Report on SSA and Mid-Day-Meal Scheme

Why in news?

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The Standing Committee on Human Resource Development submitted its report on the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Mid-Day-Meal Scheme (MDMS).

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What is SSA?

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- SSA was launched in 2000.
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- It seeks to achieve universal access to education and retention of students in schools.
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- MDMS, launched in 1995, seeks to address the issues of hunger and education in schools by serving hot cooked meals and improving the nutritional status of children, enrolment, attendance and retention rates.
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What are the findings?

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- The enrolment is now near universal.
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- But the learning outcomes are still far from satisfactory. e.g Only about half the children in standard V could do a two-digit subtraction problem with borrowing.
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- The educational development has been **better in economically developed areas** with strong infrastructural support as compared to the backward regions of the country.
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- The State Institutes of Educational Management and Trainings, which act on state specific issues and innovations, are absent.
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- There are **wide variations** in the nature and effectiveness of the District Institutes of Education and Training.
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- There are a large number of **teacher vacancies** under SSA, which adversely affects the implementation of the scheme.
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- MDMS led to **more attendance** of pupils but did **not significantly aid fresh enrolments** into schools.
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- MDMS has diverted the attention of teachers and students on activities related to it, rather than towards teaching and learning activities.
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- There is also a **shortfall in the infrastructure** required for the implementation of MDMS. e.g Lack of pucca buildings, separate toilet facilities for boys & girls, unavailability and poor functional condition of kitchen sheds, etc.
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- The states did not follow the central government's guidelines on delivering food grains at the school by Public Distribution System dealers.
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- There were also instances where due to the long supply chain, the supplied food grains got **adulterated and pilfered**.
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- The states have not earmarked funds for priority areas in education out of the increased fund devolution to states, as a part of recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission.
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What are the recommendations?

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- Therefore the states should undertake measures at their own level to improve learning outcomes.
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- The policy should shift its approach from input-based expenditure to **outcome-focused achievement**.
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- The funding should focus on progress towards goals, such as improving learning outcomes of children in elementary schools.

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- The government should introduce programmes to **minimise the gap between states** with regard to educational status.
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- The discrepancies between national and state systems (such as the norms for age of entry) should be removed.
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- The vacancies created under SSA must **remain as sanctioned posts** and the states can recruit fresh teachers against these vacancies.
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- The district nodal authorities must strictly demand **utilisation certificates** from the implementing authority and the schools so that delivery of funds/food grains are not delayed.
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- The states must **proportionately adjust** the increased devolution of funds for education.
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- The pilot project of establishing **Smart Classes** in government schools must be initiated to make the teaching–learning process more effective through computer enabled techniques.
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Source: PRS

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