well as food served better than hotels made them prefer it. Because of the wider location and sales there are two canteens in a nearby distance in some places.

Amma canteens won't give parcel food like any hotels. People who want to take food home will carry boxes along with them. The majority of the respondents don't take parcels which is around 66



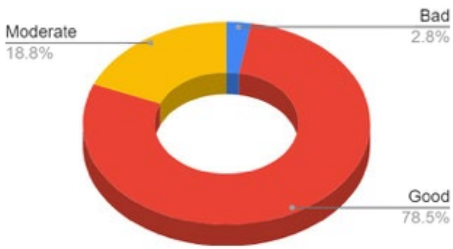
Reason for preferring Amma Canteen
Source: Primary Survey 2024



Frequency of customers visiting Amma Canteen
Source: Primary Survey 2024

percent. Followed by 33 percent respondents who take parcels. Those respondents who take parcels will be for themselves, colleagues in the working area, if the canteen is located in the hospital then the attendees of patients will take parcels to their relatives who got admitted in the hospital or nearby attendees of other patients who they know.

The figure shows that most of the customers visit Amma canteens on a daily basis which is nearly half of the respondents 55.56 percent. This large proportion suggests that the canteens are a popular spot to eat on a regular basis and that they contribute significantly to the urban poor's daily food services. That is followed by people visiting sometimes which is 28 percent and the remaining 15 percent are visitors who prefer the canteens very rarely. These respondents or the customers who are visiting the canteens rarely have other places to eat and their consumption pattern varies. The majority of the people who stated that they visit sometimes, have their food packed from home.

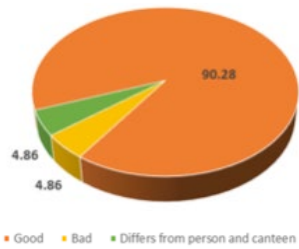


View on food taste and quality
Source: Primary Survey 2024

The figure depicts the consumers' level of satisfaction and opinion on the food taste and quality. 2.8 percent of the respondents directly stated that the taste and quality is bad. Their income levels were also lower and they were eating regularly in the canteen. People who are earning more responded that the food is moderate and good. The majority of the consumers who responded, which is 78 percent, stated that the food is good. The remaining 18.8 percent respondents said that they get a moderate level of satisfaction from the taste and quality which they elaborate by saying for ₹5 they can't expect more quality. For the money paid the food is okay and they can

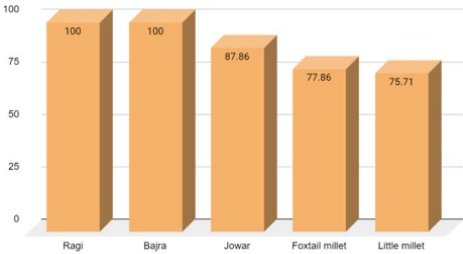
manage. When asked a little deeper, what else can be done for the canteens improvement and sales increase. The respondents started opening up with the quality can be little more and the food provided can be with some vegetables at least. In hospitals also they provide watery sambhar and rice looks plain.

The figure depicts the respondents feedback on the employees of Amma canteen. The majority of respondents over 90.26 percent had good experience with the workers and never faced any kind of issues with them. The rest 4.86 had a bad experience with them. Stated that they were verbally abused by the workers of Amma canteen and few mentioned that they even thought of not visiting the canteens again because of the employees nature and the way of speaking. Those respondents stated that we are poor coming here to eat because of the affordability and who are they to abuse us in such a way that our entire day will be ruined. The left out 4.86 percent stated that the worker’s attitude depends on the person and the canteen also. It varies from place to place and person to person.

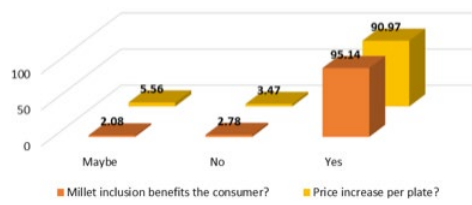


Customers feedback on employees
Source: Primary Survey 2024

Over 100 percent of the respondents were aware of Ragi and Bajra, reflecting just how popular they are. Jowar is quite close behind, showing significant familiarity with a knowledge level of 87.86 percent. At 77.86 percent, foxtail millet has a comparatively lower awareness than little millet, which is nevertheless reasonably high at 75.71 percent. All things considered, Ragi and Bajra are the most well-known millets, followed in decreasing order of awareness by Jowar, Foxtail millet, and Little millet. According to figure respondents appear to be generally well- informed on the different varieties of millet.

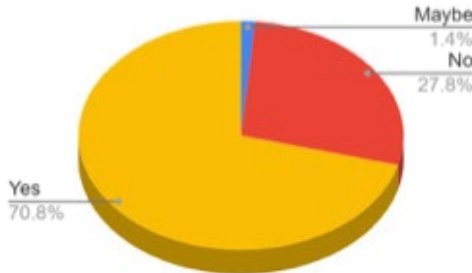


Awareness on type of millets
Source: Primary Survey 2024



Opinion of millet inclusion benefit and price increase per plate
Source: Primary Survey 2024

Around 95 percent who stated yes, when asked, does millet inclusion in the menu benefits the consumer are aware about the benefits and stated it is healthy. 2 percent who responded that it won’t benefit the consumer, stated that the people got habituated to the usual food, they won’t feel satisfied and won’t prefer to eat. Similarly 90 percent of the respondents stated Yes when asked about their opinion that price increases if millet is being included in the menu. That is because of their knowledge on trends in the prices of food products and the awareness about the benefits of millets. Around 2.78 percent of the respondents stated that millet inclusion won’t benefit consumers because people got used to this existing food consumption pattern. Other than that 3.47 percent respondents stated that the prices won’t increase by stating that people got habituated furthermore if price increased then a bad impression will be created on the government. Similarly, the rest of the respondents which is 2.08 percent stated maybe the millet inclusion benefit the consumers. Which draws an understanding that the respondents who stated maybe are not much aware and doesn’t have any idea on it. The remaining 5.57 percent respondents stated maybe the price may increase. From that response we can see that they are not aware of these.

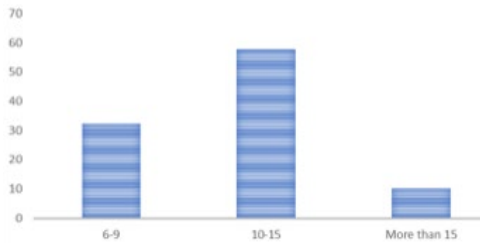


Willingness to pay for the millets
Source: Primary Survey 2024

Although the consumption pattern is different, the people are concerned about health and wellbeing, they get healthy food at an affordable price compared to the hotels and other areas people prefer to buy in the affordable urban canteens as a rational consumer. Thus around 70 percent of the respondents were willing to pay more per plate if millet is included in the menu. The remaining 27 percent respondents stated that they can’t pay more

because of their vulnerable living conditions and are accustomed to the existing price.. At the last 1.4 percent of the respondents stated that they may pay more or they may not pay more per plate for the millet inclusion. Which means that those respondents were not aware about it at present and it depends on that time how much they can afford for it.

The figure depicts that among the respondents who are willing to pay more per plate if there is millet inclusion in the menu, around 57 percent responded that they can pay ₹10 to ₹15. This is because of the respondents ability to pay and because of their knowledge on the benefits of millets. Followed by 32 percent of the respondents stated that they can pay more ₹6 to ₹9. This shows their inability to pay more than the other group of people. 10 percent of the respondents are willing to pay more than ₹15. That is because of their ability and better working and living conditions. Moreover in the normal street porridge shop itself the price of porridge will be around ₹15 to ₹30 depending on the quantity. If the same millet is provided in any hotels it will be around ₹50 to ₹60 or more than that. Instead of that cooked food with millets given at an affordable price people will be benefitted from it.



How much more the customers can pay if millets are included in the menu
Source: Primary Survey 2024

The responses received from the first question states that in the last 4 weeks, which is one month, 84.03 percent of the respondents did not worry about running out of food, indicating that they felt confident in their ability to meet their basic food demands during this time. Nonetheless, a degree of food insecurity was indicated by the fact that 15.97 percent of the respondents said they were worried about the supply of food because they were low on finance or resources which shows that a notable section of the public still faces insecurity and are dependent on subsidised

Food Insecurity Experience Scale

Source: Primary Survey 2024

Questions	Yes	No
Q1. During the last 4 weeks, was there a time when you were worried you would not have enough food to eat because of a lack of money or other resources?	15.97 %	84.03 %
Q2. Still thinking about the last 4 weeks, was there a time when you were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food because of a lack of money or other resources?	31.94 %	67.36 %
Q3. During the last 4 weeks, was there a time when you ate only a few kinds of food because of lack of money or other resources?	18.75 %	80.56 %
Q4. During the last 4 weeks, was there a time when you had to skip a meal because there was not enough money or other resources to get food?	41.67 %	58.33 %
Q5. Still thinking about the last 4 weeks, was there a time when you ate less than you thought you should because of a lack of money or other resources?	32.64 %	67.36 %

Q6. In the past 4 weeks, was there ever no food to eat of any kind in your house because of lack of resources to get food? Q6a. How often did this happen in the past 4 weeks (30 days)	11.81 % Often- 23.54 % Rarely- 47.06 % Sometimes- 29.41 %	88.19 %
Q7. In the past 4 weeks, did you ever go to sleep at night hungry because there was not enough food? Q7a. How often did this happen in the past 4 weeks (30 days)	38.89 % Often- 7.14 % Rarely- 66.07 % Sometimes- 26.79 %	61.11 %
Q8. During the last 4 weeks, did you ever go a whole day and night without eating at all because there was not enough food? Q8a. How often did this happen in the past 4 weeks (30 days)	7.64 % Often- 36.36 % Rarely- 45.45 % Sometimes- 18.18 %	92.36 %

food services. This number may be a reflection of underlying socioeconomic problems like unemployment, low income, or the absence of social support networks. The large proportion of customers who reported being food insecure may be an indication of the efficaciousness of the Amma Canteen initiative.

Jumping to the next question, 31.94 percent of respondents, a notable fraction, claimed they were unable to eat wholesome food, indicating that resource or budgetary limitations influenced their meal choices, it is distressing to see that about one-third of the respondents had difficulty consuming nutritious food. The majority, 67.67 percent, did not experience such limitations, suggesting that despite possible financial difficulties, they had access to healthy food.

When asked about variations in the food, that is during the last 4 weeks did they had accessibility to same kind of food, 80.56 percent of respondents said they did not experience these restrictions, indicating they had access to a wide range of dietary options. Nonetheless, 18.75 percent of respondents said that they could only eat a small selection of foods because of resource or budgetary limitations, indicating a degree of dietary restriction or food insecurity. A dependence on less expensive or instant foods which are readily available, which may not be as nutritionally balanced as a more varied diet, may be the cause of this lack in dietary diversity. Nearly half of respondents (41.67 percent) reported having to skip a meal, showing a considerable part of the population experienced some form of food insecurity when asked whether they are skipping meals because of financial constraints. The majority, 58.33 percent, said they were able to maintain a minimal degree of food security during this time by not having to skip a meal. According to these statistics, a large number of Amma Canteen customers experience food insecurity, indicating

that many people still struggle to achieve their basic food security needs even in the presence of subsidised food programmes in Chennai. This could be a symptom of deeper problems like poverty, low pay, or insufficient social services.

A high degree of food insecurity is shown by the 32.64 percent of respondents reduce their eating because they are short on money. This figure 4.8 is noteworthy because it shows that, as a result of financial constraints, nearly one-third of the Amma canteen survey group in Chennai had to reduce their food intake. And the remaining which constitutes the majority 67.36 percent of respondents claimed they did not reduce their eating habits, demonstrating that they had enough money to cover their food requirements during this time. The respondents who had financial constraints stated that it is fine for them to reduce their food consumption rather than their children eating less food.

According to the data, 11.81 percent of the respondents reported having food insecurity during the previous four weeks that they faced a situation where there is no food in their house, which means they went without food for a period of time owing to a lack of resources. Whereas 88.19 percent stated that they never faced any such circumstances. Among the respondents who stated yes, 88.19 percent of respondents not experiencing such a circumstance, the majority of respondents were found to have regular access to food. Among the respondents who stated yes, 47.06 percent of the respondents stated they face this circumstance rarely, who are the majority, reported experiencing food insecurity, which means for almost half of them, food insecurity was an infrequent occurrence rather than a regular one. Around 29.41 percent of the respondents stated sometimes, compared to the group mentioned rarely, this group experienced food insecurity somewhat more frequently, indicating that it

wasn't constant. Nearly a quarter of those respondents 23.53 percent who stated often they are experiencing food insecurity, suggesting a more critical level of food need. Nearly 2.78 percent in the 11 percent experienced a situation where there is no food to eat in their houses. This may illustrate the relevance of food assistance initiatives like Amma Canteen and indicate the need for further services or focused interventions for individuals who experience food insecurity on a regular basis.

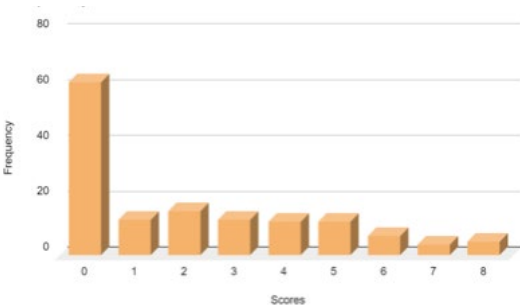
Around 38.89 percent of respondents stated that they had gone to bed hungry at least once in the previous four weeks as a result of insufficient eating. This is a significant percentage, meaning that over one-third of the respondents reported feeling so hungry that it interfered with their ability to sleep. 61.11 percent did not experience this problem, indicating that most people had enough food to eat before going to sleep. Among the respondents who stated they remain hungry before sleep, almost half of those who reported being hungry at night 47.06 percent, which implies that this was rare, it was nonetheless a cause for concern. Compared to the group of respondents stated rarely, 26.79 percent of the group of respondents encountered it more frequently, indicating a moderate level of occurrence but not a consistent level. Respondents who stated often are less in number which is 7.64 percent. This is smaller but a noteworthy group who reported hunger frequently went to sleep without eating, indicating a severe problem with food access. These groups are the vulnerable section indicating severe shortage of food.

According to the responses, 7.64 percent of the respondents said that, at least once in the previous four weeks, they went an entire day and night without eating because they were out of food. It's alarming to learn that around 8 out of 100 responders may have had acute food insecurity. The majority of respondents 92.36

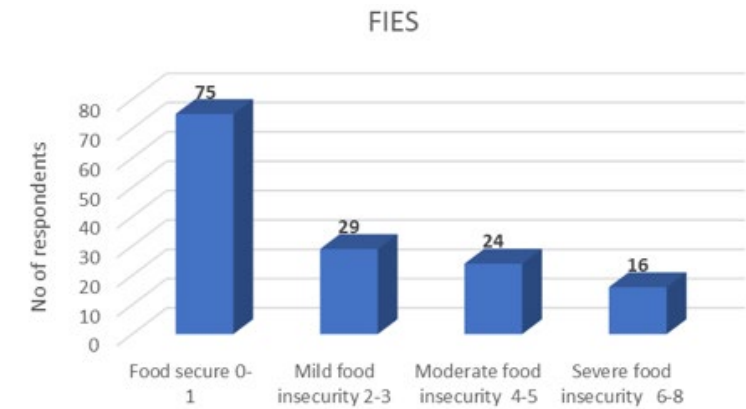
percent did not experience this circumstance, suggesting that they had regular access to food. Among the respondents, 45.45 percent faced such a situation rarely and the 18.18 percent stated sometimes and the remaining 36.36 percent stated regularly they went out of food the whole day and night. Nearly 2.78 percent in the 7 percent of the sample stated yes faced severe food insecurity by missing food the whole day and night.

The frequency of food insecurity is calculated through the method provided by FAO. A value of 0 and 1 is assigned for each yes and no responses provided by the respondents. Then each sample's score is calculated by aggregating the values which are made for each question. The aggregated value will be between 0 and 8. They are the scores of each sample. Around 62 respondents are with the score 0. The other scores from 1 to 8 have a number of respondents less than 20 which can be seen in the above figure.

The below figure is the continuation of figure FIES. The figure depicts the accurate level of food insecurity among the samples. FAO categorised food insecurity into four levels; the score 0 to



Frequency of FIES Scores
Source: Primary Survey 2024



Food insecurity experience among the samples
Source: Primary Survey 2024

1 refers to food securedness similarly the score 2 to 3 refers to the level of mild food insecurity whereas the 4 to 5 score depicts the level of moderate food insecurity. The remaining score 6 to 8 refers to the severe food insecurity level. Based on their scores on the FIES, the figure 4.10 shows the distribution of food security levels across the samples collected. 75 respondents, or the majority, are classified as “Food secure” (scores 0-1), meaning they most likely do not face food insecurity. Subsequently, 29 participants are categorised as having “Mild food insecurity” (scores ranging from 2-3), indicating a lack of confidence in food availability or a reduction in food variety or quality as a result of limited resources. Furthermore, 24 respondents fall into the category of “Moderate food insecurity” (scoring 4- 5), indicating that they face more substantial obstacles to getting enough food, which may have an effect on their eating habits.

At last, the smallest group consists of 16 people with “Severe food insecurity” (scoring 6-8), who most likely go without food for a day or more due to access problems or budgetary limits, resulting in hunger or meal skipping. This distribution is represented graphically in the chart, where the horizontal axis classifies the FIES scores and the vertical axis indicates the total number of respondents. The results of the study indicate that although a considerable segment of the population is food secure, a noteworthy proportion faces varied degrees of food insecurity. This underscores the necessity of implementing focused interventions to tackle these issues.

Examining the impact of Amma canteen on women empowerment, and their livelihood security

The second major objective of the study is to examine the role of Amma Canteen in women empowerment and their livelihood security. The upcoming data and figures reveal the socio-economic

conditions of employees, working nature and conditions of them along with the women empowerment indicators and its performances.

The workforce at Amma Canteens predominantly consists of older employees, with 36 percent in the 51- 60 age group and 34 percent in the 41- 50 age group. Together, these groups constitute 70 percent of the workforce. Meanwhile, 26 percent of employees are in the 31–40 age range, representing a notable but smaller

Socio-Economic conditions of women employees in the canteen

S No	Socio Economic Indicators	Percentage
01.	Age Group	
	i. 20- 30	4
	ii. 31- 40	26
	iii. 41- 50	34
	iv. 51- 60	36
02.	Religion	
	i. Hindu	86
	ii. Christian	12
	iii. Muslim	2
03.	Social Community	
	i. OBC	60
	ii. SC	38
	iii. ST	2
04.	Education	
	i. Illiterate	14
	ii. Primary and Upper Primary	54
	iii. Secondary	24
	iv. Higher Secondary	8
05.	Income	
	i. ₹4000- ₹6000	14
	i. ₹8000- ₹9000	86

proportion compared to the older groups. Only 4 percent of employees are from the 20–30 age bracket. This distribution does not necessarily indicate a preference for hiring older, experienced workers but rather reflects the fact that many women have been employed at Amma Canteens for over eight years, many since the canteens were established.

Amma Canteens provide employment to individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from low literacy levels to secondary school graduates. This highlights the societal benefits of such programs, as they offer opportunities to those who may struggle to secure decent employment elsewhere. Notably, 54 percent of employees indicated that they view Amma Canteens as a better option with a more stable income compared to other jobs. Women with primary and upper primary education, often limited in job prospects, find secure employment here. Similarly, 14 percent of employees are illiterate, yet they perform the same tasks as their literate counterparts, underscoring the inclusive nature of the work environment.

The workplace is also perceived as a safe and comfortable space for women, as all employees are female. This is a key factor for 46 percent of respondents who had never worked before joining the canteens. They reported feeling more at ease in this setting, enabling them to take up formal employment for the first time.

The majority of employees at Amma Canteens are Hindus (86 percent), followed by Christians (12 percent) and Muslims (1.39 percent). Additionally, marginalized communities are well-represented in the workforce: 60 percent belong to Other Backward Classes (OBC), 38 percent to Scheduled Castes (SC), and 2 percent to Scheduled Tribes (ST). This indicates that Amma Canteens provide critical employment opportunities for

women from historically disadvantaged groups, who may face limited options in other sectors.

While conversing with the employees, about 46 percent of them stated that they did not have any work experience prior to joining Amma Canteen, indicating that these Canteens are not only a source of food security for the public but also as an empowering platform for women, especially those from marginalised communities, promoting social inclusion and economic stability.

Initially, employees at Amma Canteens received a uniform salary of ₹300 per day, amounting to ₹9,300 per month. However, the government later introduced a differentiated salary structure based on canteen sales and the number of employees. As a result, 86 percent of employees now earn ₹8,000– ₹9,000 monthly, while the remaining 14 percent receive only ₹4,000- ₹6,000.

Employees have expressed concerns about the lack of salary increments since the inception of the canteens, despite having no official holidays. Many workers continued their service even during crises like the pandemic and floods. In some canteens, an alternative leave system is followed to manage salaries. For instance, a respondent explained that in a canteen with seven workers instead of the standard five, leave days are alternated for extra staff members. This arrangement allows the salaries of the additional workers to be redistributed among the rest.

Women Empowerment and its indicators

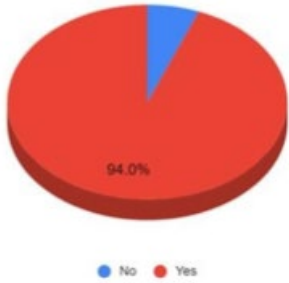
The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines women’s empowerment as the process by which women acquire authority, manage their life, and have the capacity to make calculated decisions. This entails giving women more access to opportunities and resources, making sure they have decision-making authority,

and advocating for fairness and equality in all spheres of life, including the workplace. ILO measures women empowerment with the help of 10 indicators. Among those indicators the study examines the impact of Amma canteen on women empowerment with the education level, skill attainment, financial decision making level at home, safety, income, being able to send their children to schools and other educational spaces, possession of any asset, way of treatment in family.

The data reveals that over 94 percent of respondents reported being able to send their children to school or other educational institutions. Among this group, approximately 48 percent are older employees whose children have already completed their education, started working, and in many cases, are married. Some respondents also mentioned being able to contribute financially toward their grandchildren’s education. They emphasized that the salary earned at Amma Canteens enabled them to provide for their children’s education and marriage expenses.

Conversely, a small percentage (6 percent) of respondents stated that their salary was insufficient to afford education for their children. Among those who could support their children’s education, 72 percent enrolled them in public institutions, while the remaining 28 percent opted for private institutions. This highlights the significant role that Amma Canteen employment plays in fostering educational opportunities for employees’ families, despite the financial constraints faced by some.

The data reveals that 92 percent of respondents reported having the independence to manage their own finances. This highlights a significant degree of autonomy, self-confidence, and capability in managing personal and household finances among the working women. A small subset of these respondents mentioned making



Ability to give education and basic necessities to children
Source: Primary Survey 2024

financial decisions collaboratively with their families.

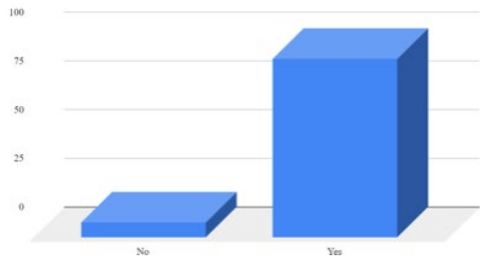
This high level of financial independence is a promising indicator of gender empowerment, suggesting that most of these women have a meaningful role in managing household finances and potentially other aspects of their lives. However, the remaining 8 percent of respondents reported relying on family members or spouses to make financial decisions, even regarding their own income.

A significant majority of female employees, 68 percent, do not own personal assets such as real estate, vehicles, land, or substantial investments. This lack of ownership may stem from institutional barriers, limited opportunities, financial constraints, or traditional societal and familial norms that hinder women’s access to resources.

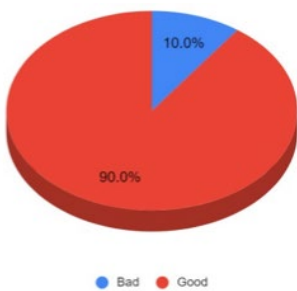
In contrast, 32 percent of the employees have managed to acquire assets in their names. This reflects a certain degree of financial security, self-reliance, and access to resources, which are crucial for meeting personal and family needs and enhancing empowerment. The data also highlights the financial vulnerability of many women who lack such ownership.

Asset ownership is often perceived as a vital means of building wealth, securing one’s financial future, and gaining respect within the community. It underscores the importance of creating opportunities for women to achieve financial independence and stability through access to resources and equitable policies.

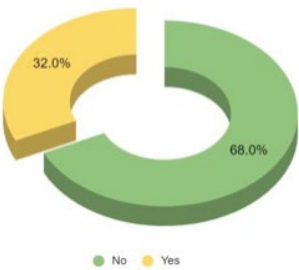
The majority of women employed at Amma Canteens, about



Decision making at home
Source: Primary Survey 2024



Feeling of empoweredness
Source: Primary Survey 2024



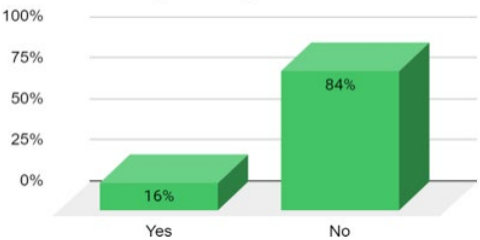
Asset holdings by working women of Amma canteen
Source: Primary Survey 2024

90 percent, reported receiving good treatment at home. This suggests that their work is respected and acknowledged within their families, creating a supportive and positive atmosphere. Many women shared that their children and husbands are particularly helpful, with some proudly stating that their children now tell friends about their mother’s employment at the canteen—something they were hesitant to do when the women were previously engaged in jobs like sanitation work or roadside vending.

However, approximately 10 percent of the women reported experiencing unfavourable treatment at home, even while being employed. This may indicate underlying familial issues, lack of support, or persistent negative circumstances despite their work contributions. Some women disclosed distressing experiences, such as being subjected to physical abuse by their husbands and feeling that their efforts at work and home go unrecognised or undervalued.

These contrasting experiences highlight the dual challenges and opportunities faced by working women in balancing professional and personal spheres while seeking empowerment and respect.

A substantial 84 percent of Amma Unavagam women workers report experiencing pressure from their families to leave their jobs, while only 16 percent do not face such challenges. Among those experiencing pressure, the most common reason cited is the low salary, which has remained stagnant without any increments over time.

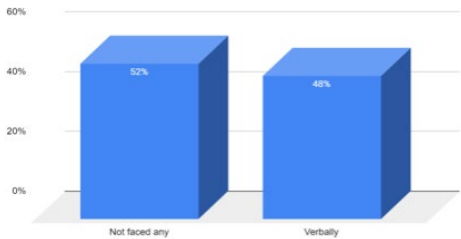


Pressure to quit job at home
Source: Primary Survey 2024

Additionally, some workers mentioned family obligations as a significant factor. They

expressed that their inability to attend to family needs during crucial moments—such as emergencies, family functions, or gatherings—creates tension within their households. This challenge is further compounded by the lack of official holidays, leaving them unable to balance their work responsibilities with personal commitments.

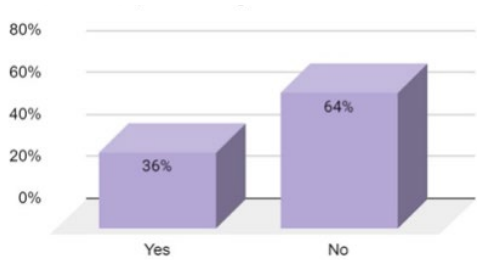
Nearly half of the women workers at Amma Unavagams—48 percent—reported experiencing verbal harassment, highlighting a significant issue in the work environment. This suggests that such harassment negatively impacts job satisfaction, mental health, and overall morale among employees. While 52 percent of workers did not report harassment, the frequency of such incidents indicates the need for attention and corrective measures.



Work place safety concerns
Source: Primary Survey 2024

The verbal harassment is mainly attributed to intoxicated men who visit the canteens late at night. Some workers mentioned that these individuals engage in inappropriate behavior, such as urinating on the premises or, in extreme cases, even sleeping naked in the canteen, which creates an uncomfortable and unsafe environment for the women. In response, workers often take it upon themselves to close the canteen after clearing these individuals out, sometimes involving the police for assistance. However, this situation varies by location and canteen, with some areas experiencing more frequent incidents than others.

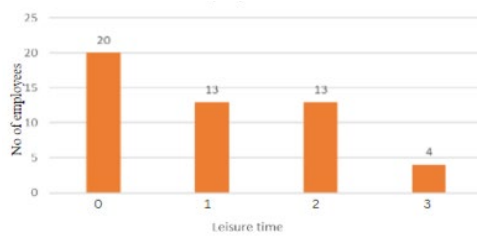
In addition to harassment, health and safety concerns, particularly regarding sanitation, have been raised. Many women workers face inadequate facilities, including poorly maintained washrooms. In some cases, workers pool their already limited salaries to refurbish these washrooms, further stressing their financial and emotional well-being.



Skill development attained through SHGs
Source: Primary Survey 2024

The majority of the workers surveyed—around 64 percent—in Amma Canteens have not participated in any skill development programs such as tailoring, embroidery, painting, or handicrafts. This raises questions about the effectiveness of self-help groups in providing relevant training opportunities. On the other hand, nearly 36 percent of the workers have attended such classes, showing that a smaller portion of the workforce has engaged in skill-building initiatives.

One particularly notable example comes from an elderly worker at one of the canteens, who initially lacked basic literacy skills. However, through specialised classes offered to older age groups, she was able to learn how to calculate the accounts for the canteen.



Leisure time of the employees
Source: Primary Survey 2024

The figure reveals that the employees of Amma Unavagam have varying amounts of leisure time. Of the sampled group, 20 employees reported having no leisure time, while 13 had one hour, 13 had two hours, and 4 had three hours. Leisure time was calculated by subtracting working hours and household chores from the total available time, which is typically twelve hours.

This breakdown shows that while many employees have little to no leisure time, some manage to carve out a few hours for themselves. For women, leisure time is particularly important as it provides opportunities for relaxation, self-care, and personal growth. However, due to their demanding work schedules and family responsibilities, leisure time is often scarce, leading to potential health issues and mental stress. This lack of personal time is a contributing factor to the pressure many employees face from their families, with some even being urged to quit their jobs.

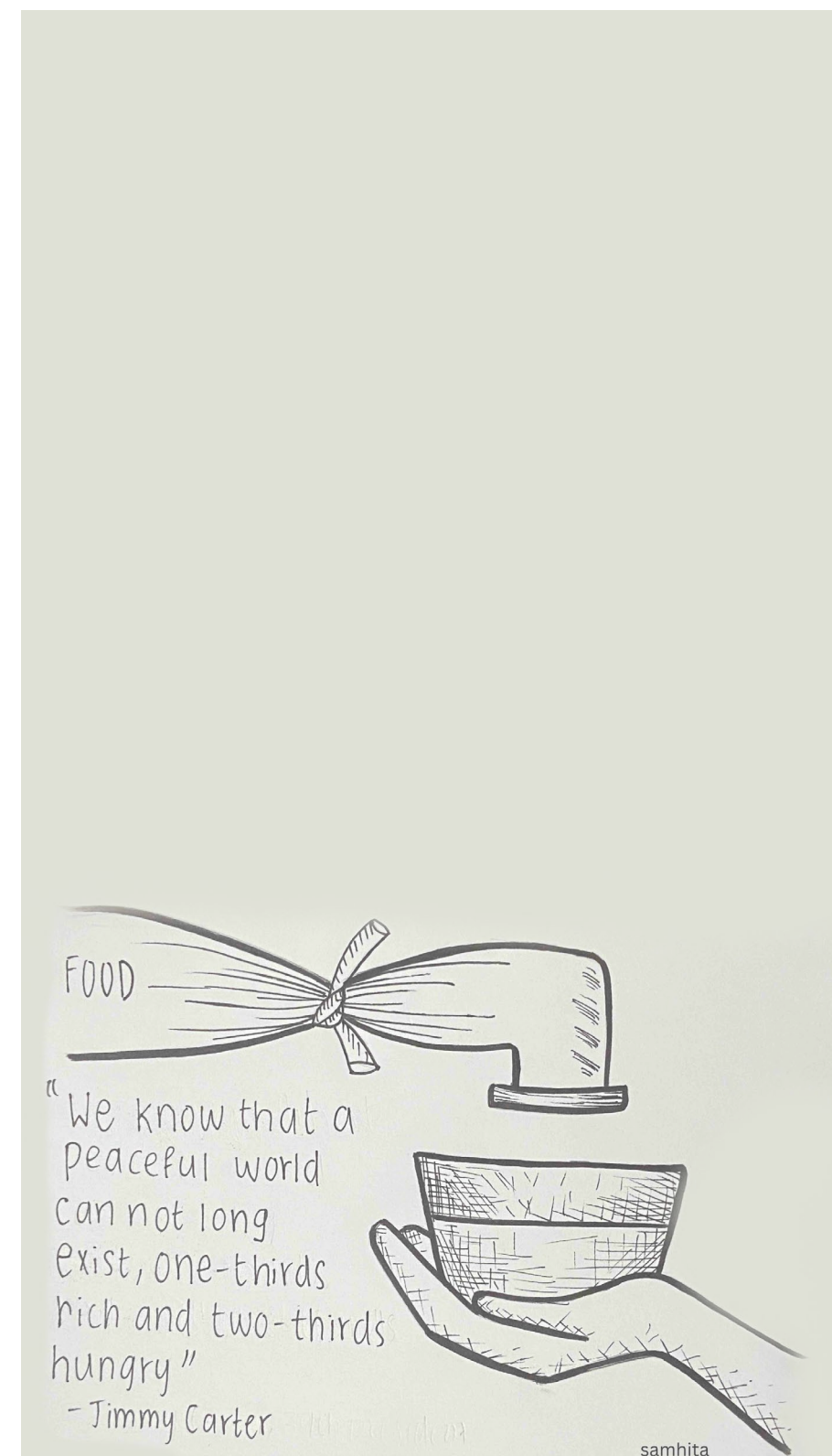
Conclusion

Amma Canteens, launched to address urban food insecurity, have been operational for over a decade with the support of government funding and effective resource allocation. Originally planned to have 471 canteens, the number has now reduced to 393 in Chennai. These canteens serve affordable meals three times a day, offering dishes like idli, pongal, rice, and roti at subsidised prices, making them accessible to a broad range of urban residents, particularly workers in industrial areas.

However, there are inconsistencies in menu offerings and food quality across different canteens, influenced by local supply constraints and customer preferences. While some locations provide rice and curry for dinner, others offer dosas or rotis, depending on demand. Hygiene and infrastructure also vary, with some canteens struggling with water supply issues or cleanliness.

The workforce primarily consists of women who work in shifts without official holidays, earning salaries between ₹4,000 and ₹9,000, based on sales. Many workers face safety concerns, particularly at night, and struggle with inadequate facilities such as poor washrooms. In some cases, employees contribute part of their own salary to help improve these conditions.

Despite these challenges, many workers report feeling empowered, as they can support their families and contribute to their children's education. However, asset ownership remains low among them. To ensure the sustainability of Amma Canteens and enhance gender equity, it is recommended to make the canteens more accessible and customer-friendly, with improved amenities. Providing weekly offs, ensuring safer working conditions, and offering customized food options could help boost customer traffic and further reduce urban food insecurity.



Deendayal Antyodaya

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Deendayal Antyodaya Rasoi Scheme: - Need to plan for Phase Four

While India meets worldwide demand for grains including wheat, 'Food security' is a major issue in the context of increasing population, rural-urban migration in the country. The 2023 Global Hunger Index ranked India at 111 out of 125 countries, indicating severity of the issue. Increasing rural-urban migration of families in search of work increases the population density in urban areas further aggravating food insecurity. Lack of nutritious food impacts the health of the urban poor, hence impacting their work ability. As, the urban poor and migrant workers depend on their daily wages, the increasing food insecurity is not only keeping them hungry but also trapping them into the vicious cycle of poverty.

We conducted a study to understand the role of the state supported urban canteens towards improving the food security in Madhya Pradesh.



Deendayal Antodaya Rasoi in Gwalior

Deendayal Antyodaya Rasoi Scheme and Its Phases

In 2017, Madhya Pradesh Government started Deendayal Antodaya Rasoi Scheme with the intent to provide subsidised meals to the underprivileged. In this phase 56 Rasoi (Kitchens/ canteen) has been established in 49 districts of the state. The canteen used to provide meals at ₹5 which includes four chapatis, one vegetable curry, Rice and Dal every day between 11am to 3pm. Amidst the elections in 2018, the canteen was discontinued by the then government.

In May, 2019 the scheme was reintroduced with necessary changes to combat the financial crunch which was faced by the municipal corporation in the earlier stage. The number of kitchens has been increased from 56 to 100 in 52 district headquarters and 6 religious cities of the state. However, the rate per thali has been increased to ₹10 from ₹5.

The second phase of the scheme was launched on February 23, 2021, where the operation of 100 kitchens has been started in 52 districts. The canteen continuously served meals amid the Covid-19 lockdown from April to June 2021.

Currently, the scheme is in its third phase, the government has reduced the price of the food plate from ₹10 to ₹5 and introduced mobile kitchens in the urban areas for labourers. The food vehicle runs in the city covering major working sites, providing food to the needy at their workplace. There are now 188 canteens across the state. The purpose of the scheme is to provide nutritious food at affordable rates to the needy people of the state. The canteen mainly provides lunch. The menu is fixed for a week in all the canteens same as in the earlier phases. The timing of canteen has changed in the third phase and now opens at 10am and closes at 3pm. The canteen does not serve on Sundays.

The Scheme has gone through several changes; it is important to understand the factors that helped the scheme to run smoothly and to anticipate many other changes. We surveyed and interacted with 50 customers in four canteens in Gwalior in the month of December 2023. We observed that the canteens were majorly located in the areas accessible by migrants' workers, hospital staff, job seekers, daily wage workers, fruit and vegetable vendors and many more categories of people.

Food quality & quantity served better in Canteens with Kitchens

On site observations revealed that the canteens which have kitchens attracted more consumers than the canteens without kitchens. Canteen located at Jhansi Road bus stop does not have a kitchen and the food supplied in this canteen is from the canteen located at Naya Bazar. The former catered to about 150-200 customers each day, whereas the latter catered to a large number of consumers (approximately 400) during lunch hours. In both the canteens, the composition of the customers generally included low-income groups. respondents were men and the rest 15 percent are women. In some canteens among the 15 canteens visited, there were no single women who came to eat. Women customers who come to eat, majorly fall under the sanitation work or the security workers. And some women among them were home makers.

The quantity of food supplied from the kitchens of the canteen in Naya Bazar and Central Bus stop can be an indicator of food demand in the canteen without a kitchen. For example, the food supply in the canteen at Jhansi Road Bus stop (without kitchen) is limited to serve 200 people which further limits the quantity being served to the consumers, in case any consumer needs more Dal, Rice, Vegetable or Chapatis.

During the study, we observed a person asking to be served just an extra spoon of rice, as the he had to finish remaining Dal with rice, instead he was asked buy another plate entirely.

“I usually prefer to eat at the canteen near Naya Bazar as they provide hot cooked chapatis and also give extra rice, if needed sometimes. Here in the canteen at Jhansi Road Bus stop, the server could not give a spoon of extra rice, to finish a little dal and asked me to buy a whole plate”, said a mason at Jhansi Bus Stop Canteen.

The quantity of food has been raised as a concern in both canteens with and without kitchens. However, the views have been varying customer to customer. For instance, daily wage workers, fruit vendors, shopkeepers, who often travel across the city and avail services of various canteens, generally found the canteen’s food quality to be adequately good. In contrast, the regular customers, who usually eat at the same canteen but tried food from another canteen for the first time may have differing opinions.

The supervisor responsible for overall management including serving, distributing coupons, opening and closing of the canteen.

“I have been working here for the last one year. I have the responsibility for overall management of this canteen and the footfall is usually 200 consumers in a day, which is sometimes difficult for me to handle alone, but I manage with the help of some regular customers. I have been verbally abused by the customers if I didn’t



Crowd at Naya Bazar and Central Bus stop

give extra food, as the canteen does not have a kitchen and food supplied is limited to a certain quantity,” said the male supervisor aged 70 at one of the canteens.

Location of the canteens are related to the variety of consumers accessing them

The location and running time become major factors for some of the consumers, especially for the daily wage earners, who usually get an hour break to finish their lunch. Large numbers of consumers in the canteen located at Jhansi Road bus stop and Central Bus stop consists of intra-state migrant workers from nearby towns of Sabalgarh, Tikamgarh, Dabra, working urban population, students (mainly those coming for central or state government examination from nearby villages and towns), bus drivers, conductors and passengers from Bus stand and Railway Station. Whereas, the canteen at Naya Bazar is situated close to government hospital, iron market and several private hospitals have consumers ranging from attenders with patients, shop workers, medical staff, ambulance drivers, vegetable vendors and few inter-state migrant workers.

“I am looking for a job and this is the third time in a week I came here for an interview. It would cost me around ₹150 if I eat at a hotel and here it is just ₹5. I can save more money as I frequently travel for interviews,” said one of the respondents availing the facility of the canteen at Jhansi Road Bus Stop.

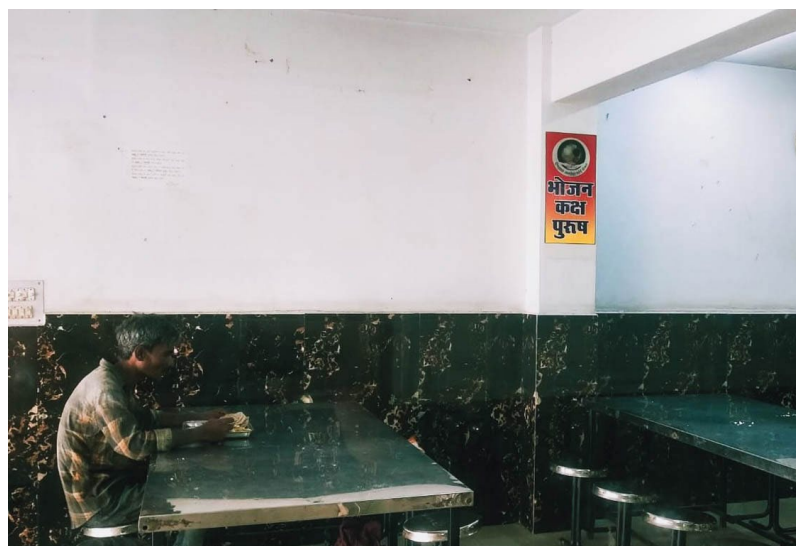
“I eat lunch at 3pm, so I don’t feel hungry at night. The canteen should serve dinner along with lunch, because I live alone and don’t know how to cook. So, I usually sleep empty stomach as I am unable to afford eating food in the market which costs ₹100 for a plate” said a daily wage earner.

The canteen's supervisor has different opinions on the functioning of the canteen based upon the accessing the service by the customers and Location. Supervisor at one of the canteens said *"the canteen used to be open till 7pm, but from last 3 months we close it by 3pm" though the official timings are till 3pm. Their remuneration is given by a Delhi based organisation "Ghanshyam Seva Samiti"*. Supervisors in all the canteens are male while Naya Bazar canteen was the only exception having women staff responsible for making chapatis/roti.

Hygiene and Ambience attracts more consumers

Good ambience and hygiene of the canteen is one of the important attractions across social and economic groups. The ambience varies across locations. However, the infrastructure of each canteen has remained typically the same- a dining hall with varied seating capacity depending upon the footfall. Canteen at Naya Bazar and Central Bus stop have a dining hall with 50-60 people seating capacity at once along with facility for hand wash and drinking water. The customers are expected to consume food in the steel plates provided in the canteen itself, while interacting with customers, those who have availed the service in various kitchens said, *"This canteen of Naya Bazar and Central bus stand are preferable as compare to the canteen at Jhansi Bus stop and Hazira"*.

The canteen at Naya bazar is an exception of having a separate



Canteen at Naya Bazar

dining hall for women with 20-person sitting capacity at once. The canteen at Jhansi Road Bus stop does not have a scullery (dishwashing area) which makes the dining hall damp and disorganised, whereas the other canteens have proper sanitation facility.

In all the canteens, management has hired employees to clean the canteens and to wash the dishes on a part-time basis. Every canteen has a coupon counter and serving window except the canteen at Jhansi Road bus stop.

"I have been working here since its inception. A different serving window and coupon counter helps us to manage the crowd during peak lunch hours." said a canteen supervisor at the Central Bus stop canteen.

Need to think for Phase- Four

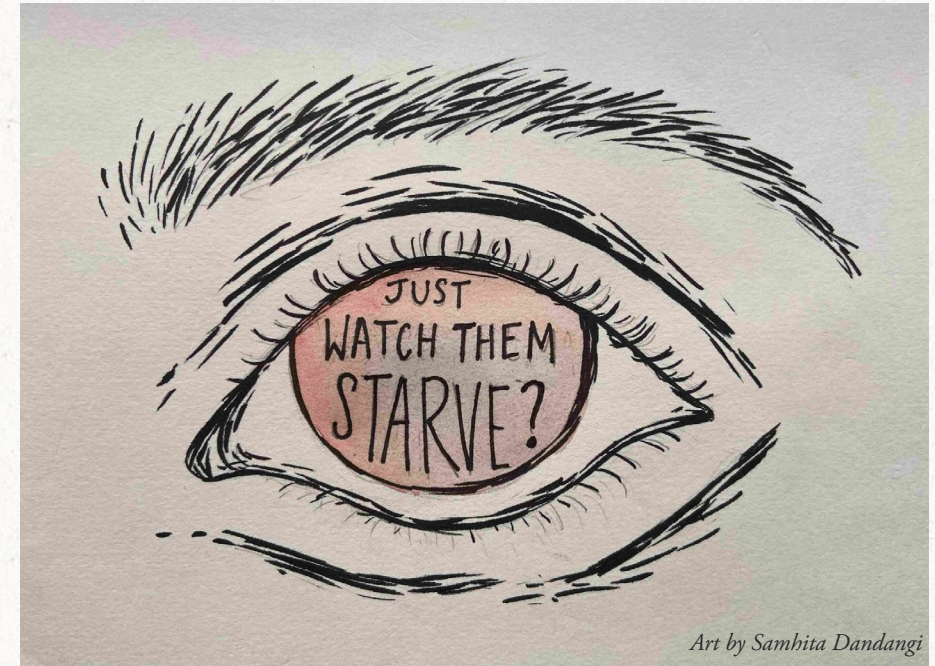
As essential are providing food at an affordable rate in an hygienic environment, it is also important make the canteen more visible to attract more customers. Adding sign boards and hoardings around the canteens can help achieve this in a efficient and economic way. Currently, only the canteen in Central Bus stop has a holding on it, highlighting the need for similar efforts at other canteens as well.

Customer friendly women staff to get the food pack or creating a physical space for women may help to attract more women customers, but to increase the footfall of women the place needs to be felt safe for the women working in the canteens and customers. The location of these canteens needs different strategies to make it more accessible to students in the cities. Each canteen can have their own kitchen to eliminate the restriction on quantity served due to the dependency on other kitchens. This can further increase the employment of the women. To put it differently, the kitchen

contracts can be given to women Self- Help Groups (SHGs). Another observation is that the canteen does not fulfill the requirement of Breakfast and Dinner. The canteen needs to consider serving meals beyond Lunch, as in the case of Indira canteen in Karnataka and Annapurna canteens in Telangana. Nonetheless, the programs and policies that address the problem of urban food insecurity play a crucial role and need to be emphasised on the issue and demand more attention in terms of research, investment and intervention by the state in providing affordable food. Action at one place may not be enough to mitigate the issue in long-run. Having said that, there is a need to extend the timing of the canteens and Mobile Vehicle beyond 10am to 3pm, providing three meals a day along with expanding the canteens throughout the state.



Separate space for women in canteen



“The war against hunger is truly a mankind’s war of liberation” ~ John F Kennedy

Shram Anna Kendra

Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Abhiruchi Das [12]

Shram Anna Kendra: Action for Food Security in Chhattisgarh

Food security has to do with the availability and accessibility of adequate, safe, culturally appropriate nourishment. With a 111th rank in the Global Hunger Index, India raises concerns not merely of global hunger but of national nutritional status. The social process of urbanisation in its entirety alters access to natural resources, increased competition and socio - economic changes ultimately changing trends of food production, consumption and nutritional status of urban population. One such ever increasing urban sprawl is Raipur, the capital city of Chhattisgarh often dubbed the 'rice bowl' of Central India.



Peak lunch time at Shram Anna Kendra, Urla Industrial Estate. Seating arrangement in use at full capacity 1:28pm, 26/12/2023

[12] MA student in Development student at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru and Former Intern, UoH-IOE Project

Methodology

Data collection was done through mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative methods) for primary and secondary data. Methods involved collection and organisation of

data from official state websites, scheme specific research, news articles, information from individuals working with the Labour Department, Chhattisgarh. Experiences of customers and staff members at the canteen facilities were collected through semi structured interviews. Anonymity of interviewees has been maintained for privacy reasons. Photographs are documented with prior consent.

Policy trend of Urban Canteens

The landmark Annapurna Dal Bhat Scheme, implemented in 2004 was an initiative to ensure food availability and food security among the financially vulnerable with daily meals worth ₹5 provided at Annapurna Dal-Bhat Centres. In addition, there were supposed provisions of gas stove, pressure cooker and the availability of rice (₹2/kg), chana (₹5/kg), salt (free of cost) at these centres. By 2015, there were **154** Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendras across the state that gradually but eventually closed down or changed ownership. The capital city of Raipur also saw a similar fate with its **11** Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendras. Increased price of produce, especially pulses; change in government and majorly the state withdrawal from rice allocation service are thought to be reasons for the Annapurna Dal Bhat centres to be out of order across the state.

Annapurna Dal Bhat Scheme was a pivotal intervention introduced by the *Raman sarkar* earning goodwill by feeding mouths. With the strong comeback of the BJP Government in 2024, the Minister of Commerce and Industries, Chhattisgarh, Lakhanlal Devangan, announced the revival of the scheme this April. It was announced the scheme would facilitate hot meals for the labour classes at a supposed rate of ₹5, however clarity regarding the same is awaited. With this proposed rate per plate the government is set to pay the centre operator a price of nearly



Annapurna Dal Bhat Centre now managed by the Bhagwan Mahavir Jain Relief Trust, Jail Road, Raipur on 02/12/2023)



Meal pricing of Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendra (Central Jail Road) managed out of philanthropic responsibility post state withdrawal (left). Shop operates as the kitchen of a tea place after Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendra (Gudhiyari, Khamtarai Road.) goes out of order.

₹52 per plate. The prior operators of the Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendras had expressed hope for such a decision with BJP rising to power. Interesting would be to see if there may come upgrades to the scheme facilities for beneficiaries to avail.

However, the prevalence of state run urban canteens still exists through the Shram Anna Sahayata Centres across the state under the **Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Shram Anna Sahayata Yojna** launched in 2017. The scheme was soon renamed to **Chhattisgarh Shahid Veer Narayan Singh Shram Anna Yojna** in 2019 with the common objective herein is to provide nutritious meals to the working class at mere ₹5. They are locally called **Shram Anna Kendra** (Labour Canteen). The scheme aimed to open **60** such **centres** in **27 districts** of the state and demanded the role of social service organisations in operationalisation under the supervision of the Labour Department. There run four such shram anna kendras in the capital city of Raipur. Two of these kendras are master kitchens whereas the other two operate as distribution centres or outlets. Each of these outlets serve one meal a day, often lunch with differing timings for each. The meal prices had hiked up to ₹10 a plate but have been reduced to ₹5 with effect



Banner near the receipt counter of Shram Anna Kendra, Urla Industrial Complex with price change notice

from 26th July 2023. The meal includes a general assortment of rice, dal, a vegetable curry (green vegetable and dry pulses served alternatively) and mixed veg pickle.

Location aids access

Shram Anna Kendras at Telibandha (Master Kitchen cum outlet) is called Kaushal Unnayan Kedra (skill upgrade centre) and runs

शहीद वीर नारायण सिंह श्रम अन्न योजना की जानकारी		
क्र.	जिला का नाम	श्रम अन्न केन्द्र के स्थानों का नाम
1	रायपुर	तेलीबाघा
		गांधी मैदान
		उरला
		मेग्नेटों मॉल
2	दुर्ग	मंडी, सुपेला (दिल्लन कॉम्प्लेक्स के पास)
		कुम्हारी
		मंडीदा, भिलाई
		छावनी
		तहसील चौक, दुर्ग
		अमलेश्वर
3	बिलासपुर	बृहस्पति बाजार
		तिफरा (सब्जी मंडी)
4	राजनांदगांव	टेडेसरा
		टोलागांव (एबीस)
		इंदामरा
		कृषि उपज मंडी
		राजाराम मेज प्रोडक्ट
5	रायगढ़	एन.टी.पी.सी.लारा
6	महाराष्ट्र	बरा स्टैंड के पास
		सी एस आई डी सी बिल्डिंग, बिरकोनी औद्योगिक क्षेत्र
7	सूरजपुर	शक्कर कारखाना केरता

List of Shram Anna Kendra in Chhattisgarh acquired from the Labour Department

along a Silai Centre (11am to 1pm). It supplies meals at two distributary outlets at Magneto Mall (GE Road) and in Gandhi Maidan. Hot meals are served at Telibandha and Gandhi Maidan outlets from 8am to 11am, whereas Magneto Mall outlet serves lunch from 12pm to 3pm. Telibandha master kitchen is located right at the Gurudwara road Bazaar, with the Shiv Temple on the left and Chhattisgarh Eye Hospital on the right. The Gurudwara road is a major *chaudi/ chakki* (labour market) allowing the labour force to eat or carry along meals to workplaces. The canteen has been functional for 6 years with temporary closure during the Covid Pandemic and functioning with precaution during its later stages.

The Magneto Mall (GE Road) outlet is a permanent setup in the Lower Basement of the mall providing hot meals at ₹5 from 12pm to 3pm serving the housekeeping staff, security staff, maintenance staff, technicians, employees at mall outlet stores and labours from the nearby commercial area. The Gandhi Maidan outlet is located inside the Gandhi maidan parking lot with Rang Mandir



Shram Anna Kendra, Gurudwara Road, Telibandha. Food being served in front of kitchen facility, 10:34am 12/12/2023



(Rangshala and Open Theatre) and Congress Bhawan on its left and Mahant Laxminarayan Das College on the right. Walking distance from the canteen is Gandhi Chowk *chaudi/ chakki*, Raipur's oldest and largest labour market. The canteen operates from the seating area of the Nagar Palika Nigam Raipur with a separate boundary wall and gate. Main roads around the canteen cater to medical service clinics including veterinary clinics, homoeopathy clinics, pathology lab centres and pharmacies.



Shram Anna Kendra (outlets) at Magneto Mall, GE Road (L) and Gandhi Maindan (R)



Urla master kitchen at Urla Industrial Complex is around 9km away from the main city of Raipur. Located opposite to Pankaj Oxygen Limited, beside Urla sub Post Office, the labour canteen is managed under contract from the Labour Department, Chhattisgarh. The canteen functions under the Shaheed Veer Narayan Sighn Shram Anna Yojna to serve hot meals from 10am to 3:30pm, six days a week. In the vicinity are numerous factory units including Airtel BTS, Bajrang Steel Industry and Minerals, Anuj Rice Mills Pvt. Ltd, Dainik Bhaskar Press, Hira Power and Steel Ltd unit 2 and Ashirwad Ispat Udyog. Within a radius of 2km- 5km are Hindustan Petroleum Petrol Pump, Government Navin Mahavidyalaya, Jan Aushadhi Store, Urla Police Station, Shri Dhanvantari Generic Medical Store, State Bank of India

and Sarora Main Market. The canteen attracts labour forces from chaudi/ chakki in Urla and Birgaon.



Serving station at Shram Anna Kendra, Urla Industrial Estate

Covering the informal sector

With the canteen’s location right in the middle of the *chaudis / chakkis*, customers often wait for the canteen to open up. The customer crowd across outlets consisted of industrial workers, security guards, daily wage labourers, auto drivers, technicians and managerial staff. Customer base at Telibandha and Gandhi Maidan were comparatively similar as they attracted more daily wage workers from respective *chaudis/ chakkis* whereas the customer crowd at Magneto Mall majorly served professionals, housekeeping staff, technicians, security guards of the facility employed via outsourcing. Telibandha outlet despite being beside the eye hospital and walking distance from government middle school and high school, saw very few staff members from both places.

Numerous customers including construction site workers and majdoors were seen packing multiple meal portions in large steel tiffins and water to carry along with them to the construction site

Customer crowd at each Shram Anna Kendra in Raipur, Chhattisgarh

Location of Shram Anna Kendra (Labour Canteen)	People served per day (approximately)	Timing (6 days a week)
Telibandha (master kitchen and distribution outlet)	215- 230	8am- 11am
Lower Basement of Magneto Mall (distribution outlet)	180- 200	12pm- 3pm
Gandhi Maidan (distribution outlet)	270- 300	8am- 11am
Urla Industrial Estate (master kitchen and distribution outlet)	550- 600	10am- 3:30pm

for co-workers. There also exist multiple physically and mentally disabled individuals who depend on the canteen food with no means of livelihood and served meals from the staff’s side. Customers describe the taste and quality to be close to hot home cooked meals. They expressed appreciation for the meal menu being simple and comforting with little variety here and there.

Supporting immigrants

New housekeeping staff members at Magneto Mall apprised that the canteen facility posed a great help as they gradually settled down at their accommodation and figured out means of cooking food like acquiring a gas cylinder, a stove, regular market visits for ingredients, etc. Majority of the customers at Magneto Mall outlet were local while some were migrants from other districts of Chhattisgarh including Durg, Mahasamund and Baloda Bazar. Some had migrated years back from their home states like Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh. One customer mentioned that there needs to be more such canteens available across the

city especially because it is a big support to new migrants as it becomes a source of nutritional intake and a good networking opportunity.

Gandhi Maidan outlet serves families of patients admitted to the nearby Bal Gopal Children’s Hospital who also come along to pack and carry multiple tiffins of food. Some travel districts to get medical help. Shram Anna Kendra at Urla is said to serve the most number of migrants amongst all the outlets. A customer at Urla outlet, working at Royal Ispat Udyog introduced himself as a native of Rewa, Madhya Pradesh. He elaborated that has been staying here in Birgaon basti since the past 6 years and visits his family back home every 3 months. He visits the canteen daily and describes that even though he is largely a chapati eater, he manages with rice during the day but makes rotis for dinner.

Gender divide and access

Majority of the customer crowd at all outlets were men. These canteens saw more able bodied men of all ages over 18 years



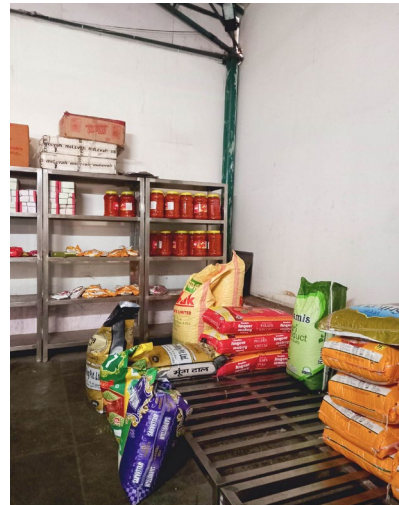
The only woman head chef at Telibandha master kitchen and outlet with the non functional RO system in the background, 12/12/2023

coming in. Although the labour canteens are not supposed to serve food to individuals under the age of 18 years, the staff at times tends to serve them meals by paying for them, especially if they are children. Families as a social group visited far less than single worker men heading out to work. Families that visited, did so due to instances of relatives admitted to hospitals nearby or while travelling.

At the Magneto Mall outlet the lunch hall space is utilised by all (those who eat meals from the canteen and those who don’t), therein the majority of the staff who carry home cooked meals are women. The Telibandha outlet serves far fewer women than men including the daily 8am visit of 8-10 women sweepers who travel to Naya Raipur for work. The Gandhi Maidan outlet on the 16th December 2023 served 274 people. It hardly served 6 women that day between 8- 9am who brought along their children to the facility. This particular outlet is said to be infamous for conflicts and quarrels making the space unsafe for many especially women. The Urla outlet did not have a single woman visitor between 12:30pm- 2pm on 26th December 2023. According to the staff, the canteen serves around 30- 40 women daily in contrast to around 550- 600 men daily. These women customers tend to carry along with them meals for some 6- 7 other colleagues on their visit.

Service beyond Meals

The master kitchen at Telibandha is equipped with basic cookware and three gas stove burners. Since the kitchen supplies meals at three distribution outlets (Telibandha, Magneto mall and Gandhi Maidan), meals are prepared multiple times in cookware with volumes of 100- 150 litres. The facility includes a store room, kitchen space, utility area, serving station, dispatch area for loading and unloading of food containers and an open area with



Master kitchen and store room of the Shram Anna Kendra at Urla Industrial Estate



Utility area of the Urla outlet. Open disposal of leftover food attracts cows

tables and chairs for customers to eat meals. The master kitchen at Urla Industrial Estate serves meals at three other distribution outlets including Kumhari, Amleshwar village and Ishwar TMT Private Limited in addition to serving meals at the kitchen. It is equipped with mechanised cookware meant for huge portions including two boilers capable of cooking 30kg rice each (both

used twice a day), two handi(s) (one for dal, another for curry) and many others. A well stocked store room, spice trolley, gas cylinder points and cold storage are also present.

Both master kitchens facilities have non functional RO Systems that have been that way since a couple of years. Along with serving meals at distribution outlets, the vehicle also carries along drinking water in case the facility does not have the provision for the same. All labour canteens outlets follow a receipt counter system. Telibandha master kitchen and its distribution outlets (Gandhi Maidan and Magneto Mall) take payments in both cash and UPI mode whereas the Urla master kitchen and its distribution outlets (Amleshwar, Kumhari and Ishwar TMT) take payments in only cash. Both master kitchens have the convenience of sanitation while other outlets have makeshift sanitation facilities, none of these are open for public use, and are used only by the staff. The facilities are cleaned thoroughly twice a day however cleanliness around the facility, near the utility area, outside the entrance is not the best and often attracts animals.

The serving stations and seating arrangement at most outlets are open, well lit, well ventilated spaces with optimal amount of green shade. Customers were seen not just utilising the seating area but the surroundings including the parking space and the concrete landscapes around the trees. Many customers would finish their meal, have a glass of water and relax at the facility for a while before leaving. Since many of the customers come in groups, they would sit around and chit chat post meals. The canteen no longer just fed the hungry but also strengthened social ties between people having busy lives.

Small serving size, conflicts and break-ins

Conflicts are a regular event at every facility. Arguments could



Non functional RO plant system at Shram Anna Kendra at Urla Industrial Estate



*Vehicle being loaded with hot meal to leave for the Magneto Mall outlet (L)
Customer sits down to have a meal at the parking lot at the Urla outlet (R)*



begin from not being able to pay for meals to demanding extra servings for free. Conflicts arising out of customers being intoxicated or mentally ill are also not rare. Familial conflicts have also taken a public display at the canteens. At the Gandhi Maidan outlet, most break-ins happen on Sunday or holidays are often recorded in the camera, however reporting the same at the Police Station doesn't really do much. The staff is forced to keep tables, chairs, plates, and the refrigerator inside the store house.

Despite most customers being satisfied with the quality and taste of meals, the complaint is of quantity where some who tend to work more than 10-12 hours daily find the 400 grams serving

size of rice per meal to be insufficient. Sometimes the canteen staff would serve more than the decided portion size however this is not always possible and customers are asked to pay for another meal to get a second helping. The facility also sees a large number of individuals asking for food without a payment, with a delayed payment or a promise of payment post meals. The staff at all facilities has been strictly instructed to serve only a maximum of 400 grams of rice, one portion each of dal and the vegetable curry per plate. In contrast, the Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendra on Jail Road (philanthropic service) allows multiple servings of rice, dal, curry, pickle and papad at ₹20.

Covid and Canteen

All Sharm Anna Kendras and Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendras were out of order during the Covid pandemic and reopened only in the late 2021. Covid precautionary measures were followed as disposable pattal replaced plates, mandatory masks on visit, thorough washing of hands pre and post meals. Some customers thought it was better to bring tiffin from home than to have meals at the facility. Supervisors informed that the customer crowd at the Kendras, drastically reduced post covid pandemic. The reason for the same was the fear of contamination from the facility even though cooked meals posed less of a threat. Even the staff requirement reduced post covid. The Annapurna Dal Bhat Kendra at Jail Road (philanthropic service) though halted serving meals, distributed ration that came in from the Jain relief trust.

Food For Thought

1. Activities allotted to women staff at these facilities revolve around roles that are an extension of the three *C's* - *Cook, Care and Clean*, specifically gender norms. Are we yet not ready to see women in leadership roles like operators, managers and supervisors?
2. With due respect to the meal pricing, it would be fascinating to explore possible reasons for serving exclusive vegetarian meals at urban canteens.
3. Urban Canteens are a common site for drunken arguments between the customers and staff demanding free meals. Is the prevalence of addiction to intoxication coming in the way of food security?
4. A cheaper diet may not be a balanced diet. Is satiating hunger enough? When is the optimal time to make satiating hunger secondary and nutritional requirements primary?

*"If you want to eliminate
hunger, everybody has to
be involved" ~ Bono*

FOOD SECURITY





Shramik Annapurna Yojana

Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Vaishnavi Paliya [11]

[11] Master of Arts in Development (Batch 2023-2025), Azim Premji University, Bengaluru and Former Intern, UoH-LoE Project

At Shores: Shramik Annapurna Yojana for combating food insecurity

With changing landscape from developing to a developed nation, easing out the living standards, barging into questions of unemployment, healthcare and schooling, it all starts with mental and physical well-being. All that pins down is how healthy a body is, and how well we as a nation securing food for its citizens. With increasing numbers of billionaires and millionaires, how well we are offering platform for the bottom three-fourth of citizens to grow, is always the story the state draws in its mind and secure its people the unachieved. One such story is challenge of food insecurity.

We conducted a study, from the trading state of India, the vibrant Gujarat regarding its program for the meals it provides at minimal cost to the informal and unorganised sector. How well it's shaping the mind and body of people, who are shaping the future of the state and the bridge that fills the gap of extra yield from field and hunger that haunts another day with a hope.

Shramik Annapurna Yojana and urban food security

Shramik Annapurna Scheme, first launched in 2017 by the then Gujarat government, was officially relaunched in October 2022, with token amount being reduced from ₹10 to ₹5. The Shramik Annapurna Scheme is among the 20 welfare initiatives funded through the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess in the state. According to the state government the scheme has benefited about 50 lakh workers in a year, which makes this scheme an important one in the lives of migrant construction workers residing in the state. Under the Shramik Annapurna Scheme, meal is being provided at 118 'Kadia-Naka', the focal point of workers to find their living, through dedicated kiosks set



Canteen at Ahmedabad

up in 10 districts of the state. The benefits can be availed by the workers and their family by registering at the Gujarat Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Board. After registering the worker is issued an E-Nirman card and he/ she can avail the benefits of the scheme with this card. The workers who are not registered in BOCW welfare board can get the food for 15 days but not more than that. The canteens are exclusively for the migrant construction workers registered under BOCW Welfare Board. The intent is to provide lunch to the workers and secure their one-time meal. The canteen serves all days in the months except on Amavasya “New Moon” day.

Accessibility and its importance

With 47 out of 118 Kadia- Nakas present in Ahmedabad, covering vast number of migrants, marking location is a step that paves the way for success of any scheme. With continuous construction at 12 special economic zones and 10 industrial parks, with the largest having nearly 2500 industries, it is definitely difficult to manage but with most kiosks in capital, the program is trying

to reach the last mile covering as many clusters as possible. The canteen’s objective is to cater to the need of the migrant workers who gather around the Kadia-Nakas in the morning.

“Sometimes I forget my tiffin at home, If the canteen would be near the labour colony, or the near the place we reside, it might be more feasible,” said one of the respondents availing the facility of the canteen at Gurukul Kadia Naka.



Interacting with a customer regarding the quality (L), Crowd at the canteen (R)

The scheme aims to provide packed lunches to workers who often lack the time to prepare meals in the morning and otherwise rely on snacks like samosas or dhokla to sustain themselves during their demanding 8- 10 hour workdays.

Timely meals are well absorbed meals

The kiosks operate from 7am to 11am, coinciding with the time when most workers gather at *Nakas* to seek employment. While the timing is sufficient, each *Naka* serves approximately

100 meals, making it essential to arrive early to secure one. The convenience of not having to prepare meals in the morning has also led to increased participation from women, as it frees up time for other tasks. Workers report that this arrangement allows them to manage morning chores better and enjoy proper rest without worrying about food preparation.

However, despite the adaptive timing, a single meal often leaves workers drained after a physically exhausting day on-site, followed by evening kitchen duties. For families, the burden is somewhat mitigated by shared responsibilities after work. In contrast, individuals living alone face the challenge of a long, tiring day before they can rest.

“I like to get the service from the canteen since it allows me enough time to finish other work at home – including cleaning” a female worker said availing the benefit from the Naka at Sarkhej.

Questioning the Quality and Quantity

Workers are required to bring their own containers to collect their meals, which they can choose to consume immediately or save for later. Each meal typically includes six chapatis, dal, sabji, and occasionally a sweet, with minor variations. While the overall food quality is reported to be good, there have been complaints about undercooked chapatis from some workers.

Given the high demand at each *Naka*, which serves nearly 100 meals, some workers have noted dissatisfaction with the portion sizes, although the serving staff do their best within their constraints. However, the majority of workers express satisfaction with both the quantity and quality of the food provided.

The lack of additional facilities such as drinking water, proper packaging, or a dine-in arrangement is a notable shortcoming that could alleviate some of the workers' challenges.

“I like having food from the canteen; the taste is good. But the chapatis are not cooked properly. Still, for ₹5, what more can we expect?” remarked a worker at the Gota Kadia-Naka.

One-meal to full-day meal

Providing meals, a day, at an accessible location, with good food at an affordable rate attracts workers to avail the benefits. However it is equally important to ensure that the canteens are welcoming and safe for women. It was observed that usually women don't come to avail the service, as the canteens are set up in the public crowded places. Creating a more safe and inclusive environment around the canteen could encourage their participation.

Additionally, the one meal service can be extended to a full-day meal option. The study revealed that the households where women work alongside men, did not find any issue with the one-day meal program as the responsibility of dinner often falls on the women, adding to their burden.

Another challenge for the workers is to have the E-Nirman card to avail any benefit. Those without the card can avail food only for 15 days. This needs to be extended as the documentation process often gets delayed. Many workers also face the issue of linking their mobile number to Aadhar further hindering the registration process. Addressing these administrative issues and extending the eligibility period, would allow the scheme to reach more individuals in need.

Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana

Ranchi, Jharkhand

Anjor Bhaskar [13] and Ruchi Singh [14]

A Second Serving: Reimagining Jharkhand's Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana

When asked about the food quality at the Dal Bhat Kendra, Akla Mahto from Daltonganj responds, “*Paanch Rupaye mein kya khaiye ga, sahib?*” (*What can you eat for 5 Rupees, sir?*). Akla is traveling to Ranchi to get his wife treated at the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences hospital (the main government hospital of Jharkhand). He describes the food at the state-subsidised Kendra as poor—the rice is full of stones, and the dal extremely watery—but he says it is still better than going to bed hungry. The helplessness in his words sheds light on the unique salience of the Dal Bhat Yojana. Despite the oft-subpar food quality, the canteens are a veritable lifeline for many people of limited means who are grateful for whatever they can get.

Akla and his wife's experience is not an isolated case; it highlights the broader struggle of vulnerable communities to access affordable food. The COVID-19 pandemic and climate-driven natural disasters have laid bare the vulnerability of these individuals and communities in India, emphasising the importance of public welfare programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and MGNREGA. However, these systems often fail to meet the needs of mobile urban populations without access to a kitchen or the ability to cook food. This is where community kitchen or subsided meal programmes come in. In Jharkhand, the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojna (DBY) has played a pivotal role in providing affordable meals to the urban poor, making it a significant intervention amid high poverty and migration.

The Need for Community Kitchens in Jharkhand

Jharkhand's rich mineral and forest wealth and high level of industrialisation stand in sharp contrast with its deprivation in

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terms of human development. A combination of factors has left an especially large chunk of the population vulnerable to food deprivation.

Firstly, Jharkhand's resource curse is driving the displacement and alienation of tribals from their forests due to mining. They have increasingly diminished access to forest resources to supplement their incomes and food baskets.

Secondly, agricultural distress and stagnation in the rural agricultural sector further contribute to imbalanced development, forced migration, and the creation of footloose urban poor.

Thirdly, there is a high incidence of poverty. As per NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2021 around 42.16 percent of the population of Jharkhand is multidimensionally poor, making it the second poorest state in the country after Bihar. This high incidence of poverty is largely concentrated in rural areas which creates rural urban inequality. This, in turn, leads to a very high prevalence of urban poor footloose in the towns and cities of Jharkhand. This deprivation and unequal growth are the leading cause of extremely high levels of migration in the state.

Additionally, services and amenities are heavily concentrated in urban areas with rural areas suffering from major deficits in infrastructure and service provisioning – particularly healthcare and administration. This is reflective of the poor status of healthcare in rural areas and its concentration in the city. People have to travel to cities for medical, legal, and administrative reasons.

As per the Indian Economic Survey, 2023-24, unemployment

in Jharkhand has been one of the highest in the country. Unemployment has a direct connection with hunger and food security.

The spectre of starvation deaths that has resurfaced in the state in recent years is symptomatic of a culmination of all these factors contributing to systemic neglect. Notably, most of these deaths are reported from Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGS), dalits, adivasis, daily wage workers, and nomads.

All of these factors - displacement, alienation, agricultural distress and stagnation, poverty, rural-urban inequality in income and public services, unemployment, and the spectre of rural starvation - combine to force people to move towards urban centers - giving rise to a large and floating footloose poor population. These are people who are either unable to access their entitlements under food security schemes such as PDS, MDM, ICDS, etc., or if they have access to rations - lack the facilities to cook and eat meals.

Background and Context of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana

With the launch of the Dal Bhat Yojana in 2011, Jharkhand became one of the pioneering states to address hunger and food security for the urban areas; even before Tamil Nadu's Amma Unnavagam garnered widespread attention. The idea was to provide a decent wholesome and hygienic meal at a nominal price.

Unfortunately, much unlike Tamil Nadu's Amma Canteens, Jharkhand's Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana remains one of those schemes that is largely unknown, even for many within the state itself. This chapter attempts to fill this gap. It attempts to provide a detailed account of the scheme, its evolution, performance,

challenges, successes, and reasons for the same. Finally, it provides some recommendations to leverage the policy for more effective outcomes. The chapter is based on extensive research, including a survey of 1,898 Dal Bhat Yojana customers in Ranchi, observations of 10 canteens over 20 days, interviews with canteen operators, policymakers, activists, and implementing agencies, as well as an analysis of newspaper reports and thousands of pages of policy communications between the Department of Food (the nodal agency overseeing the policy) and the District Administration (the agency responsible for implementing the policy at the district level).

Evolution of the Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana

Launched on August 15, 2011, the Mukhya Mantri Dal Bhat Yojana (lentils and rice scheme) aimed to provide affordable meals of rice and lentils to those below the poverty line. Within two months, soyabean and chickpea curry were added to the menu. Over the past 13 years, the scheme has undergone several changes and witnessed (and survived) nearly five changes in government.

When it was launched in 2011, 100 canteens were established across Jharkhand's 24 districts, only in the urban areas. By October 2 of the same year, the program expanded to block headquarters, bringing the total to around 370 canteens across both urban and rural areas. As of 2020, around 377 canteens, managed by Self-Help Groups, were operating in cities and block headquarters.

These canteens are supposed to be equipped with the necessary infrastructure to cook and serve meals, and seat diners. Locations are strategically chosen based on factors like labor density, population, and proximity to areas with high foot traffic, such as bus stands, railway stations, hospitals, and markets. The scheme

was an ambitious government programme with the potential to address the growing hunger and food insecurity in the urban areas of Jharkhand.

Interruption in the Policy

From its inception in 2011 till 2013, when Mr. Hemant Soren of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha took over as Chief Minister, the Dal Bhat Yojana continued to function uninterrupted. Rice for the scheme was supplied to the state by the central government through the Open Market Supply Scheme (OMSS). However, in 2014, the Government of Jharkhand stopped receiving rice supplies from the central government because of which it decided to stop the programme. This created a furor across the state. Several grassroots organisations came together to protest and demand that the scheme be resumed. As a result, the Government of Jharkhand under Chief Minister Hemant Soren decided to restart the scheme using its own resources. Meanwhile, Jharkhand State Assembly elections took place in November- December, 2014 and the BJP (whose Chief Minister had first initiated the Dal Bhat Yojana back in 2010), formed the government once again – this was the first time Jharkhand saw a single-party majority government. The protests continued under the new government, and in January 2015, the state government agreed to restart the scheme by procuring rice from within the state instead of being dependent on rice supplies from the Government of India through the OMSS. Thus, nearly 370 meal outlets began serving meals once again in all towns across the state. This was a big success for all civil society organisations working on food security in the state.

Dal Bhat Yojana (DBY) During COVID- 19

The DBY canteens played an extremely crucial role during the COVID-19-induced lockdown. The state government of

Jharkhand also leveraged the canteens to provide food security to stranded migrants. During the lockdown, the number of canteens increased tremendously to cater to the needs and demands of the migrants. The government introduced **498 Special Dal Bhat Canteens, 94 Migrant Worker Canteens, and 382 canteens at police stations** all over Jharkhand. In areas of high demand even night canteens were opened. These canteens were to open in the day and night (for serving dinner) and were provided 50 percent more rice, soyabean, and chana to be able to serve 600 people each.

Ram Vilas (name changed) was an elderly priest from Palamu. In March 2020, he came to Ranchi for official work in the high court. Suddenly, the nationwide lockdown was announced and Ram Vilas was unable to go back to Palamu since all transport systems were shut. The district administration created night shelters for stranded people and Ram Vilas also stayed in one of those. However, for food, he would walk to the nearest Dal Bhat Canteen and eat his meal for ₹5. Like Ram Vilas, thousands of stranded people, migrants, destitute, and informal workers benefited from the canteens during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns.

Structure and Operations of DBY

Each DBY meal includes **200 gm of rice**, dal, and a curry with **12.5 gm of soyabean nuggets or chana**. The main drawing point is the price of each meal - ₹5.

These canteens are strategically located in high-density areas such as bus stands, railway stations, hospitals, and markets to reach urban footloose populations. The use of self-help groups (SHGs)



Food served at the ITI Bus Stand Dal Bhat Kendra, Ranchi

as operators tap into local networks, fostering community involvement.

Under the scheme, the government is responsible for providing the following:

1. *Rice and soybean nuggets/chana*
2. *Space for the canteen*

Everything else is supposed to be provided by the self-help groups (SHGs) operating the canteens. This includes

- *Spices, vegetables, condiments like pickles and chilies, and cooking oils*
- *Water for cooking and washing utensils and hands*
- *Electricity and cooking fuel*
- *Dining and cooking equipment like utensils for cooking, serving, and eating, chairs, tables*
- *Salaries of employees and transport of materials*
- *Storage space where it is not provided*
- *Chairs and tables for sitting, eating, and serving food*
- *Notebooks and stationery for maintaining accounts and details of visitors*

As mentioned earlier, during the start of the policy, the rice was provided by the central government to the state government through the OMSS. The scheme would often be threatened due to the erratic supply of rice from the central government. However, since January 2015, the state government began procuring rice and soybean/chana from within the state through contractors. The private contractors are selected, through a tender process, to procure rice, soyabean, and chana from the market or from the State Food Corporation at prevailing APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) rates. This has ensured a more stable supply to the canteens.

Under the new system, canteen operators (often SHGs) are required to deposit ₹2400 per month at the DC office for 2400 kg of rice. Upon payment, they receive a receipt, which they present to the food contractor who then purchases and supplies the designated quantity of rice, soya bean, and chana to the canteens and obtains an acknowledgment from them. The contractor submits this acknowledgment receipt to the DC office to get paid according to the rates specified in the tender, which are kept in line with the APMC prices. As a result, while the Central and State Food and Civil Supplies corporations no longer play a role, the APMC determines the prices of food items, ensuring that the cost of procurement remains reasonable and avoids inflated government purchase prices.

Successes of the program

A big success of the scheme is that Dal Bhat Canteens *do* exist in all the locations where they are supposed to exist and are broadly located in areas where the urban poor footloose are concentrated. The canteens open and cook fresh food every day, and serve this food to anyone who wants to eat at the given price. No one willing to pay five rupees for a meal is denied food at the canteen. In some cases, even those who cannot afford to pay, are provided meals. While the DBYs are open to all and there are no exclusion criteria, the programme design implicitly and the policy document explicitly intend to cater to the poorest of the poor. Further, the scheme is very well targeted - primarily serving in areas where the most needy and disadvantaged population stays or transits.

However, this success may be impeded by the June 2022 orders of the government requiring customers to show their Aadhaar card before being served. If implemented, such an order could be the death knell for the policy as its greatest strength lies in serving food

to anybody willing to pay a normative sum without needing to furnish any documents.

DBY successfully leverages Jharkhand's existing food distribution network - the Department of Food, the Jharkhand State Food and Civil Supplies Corporation, and an elaborate network of ration dealers - to address hunger and food insecurity for those in need and those lacking access to cooked meals. Shortage/delay in the provision of state-provided ration was rarely reported as an issue by the canteen operators.

Dal Bhat Kendras address both transient and chronic hunger and significantly contributes to food security especially that of the urban footloose population. For many repeat customers, these canteens are a regular source of nourishment; for others, they are an affordable option when in transit. The table below illustrates the variety of customers benefiting from these canteens. The data is based on a 2019 survey of 1898 customers across 10 DBY Kendras in Jharkhand. The Kendras cater to both workers and non-workers, including women engaged in household chores, students, the elderly, street children, and individuals with physical or mental challenges. Non-workers also encompass low-income individuals who cannot afford nutritious, hygienic meals.

Additionally, a majority of the customers fall within the 30-59 age range, highlighting the DBK's role in supporting mobile adults who live or travel far from home and lack access to home-cooked meals. The Dal Bhat Kendras are a boon for all of these people. This is highlighted in several of their statements which describe how they (and sometimes even their families) would either have to stay hungry or sacrifice other critical expenses to afford a meal.

Moreover, canteen operators demonstrate significant ingenuity

Distribution of Dal Bhat Kendra Customers by Occupation/ Activity

Sl No.	Occupational Grouping	Percentage
Workers		
1	Construction Labour	27.45
2	Farmer/ Fisher	14.96
3	Rickshaw Puller	13.17
4	Waste Picker or itinerant waste buyer	3.42
5	Masons/Mistry/ Raj Mistry	2.85
6	Salaried Skilled/Semi Skilled Manual workers such as Workers in small enterprises (Carpenter, Painter, Grill Maker, Cycle Shop, etc)	2.74
7	Worker in Shop/ Medical Shop/ Dhaba/ Restaurant etc	2.63
8	Sweeper/Domestic Worker	2.48
9	Salaried Unskilled Work - Khalaasi (Driver's Helper), Washer, etc	2.32
10	Chowkidar/ Watchman/ Guard/ Lift Man etc	2.05
11	Other Self-Employed Work	1.9
12	Manual Worker - agriculture, loader, coolie, etc	1.79
13	Other Casual Skilled/ Semi Skilled Manual Workers such as Carpenter, Electrician, Plumber, Driver	1.74
14	Fruit/ Vegetable Seller	1.63
15	Self Employed Street Vendor or Small trader such as Bidi Maker, Coal Trader, Leaf Seller, Basket Seller, etc	1.63

16	Self Employed Skilled/Semi Skilled Workers such as Shop Owners (Including Barbers, Scrap Shop Owners), Cobblers, Astrologers, Drivers	1.53
17	Professional or Salaried Worker such as Teacher/Tuition Teacher / Madarsa Teacher, salesperson, Clerk, Peon, Correspondent, etc.	0.68
Non-workers		
18	Students/ Children	8.06
19	Housewife	4.48
20	Beggar	1.95
21	People who can't work due to ill health, old age, or are mentally unsound	0.37
22	Unemployed/ Person Looking for work	0.16
	Total	100

and entrepreneurship, often overcoming infrastructural challenges and policy limitations to sustain operations—sometimes even without compromising food quality or quantity.

Challenges and Limitations

However, despite these successes, there are significant challenges that limit the effectiveness of the policy. Some of these challenges are briefly described here.

1. Limited Outreach

Daily attendance at community canteens varies widely, from 26 to 159, falling short of the intended numbers. While canteens are stocked to serve up to 400 meals daily in cities and fewer in rural areas, actual attendance often lags behind. Poor placement and low food quality also limit outreach. Canteens near alcohol shops

and in inconspicuous areas deter female and new visitors. Faded signs and dingy locations further reduce visibility. Some managers avoid promoting their canteens to prevent excess patronage, preserving the surplus to sell in the market. While attitudes vary, unfriendly or dismissive staff often dissuade potential diners.

2. Gender Disparity

Although managed by women-led SHGs, women make up only **14.2 percent** of customers. This is mainly due to the absence of women in the main occupational groups frequenting the canteens - informal, migrant, kitchenless workers. Women typically visit only when away from home, such as during travel or medical visits. However, other factors such as canteen locations near undesirable areas such as alcohol shops, lack of variety and poor quality of food deter them further.

3. Over-reporting of Beneficiaries

The scheme is highly prone to over-reporting. In the 10 Dal Bhat Kendras surveyed about 76 percent of recorded beneficiaries were found to be fictitious entries by canteen operators. Actual feeding rates vary. The percentage of real beneficiaries compared to their reported numbers, was as low as 6 percent in some canteens and went up to 47 percent in others.

A 2018 interview with a coordinator indicates that canteen staff inflate customer counts out of economic sustainability concerns. Although the government provides rice, soybeans, and chana, the responsibility for vegetables, dal, condiments, fuel, infrastructure, and wages falls on the canteens themselves. To cover these costs, canteens often report serving up to 400 meals daily but serve far fewer. This creates a system that inherently encourages misreporting and incentivises limiting real meals to divert unused rations for resale.

If appropriately designed with better compensation, the program can not only address food security but also the livelihood security of many who serve in these canteens.

4. Location of the Canteen and unhygienic surroundings

contribute significantly towards the outreach of the Dal Bhat Canteens. Even canteens run well by ingenious and enterprising managers could not compensate for badly chosen locations. Some are in areas far away from the points of workforce concentration, while others are in the vicinity of alcohol shops and gambling addas rendering them inaccessible for women. The ITI canteen building, for instance, is often surrounded by people urinating. As a result, the strong suffocating stench of urine is a permanent feature associated with the building. The canteen at Sadar Hospital was given a dilapidated albeit pucca building inside the hospital, but it had to deal with issues such as construction noise, pollution, and proximity to the hospital's garbage dump. The survival and sustenance of the policy depend upon the suitability of the space and the external environment that it offers.

This space - or location - determines the visibility of the canteens, the footfall at the canteen, the social and economic demography of the people visiting the area, the ownership of land, and the experiences of those visiting the canteens, etc.

5. Variable quantity of servings

The primary policy objective is to provide a nutritious and satisfying meal for five rupees, consisting of 200 grams of rice and 12.5 grams of either soya chunks or chana (alternating daily), supplemented with dal, vegetables, and pickle. This meal is intended to meet the average person's caloric and nutritional needs. However, in many canteens, the actual food portions served fall short of the specified quantity. In a survey of 1,898

individuals conducted in the year 2019 only 12 percent cited the quality or quantity of food as a reason for choosing to eat at these canteens. An overwhelming majority of the respondents found the rice portion insufficient. Portions also vary across different canteens, For instance, 27.7 percent of the respondents at the Doranda canteen perceived the helping of rice to be enough while only 21.6 percent found it sufficient at the ITI canteen. Rice portions vary not only across different canteens but also within the same canteen, fluctuating depending on the day and time.

Further, using rice starch (maadh) from strained rice to thicken dal thereby reducing the lentil portion is a common practice. Moreover, while rice is cooked multiple times daily to meet demand, vegetable curry is typically prepared only once. Once the curry runs out, customers are served rice, accompanied by dal (if available) or simply chili and salt.

It has been observed that it is easier to serve smaller portions, or even none at all, of dal and vegetables later in the day, as most inspections occur around noon.

To reduce costs and boost revenues, canteen operators often serve less rice, soyabean/chana, and dal than specified. This practice is prompted by the shoestring budget in which the operations are carried out.

The insufficient food portions force many manual workers to buy 2- 4 plates a day to satiate their hunger, resulting in additional expenses.

6. Quality of Food

The quality of food is primarily assessed through three key factors: the freshness of ingredients, the quantity of ingredients

used (particularly pulses and vegetables), and the overall taste of the food.

When asked about the reasons for eating at the Dal Bhat canteen and whether food quality influenced their choice, experiences varied across different canteens. For some, food quality is indeed a deciding factor. Around 20 percent of the 1,898 customers surveyed stated that food quality was one of the main reasons they chose to eat at the canteens. However, this average was skewed by a few canteens in Ranchi. Where nearly 40 percent of customers at the Dhurwa canteen and 46 percent at the Birsa Chowk canteen cited the good quality of food as a primary draw. One example is the canteen at the Mango bus stand in Jamshedpur, where meals included rice with plentiful, non-watery dal, soyabean, chana, potato, and other vegetables, all appropriately spiced. The canteen also offered fish for ₹10 per piece. Customers were greeted warmly by the canteen coordinator, who communicated with them in Bengali.

However, for the majority of customers (80.7 percent), food quality was not a reason for eating at the canteens. Instead, factors such as the lack of convenient alternatives and affordability drove their choice. In many canteens, the food was described as unappetising, with thick rice, minimal or no pulses, a small amount of soya bean, and little or no vegetables. Spices and oil were often used sparingly. Some canteens even relied on rice starch (maadh)—the excess water from boiling rice—thickened with turmeric to give it a yellow color, replacing pulses altogether. Customers often had to buy curry from nearby shops or eat rice with salt and chilies. For many, the food was merely “good enough” to satisfy hunger and was consumed mainly because it was cheap, helping them save money for other needs or, in some cases because it was the only food they could afford.

Canteen operators, according to officials, appear to have a vested interest in producing low-quality food, as it caters to the most desperate customers. This low-quality approach seems to be a strategy for canteen managers to keep costs down and sustain their operations by selling excess rice, pulses, and soybeans for profit. However, not all canteens follow this strategy, nor do they implement it to the same extent.

Nearly all customers also expressed a desire for more variety in the menu. Some canteens do offer non-vegetarian options, such as egg curry and chicken, in addition to the standard meals. These items are sold at an extra charge of ₹10- 20, providing an additional revenue stream for the canteen.

The canteen serves food, rice, dal and vegetable for ₹5 per plate. For an additional ₹10 for a serving of fish. The canteen seemed to be extremely popular - especially among the Bengali migrants in the city since it serves fish along with the regular meals.

7. Infrastructure Deficiencies

The policy documents do not outline specific infrastructure or facility requirements for canteens. The state's role is limited to providing space, typically in areas frequented by the urban poor. All other operational and infrastructure responsibilities are assigned to the agencies managing the canteens. Although the government announced plans in 2016 to upgrade some canteens to 'Adarsh' Dal Bhat Kendras with better infrastructure and increased capacity, these plans were never executed.

With unclear state responsibilities, canteen



Food Served at the JSRTC Bus Stand Canteen



Food being served at the Khadgarha Bus Stand Canteen



Khadgarha Bus Stand Canteen. Typically, food in the Dal Bhat Kendras is characterised by thick rice, watery dal and scant soybean

infrastructure relies heavily on the creativity and resourcefulness of the operators. Some managed to create semi-permanent structures using makeshift materials like sarees or plastic sheets for walls, sourced water from public taps or hand pumps, and negotiated for electricity connections.

Infrastructure wise, canteen establishments can roughly be categorised as - Pucca canteens in dilapidated buildings, semi-pucca canteens with asbestos or tin roofs, and temporary sheds on footpaths and roadsides.

Pukka Canteens: Most pucca canteens provide basic shelter and storage for raw materials, but few have electricity for fans or lights. This results in poorly lit, inadequately ventilated spaces that become dark, hot, and suffocating, especially in summer. The tin or asbestos roofs trap heat and the absence of windows or fans prevents cooling. Essentials such as working light bulbs, fans, freshwater connections, and washbasins are rare. Additionally, many canteens lack proper drainage for wastewater, attracting flies and insects. While some canteens offer adequate seating, many can only accommodate 8-10 customers at a time due to limited space.

For pucca canteens to be truly functional, they must be well-ventilated, sufficiently lit, equipped with chimneys or vents for furnace soot, and insulated to block direct heat.

Semi- pukka canteens and Temporary sheds: These don't have space for safe storage of materials (grains, utensils, stoves, fuel, oils, spices, vegetables, etc.). They are open to theft and even the chairs and tables in most of them have been stolen. Asbestos roofs tend to get very hot in summer and holes in the roof leak during rains. Replacing the rusting tin roofs every few

years is an additional cost for the managers, which like other things comes at the cost of compromising the food quality for the customers.

The temporary sheds (made of sarees or cloth tied to poles which they had put up) meant that the beneficiaries had to bear the heat of the sun during the summer and rain during the monsoon if they had to eat at the canteens. They are mostly just allocated a space on a footpath or an empty space near a temple.

Overall, most Dal Bhat Canteens provide a dismal environment to the customers. The canteens are mostly in a state of neglect, with no investment over basic necessities such as a whitewash for a dilapidated old and soot-covered buildings. If people are to consume meals, they need an appropriate environment protected from rains and the harsh summer sun. They need to be able to eat away from the dust and pollution of the city and the dirt and stench of garbage piles. They also need utensils (plates etc), chairs to sit on, and tables to keep their plates. They need light to be able to see their food and possibly fans to stay cool. They need water to wash their hands and to quench their thirst.

Due to the absence of proper storage facilities, canteens have been facing losses due to theft and vandalism. In addition, canteen managers have to spend a lot of money on transporting rations from the canteen managers' homes. Ultimately, this cost



Food served at the Nagarmal Modi Seva Sadan Canteen (the Extra Bowl of Chicken Curry Costs ₹20)



The Dal Bhat Canteen at Mango Bus Stand in Jamshedpur city of Jharkhand



The "Adarsh" RIMS Canteen from inside -one of the canteens with a 'pukka' concrete building



Food at the RIMS Canteen



People eating at the Dal Bhat Kendra at ITI bus stand, Ranchi



The ITI Bus Stand Dal Bhat Canteen from the Outside



View of the Dal Bhat Kendra at ITI Bus Stand in Ranchi from Inside



Views of the Exterior and the Interior of the Dal Bhat Kendra, JSRTC Bus Stand (at the Ranchi Railway Station)

is recovered through reduced quantity or quality of food provided at the canteens.

However, canteen operators see no particular incentives to invest in the infrastructure or facilities either. As a result, the customers have to suffer the indignity of having to eat meals while soaking under the rains (as in case of canteens without any proper sheds such as the Doranda canteen) or inside dark, dingy, hot, and suffocating rooms with soot-covered walls (as in the case of canteens with sheds without ventilation, light, fans, etc. such as the Dhurwa and Khadgada canteens).



*Inside the JSRTC Bus Stand Canteen (T)
View of the Doranda Market Dal Bhat
Kendra from Outside (B)*

Causes of Inefficiencies

Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana was an ambitious programme of the government and has the potential to address the growing hunger and food insecurity in the urban areas of Jharkhand. Here, we present two of the key factors which hamper the performance of the DBYs.

Low Resource Allocation

The most prominent factor for the poor performance of the policy is the extremely minuscule budgetary allocation for it — less than ₹15 crore for the entire state, with nearly 370 canteens. Compare this to a budget of over ₹100 crores for nearly 451 Amma canteens in Tamil Nadu. The state's limited financial commitment—just ₹14 crores until three years ago, rising to ₹70 crores by 2020-21—pales against the overall state budget of over ₹80,000 crores. Its responsibilities are limited to providing space (often unused public areas), rice, soybeans, chana, and oversight. SHGs are expected to manage all other aspects within their earnings from selling 400 meals daily at ₹5 each, a sum of



*Views of Dal Bhat Kendra
Doranda Bazar from the
inside*



*The Canteen at Birsa Munda Bus Stand,
Khadgadha, Ranchi*

₹2,000. Their costs include:

- *Cleaning/renovating premises*
- *Repairs or building sheds*
- *Electricity, water, fans, lights, furniture*
- *Salaries for staff*
- *Procuring utensils, stoves, condiments, vegetables, pulses*
- *Renting storage space*
- *Transporting rations and staff*

Therefore, there is a strong incentive for malpractice by the canteen coordinators built into the policy design. Some of the common ways the centers boost incomes are the following:

- *Show the number of customers as 400 approx. and get the full quota of 80 kg of rice per day. This incentivises the diversion of the additional rice for extra money.*
- *No incentive to provide better quality food and to attract customers.*
- *Serve less than the mandated quantity to the customers.*
- *Discourage customers in other ways; for example, by not providing safe clean drinking water, a filthy environment, or rude behaviour, thereby perpetuating an environment where only the most desperate customers eat at DBY canteens.*

Lack of Accountability

The absence of a formal grievance system or legislative backing allows substandard practices to persist. One canteen coordinator's dismissive comment to a customer— “*You want a royal feast for 5 rupees? If it wasn't for this, you'd be starving right now*”—highlights the system's perception of the scheme as largesse, not a public right.

Recommendations for Improvement

Despite the challenges and limitations, the policy plays an extremely crucial role in the lives of the footloose poor. However, its impact on food and nutrition security and the general well-being of the footloose can easily be enhanced with some simple measures listed below:

1. Infrastructure Upgrades

The state should invest in essential infrastructure, including electricity, seating, and protection from the elements. Improved conditions would attract more patrons, including women, and create a safer dining environment.

2. Policy Reforms and Rights-Based Approach

Incorporating community kitchens into the NFSA, 2013, as a right-based scheme would transform it from a charity initiative to a state obligation, ensuring better accountability and customer rights.

3. Increased Budget and Resource Allocation

Expanding the budget to cover vegetables, pulses, and operational costs would relieve SHGs and improve meal quality. This would reduce reliance on cost-cutting practices and improve sustainability.

4. Enhanced Monitoring

Regular inspections, transparent reporting, and technology-driven oversight could curb over-reporting and ensure adherence to meal standards.

Conclusion

The Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojna is more than a meal—it's an important instrument to address hunger and food insecurity in the urban scape. But for it to truly deliver, it needs more than just survival—it needs to thrive. The program is in desperate need of a makeover—better infrastructure, robust funding, and higher food quality are some important pathways to improve the services. While the basic institution is in place, with a better envisioning of the system, food and livelihood security can go a long way.

Role of Civil Societies

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Role of Civil Societies in Urban Food Security

Civil society organisations are indispensable players in ensuring food security in urban areas. Their diverse roles such as advocacy to direct service provision, enable them to address the multifaceted nature of urban food insecurity. As urban populations continue to grow and the pressures on food systems increase, the role of civil society seem to become more critical in creating sustainable and inclusive food systems that can meet the needs of all city dwellers. Through collaboration with governments and communities, these organisations would aid in mitigating urban food insecurity and hunger. The role of government and civil societies including the nonprofit organisations, philanthropy is crucial in addressing hunger and food security especially in the urban-scape. In our project exploring institutions that provide affordable food in urban settings, we extended our focus beyond government-led initiatives to examine philanthropic organisations making significant contributions. This chapter highlights two such organisations: (1) **Thavamoszhi Foundation in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu** and (2) **Buvva Bandi in Hyderabad, Telangana**, that have established to serve the needy.

Thavamoszhi Foundation **Knock the door, if hungry**

Umarani, also known as Guberalakshmi, is a remarkable woman whose life is dedicated to serving the needy. She is the founder of Thavamoszhi Foundation and a nursing graduate who has worked in various sectors such as agriculture, marketing, and entrepreneurship. Despite facing numerous challenges, she has dedicated herself to providing free meals to those in need. Each day, Umarani single-handedly prepares breakfast and lunch for

the underprivileged in her community. In the morning, she serves a nutritious ragi drink to 150 people, and by lunchtime, that number increases to around 400 people, up from the initial 250. Many of those who visit her home for breakfast are workers in the informal sector who rely on her meals before starting their day.

Umarani's journey of service began long before the establishment of her foundation. From the time she started earning, she has been involved in helping others. Wherever her career took her, whether in agriculture or as an entrepreneur of a notebook manufacturing unit, she always made time to serve the less fortunate. Before the pandemic, she personally delivered food to people in need, often searching roadside areas to find those who were struggling. During the pandemic, she maintained cattle in a village, using the resources to make and distribute food to the community.

Thavamozhi Foundation was officially founded four years ago, with Umarani offering food without ever directly asking for money. She believes in accepting donations and material contributions from those who are willing to give. But how does she manage to provide free food to so many people without substantial funding? Her financial model is based on a combination of earnings from an old-age home and services like nursing care, as well as small donations. Umarani also provides home-care services for elderly individuals, including assistance with daily activities, administering medication, and maintaining hygiene. In addition to this, she receives income from orders placed for birthday parties, funerals, and other ceremonies. The money earned from these services supports the daily meal distribution, allowing her to continue her work.

Umarani's motivation for serving others comes from her mother,



Umarani alias Guberalakshmi, a common woman is the founder of Thavamozhi foundation

who was always compassionate and gave food to workers in the fields. Her mother's strength in the face of cancer deeply impacted Umarani, especially when her mother sent her and her siblings to the hostel to shield them from witnessing her suffering. This experience fuelled Umarani's resolve to care for the elderly and those in need, as a way of honouring her mother's legacy.

When asked why she chose this life of service, despite opportunities to work in hospitals or pursue further education, Umarani explained, *"I love God. If you love someone, you try to make them happy in every way you can, and for me, serving the lives he has sent is my way of expressing that love."* For her, the people who come to her for food become her family, and through this service, she experiences immense love and fulfilment.

Although her foundation continues to grow and attract attention from people in other states and countries, she has faced many obstacles. Umarani has dealt with threats to the safety of her food and her property. Some people even threatened to poison the food or place harmful substances in it. To ensure safety, she installed CCTVs around her home. She has also been harassed for not having a permanent place to live, as landlords often raise rents upon learning of her charitable activities, assuming she has money to pay higher prices.



Serving of food to a customer

Despite all these challenges, Umarani has persisted in her mission to feed the hungry. She has lived without a permanent home and has faced financial burdens, but her commitment to service remains unwavering. The people who question her motives often assume she is involved in illegal activities or that she is seeking fame or commercial gain. However, Umarani is clear about her intentions: *"If someone is serving others, we*

should appreciate it, not question their motives. The true problem lies in the mentality that serving others for the greater good must somehow be for profit or popularity.”

When asked how people can become more involved in serving the poor, Umarani expressed her frustration with society’s tendency to question the motives of those doing good.

“Unless people stop seeing service as something done for fame or financial gain, real change will not happen. Celebrities and politicians are often praised for their service, but those of us who are working quietly and without recognition should be supported as well.”

To address this, she advocates for stronger protection for people working in service fields, particularly those helping the poor. She recalls that, in the early days of her work, she placed a simple board outside her home: “Knock the door if you’re hungry.” Although some youngsters mocked her for this, they often came to eat at her home later, proving that, in the end, the service she provides speaks for itself.

Through her service, Umarani has not only fed the hungry but also built a community of people who see her as a role model for selflessness and compassion. Her foundation may have started small, but it continues to grow, fuelled by the love and respect she earns from those whose lives she has touched. Despite the social and financial struggles, Umarani’s commitment to serving others remains steadfast. She continues to



Crowd at the kiosk

provide food for the needy, and her message is clear: “*Service is not about wealth or fame—it’s about love, compassion, and the willingness to give what you have to others.*” Her story is a reminder that sometimes, true service to humanity doesn’t require a big name or a fortune, it only requires a big heart.

Buvva Bandi

A group of elderly men wait eagerly at the **Buvva Bandi Canteen**, located in the heart of a bustling neighbourhood, anticipating a hearty meal. The name “*Buvva*,” meaning rice, and “*Bandi*,” meaning vehicle in Telugu, symbolises this mobile service that provides more than just food—it’s a beacon of hope and community. At precisely eight o’clock, a white **Maruti van** pulls up, bringing with it cans of nourishing millet **upma** and **Ghanji** (starch water from millet).

As the plates are filled with breakfast, an atmosphere of camaraderie and shared relief settles over the crowd. Men and women of all ages gather, each drawn by their own reasons to visit Buvva Bandi. When asked about their preference for this service, one individual simply replies, “*Free food, I eat breakfast here every day.*”



Customers having their millet breakfast

A young auto driver mentions that he doesn’t feel hungry until late in the afternoon, while an elderly man with diabetes shares that the meals help him manage his blood sugar, which has dropped from 180 to 120.

The story behind this charitable

movement is as heart-warming as the meals it serves. **Satthaiah**, a 62-year-old retired clerk from BHEL Lingampally, is the driving force behind this initiative. We meet under the shade of a large banyan tree, where he is reading the morning newspaper.

“My father had two wives and 14 children,” Satthaiah explains matter-of-factly. *“So, there wasn’t much inheritance to speak of.”* Yet, through hard work and perseverance, Satthaiah managed to educate his four daughters and one son, all of whom are now well-settled in life.

In his years working in the trade union movement at BHEL, Satthaiah noticed a glaring lack of diversity in leadership. This observation fuelled a desire for change, inspiring him to take action. *“I saw the children of migrant labourers in our neighbourhood picking food from the trash,”* he recalls, reflecting on his motivations during the pandemic. *“Pregnant women and toddlers were suffering from severe malnutrition, headaches, and other health issues. That’s when I decided to step in and help.”*

His mission began with providing meals to those in need. Over time, it expanded to include an educational project for orphaned children. What started as an initiative for boys evolved in 2019 into the **Phule Ambedkar Study Circle**, which now offers free education to 25 boys and 25 girls from across the country.



Employees serving food to the customers



The chef who cooks food for the canteen and institute



Mr. Satthaiah interacting with project team under the tree

When asked about the financial aspect of his charitable work, Satthaiah speaks humbly. *“I had some land here that I purchased in the late ‘90s,”* he explains. *“I sold it for a profit, and I’m using that money to fund all my projects.”* For him, this work is not just about charity—it’s a way to make amends for past wrongs.

Looking ahead, Satthaiah shares his vision with quiet determination: *“I want to establish one institution in every Mandal,”* he says. When asked about the possibility of state support, he responds, *“I will continue doing this until I die. It’s not in my power to ensure that my children carry on this work, but I will give it my all.”*

The **Buvva Bandi** and the **Phule Ambedkar Study Circle**, located in the heart of the community, stand as symbols of hope, compassion, and the transformative power of one person’s dedication to making a difference in the lives of others.

Conclusion

Civil society organisations play a vital role in addressing urban food insecurity through advocacy, direct services, and community collaboration. As urban populations grow, these organisations work alongside governments and communities to create sustainable food systems. The chapter highlights two such organisations:

Thavamozhi Foundation: Founded by Umarani in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, the foundation provides free meals to the underprivileged, particularly workers in the informal sector. Umarani, a nursing graduate, started her service years before formally establishing the foundation. She personally prepares and distributes meals, funding the initiative through donations, small

contributions, and income from event-based catering. Inspired by her mother's compassion, even though she faces challenges such as harassment and skepticism, she has remained committed to serving humanity with love and devotion.

Buvva Bandi: Founded by Satthaiah, a retired clerk, Buvva Bandi is a mobile canteen that offers free, nutritious millet-based meals to the elderly and migrant workers. Inspired by the severe poverty and malnutrition he witnessed during the pandemic, Satthaiah also supports orphaned children through the Phule Ambedkar Study Circle, which offers free education. Satthaiah funds the initiative from proceeds of land he purchased in the '90s, and he aims to expand the model throughout his state.

These initiatives showcase the power of selfless service in combatting urban food insecurity and improving the lives of vulnerable populations.



Conclusion

Gummadi Sridevi [1] and Amalendu Jyotishi [2]

Food security is achieved when all individuals have consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Its key dimensions include availability (food production and supply), accessibility (economic and social factors), utilization (health and nutrition practices), and agency (government and community-driven initiatives). India continues to grapple with rising malnutrition, particularly among women and children under five, marked by increasing rates of anemia and stunting. While government programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and mid-day meal schemes aim to mitigate these issues, significant gaps remain. Recent reports underscore that many states are far from achieving the goal of zero hunger, a challenge exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted all aspects of food security.

With rapid urbanization, urban food insecurity is on the rise. Rural poverty and migration to cities have led to unorganized labor markets and the proliferation of slum settlements, amplifying the challenges of food access in urban areas. Urban canteens in cities like Hyderabad and Bengaluru have emerged as crucial interventions to mitigate food insecurity. Especially during the pandemic. These canteens provide essential food support to diverse urban populations, helping to address the pressing issue of food access in urban settings.

The table towards the end of the chapter highlights the major findings of the study and recommends policy changes based upon the reviews from the beneficiaries of the respective canteens in each state. All the canteens serve a wide range of customers, including IT professionals and the homeless except for the Shramik Canteen that serves only to the migrant and construction workers. The quality of their cuisine and operating hours differ depending on the location. For instance, GHMC

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Annapurna, Deen Dayal, Annapurna Dal Bhat and Shramik Annapurna canteens serve only one meal per day at ₹5/-, the other two canteens Indira Canteens and Amma Unavagam serve food at three times per day from breakfast to dinner pricing it between ₹5/- and ₹10/-.

Our studies highlight the vital role urban canteens play in addressing food insecurity and hunger. However, significant questions remain regarding their performance, inclusiveness, expansion, and the integration of nutrition-focused initiatives. These aspects require critical evaluation and improvement to maximize the impact of such programs.

Each canteen model offers unique lessons. For instance, the women-run Amma Unavagams in Tamil Nadu exemplify the successful combination of food security with livelihood generation and women's empowerment. In contrast, the GHMC Annapurna model in Hyderabad showcases the potential of public-private partnerships to enhance food security in urban regions.

The study conducted in Hyderabad and Bengaluru emphasises the importance of strategic location in establishing urban canteens. Location strongly influences customer demographics, with lesser footfall among women and children being a notable concern. This suggests that accessibility and perceived safety are crucial factors that must be considered to ensure inclusivity.

Urban food insecurity remains a pressing issue, yet the expansion of canteen networks to smaller cities and towns has not been adequately explored. Enhancing these programs requires addressing infrastructural challenges, such as providing adequate drinking water, proper seating arrangements, and efficient waste disposal systems. Additionally, embedding a stronger nutrition

focus in the menu offerings can further elevate the quality and purpose of these canteens, making them more impactful in combating hunger and malnutrition.

The chapter also sheds light on grassroots initiatives like those of Umarani and Satthaiah, whose personal dedication to community service exemplifies the transformative power of individual efforts, proving that with passion and perseverance, individuals can make a significant difference in the lives of many.. Their work underscores the importance of complementing government programs with civil society and corporate sector participation to address urban food insecurity effectively.

By learning from these urban canteen models and their challenges, governments and stakeholders can foster inclusive, sustainable, and nutrition-focused community kitchens, contributing significantly to reducing urban food insecurity and promoting social equity.

Major Findings and Policy Points

State & the city	Name of the Canteen	Major Findings	Policy Points
Telangana, Hyderabad	GHMC Annapurna Canteen	<p>Placement of the Canteen Study finds on how the placement of the canteen affects accessibility and the makeup of its clientele, with more people walking by bus stations and places of employment.</p> <p>Waiting time and Unhygienic Even though the meal is reasonably priced, customers have complained about things like lengthy lines, poor hygiene, and a little selection of food.</p> <p>Infrastructure Customer attraction is also influenced by the atmosphere, with certain places having better amenities than others.</p> <p>Food Quality Customers' opinions vary; some compliment the price while criticizing the quality of the cuisine, particularly in places like Secunderabad. Among the difficulties supervisors confront are hygienic concerns and unhappy customers.</p>	<p>Improvement in Infrastructure and Establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) According to the study, the canteen's infrastructure should be improved in terms of cleanliness, patron safety, and the establishment of self-help groups for service management.</p> <p>Need for the Role of State It highlights how urgently the government must step in to improve food security in India's cities.</p>

Karnataka, Bengaluru	Indira Canteen	<p>Inverse Relation between Income and Satisfaction People with greater incomes are less satisfied, even if affordability draws a lot of consumers.</p> <p>Gender Imbalance Female beneficiaries opined that the canteens cater mostly to men. In order to encourage more women to use the services, there is a need for improved accessibility and safety precautions, as indicated by this gender imbalance.</p> <p>Hygiene, Infrastructure and Sanitary Facilities Concerns about hygiene and insufficient seating are among the infrastructure problems that have been highlighted. The lack of adequate sanitary facilities in many canteens affects their capacity to attract patrons. Operational difficulties have also resulted from decreased staffing levels following COVID.</p>	<p>The report recommends Improve Safety and Female Employees Improving safety perceptions and expanding the number of female employees in order to ameliorate the issue.</p> <p>Establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) It may be possible to improve administration and service delivery by taking inspiration from effective models in other states, such as the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Tamil Nadu.</p> <p>Need for the Role of State In the end, reviving the Indira Canteens and successfully tackling urban food shortages require sustained governmental backing and institutional adjustments.</p>
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			<p>Canteens Expansion</p> <p>Reduction in hunger and an enhanced access to nutrition throughout the state could be achieved by extending these canteens to additional Karnataka cities.</p>
Chennai, Tamil Nadu	Amma Canteens	<p>Difference in Menu Expectations</p> <p>Variations in local demand and supply can impact food quality and availability, even though the menu is consistent. Some canteens struggle to satisfy expectations, especially in hospitals where patients would benefit from additional vegetables in their meals, but others provide wholesome meals.</p> <p>Surviving among Odds</p> <p>The majority of Amma Canteens' staff are women, and they work in shifts. They deal with issues like low pay, harassment, and a lack of essential amenities like sanitary hygiene and restrooms. Despite the challenging working conditions, many employees report feeling empowered and financially independent, underscoring the canteens' contribution to livelihood assistance.</p>	<p>Considering Tastes and Preferences</p> <p>Measures like varying the food options according to regional tastes, improving hygiene, and giving staff regular vacation days could all contribute to the canteens' increased efficacy by boosting employee morale and service standards.</p> <p>Safe Place for Marginalised groups</p> <p>The Amma Canteens can continue to be a key factor in lowering urban food insecurity in Chennai by creating a more welcoming atmosphere for women, kids, and underprivileged groups.</p>

		<p>Security and Cleanliness Issues</p> <p>Safety and cleanliness are still major issues, though. There have been reports of unsafe working conditions and verbal harassment, which primarily affects female employees. It is essential to address concerns such as raising health and safety requirements, for both employees and clients to make the space more hospitable.</p>	
Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh	Deendayal Antodaya Rasoi Scheme	<p>Growth with Own kitchens</p> <p>The canteens with own (real) kitchens drew more patrons than those that relied on outside supplies, according to our survey of 50 patrons at four canteens in Gwalior. As observed the Jhansi Road bus stop canteen, which relies on outside supplies, serves just 150–200 patrons each day, the Naya Bazar canteen, which has its own kitchen, provides over 400 meals.</p> <p>Desire for Dinner</p> <p>A lot of customers stressed the value of cost, pointing out that dining at these canteens is significantly less expensive than staying at nearby hotels. Though some patrons are asking for dinner alternatives because they frequently cannot afford meals outside of the canteen, there is a noticeable desire for longer service hours.</p>	<p>Infrastructure Improvements</p> <p>To guarantee consistent food quality and quantity, each canteen should have its own kitchen, which could be run by women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs).</p> <p>Extended Hours</p> <p>Adding breakfast and dinner to the menu could better serve a wider range of patrons, especially those who live alone or have erratic work schedules.</p> <p>Increased exposure</p> <p>Better cafeteria signage and exposure might draw in more patrons, particularly women and</p>

		<p><i>Separate Women Section</i> Customers’ choices are greatly influenced by ambiance and hygiene, with canteens that provide hygienic, well-organised spaces drawing in more business. One notable feature of the Naya Bazar canteen is the separate dining space for women, which increases its accessibility and popularity.</p> <p><i>Cleaning Issue</i> Jhansi Road canteen’s overall quality is diminished by infrastructure problems, such as the lack of a dishwashing station.</p>	<p>students who might feel insecure in less noticeable places.</p> <p><i>Safety and Comfort</i> Increasing female patronage can be achieved by making the establishment safer and friendlier for female employees and customers.</p>
Raipur, Chhattisgarh	Annapurna Dal Bhat Scheme	<p><i>Women in Leadership Roles</i> The current distribution of roles among women staff in canteens highlights persistent gender norms that limit women’s participation in leadership positions. While women are engaged in essential tasks such as cooking and cleaning, there is a lack of representation in managerial roles. To foster gender equality, the sector must recognize women’s capabilities beyond traditional roles and actively encourage them to take on leadership positions. This could be achieved through targeted training programs and mentorship initiatives that prepare women for</p>	<p><i>Gender Balance and Menu Diversification</i> Addressing the associated challenges—such as gender inequality, dietary diversity, the impact of addiction, and nutritional quality—will be vital for the long-term success of these programs.</p> <p>Implementing strategic changes can enhance their effectiveness, ensuring they not only feed the hungry but</p>

		<p>supervisory roles.</p> <p><i>Exclusively Vegetarian Meals</i> The decision to serve only vegetarian meals in urban canteens may stem from cultural norms, economic considerations, and logistical challenges. Vegetarian meals are often less expensive and easier to prepare in bulk, making them suitable for large-scale distribution. However, exploring the reasons behind this exclusivity could lead to discussions about dietary diversity and nutritional adequacy. A mixed menu that includes vegetarian and non-vegetarian options could better meet the diverse preferences and nutritional needs of the customer base.</p> <p><i>Impact of Addiction on Food Security</i> The prevalence of arguments and disruptions caused by intoxicated customers raises questions about how addiction affects food security. Intoxication can lead to conflicts over meal access and may deter some individuals from utilizing these services. Addressing the underlying issues of addiction through community support programs could contribute to a</p>	<p>also contribute to overall well-being and social equity in the community.</p>
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		<p>more stable environment at the canteens, ensuring that food security initiatives are not undermined by social challenges.</p> <p><i>Nutritional Adequacy vs. Hunger Satisfaction</i></p> <p>While providing affordable meals addresses immediate hunger, it does not necessarily ensure a balanced diet. The focus on quantity over quality may lead to nutritional deficiencies, particularly for those with higher energy demands. Shifting the emphasis from merely satiating hunger to prioritizing nutritional needs is essential. This could involve integrating nutrition education into the canteen framework, encouraging customers to make healthier choices, and diversifying meal offerings to include more fruits, vegetables, and protein sources.</p>	
Ahmedabad, Gujarat	Shramik Annapurna Scheme	<p><i>Accessibility and Location</i></p> <p>The strategic placement of 118 kiosks at Kadia-Nakas, particularly concentrated in Ahmedabad, is vital for reaching migrant workers. However, as noted by some workers, having kiosks closer to labor colonies could significantly improve access. This highlights the importance of considering worker</p>	<p><i>Improving Meal Quality</i></p> <p>Establish protocols to ensure consistent food quality and safety, including proper cooking standards and hygiene practices.</p>

		<p>demographics and daily routines when planning service locations.</p> <p><i>Meal Provision</i></p> <p>The scheme effectively addresses the immediate need for nutritious meals. Each meal includes chapatis, dal, sabji, and occasionally a sweet, which provides essential carbohydrates and proteins. However, issues like half-cooked chapatis suggest a need for better quality control. While the low price point of ₹5 is commendable, it raises questions about long-term sustainability and meal quality.</p> <p><i>Worker Experience and Satisfaction</i></p> <p>Workers report positive outcomes from the scheme, including improved time management and reduced morning stress. This is particularly beneficial for women, who can balance multiple responsibilities more effectively. However, the limited meal provision—just one meal a day—can be a challenge, especially for those living alone or working long hours.</p> <p><i>Safety and Inclusivity</i></p> <p>The observation that women are</p>	<p><i>Enhancing Accessibility</i></p> <p>Consider opening additional kiosks in closer proximity to labour colonies, and expand operating hours to accommodate workers' varied schedules.</p> <p><i>Creating a Safe Environment</i></p> <p>Invest in measures to enhance safety and comfort around the canteen locations, particularly for women.</p> <p><i>Streamlining Registration</i></p> <p>Simplify the registration process for the BOCW Welfare Board and consider extending the temporary access period for non-registered workers to ensure no one goes hungry.</p>
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		<p>less likely to use the canteen services due to safety concerns is critical. Enhancing the environment around these kiosks to ensure they feel safe and welcoming for women could increase participation. Additionally, expanding service hours to provide meals throughout the day could alleviate the burden on women who often handle evening cooking.</p> <p>Registration Challenges The requirement for workers to register with the Gujarat Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Board to access benefits introduces barriers. The limited duration of 15 days for non-registered workers is insufficient, especially given potential delays in the registration process. Streamlining this process and extending access could better serve the needs of a larger population.</p>	<p>Promoting Awareness Increase awareness of the scheme and its benefits among workers, especially in marginalised communities, to ensure wider participation.</p>
Ranchi, Jharkhand	Mukhyamantri Dal Bhat Yojana	<p>Need for Canteen in the city Displacement, agricultural stagnation, poverty, inequality, unemployment, and lack of basic services have led to a growing footloose poor population. Many of these people are either unable to access food security benefits or lack</p>	<p>Infrastructure Upgrades The state should invest in better facilities like electricity, seating, and weather protection to make the dining experience safer and</p>

		<p>the means to prepare and consume meals, resulting in widespread deprivation.</p> <p>Aid during COVID-19 Pandemic The state government expanded the network of canteens to meet the increased demand, introducing 498 Special Dal Bhat Canteens, 94 Migrant Worker Canteens, and 382 canteens at police stations.</p> <p>Canteens Success The canteens cater to a wide range of people, including workers, women, students, the elderly, and individuals with physical or mental challenges. A survey of 1898 customers in 2019 revealed that most users are mobile adults aged between 30-59, who depend on the canteens for regular meals or as an affordable option while traveling.</p> <p>The canteens have been a lifeline for many, as without them, people would often have to go hungry or sacrifice other essential needs.</p> <p>Impediments DBY scheme addresses significant food insecurity issues; its effectiveness is limited by logistical challenges, poor infrastructure,</p>	<p>more attractive, especially for women.</p> <p>Policy Reforms and Rights-Based Approach By integrating community kitchens into the National Food Security Act (NFSA) as a rights-based program, the initiative could transition from a charity to a state obligation, ensuring better accountability and customer rights.</p> <p>Increased Budget and Resource Allocation Expanding the budget to cover more food varieties and operational expenses would enhance meal quality, ease the burden on self-help groups (SHGs), and make the program more sustainable.</p>
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	<p>gender disparities, and inconsistent food quality and quantity. Improvements in location, infrastructure, food quality, and transparent reporting are necessary for the program to reach its full potential.</p> <p>Inefficiency Causes DBY scheme's low budget and lack of accountability are key factors undermining its potential to combat hunger effectively. These challenges lead to malpractices, substandard food quality, and a general failure to meet the needs of the target population.</p>	<p>Enhanced Monitoring Regular inspections and technology-driven oversight would help ensure meal standards are met and prevent issues like overreporting, improving transparency and effectiveness.</p>
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Thavamozhi Foundation and Buvva Bandi

Two Exemplary Stories of Service

State & the city	Name of the Service	Pros & Cons	Vision
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	Thavamozhi Foundation	<p>Funding and Sustainability Umarani does not accept donations directly but relies on materials offered voluntarily. She also generates income through her nursing services and orders for events like birthdays and funerals.</p> <p>Personal Motivation Her motivation stems from her mother, who instilled in her the value of serving others. Umarani's experiences during her mother's illness deeply impacted her commitment to helping the elderly.</p> <p>Challenges Despite her service, she faces skepticism regarding her intentions, especially in a society that often questions the motives behind charitable acts. Threats from some individuals about contaminating her food service prompted her to install CCTVs for safety. Financial instability is a constant concern, as she moves frequently due to rising rents.</p>	<p>Umarani aims to expand her service and recruit more helpers, but she hesitates, fearing that a focus on profit might compromise the spirit of her work. She encourages others to start similar initiatives in their communities instead.</p>

Hyderabad, Telangana	Buvva Bandi	<p><i>Funding and Sustainability</i></p> <p>Satthaiah funded his projects by selling land he purchased in the late '90s, using the profits to support his charitable work.</p> <p><i>Motivation</i></p> <p>His concern for the plight of migrant labourers' children during the pandemic inspired him to take action. His background in the trade union movement influenced his desire for social change.</p>	<p>Satthaiah aspires to establish educational institutions in every Mandal, showing a strong commitment to community improvement. He expresses a desire to continue these initiatives independently, regardless of state support.</p>
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Food insecurity is rapidly increasing in metropolitan areas, largely due to the growing population of unorganised laborers in the informal sector. The influx of rural migrants into urban areas has led to the rapid expansion of slums, which often lack proper sanitation, healthcare, and basic infrastructure. This situation further increases food insecurity, as informal sector workers frequently live in slums with limited access to adequate housing, clean water, and sanitation facilities.

For many migrants, reliance on fluctuating daily wages makes it difficult to consistently afford and access food. Moreover, government programs aimed at supporting impoverished populations primarily benefit residents of recognised slums, leaving those in non-notified slums without access to critical resources. Without eligibility for the Public Distribution System (PDS), many non-notified slum dwellers are forced to depend on fair-price shops, further restricting their ability to secure nutritious food.

Despite economic growth, indicators of food security show a decline in nutritional intake, highlighting the persistent challenges of both food and nutrition security. Addressing these issues requires focused government intervention to ensure equitable access to resources and improve food security for vulnerable urban populations.

The study discusses the role of urban canteens and community kitchens in addressing hunger, a universal issue, distinct from food insecurity, however governing authorities must immediately operationalise policies and programs focused at alleviating hunger and food insecurity. In order to enhance food security and nutritional status in urban settings, the study highlights the significance of taking complete action on the following issues:

1. Universal Access: Urban canteens should not be seen solely as services for the poor; their universal branding can promote inclusivity.

2. Strategic Locations: Canteens should be situated near high-traffic areas like bus stand and railway stations and public institutions to attract diverse consumers, with attention to gender sensitivity in design.

3. Empowering Women: Involving women in serving and managing canteens can help increase participation from women and children.

4. Support for Women's Groups: Partnering with women's self-help groups (SHGs) for managing canteens can enhance both food and livelihood security.

5. Wider Reach: Expanding canteen services across urban areas and establishing community kitchens in rural areas through local governance can improve access. Offering three meals a day would be beneficial.

6. Nutritional Focus: Incorporating nutritionally rich foods like millets, eggs, and milk into the menu can enhance food and nutrition security.

These strategies aim to create inclusive, accessible, and nutritionally beneficial food services for all urban residents and reduce hunger.



Students at the Anrutha Sathaib Kolluri Educational Society (ASKES) Institute founded by Mr. Sathaiab

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“If you cannot feed a hundred people, then feed just one.”

~ Mother Teresa



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