

# Mapping of School Meal Stakeholders in India

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

This publication includes information provided by organizations that responded to a survey conducted by GCNF between September 2020 and October 2020. The data and the analysis and presentation thereof are provided in good faith and for general information purposes only. GCNF makes no warranty or representation as to the completeness or accuracy of the information.

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# Acronyms

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FSSAI	Food Safety and Standards Authority of India
GCNF	Global Child Nutrition Foundation
GoI	Government of India
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
MDM	Mid-day Meal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
MoTA	Ministry of Tribal Affairs
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NEP	National Education Policy
NFSA	National Food Security Act
NGO	Non-government Organisation
TRSF	Tribal Residential School Feeding
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UT	Union Territory
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

# Background & Purpose

School meal programmes<sup>1</sup> – in which students are provided with snacks, meals, or other foods in or through schools – are common throughout the world, including in India.

The Mid-day Meals (MDM) Scheme, India's national school meal programme, is administered by the Ministry of Education (MoE)<sup>2</sup> and feeds over 100 million school children daily, making it the largest school meal programme in the world. In addition, the Government of India's (GoI) Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) administers a child nutrition programme for pre-school age children through its Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in Anganwadi Centres, meaning "courtyard shelters"<sup>3</sup>. This national programme reaches 3.2 million children<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, the GoI's Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) runs Ashram Shalas, meaning "residential schools" targeting children from tribal communities<sup>5</sup>. At these schools, children receive three meals per day as part of its health and nutrition component<sup>6</sup>.

Each of these school meal programmes has a strong track record of engaging civil societies and non-government organisations (NGOs); however this collaboration is regarded mostly as a contractual arrangement between the government and the implementer. The existing school feeding literature on India does not delve much into these partnerships and, where available, reporting is mainly on MDM. Additionally, given the scale of the programmes and the number of NGOs operating in India, it is challenging to find sources that provide comprehensive lists of organisations for school feeding, whether they are contracted for the government programmes or working independently.

Taking these factors into consideration, the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) embarked on an exploratory study to map school meal programme stakeholders and gain a better understanding of the NGO partnership model across three key pre-school and school-based child nutrition programmes in India – MDM, Anganwadi, and Tribal Residential School Feeding (TRSF).

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<sup>1</sup> While aware of distinctions that may exist between the terms school meal, school feeding, and school nutrition (programmes), we use school feeding and school meals interchangeably throughout this document, as we aim to capture information regarding all such programmes. School meals is primarily used when referring to it as a programme and school feeding when referring to activities and other usage.

<sup>2</sup> Formerly known as the Ministry of Human Resource and Development. Ministry renamed with adoption of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on 29 July 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The NEP policy document emphasises education for children aged 3-6 years through Anganwadi Centres. These centres primarily operate as childcare establishments, mostly in rural areas within India's public healthcare system, and they were previously not recognized as part of the formal education structure.

<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this study, the pre-school meal programme in Anganwadi Centres will henceforth be referred to as Anganwadi.

<sup>5</sup> Tribal people constitute 8.6% of India's total population, over 104 million people according to the 2011 census. These communities continue to be the most undernourished demographics and as such, targeted nutrition interventions through Ashram Shalas have been a longstanding initiative by the government.

<sup>6</sup> The MoTA does not have a designated name for the school meals in its Ashram Shalas, but for the purpose of this study, the programme will henceforth be referred as Tribal Residential School Feeding (TRSF).

This exploratory study had multiple objectives and aimed to:

- Create a comprehensive directory of school feeding partners in India
- Characterize the landscape of key organisations partnering with central and state governments for the MDM Scheme
- Identify and map pre-school feeding (Anganwadi) in Anganwadi Centres
- Identify and map school feeding (TRSF) in Ashram Shalas
- Build an understanding of partnerships and operational arrangements in place with central and state governments
- Determine if there are any overlaps across partners in scope, scale, and geographic coverage of programmes
- Serve as a useful resource for stakeholders to identify key organisations that are strengthening and advancing school feeding in India
- Encourage the Government of India and its key partners to support and sustain the school feeding network in India and become leaders in the global context.

## Method

The study was conducted from July to December 2020 and followed a basic research cycle starting with an inception phase, followed by data collection, data cleaning, and analysis.

TABLE 1. STUDY TIMELINE

Phase	Activity	Timeline
Inception	Background research	July-August, 2020
	Questionnaire design	
	Stakeholder consultation	
Data Collection	Generate contact list Outreach	September-October, 2020
Data Cleaning and Analysis	Data cleaning	November-December, 2020
	Analysis and report write-up	

The inception phase built on findings from desk review of existing literature including from the GCNF's Global Survey of School Meal Programs, as well as the State Survey of School Meal Programmes India. A survey was designed with core set of questions to explore six areas of enquiry categorised in sections A-F as (A) Scope, Scale and Geographic Coverage; (B) Government's Eligibility Criteria; (C) Contribution of Complementary Resources; (D) Complementary School Health and Nutrition Activities; (E) Collaborations with Other School Feeding Organisations; and (F) Challenges.



The draft questionnaire was then shared with diverse stakeholders for their review and input, including the central and state governments, the United Nations (UN), NGOs, the private sector as well as various research entities.

To achieve maximum reach, the survey was administered digitally. Various commonly used online tools were explored with the decision to proceed with the KoBo Toolbox based on its ease of use for end-users, availability online and offline, and direct access for respondents through email links.

To curate a list that was as comprehensive as possible for the outreach, a meticulous, wide-ranging, and inclusive process was adopted. After considering several websites including “giveindia.org” and “indianngos.org” (among others), “ngodarpan.gov.in”, a government portal, was selected as the primary source to generate the contacts. Basic information for almost 100,000 organisations listed on the website was scanned, and the list was then narrowed down to 27,000 names by filtering with keyword searches that included “nutrition”, “education”, “children” and “food”. A general email introducing the study and link to the survey was sent to all of these contacts in a phased manner, providing no less than three weeks to respond. Two rounds of emails to all contacts were sent during the two-month data collection phase (September-October). A targeted outreach was also made to other agencies including UN, private sector and research organisations from GCNF’s school feeding network.

Upon conclusion of the data collection, considerable time was spent on data compilation and cleaning. All responses, including from small organisations that implement charity-based school feeding which may not be part of the government’s school meal programmes, as well organisations that do not perform any direct feeding functions but provide other critical support such as technical assistance and monitoring, have been included in this exploratory study.

## Response Rate

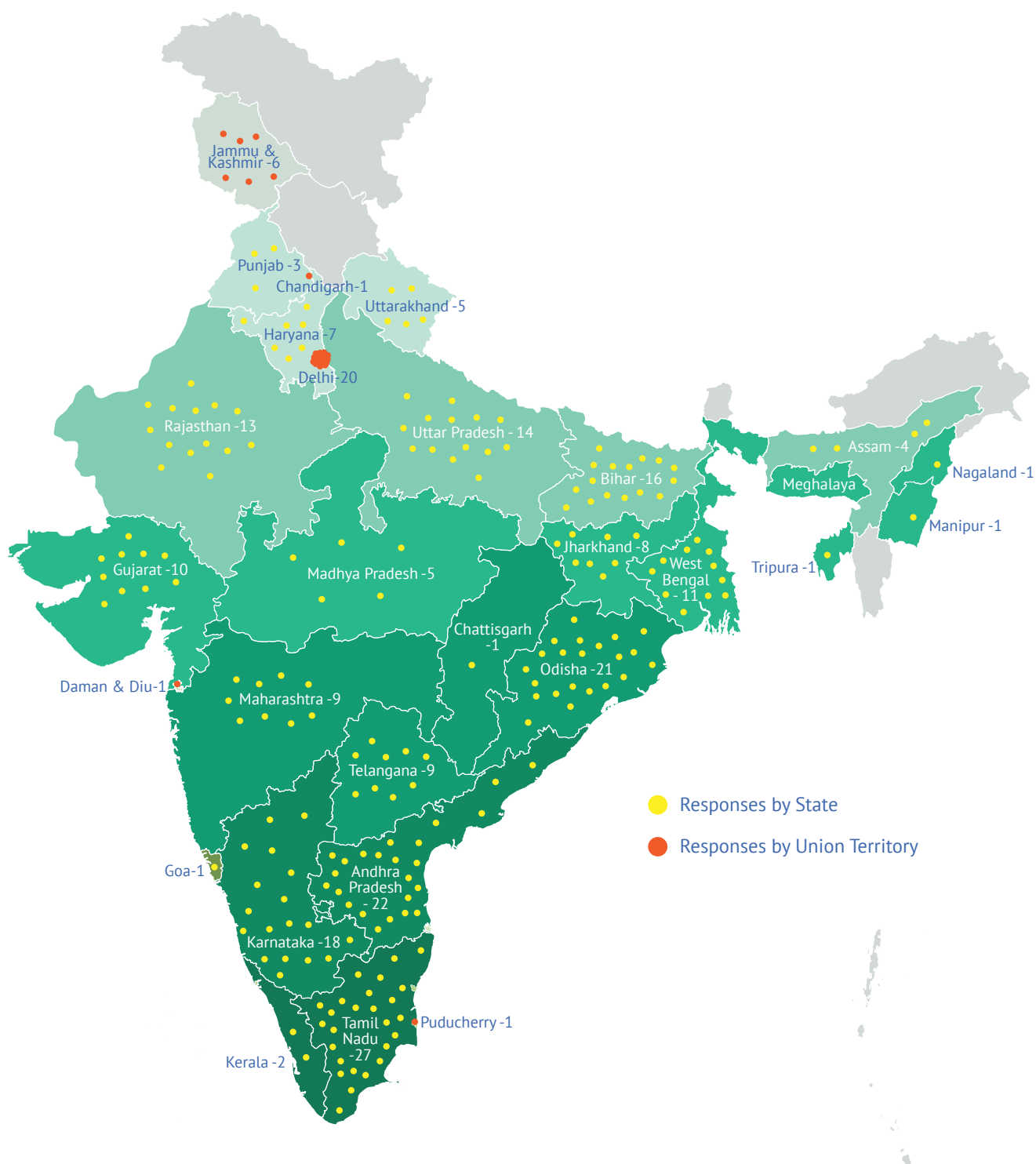
Attention was given to ensure that the questions were not too intrusive and that the survey could be completed in a relatively short time. Of the almost 27,000 contacts—spanning 28 States and 8 Union Territories (UTs)<sup>7</sup>—that were invited to participate in the study, 250 completed the survey. 12 of these were duplicate submissions and were excluded from the study, bringing the total number of responses to 238. 96% of respondents identified as NGOs with private sector, UN Agency and others making up the rest of the profile.

The response rate of 0.09% was lower than the expected 2%; however, given that this is the first study of its kind, data gathered from the completed surveys were determined to be sufficient to glean some lessons regarding common practices and trends.

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<sup>7</sup> India is a federal union comprising of 28 states and 8 Union Territories as of 2020. This count includes Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh as two separate Union Territories after its special category status was revoked on October 2019 prior to which it was counted as one.

FIGURE 1. RESPONSE BY STATE



Overall, Tamil Nadu has the highest response with 27 submissions. Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and the National Capital Territory of Delhi each reported over 20 submissions, whilst no responses were received from several states and UTs including Andaman & Nicobar, Arunachal Pradesh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim. It should however be noted that the number of organisations registered in each of these places range from only two (Lakshadweep) to 359 (Arunachal Pradesh), which is at the lower end of the range. Most other states and UTs have upwards of 1,000 registered organisations, with the highest number of almost 14,000 found in Uttar Pradesh.

# Limitations

- At the outset, the study was designed to capture a comprehensive mapping of school feeding stakeholders in India. However, with no existing directory in place or reference of prior similar studies, it was challenging to determine what that comprehensive list would look like. The study was instead revised to explore the landscape of school meal programme stakeholders.
  - The scope of the study is limited to quantitative data collected through the self-administered online survey, which although cost effective has low response rate.
  - From the responses received the study is not able to determine the actual number of NGOs working with the various government school meal programmes.
  - Data for this study are self-reported by organisations completing the survey and were not subjected to cross verification.
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# Key Findings

This study explores six areas of enquiry categorised in sections A-F as:

- (A) Scope, Scale & Geographic Coverage;
- (B) Government's Eligibility Criteria;
- (C) Contribution of Complementary Resources;
- (D) Complementary School Health and Nutrition Activities;
- (E) Collaborations with Other School Feeding Organisations; and
- (F) General Information.

This chapter covers the findings from the mapping exercise with respect to these areas of enquiry.

# Scope, Scale & Geographic Coverage

With the goal of understanding the engagement of organisations across all three school meal programmes—MDM, Anganwadi and TRSF— the survey gathered information on the core roles of the organisations and the duration of their engagement with the MoE, MWCD and MoTA. Over half of the organisations reported performing more than one role for the school meal programmes. This section also presents information on the feeding modalities, meals preparation sites, and geographical coverage of the organisations' operations.

FIGURE 2. CORE ROLE FOR SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMMES

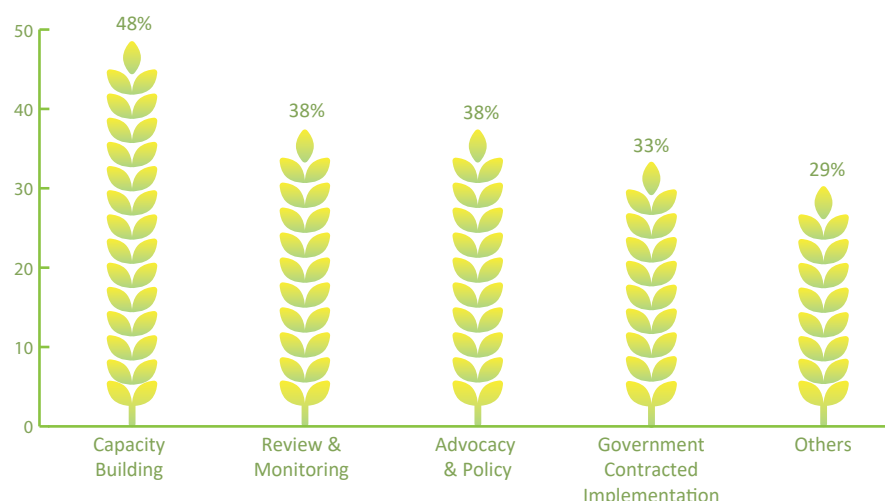


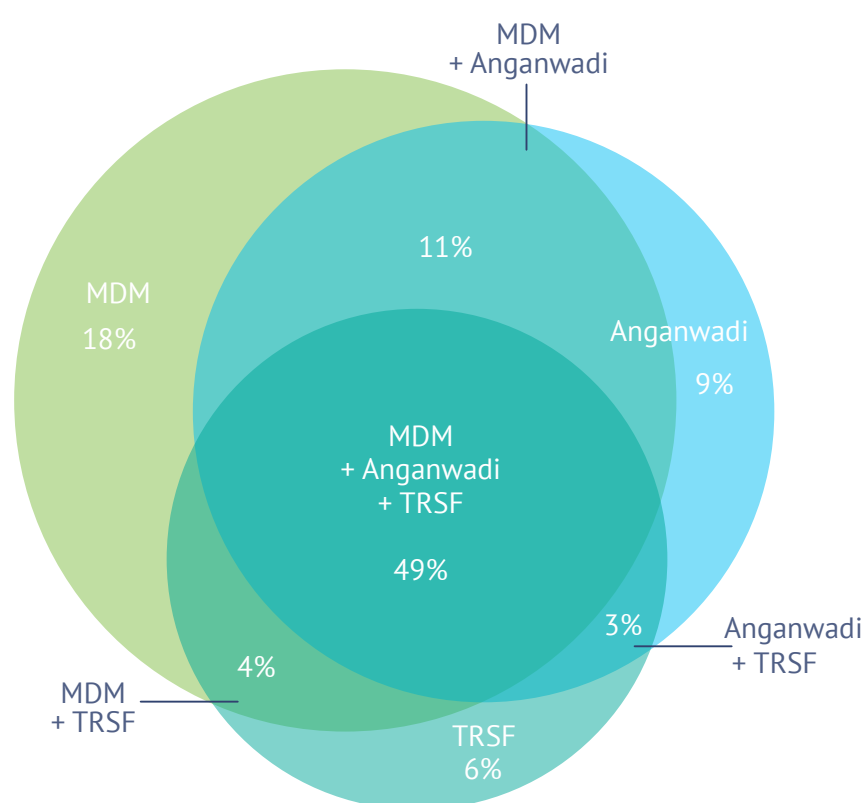
Figure 2 presents the core roles of the organisations with respect to school meal programmes. A third (33%) of the organisations reported that they are contracted by the government to implement school meal programmes; however, almost half (48%) engaged in capacity building, while 38% reported that they provide review and monitoring services, as well as undertake advocacy and policy activities as their core roles. Additionally, almost a third of the organisations (27%) reported some research activities while less than a quarter (20%) engaged in technical assistance, including the WFP in India, which is one of the most noticeable players in the country.

TABLE 2. DURATION OF GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

Duration in Years	MDM		Angadwadi		TRSF	
	N=162		N=119		N=106	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<5	83	51	65	55	60	57
5 to 10	38	23	28	24	21	20
10 to 15	18	11	13	11	14	13
>15	23	14	13	11	11	10
Total	162	100	119	100	106	100

Table 2 present the duration over which organisations have worked with the nodal ministries—MoE, MWCD and MoTA of the Gol—administering MDM, Anganwadi, and the TRSF programmes. Interestingly, engagement across all ministries received similar responses. More than half of the organisations (54%) appear to be relatively new in the industry, reporting experience of less than five years. Another 22% of organisations reported experience of up to 10 years, while the remaining had 10 or more years of experience working with one of the nodal ministries. Of the three programmes, MDM clearly had the highest engagement with over half of the organisations (162) of the 238 respondents reporting various levels of engagement with the MoE.

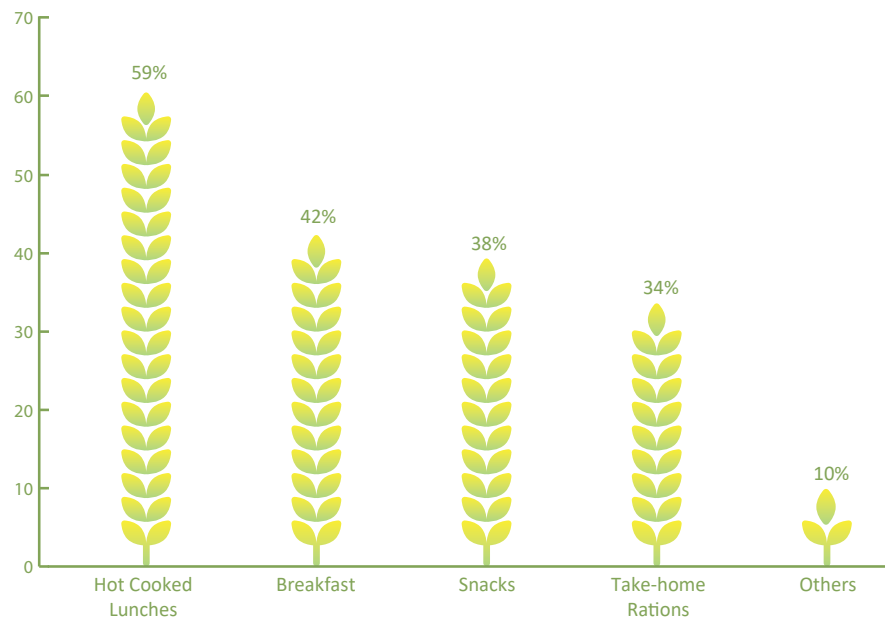
FIGURE 3. PROGRAMME COMPOSITION BREAKDOWN



Almost half (49%) of the organisations reported engaging across all three programmes, while a third worked with just one programme, MDM (18%), Anganwadi (9%) and TRSF (6%). Another 11% reported a combination of MDM and Anganwadi, 4% of MDM and TRSF, and at least 3% of those engaging with Anganwadi also provided services for TRSF.

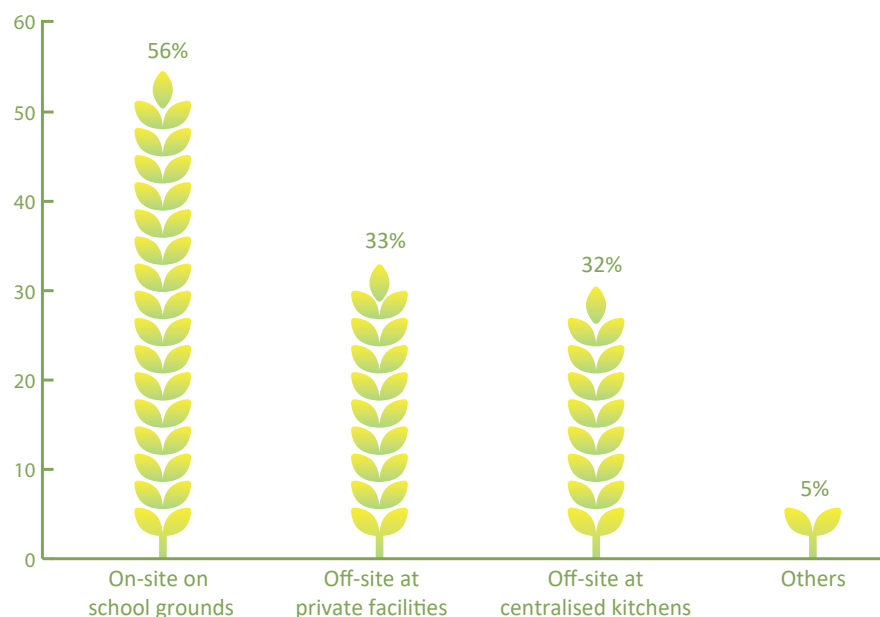
The scale of operations across the organisations range from a few hundred students in a handful of schools to coverage of millions. For example, the Child in Need Institute's meal programme in 81,506 schools cover almost 8.2 million children, the Akshaya Patra Foundation's cover almost 2 million children in 24,142 schools, and the Annamrita Foundation operates in 6,500 schools reaching 1.2 million children. Collectively, these three organisations partnering with various government agencies, feed almost 11.5 million children in India, which accounts for about 10% of the total government programme coverage. Many of the smaller organisations participating in the study reported they do not receive government funding and may most likely be charity organisations supplementing the government's program.

FIGURE 4. PROGRAMME MODALITY



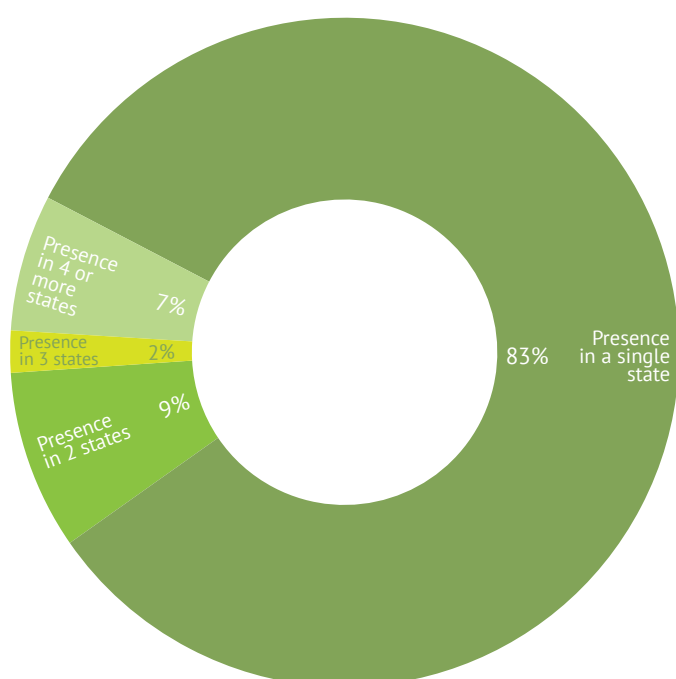
The 2001 GoI guideline specifies provision of hot cooked meals to every primary school student attending a government or government-aided school. Lunches could be supplemented with other meals, depending on the policy of the state and the local governments. Not surprisingly, the survey findings reveal that hot lunches were the most common modality (59%), with 42% also reporting that they provided breakfast, and 38% served snacks. Take-home rations were particularly popular under the Anganwadi programme, with 34% of the organisations offering this option. About a tenth of the organisations employed other modalities, including the provision of dinner (evening meals). While the survey did not expand on this question, it is safe to infer that these dinners cater to the specialized TRSF school meal programme under MoTA.

FIGURE 5. MEALS/SNACKS PREPARATION SITE



Given the decentralised programme implementation arrangement, it is expected that the programme designs incorporate a wide array of modalities and, by extension, preparation sites for meals and snacks served. *Figure 5* presents a tally of the sites where school meals or snacks are prepared. An estimated 56% of the organisations reported that they have on-site kitchens to prepare meals and/or snacks on school grounds, whereas 33% of the organisations do so off-site, often at the organisation's centralised kitchen, and 32% do so in private facilities which may or may not be operated by the organisation.

FIGURE 6. PRESENCE BY STATE



To gain an understanding of organisational size and presence, the survey asked respondents to select all states and UTs where they had school meal activities. Organisations were then categorised for their presence in one, two, three, or more than three states and/or UTs. An overwhelming majority of organisations (83%) were relatively small with a presence in their state of origin only. About 7% reported having a presence in four or more states, while the rest operate in either two or three states.



# Government's Eligibility Criteria

For non-government entities to bid for any of the government's school meal programme contracts, they have to meet certain standards set by the nodal ministries—the MoE for MDM, the MWCD for Anganwadi and the MoTA for TRSF. Additionally, many state governments also set specific guidelines for their own states. Whilst each guideline is unique, there are some common eligibility criteria noted. These are:

- ✓ Organisations have to be registered for a minimum period (two years for MDM and Anganwadi, and three for TRSF) under the Indian Societies Registration Act or the Public Trust Act.
- ✓ Organisations must have proven experience of working for at least three years in the relevant programme sectors.
- ✓ Organisations must be financially able to contribute their share of resources as determined by the programmes and must have the ability to sustain the programme uninterrupted for a specified period in the absence of assistance from the government if the need arises.
- ✓ Organisations should have a clean record, and any organisation identified as a “non-performing organisation”<sup>8</sup> by any government institution in the recent past must have these issues resolved. The timeframe for this in most cases is within three years.

TABLE 3. RATE AT WHICH RESPONDENTS MEET GOVERNMENT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

	<i>MoE</i>		<i>MWCD</i>		<i>MOTA</i>		<i>State Government</i>	
	<i>N=189</i>		<i>N=197</i>		<i>N=174</i>		<i>N=201</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Yes</b>	112	59	130	66	94	54	141	70
<b>No</b>	19	10	15	8	22	13	15	7
<b>Not Applicable</b>	32	17	33	17	33	19	25	12
<b>Don't know</b>	26	14	19	10	25	14	20	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>99</b>

Most existing school meal literature in India accounts for the government's contribution shared between the central and the state covering various operational components including the supply of food grains, transportation subsidy, costs for cook-cum-helpers, management, monitoring and evaluation, as well as for essential infrastructure.

<sup>8</sup> Organisations, which have been “blacklisted” or have had their “grant suspended” among other criteria are identified as non-performing NGOs and have their names on the government list. It is not clear how often the list gets updated or published. Three of the 238 organisations from this study reported that they fell in this category but have since resolved the issue.

The survey included questions to gauge where non-government organisations stand in this regard. Overall 191 organisations reported that they met the standards for at least one nodal ministry or for their respective state government.

More specifically, 59% met the MoE's criteria, 66% met the standards set by MWCD, 54% met the standards of the MoTA, and as expected, a majority (70%) at the least met the standards of state governments. On average about 16% reported they did not know if they met the government eligibility criteria, and 12% reported that meeting the government required criteria was not applicable for their organisations. As previously noted, only 33% of organisations reported implementation of school meals as their core role, so fulfilling the extensive government criteria for organisations that do not intend to bid for contracts may simply not be a priority.

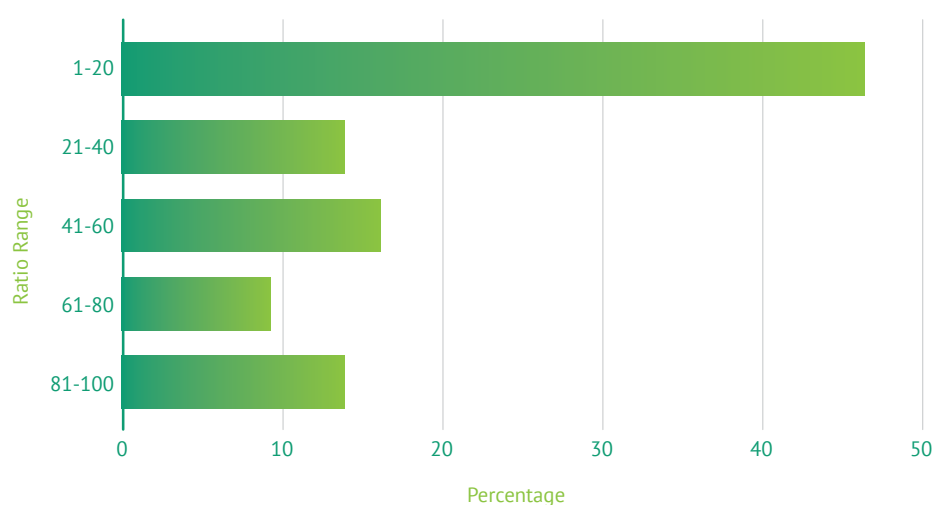
Only 93 organisations responded to the query on whether there was any significant difference for the partnership requirements set by the central government and the state governments because of the decentralized modality of the national programmes. Of these 4% reported there was some difference but majority (58%) noted they did not experience any differences. It is possible that the respondents did not clearly follow this particular line of questioning with several of the entries (18%) deemed unclear.

# Contribution of Complementary Resources

The central government's share in a given state is based on prevailing policy and legislation, and ranges anywhere from 60% in some states and UTs, and up to 90% in others<sup>9</sup>. UTs administered directly under the control of the central government with no legislatures attribute 100% of programme budget to the centre's share<sup>10</sup>.

However, a gap that seems evident is an understanding of contributions from non-government partners. With programme designs increasingly supplementing school feeding activities with other interventions such as nutrition education, school kitchen gardens, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) activities, among others, the study deliberately sought to understand whether organisations provided any complementary resources for the school meal programme and if so, at what ratio was the contribution in comparison to the government funding.

FIGURE 7. RATIO OF COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

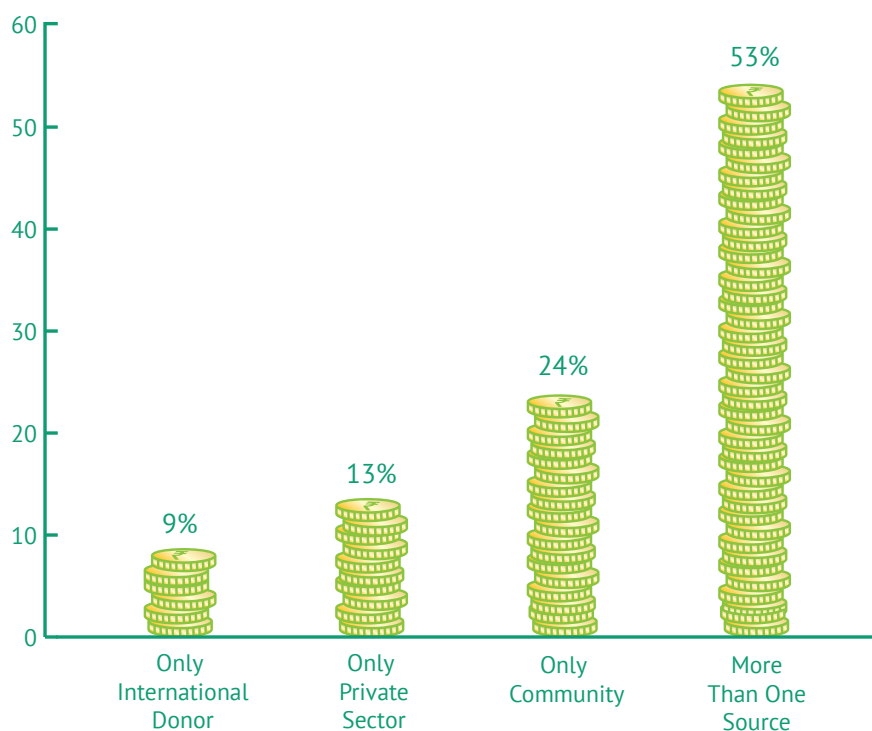


30% of the respondents reported that they provided complementary resources for school meal programmes. 43 organisations provided further details on the breakdown of these complementary contributions and what their share was compared to funding received from the governments. At least 47% of 43 organisations contributed up to 20% funding, and about a fifth (14%) contributed more than 80%.

<sup>9</sup> GCNF's State Survey of School Meal Programmes in India reveal that often the state share is larger than the proposed ratio with at least 42% of the states reporting spending higher than their stipulated share for programme expenses.

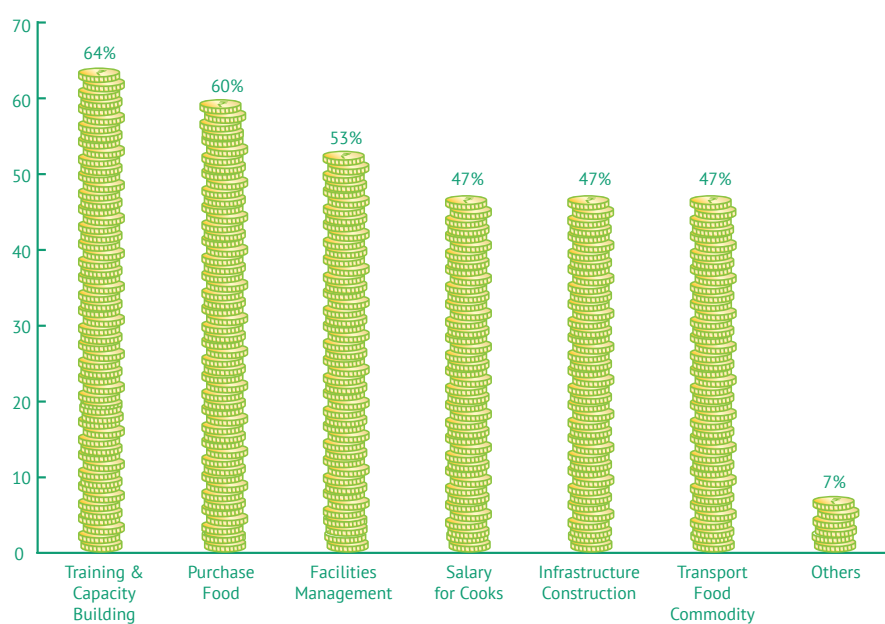
<sup>10</sup> Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Lakshadweep.

FIGURE 8. SOURCES OF FUNDING



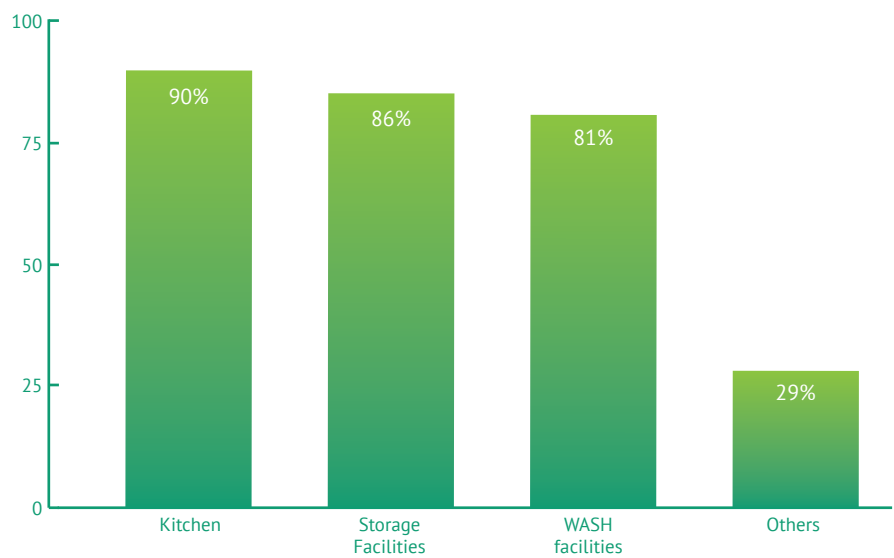
The survey further probed the sources of funding for these complementary resources. More than half (53%) reported receiving funds from more than one source. Of single sources reported, community contributions stood at 24%, whereas private sector (13%) and international donations (9%) accounted for the rest.

FIGURE 9. PRIMARY UTILISATION OF COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCES



Organisations were asked to provide information on the primary utilisation of these complementary resources. Allocation for training and capacity building activities accounted for the most common utilisation at 64%; 60% reported using funds to purchase food, whereas 53% reported use of funds for facilities management, with salary for cooks, infrastructure construction and transportation for food, accounting for 47% each.

FIGURE 10. TYPE OF INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTED

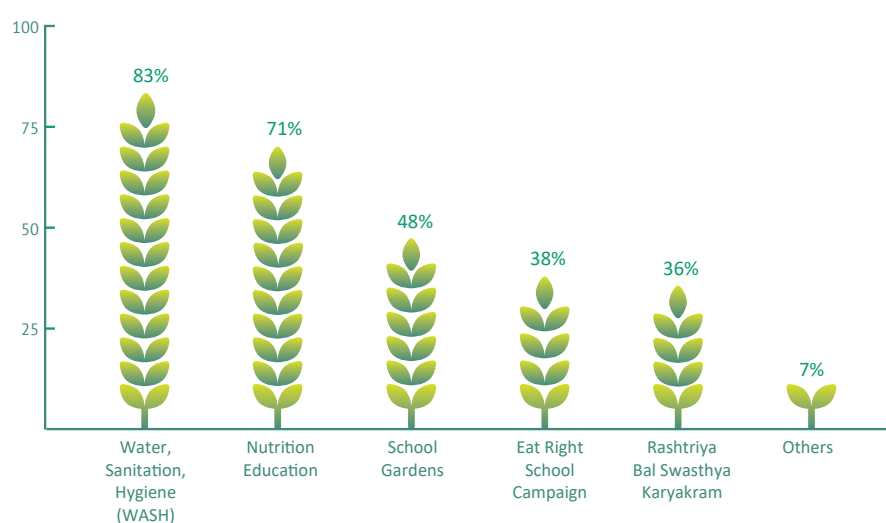


To get a deeper understanding of funds utilised for infrastructure, the survey asked organisations to report on the types of construction undertaken. Only 21 organisations were able to provide this additional data point, reporting kitchens (90%), storage facilities (86%), WASH facilities (81%) and others (29%).

# Complementary School Health and Nutrition Activities

As observed in many countries, it is common for school meal programmes to be paired with complementary services or programmes related to health or hygiene. Complementary services and educational programmes can generate substantial positive spillovers through behaviour change and communication, which leave a long-lasting impact on households.

FIGURE 11. COMPLEMENTARY SCHOOL HEALTH AND NUTRITION ACTIVITIES



Keeping with global trends, 67% of organisations confirmed incorporating complementary activities into their school-meal programme. Of the 143 organisations that provided details of these activities, 83% reported WASH activities as a core complementary component, and 71% offered nutrition education. School gardens were also fairly common, with 48% organisations reporting this component. Encouragingly, 38% also reported engaging in FSSAI's Eat Right School Campaign<sup>11</sup>, and 36% engaged with school health activities under the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram<sup>12</sup>, both government-promoted initiatives.

<sup>11</sup> To promote a culture of food safety and nutrition in schools FSSAI launched The Eat Right School programme in 2016. The MoE's MDM programme is an important entry point to raise awareness on these issues.

<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, GoI, under the National Health Mission launched the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), an initiative which promotes Child Health Screening and Early Intervention Services, a systematic approach to early identification with links to care, support, and treatment.

# Collaborations with Other School Feeding Organisations

A key objective of this study was to explore collaborations among key non-government stakeholders, primarily the UN, NGOs, the private sector, and research institutions. Such collaborations are undeniably critical for peer learning and to generate common knowledge and build accountability, among other positive outputs. However, despite the scale of operations and a common model of working with non-government entities, as well as the volume of organisations involved, there appears to be a lack of opportunity for organisational collaborations in India. For example, anecdotally a prominent school feeding stakeholder in Delhi informed that over 40 NGOs in the city have contracts to implement MDM; however, these organisations are not aware of the activities of the others and do not come together to collectively advance the school feeding agenda.

By asking about collaborations, the present study aimed to bring to attention the need to address basic knowledge gaps and encourage discussions and collaborations among school feeding stakeholders in the country and with the global community. The survey included an open-ended question seeking to understand some of the major challenges that the organisations faced in general. From the diverse set of responses received, the most common themes were tabulated to present some prevalent trends.

As expected, only 17% of the organisations reported that they collaborated with other organisations.

With more than 80% indicating that they do not collaborate with their peers, clearly this finding is indicative of the existing gap to invest in learning platforms among various stakeholders.

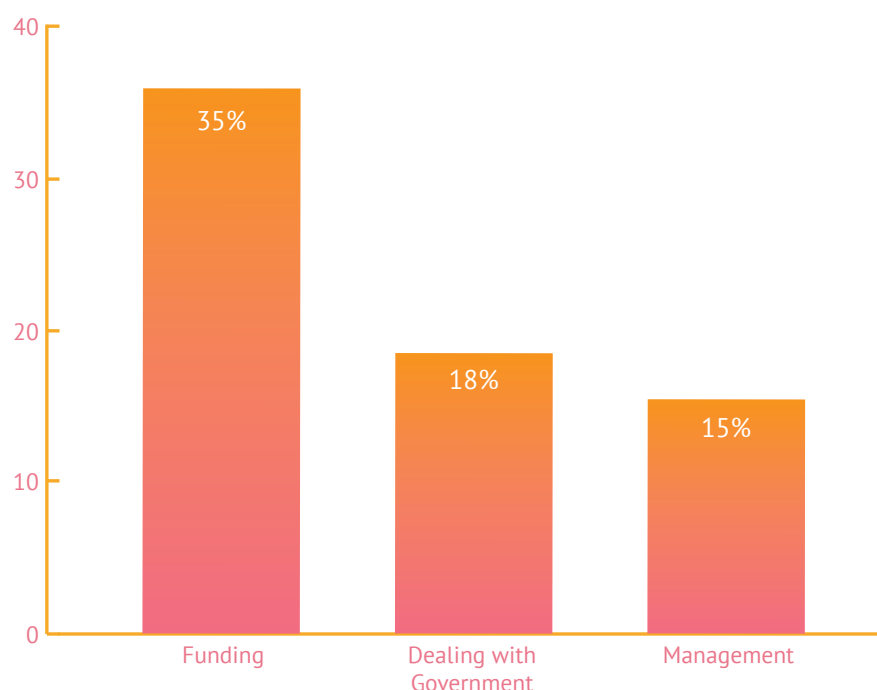
Based on the responses received, the study determined that the top three areas for collaboration were:

- Advocacy
- Capacity building and training
- Community engagement

# Challenges

This study was conducted in the midst of the global pandemic with schools closed for extended periods. Needless to say, school closures have had an immediate impact and are expected to have longer term repercussions on children's nutrition and learning.

FIGURE 12. TOP THREE CHALLENGES



Of the top three challenges reported, funding featured quite heavily with 35% reporting on this issue mostly due to untimely disbursement of funds, followed by issues arising from having to deal with government including complicated regulations (18%) as well as management issues (15%), both internal to the organisation and external. Fluctuating food prices, social issues such as caste based discrimination and political instability were other common challenges mentioned.

Surprisingly, a significant number of organisations (24%) also reported that they did not have any major issues, including The Akshaya Patra Foundation which states that “the organisation’s programme and procedures are designed and established in such a way that there are no major challenges that we face on a day to day basis.”

## Impact of School Closures due to COVID-19

The situation is further compounded in many low income and middle-income countries where children from vulnerable populations are susceptible to school dropout, child labour, early marriages and other social risks. WFP India’s rapid assessment of MDM<sup>13</sup> conducted in the early phases of the nationwide lockdown finds that school closures

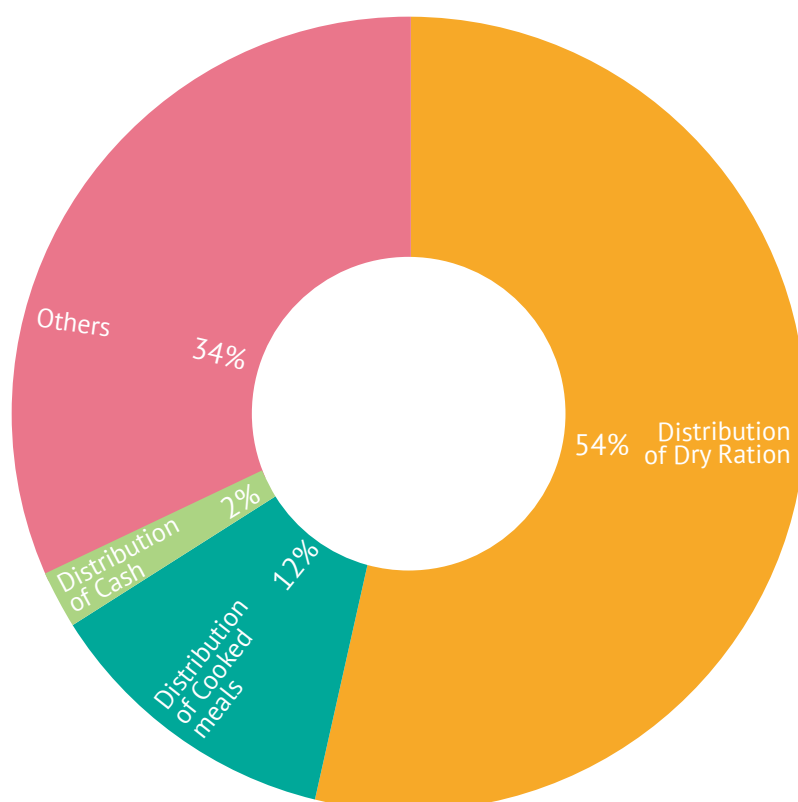
<sup>13</sup> Data for the rapid assessment collected through media reports, phone calls with government and other state stakeholders.



from the COVID-19 pandemic pose an unprecedented risk to children's daily diet for whom MDM represents a predictable source of support and can often serve as a lifeline.

In its letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> March and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (now Ministry of Education) issued a guidance to all states and UTs of India, instructing them to provide mid-day meals in schools or dry rations in lieu of cooked meals, or to provide a food security allowance in lieu of mid-day meals to school children, wherein the cost of food grains and cooking should be transferred to the beneficiary accounts. This guidance was intended to fulfil nutritional requirements of eligible children under the MDM scheme to safeguard their immunity during the COVID-19 outbreak. MWCD too issued similar directives to ensure the distribution of food items and nutrition support for its Anganwadi.

FIGURE 13. ACTIVITY EMPLOYED DURING COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES



This study sought to explore whether and how NGOs were impacted by the global pandemic and to report on any adaptations made in their programmes and services while schools were closed. More than half of the organisations (123) reported that their programme and activities were affected but only 50 respondents indicated carrying on with some form of activity. Of these, 54% reported distribution of dry rations, 12% reported distribution of cooked meals, and only 2% reported distribution of cash. The remaining reported employing various means to reach the affected populations, such as setting up homestead kitchen gardens in the community; facilitating nutrition and livelihood activities; providing virtual engagement to foster learning on nutrition, hygiene, safety, social distancing, and WASH; raising awareness of COVID-19; distributing face masks, sanitizers; and providing counselling in the community, among other activities.

# Conclusion & Discussions

India's child nutrition pre-school and school meal programmes in the form of MDM, Anganwadi and TRSF are the government's key interventions to end classroom hunger, malnutrition, improve school attendance and promote equity. GCNF believes this Mapping of School Meal Stakeholders in India is a first-of-its-kind exploratory study that takes into account all three programmes collectively and aims to understand the role of non-government entities in these programmes.

India is estimated to have millions of NGOs registered. The government portal (NGO Darpan) referenced for this study alone has almost 100,000 organisations listed, 27,000 of whom were contacted, of which 238 completed the survey. Though the response rate is extremely low, this also suggests that there is much that needs to be explored in this area.

Findings of the study provide critical insights into the nature, level, and extent of engagement of NGOs with the school meal programmes, with almost half (49%) of the organisations included in this study reporting that they engaged in all three programmes. An equal measure reported that they have over five years of industry experience, and about a third of the organisations have a presence in more than one state. There is scope for future studies to examine these relationships in more depth and create opportunities for a shared agenda.

Given the scale and size of school meal programmes in India, it is challenging to establish exactly how many organisations are contracted to implement the government's programmes nationwide. However, the study reveals that NGOs implement a sizeable share with just the top three organisations reporting coverage for at least 10 million children collectively.

With school meal programmes increasingly leveraged to incorporate other school-based health and hygiene initiatives such as nutrition education, school kitchen gardens, and WASH activities, NGOs play

an instrumental role in providing complementary resources for many of these activities. A third of the organisations participating in this study reported their contributions were upward of 20% and some even reported contributing 80% of resources for these complementary activities.

The COVID-19 global pandemic and associated school closures further amplify the vulnerability of children who benefit from school meal programmes. Adequate nutrition is essential for school children's health and well-being, and for many families, school meals may have been the only meal their children consumed in a day. With schools closed indefinitely, many lost their access to regular school feeding and nutrition services during the pandemic. The role of ordinary people and non-government organisations mobilizing rapidly to distribute food and other essentials made headlines around the world, and a similar scene was observed in India.

At least 50 organisations responding to the survey reported continuing with some form of activity, many making home deliveries of cooked food or dry rations during these challenging times. Though this is a small sample, given the volume of organisations registered in India, the scale of such support could likely be significant. Furthermore, many organisations have a local context advantage, be it language, culture, familiarity with the area, and other such insights, which could prove valuable in times of emergency.

Despite the prominence of NGOs in the country, platforms and opportunities to engage in learning, sharing appear to be extremely limited with less than 80 of the 238 organisations reporting that they collaborated with other organisations. This revelation further reinforces the importance and need to encourage discussions and peer learning among school feeding stakeholders in the country and with the global community.

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# About

The Learning Exchange aims to develop and strengthen sustainable professional network between those working in and responsible for school meal programmes. The network is not exclusive and is evolving as more stakeholders form an alliance to support a shared agenda of advancing child nutrition in schools around the world.

Global Child Nutrition Foundation is a global network of governments, businesses and civil society organisations working together to support school meal programs that help children and communities thrive. Learn more at [www.gcnf.org](http://www.gcnf.org)

Share our Strength is a nonprofit working to end hunger and poverty in the United States and abroad. Most of their work takes place in the United States, through the No Kid Hungry campaign, but they also support research and programs around the world. Learn more at [www.ShareOurStrength.org](http://www.ShareOurStrength.org)