

Seventh Joint Review Mission on Mid Day Meal Scheme

State Report: Assam

(24 - 28 March, 2015)



Mission Members

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Telangana



DISTRICTS VISITED

1. Kamrup (Rural)
2. Kamrup (Metro)
3. Bongaigaon

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Acknowledgement

We as the members of the 7th Joint Review Mission thank the state MDM officials and functionaries,(Mission Director, SSA and MDM, SPOs, MDM) and District and Sub-district level functionaries, Head Masters, Teachers, SMC and Mother SHG Members, Parents, children for their help and cooperation during the Field visit to Assam (24 – 28 March, 2015). We also thank the officials and functionaries of the Akshay Patra Foundation, Guwahati; Institute of Hotel Management, Guwahati; Food Corporation of India, Regional Office Guwahati and District Zonal Office, Bongaigaon. Our sincere thanks go to Mr. H.C. Mahanta, Consultant, MDM for accompanying mission members and doing the needful.

Mission Members, 7th JRM

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Introduction

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, popularly known as Mid Day Meal Scheme is in implementation in all the districts of Assam, covering 44,62,362 children of classes I-VIII in 42526 government and govt. aided schools, special training centers, Mantas/Madras covered under SSA, etc. The State has 27 districts which include 6 Autonomous districts (districts governed by Autonomous District Councils. The Autonomous Council Districts have its governance structure for administering all education and development schemes, including MDM scheme. It has substantial minority and tribal population. The current form of the scheme of providing cooked meals to the class I-VIII children is in implementation since 2005. Some of the achievements of MDM implementation during 2014-15 are as follows:

- **56,113** Schools, KGBV, Madrassa / Maqtab, RSTC, NCLP Centers covered through MDMS till 3rd Qtr.
- **44,62,362** Children from Classes I to VIII covered under MDM (April – December, 2014).
- **651,80.189** MT food grains (rice) consumed (April-Dec,14)
- **1,22,724** Cook-cum-helpers engaged in schools through School Management Committees:
- **Dedicated MDMS cells** set up at State & District levels; 68 functionaries engaged as contractual staff.
- **Training of Cook-cum-helpers initiated;** Training of 60 Master trainers conducted through Institute of Hotel Management, Guwahati during November, 2014.
- **E-transfer of fund** (Cooking cost and honorarium to CCH) from State office to SMC's accounts started.
- **Training of SMC members** & Head Teachers is being conducted in Convergence with SSA, Assam.
- **Development of Contingency plan** at school level has initiated.

Before this 7th Joint Review Mission, the state has been visited twice by the JRM (February, 2010 and November, 2013). Besides interacting with the state, district, block and cluster level officials and functionaries, the members of the 7th JRM team visited 9 schools in the three districts (Kamrup Rural, Kamrup Metro and Bongaigoan) (*Annexure I and II*). The members also interacted with the officials and functionaries of Food Corporation of India (FCI), Gram Panchayat Samvay Samiti (GPSS) and Institute of Hotel Management, Guwahati involved in the implementation of MDM scheme in the state. The members also observed the functioning of the Centralized Kitchen managed by Akshay Patra Foundation.

Management and Implementation

The MDM scheme managed earlier by the directorate of education, has now been brought under the umbrella of SSA with its offices located within the same office at both state and district levels. This has improved the co-ordination and convergence between SSA and MDM, the two major schemes in education. Recently besides filling up some posts for MDM at the state level, the state has created three posts specifically for the MDM scheme in which minimum one post is filled up in each district. *MDM being a major scheme, there is also need to have some functionary dedicated mainly for MDM at the block level, to facilitate monitoring of the implementation of the scheme at lower levels keeping in mind the nature and complexity of implementing the scheme.*

Assam being a north-east state, funds are shared between the centre and the states in the ratio of 90:10. The effusiveness depends on the timely flow of funds from the centre. Delay in quarterly release of funds result into delays in initiating other related activities. It was pointed out by the state that it usually receives funds for MDM from the central government almost every year in the month of July/August. Recently the state has started releasing funds for the last two quarters directly into accounts of the SMC. With regard to managing first quarter MDM operation, it was pointed out by the Mission Director that the state is thinking of taking decision on contingency basis to relapse whole state share in the first quarter itself to care of problems arising out of initial delay in release of funds from the centre.

Issues

- Lack of adequate MDM staff and functionaries at the state and district levels
- Lack of dedicated MDM staff at block and cluster levels
- Despite financial year closing, the funds of the last quarter of MDM not released to the state.
- Delay of 8 to 10 months in release of salary/honorarium to the cooks
- Bills pending for the FCI at district levels

The state should therefore devise mechanisms for making MDM cell fully functional and ensuring smooth flow of funds and make pre-emptive efforts to avoid any such delay.

Supply of Foodgrains

Under the scheme, the supply of foodgrains to the schools goes through a multi-layered process, involving the functionaries of three different departments, (Education, Food and Civil Supply and Co-operatives.) In response to request of allocation by the Education Department, the foodgrains (rice) are supplied to the schools by the Food Corporation of India (FCI), via the Gram Panchayat Samavay Samiti (of the Co-operative Department). Three out of four schools reported lack of food grains in the school stock. They have been managing the MDM by taking foodgrains from the local grocery shops on credits/courtesy in the hope of getting paid in future. There seems to be delays due to procedural lapse at different levels. Minor procedural lapse (such as, payment of transportation charges, delay in lifting and raising of bills, delay in payment, etc) may cause months delay in supply of foodgrains to the schools. *There is need to improve the co-ordination among the FCI, the GPSS and Education Departments to ensure timely supply of foodgrains to schools.*

Unit Costs: cooking and honorarium to cooks cum helpers

The SMC members, teachers and parents in general expressed the inadequacy of the current unit costs of meals (i.e. @ Rs. 3.59/ - per child per meal for LP and @ Rs. 5.38/- per child per meal for UP) for providing quality meals. The problems get further complicated, as within the same amount, the pre-primary children are also provided meals under moral compulsion. It was pointed out by the schools that under moral obligation pre-primary children (who are not covered under the scheme but sitting in the same school/classroom along with Class-I children) are also provided meals. Very often, they are the younger siblings of students from higher classes. In some of the LP schools, it was pointed out that unit cost is too inadequate for the LP schools and small size schools. As in large schools with LP and UP sections, there is greater possibility of adjustments and scope for providing quality meals to children.

The monthly honorarium of the cook cum helper (@Rs. 1000/-) is reported to be too low. It is much less than the minimum wage rate of unskilled labour (i.e.@ Rs. 167/- per person per day) paid for unskilled labour under rural development scheme.

Unit costs of cooking charges for both LP and UP schools and honorarium to cooks cum helpers should be reviewed in the light of inflationary rise in consumer price index

Innovative Practices

Recently the state has started three innovative practices. The observation on the innovative practices are as follows:

Pre and post meal handwashing system

The state with support from the Unicef has started innovative practice of pre and post meal group handwashing system which has become popular among the students. For the system to function, in convergence with the Unicef the state has installed multi-points water flow from a pipe connected to a water tank. The innovative practice goes well in line with the current initiative of 'Swachhata Ahiyan' launched by the Govt. of India. The high value practice is also cost effective, as local materials (such as the half cut coconut covers tied with water pipes)



are being used as soap trays. *This practice needs to be upscale to remaining schools both in rural and urban areas.*

The Kitchen Garden

The Mission members had the opportunity of visiting one Kitchen garden in a school in Bongaigaon district which has been operationalised with the support from DRDA. The activity is at the initial stage and needs support and guidance. However the idea is good and needs to be encouraged. With kitchen garden, there is prospect of using it to impart moral lessons among the children about the value of manual work. The idea is suitable for the schools located in the rural areas with adequate land available and regular water source. *There is also need to erect boundary walls, and constant care y SMC members for protection against theft and damage.*

The Annual Calendar

The state has also prepared and supplied an official MDM calendar with relevant and useful details of the MDM scheme. The annual calendars were found in most of the schools visited by the members. The idea of calendar is good for generating awareness, provided it is used effectively. The calendars were found hanging in the headmaster's office only, without monthly pages changed some cases. It appears that the calendar was not being used effectively. *It is suggested that the calendars should be provided in large numbers to be made available in classrooms and other places. There is need to sensitize teachers, SMC members, mothers self help groups, cooks about the use of calendars.*

Orientation and Capacity Building

The state arranged training of Master Trainers on various aspects of Mid Day Meals at Institute of Hotel Management, Guwahati. The members had interaction with faculty members involved in the training on training module and its transaction process and found it quite useful and worth doing for boosting the morale of the cooks and upgrading their skills related to cooking and serving meals. *The members, therefore suggest that based on the experience of training by the Institute Hotel Management, Guwahati, the state should devise mechanisms and plan for orientation and skill building among the cooks and concerned MDM functionaries*

Community Participation (SMCs and SHGs)

The SMCs and Mother's Self Help Groups have been assigned critical role in implementing the scheme. The mothers SHGs were found quite active in rural areas in assisting in cooking, tasting food and distributing the meals. But their role in MDM is limited to the extent of assisting the teachers, following instructions and they do not have any proactive roles. *There is need to have intensive orientation programme for the skill building of the SMC and SHG members to have say in the decision making process with regard to MDM.*

Health and Hygiene

The schools in state they have adopted various health and hygiene related measures, such as supplying water filters (provided under Assam Vikas Yojna) to schools in rural areas (to filter

high iron content in water), group hand washing, health cards, etc. The mission had interaction with school functionaries on the health and hygiene issues affecting the MDM scheme.

Issues

- The filters provided in the schools do not have maintenance coverage, as they were not functioning in two schools. The filtered water was not being utilised by the children.
- The child wise health cards signed by the doctors were kept in the schools, but apparently not used for the purpose as details have not been entered in all the cards.
- Although weighing machine and height chart were kept in the schools, but no records were maintained with regard to (BMI) Body Mass Index.
- The parents are not being sensitized about positive aspects of the immunization and other health practices, as in one of the schools visited by the members, it was found that over 60 % of children were absent due to fear of the immunization scheduled next day.
- Food tasting registers are not maintained properly in most of the schools.
- The nature and extent of the problem varies from area to area. It was found that in comparison to the rural schools, the schools in the urban area were suffering more from the problems of health and hygiene.

There is need to take health, hygiene and safety issues more seriously, keeping in mind the stake involved in implementing the MDM scheme. The urban areas need to be given due emphasis while chalking out strategies and interventions.

The Involvement of Voluntary Agencies

The Akshya Patra Foundation, Guwahati has been engaged for providing meals to children of 591 schools in Kamrup Rural and Metro districts. The members observed the functioning of the centralized Kitchen, preparation of meals and distribution of the meals in two schools covered by the Foundation.

Strengths

- The organisation takes utmost care in preparing quality meals, using sophisticated equipments to prepare quality meals on a large scale.
- It subsidizes the costs of preparing meals with donations from outside.
- It maintains high standards of quality checks, through its own labs.
- It has the experience of operationalising the large centralized kitchen in many states

Weaknesses

However, some of the issues identified in the distribution of meals are as follows:

- The process and mechanism of distribution of meals, is not effective, as despite meals provided by the foundation, the children have been bringing their own Tiffin's.
- There was lack of proper and adequate number of serving utensils and plates.

- The teachers, helpers and education functionaries did not show similar interest, care and concern in the meal distribution, as done in the schools where meals are cooked inside the school premises.
- The hygiene and health practices are not maintained in the school premises.

The Akshay Patra functionaries should also be involved in the supervision of the distribution of the meals prepared by them. The teachers need to be oriented properly about the tasks involved in such schools where the meals prepared outside are served.

Recommendations and Suggestions

- 1) *Smooth flow of funds. Assam being the north-east state, the release of funds from the centre to the states should be ensured in the first quarter to avoid any delay in release of funds.*
- 2) *The orientation of HMs/SMC members should be focused on skill building with regard to maintaining records and performing quality checks*
- 3) *There should be dedicated MDM staff at all levels for monitoring MDM in schools at regular intervals.*
- 4.) *The schools should have proper arrangement for making the premises clean and tidy, so that meals can be served in hygienic condition. Special fund should be allocated for maintenance of toilets and premises of schools*
- 5) *All efforts should be made to ensure the buffer stock of rice of at least one month in all the schools*
- 7) *Based on the experience of training by the Institute Hotel Management, Guwahati, the state should devise mechanisms and plan for orientation and skill building among the cooks and concerned MDM functionaries*
- 8) *The Centre should facilitate inter-state exposure visits of MDM functionaries including SMC members to the best practices*
- 9) *Distribution of meals prepared by the centralized kitchen in schools should be monitored properly*
- 10) *The State should consider creating infrastructure for having dinning space to feel the dignity of having meal. The operational and financial details should be worked out.*

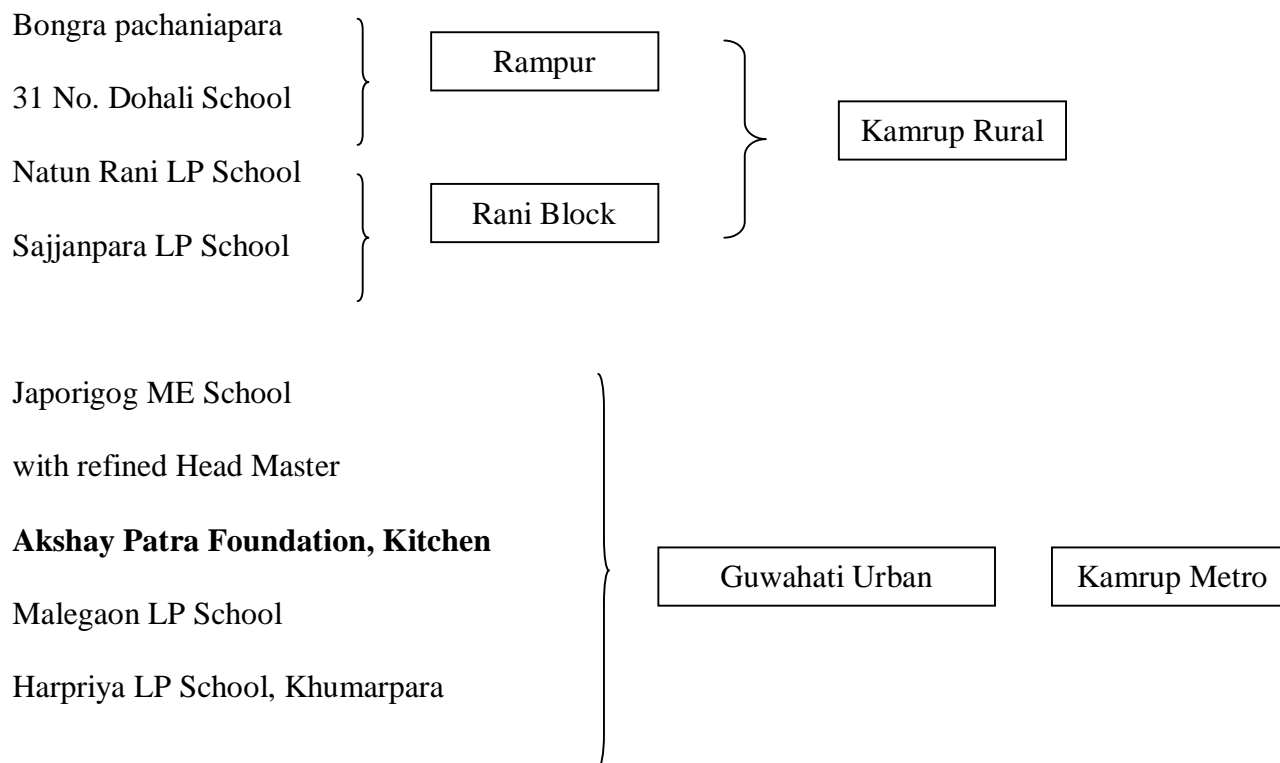
11) *Many kitchens which were constructed over seven years ago need repair and maintenance. The state should ensure*

The Way Forward or Long Term Strategy

- *The MDM process should be transformed into educational activities by incorporating lessons (in the form of workbooks and teachers handbook) in which besides the headmaster, other teachers of the school are also involved. The whole experience of having meals should be treated as an opportunity to foster healthy practices and scientific attitude.*
- *The state in collaboration with the centre should consider providing MDM to the pre-primary children studying in the same school.*
- *The Unit costs of MDM should be fixed and made operational in consonance with CPI,*
- *There should be vision and plan for extending MDM for the whole school system (i.e. from pre-primary to Class X)*

Field Visit - Assam
(24 – 28 March, 2015)

- 24/03/2015 - Arrival
 - Interaction with State Mission Director (Ms Aruna Rajoria)
- 25/03/2015 - Proceed to schools of Palasbari Block & Rani Block then proceed to Bongaigaon & Halt
- 26/03/2015 - Visit schools at Bongaigaon district and back to Guwahati
- 27/03/2015 - Visit schools at kamrup (Metro) and Akshaya Patra Foundation.



- 28/03/2015 - Wrap-up with MD and MDM functionaries

List of Persons Meet

State Level Officers/Functionaries (Guwahati)

1. Mission Director, (SSA & MDM)
2. State Project Manager, MDM
3. Consultant, SPO, MDM
4. Director, Institute of Hotel Management, Guwahati
5. Faculty Co-ordinator, Orientation Programme IHM, Guwahati
6. Assistant General Manager, FCI Regional Head Quarter, Guwahati.
7. Sr. Manager, Officer In-charge FCI (MDM)
8. Akshay Patra Foundation, Guwahati

Kamrup Rural and Metro District

- District Programme In-charge (MDM)
- Assistant Supervisor (MDM)
- BEO, Rani Block Kamrup Rural
- Cluster Resource Centre Co-ordinator, Rampur
- Head Masters and Teachers
- SMS Master Trainers
- Parents
- District officer In-charge, FCI


Bongaingaon District

- District Programme Co-ordinator, (MDM)
- Teacher Training In-Charge (SSD)
- BEO, Bongaingaon
- Head Masters and Teachers
- SMC Master Trainers
- Parents
- District Officer In-charge, FCI

Annexure-III
Photos related to MDM Scheme
JRM Visit

Photos: Registers related to MDM Scheme maintained by schools

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME



মধ্যদিন খোজা যোজনা
Mid Day Meal Scheme

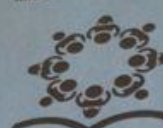
ATTENDANCE REGISTER

DISTRICT : BONGAIGAON

Name of School / Centre : *Bijhona Girls M.V. School*
DISE Code No. *18040218503* Category : LP / UP / Composite/NCLP
Management : Govt / Provincialised / Recognised / FA / SSA
Name of Block : *Bongaigaon*
W.e.f. Jan/2015

Kahilpara, Guwahati - 781 019
Toll Free No. : 18003453525, e-mail : assammdm@gmail.com

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME



মধ্যদিন খোজা যোজনা
Mid Day Meal Scheme


CASH BOOK

DISTRICT : BONGAIGAON

Name of School / Centre : *Bijhona Girls M.V. School*
DISE Code No. *18040218503* Category : LP / UP / Composite/NCLP
Management : Govt / Provincialised / Recognised / FA / SSA
Name of Block : *Bongaigaon*
W.e.f. Jan/15

Kahilpara, Guwahati - 781 019
Toll Free No. : 18003453525, e-mail :

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME



মধ্যদিন খোজা যোজনা
Mid Day Meal Scheme


STOCK REGISTER (Foodgrains)

DISTRICT : BONGAIGAON

Name of School / Centre : *Bijhona Girls M.V. School*
DISE Code No. *18040218503* Category : LP / UP / Composite/NCLP
Management : Govt / Provincialised / Recognised / FA / SSA
Name of Block : *Bongaigaon*
W.e.f. Jan/15

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GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME



মধ্যদিন খোজা যোজনা
Mid Day Meal Scheme

DAILY RICE EXPENDITURE REGISTER (Foodgrains)

2015

Name of School :- *Bongara Pachaniapara M.V. School*
Name of Block :- *Rampur, Dist :- Kamrup (R)*

Photos: Water Purifiers /Filters in schools



Photos: Quality of Rice



Use of Gas and firewood for Cooking Meals



Distribution of Meals in Schools



Distribution of Meals in Schools



Children having Mid-Day-Meals in the classrooms



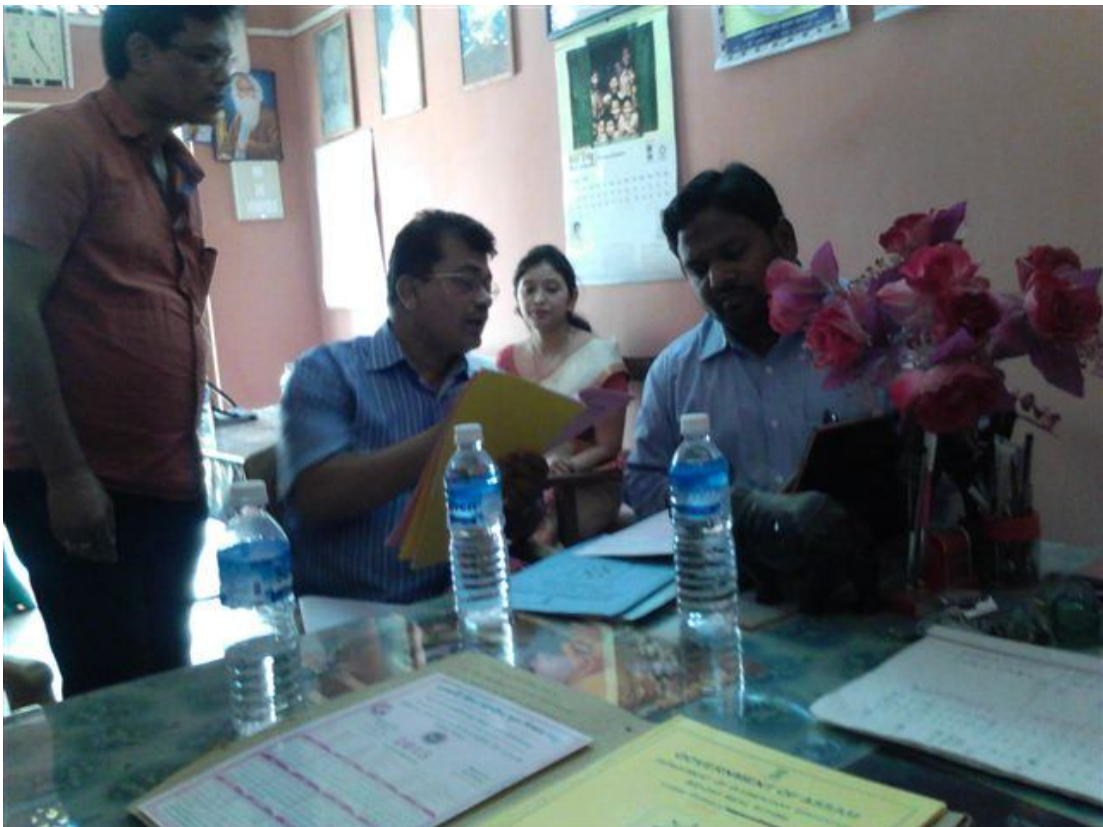
Pre and post meal handwashing system



Training of SMC Members



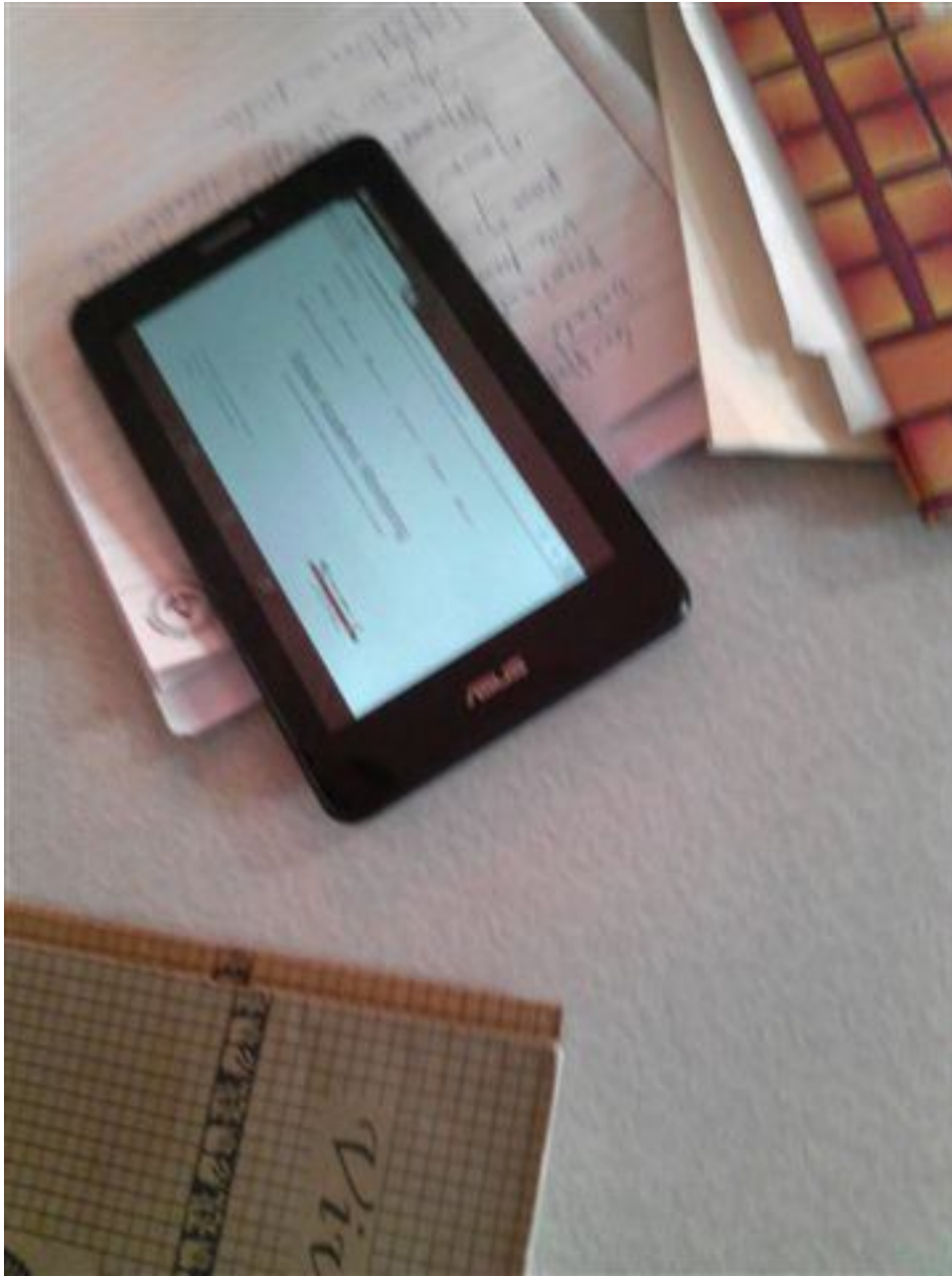
The mission members with teachers and students



Kitchen Garden in the school premise



Use of Tablets (Digital) for observation and feedback



Medicines provided for children in the schools



Health cards for recording children's health in schools

