

## **In this Chhattisgarh school, fathers supply farm produce, mothers cook children's mid-day meal**

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Mothers serving mid-day meals to children of Adani Vidya Mandir

RAIPUR: At a time when grievances about the poor quality food being served under the mid day meal scheme (MDMS) are not uncommon, a private school in tribal belt at Salhi, some 60 km away from the district headquarter of Ambikapur in Chhattisgarh, has entrusted the responsibility to mothers to operate the school kitchen and ensure quality, nutritious food for students.

Ambikapur is around 300 km from Raipur.

The food for around 750 (including 50 school staff) are being prepared for about 220 academic days in 'Adani Vidya Mandir' not by any vendor or contractor but by the committee of village women whose children are enrolled in this school. The school has hired 12 women members of the committee to procure, prepare and serve food.

Like homemade food, the emotions and care are apparent in this 'Farm to Fork' model. The students' parents, who are into organic farming, supply rice, wheat and green vegetables to the school kitchen. Spices are procured from 'Mahila Udyami Bahuddeshiy Sahakari Samiti', a local self-help group.

"In a way, it also enables women empowerment", said Vedmati Uike, a local resident. The model ensured remunerative prices for farmers' produces.

The breakfast comprises of dalia, halwa (sweet), poha or upma and milk daily. During special occasions, the food of children's choice is served.

"Quality and hygiene remain the prime focus. Since 2013 onwards, we found a rise in school enrolment, a decrease in drop-out besides improving the nutritional status of children and checking malnutrition. In Ambikapur area, the villagers are unaware of what the nourishment value means and the importance of properly balanced diet. So, now not only the health of the children is getting better, but the awareness among the villagers about the nutritional food is also spreading fast", asserted Rajanikant Sharma, the school principal.

The women engaged are involved right from purchasing, preparation to serving. This 'Farm to Fork' model has intrigued the villagers, the principal added.

"Since all produces and outputs are from the parents of students, the purity and the quality remain guaranteed. The mothers are preparing foods from ingredients, vegetables and ration materials procured locally", Raniya Devi, woman sarpanch of Salhi told this newspaper.

Around 95 percent of students in the school, which admits students from LKG to Class IX, are tribals.