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Midday meal, anthropology policy, community school, perspective, and education policy Abstract: Explore The Mid-day Meal Policy in the Context of Retention in School Education: A Teacher's Perspective from Lalitpur District. Nepal's midday meal policy, aimed at improving children's health and educational access, is a critical component of its national education system. However, limited research has explored this policy from the viewpoint of community school teachers. This study addresses three pivotal research questions: The funding for midday meals is adequate. The allocated funding is fully utilized. The program enhances education quality and reduces dropout rates due to midday meals. In-depth interviews with Lalitpur district teachers, where the midday meal policy is active, provided qualitative data. Ethical considerations safeguarded participants' identities and opinions. Teachers expressed concerns about insufficient funds for midday meals, requiring additional local contributions. Nevertheless, they reported that the granted funds were fully utilized, supporting students' nutrition and local farmers. The program positively impacted education quality and reduced dropout rates. This study underscores the midday meal policy's challenges and successes, highlighting the importance of supplementary financial support for student nutrition. It also emphasizes the program's multiple advantages, including improved education quality and lower dropout rates, especially among disadvantaged students. The provision of a midday meal program in schools can have a positive impact on student retention This research offers vital insights into Nepal's midday meal policy's impact on the education system. It emphasizes the ongoing need for financial support to sustain and enhance the program, ultimately benefiting children's comprehensive development.

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Introduction

This research paper delves into the anthropological aspects of Nepal's Mid-day Meal educational policy. The Free and Compulsory Basic Education Act of 2075, coupled with Regulation 2077, has officially institutionalized the provision of midday meals, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal in 2072. This topic holds significant importance in the realm of education and health policy documents concerning Nepal, such as the School Sector Development Program of the Fifteenth Plan and the Integrated Health Strategy (MoEST, 2077).

Since its inception in 1975, the Mid-day Meal program has received continuous support from the World Food Program and has been consistently allocated a budget in every financial year. In 2008, the Nepalese government took a significant step by continuing the daily lunch program with the support of the World Food Program and introducing a cash-based daily lunch initiative funded by the government. Initially, this initiative benefited only designated districts, totaling 19. Nevertheless,

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questions persisted regarding the efficacy of the midday meal program administered through the District Education Offices in its previous structure. Nonetheless, this state investment in education and nutrition has evolved into a crucial opportunity, bridging the educational gap for children from both disadvantaged and privileged backgrounds, and facilitating their access to education (MoEST, 2077). The government has now allocated a substantial budget of 7.92 billion rupees for the upcoming fiscal year, benefiting 2.8 million students across the nation. Within the education sector, this midday meal budget accounts for 4.6 percent of the total budget, making it the third-largest allocation within the sector (MoEST, 2077).

While Nepal's National Education System encompasses several policies, they all share a common goal: ensuring children's access to education, retention and completion of education cycle, with the Mid-day Meal policy being one such initiative. Recognizing that a healthy body and a pollution-free environment are fundamental to children's learning, many countries have introduced school lunch programs to enhance educational access, participation, and learning outcomes, while simultaneously addressing issues of childhood hunger and improving nutritional and health statuses. Following this global trend, Nepal extended the Mid-day Meal program to all 77 districts in 2077, with a target audience of 2.8 million students. The government aims to enhance learning outcomes, resulting in increased student enrollment rates (Edusanjal, 2021).

The introduction of midday meals into community schools in Nepal represents one of the simplest yet most effective means of improving children's nutrition and empowering education. This program seeks to address several pressing issues, including reducing dropout rates, improving retention and enrollment rates, eliminating classroom hunger, and aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2, which aim to provide freshly cooked nutritious meals to children in community schools by 2030. The expected impacts encompass increased child literacy rates, decreased child morbidity and mortality due to hunger and malnutrition, and improved school performance and overall health among children. As per this guideline, there is also a recommendation to eliminate junk food from children's diets, as some community schools reported instances of children consuming items like instant noodles, dalmoth, and beaten rice as part of their midday meals (Paudel, 2022). The Mid-Day Meal program has outlined three primary objectives: firstly, by providing a diversified diet with at least a thirty percent nutritional supplement for school children to enhance their health and nutritional status; secondly, by increasing children's engagement in teaching and learning, and improving learning standards; and lastly, by establishing a link between schools and agricultural production, thereby increasing the consumption of locally produced agricultural goods in midday meals, boosting agricultural yields, and expanding local economic markets (MoEST, 2077). Community schools have come to represent a place where children from underprivileged families have access to education (Budhathoki, 2070).

The context of retention in school education refers to the factors and conditions that influence the ability of students to stay in school and progress through their academic journey. Retention in this context typically refers to preventing students from dropping out or repeating grades. Understanding and addressing the various elements within the context of retention is crucial for creating an environment that supports students in their educational pursuits (Kushiyiat,2009). The provision of a midday meal program in schools can have a positive impact on student retention. A midday meal program in promoting retention depends on its effective implementation, the quality of the meals

provided, and the collaboration between schools, communities, and relevant authorities. Additionally, while a midday meal program can be a valuable component, it should be considered as part of a broader strategy that addresses multiple factors influencing student retention, as discussed in the previous response.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

The current study was influenced by Maslow's hierarchical needs theory, conceptualized by Abraham Maslow (1943), wherein needs are organized hierarchically, ranging from basic necessities to self-actualization. Foundational to this hierarchy is the fundamental need for sustenance, with food representing a crucial element. Consequently, this research is grounded in Maslow's need theory. When applying Maslow's framework to educational contexts, the argument posits that providing mid-day meals to hungry children at schools contributes to increased attendance and prolonged engagement in learning activities. This, in turn, enhances attention and addresses short-term hunger issues, as suggested by (Ramadhni, 2014).

In the context of the prevailing schools of thought during that period, including psychoanalysis and behaviorism, which predominantly concentrated on addressing problematic behaviors, Maslow distinguished himself by directing his focus toward understanding the factors contributing to individuals' happiness and the actions they undertake to attain that objective (Lester et al., 1983). Added that Maslow, who was a humanist, believed that people naturally want to be their best selves, a concept called self-actualization. But to reach this goal, they first need to fulfill basic needs like food, safety, love, and feeling good about themselves.

Empirical Foundation

The implementation of midday meal policies in schools, aimed at improving children's health and providing nutritious food, has a long history dating back to 1967. Notably, significant transformations have taken place since 1956, when the Ministry of Education and Sports in Nepal assumed a pivotal role in education (MoEST, 2077). This paper investigates the impact of school feeding programs, with a focus on learning achievement as a fundamental support initiative. Existing literature on this subject can be divided into two primary categories.

In the first strand, randomized field experiments have been employed to assess the influence of school feeding programs on learning outcomes. Surprisingly, most of these experiments yielded no discernible effects. The second strand of literature utilizes quasi-experimental methodologies to explore the impact of India's midday meal program on children's nutritional and educational outcomes. Remarkably, the local variations in learning outcomes have only been studied in two instances, both of which employed local variation as a key factor (Singh, 2008).

Over time, an increasing number of countries have adopted midday meal programs on a large or universal scale (With et al., 2008). The importance of midday meals in addressing short-term hunger within schools cannot be overstated. Diet plays a crucial role in physical health and psychological well-being, significantly influencing healthy brain development and function. The concept of healthy nutrition varies across countries and cultures (Panta, 2020).

Bessler (2012) emphasized the direct impact of nutrition and diet on children's mental and physical development. Given that a child's brain undergoes rapid growth in the last trimester of pregnancy and during the first two years of life, it is crucial that school-going children consume nutritious meals during their school hours to support good health and active participation in their educational endeavors. In the United States, for instance, approximately 5 billion school lunches are served each year, benefiting 31 million children and teenagers through the national school lunch

program (Mozer et al., 2019). Students' eating habits are influenced by their education, school midday meal policies, and parental guidance. Parents, in particular, serve as role models in making dietary choices for their children, while teachers possess the authority to address unbalanced nutritional habits, such as the consumption of junk food and unhealthy dietary behaviors (Fleary & Ettienne, 2019).

Unfortunately, only a limited number of community schools ensure that students consume healthy lunches at school and maintain a diet of green and natural foods at home. Cultivating healthy eating habits can foster positive attitudes and values among students (Ahmadi & Black, 2015). To promote these habits, nutrition education should be integrated into school curricula, motivating students to embrace locally available natural foods, which provide physical strength, encourage a positive lifestyle, and enhance mental capacity (Loth et al., 2016; Pickett, Michaelson, & Davison, 2016).

The utilization of natural foodstuffs in school-based nutrition programs can combat malnutrition and obesity while diminishing the consumption of junk food, although sustaining these effects has proven challenging (Naidoo et al., 2019; Schapiro et al., 2019). It's essential to acknowledge that students' eating habits are influenced by school education, school midday meal policies, parental guidance, and peer social gatherings (Gutuskey et al., 2016; Peltzer & Pengpid, 2016). The objectives of the midday school meal program are to enhance the learning capabilities of school-going children, alleviate poverty, and promote sociological behavior. The program seeks to tackle short-term hunger, incentivize regular school attendance, and sustain students' engagement in the classroom. Early malnutrition can have detrimental consequences, encompassing underweight issues, stunted growth, weakened immunity, and increased mortality (Panta, 2020).

Chisala (2017) posited that hunger and poverty not only affect children's health and development but also impair their learning abilities and school attendance. Midday meal schemes have sometimes been perceived as populist measures, seen as a welfare program benefitting all sections of society (Nagaraju, 2014). It is worth considering the trade-offs faced by households between spending on food for their children and other goods (Nagaraju, 2014).

In Nepal, community schools, despite facing challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited teaching staff, and tight budgets, continue to compete with private schools, primarily serving children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These schools are comparatively affordable and government-supported, making them an important focus of the Mid-Day Meals Program. This program, referred to as "Nutrition Support to Primary Education," aims to alleviate classroom hunger for children under 14 years old attending school (Kadari & Roy, 2016).

In addition to its impact on enrollment, attendance, and retention, the program has positively influenced students' nutritional status, enabling disadvantaged students to attend school more regularly and actively participate in classroom activities (Kadari & Roy, 2016). The Mid-Day Meals Program not only provides cooked meals but also strives to meet prescribed nutritional standards. Furthermore, it has a far-reaching impact on physical and mental growth, as well as the reduction of the gender gap in education, addressing various contributing factors such as poor socioeconomic conditions, child labor, lack of motivation, and poor nutritional status (Kadari & Roy, 2016).

In summary, the Mid-Day Meals program has three primary objectives: increased enrollment, attendance, and retention; improved nutrition; and the promotion of social equity (Drèze and Goyal, 2003; Khera, 2006). In addition to its educational benefits, it contributes to child socialization, helping erode caste prejudices and class inequalities as children share meals.

The anthropological interpretation of educational policy in Nepal reveals a dynamic history marked by frequent modifications. The term 'policy study' encompasses several concepts, such as policy analysis, policy science, implementation study, and evaluation study (Regmi, 2017). Dale (1986) illustrates distinct traditions in policy studies through three projects: social administration, policy analysis, and social science. Between the 1940s and 1970s, the dominant focus in educational policy was the social administration project, which aimed to improve administrative aspects within a nation-

state's welfare system (Regmi, 2017). More recently, the social science project, particularly prevalent in educational policy studies, has gained prominence. It identifies social issues and explores how educational policy can address them (Ozga, 2000). Dale (1986) emphasizes that there is no fixed definition of policy; its interpretation depends largely on the researcher's perspective.

In this study, an anthropological approach has been employed. An anthropological perspective on policy offers valuable insights into the nature of policy and the areas that policy researchers investigate. Rather than seeking abstract and unchanging definitions of 'policy,' policy anthropology focuses on understanding how policy functions in shaping society. The central question is not 'what is policy?' but 'what actions do people take in the name of policy?' Advocates of policy anthropology argue that each policy is shaped by the individuals it affects (Khanal, 2010).

Furthermore, the emergence of the anthropology of policy stems from the realization that policy has become increasingly central and influential in modern society, even defining modernity itself (Shore & Wright, 1997: 6). In contemporary times, governments, public institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private-sector entities influence virtually every aspect of human life. Policies extend to international trade, resource management, law and order, national security, public health, building regulations, employment relations, education, taxation, citizenship rights, domestic space utilization, and even sexual behavior (Shore, 2012). Consequently, this study adopts an anthropological viewpoint with a focus on the perspectives of public-school teachers.

The anthropological perspective in this study examines the influence of public-school teachers, highlighting how policy functions in shaping society, emphasizing that each policy is shaped by the people (Khanal, 2010). In contemporary society, policies affect virtually every aspect of human life, and as such, a comprehensive understanding of how policies operate and impact society is crucial (Shore & Wright, 1997; Shore, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The government of Nepal has introduced the mid-day meal program to support children's holistic development by addressing early developmental challenges and ensuring consistent physical growth. Additionally, the mid-day meal initiative serves as a social safety net, offering nutritious food to children from low-income and food-insecure families during times of need. Consequently, the mid-day meal program is recognized as a valuable investment in human capital development. However, despite these important functions, there appears to be a lack of comprehensive research on this topic. Therefore, this study aims to explore teachers' perspectives and provide answers to the following questions

- How does the allocated budget for mid-day meals affect the adequacy of nutrition provisions for students?
- How is the allocated funding for mid-day meals being utilized, and what factors contribute to its effective or ineffective utilization?
- Why and how has the mid-day meal program influenced the reduction in dropout rates among students concerning its impact on the quality of education?

Significance of the Study

The midday meal scheme in community schools is a significant policy initiative with multifaceted benefits, encompassing children's physical, mental, and economic development, as well as improvements in enrollment rates and reductions in dropout rates. As an investment, it has been noted that every 1 US dollar allocated to the midday meal program yields a result equivalent to 5.2 US dollars (MoEST, 2077). UNICEF (2012) also underscores the crucial role of midday meals in the overall development of schoolchildren. This study holds significance for various stakeholders, including researchers, students, teachers, parents, school administrators, planners, organizers, and policymakers.

Moreover, it aims to explore teachers' perceptions, which can inform the effective implementation of mid-day meal policies in community schools.

Methodology

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the perspectives of community school teachers regarding their schools' mid-day meal policy. In the realm of policy discourse, ideologies shape policies that influence social practices, and individuals formed by these systems often accept and contribute to these ideologies (Regmi, 2017). This research is grounded in Maslow's need theory, consequently Maslow (1954). In this context, the study employed a phenomenological research design, which is conducive to qualitative studies where participants describe their lived experiences related to specific phenomena or concepts. The research was conducted in the Lalitpur district, focusing on community school teachers' views on the midday meal policy. In-depth interviews were conducted with three teachers from two different community schools purposively chosen. The data obtained from these interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a suitable method for analyzing qualitative data (Caulfield, J., 2023).

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are paramount in research to protect participants' identities, opinions, and views. Therefore, researchers must adhere to ethical principles diligently. In this study, ethical approval was sought, and permission was obtained from the selected three teachers. Pseudonyms were used for both the school and the teacher; for example, "Ram" and "School A" or "School B" were used to conceal their identities. The participants' consent was secured to record their insights for research purposes. Additionally, the interpretations and findings were presented to the participants to ensure accuracy and alignment with their statements.

Findings

Is the available payment enough for you?

My results are based on data triangulation between the two schools and the three teachers interviewed, opinions on the amount provided by the government according to the mid-day meal policy of Nepal. which is Rs 15 per meal per student, is insufficient. Due to the rising inflation rate and the higher cost of everything, different schools are collecting funds and feeding the students continuously for the mid-day meal. According to all responses.

My name is Daya (changed name). I have been teaching in this school for around 10 years. Nowadays students up to class 6 are charged Rs 15 per day for their mid-day meal and made available to every student. This amount alone is not sufficient but the municipality provides Rs 10 for each meal and a total of Rs 25 is good enough for the food. But the amount provided by the government only is not sufficient.

The second response is quite similar to the other response. The limited and not sufficient governmental funds and the funds collected locally by the teachers from their monthly salary were found.

I am Ram (changed name). I have been teaching in this school for 5-6 years now. Mid-day meal has been a regular thing since I joined here. Although the amount given by the government i.e. Rs 15 per student is not sufficient as the inflation rate is very high these days. Kitchen utensils, a cook and the management are not sufficient by that amount so we teachers collect some amount from our monthly salary and contribute to the meal. If we don't collect the money the amount is not enough to feed the students. This amount is very low as these days even a black tea costs Rs 15 per glass how can we give a full meal to students by that amount

The third respondent has a similar view too. Insufficient funds from the government and the amount collected from the school fund were seen.

According to Ramesh (name changed), the provided amount is not sufficient, and whatever the amount, the consumption of junk foods has significantly reduced among children. If the amount is sufficient enough then we also provide seasonal locally produced fruits to children. However, the government-provided fund is not sufficient so we manage the money from our school fund.

Although the fund from the government is not sufficient schools are feeding the children by collecting funds from the local government, teachers' monthly salary, and the school fund. This campaign is crucial for the physical mental and intellectual growth of the children. It has helped in the government's plan of providing 30% nutrition in children's meals. School feeding programs aim to alleviate hunger and malnutrition in order to support students' education (Conklin & Bordi 2003; Murphy et al. 2000; Russell et al. 2007). It also has directly helped the Children living in poverty and who are dominated by racial and cultural beliefs in society. Studies relating to development, health, and nutrition, and teacher involvement are considered peripheral to the research concerns (Gleason 2008; Datar and Nicosia 2012; Conklin & Bordi 2003; Murphy et al. 2000; Mirtcheva & Powell 2009).

Has the grant amount been fully utilized?

Daya tells about the grant amount, A small amount of money is also provided as donations from our local government so we make 6 different dishes on 6 different days and me being a headteacher myself it has been most appropriately and fully utilized. Seasonal vegetables and foods produced from the local region also have a positive impact in this.

The second response is quite similar to the other response. The Grant amount has been fully utilized which is provided by the government.

Ram tells me about; the amount is fully utilized not only the amount from the government we have also managed some of the amounts from the school fund. We feel pleased seeing the children having the meal provided by us. If that amount is leaked amongst us it is like a sin to us.

Another respondence Ramesh said,

The amount has been fully and most appropriately utilized also the children who were surviving by having cheap junk foods with poor quality available in the market, this mid-day meal campaign has given them locally produced quality food with good nutrition. Also, it has directly contributed to the local farmers and their products and also their employment and financial sector.

The provided amount has been fully utilized. Along with funds from big-hearted teachers and the group of community. School education, the mid-day meal policy of the school, and parental influences influence students' eating habits. As well as preparing their own meals, parents serve as role models for their children when it comes to their dietary choices. Teachers have the authority to correct students' unbalanced nutritional habits such as taking junk food and unhealthy dietary habits (Fleary, & Ettienne, 2019). Several community schools reported that children were eating junk foods such as instant noodles, dalmoth, and beaten rice as part of their midday meals (Paudel, 2022). It promotes local production, and the grant amount is so small but teachers manage quietly. To increase children's access to education, participation, and learning level in order to keep them healthy, school lunch programs are being run in most countries to recognize this fact. Long-term goals include reducing hunger among children, improving their nutritional and health status, and increasing educational access, participation, continuity, and knowledge (MoEST,2077 BS).

Has the program increased the quality of education and reduced the dropout rate?

Mid-day meal is included in one of the government policies. In this scheme, the primary-level children have been fed with daytime snacks. Nepal is a developing country most of the students studying in government schools are from poor economic backgrounds and the guardians of those children are working to fulfilling the needs of the household. The children are not fed with nutritious diet in a house

because of the busy guardians and when the school provides good meals to the students attend school on daily basis. Again Daya;

Students in government schools mostly are from poor financial backgrounds and poor families. As the guardians are not able to feed the children properly because of their busy work schedule and as the children don't get a balanced and nutritious diet in their home the children come to school daily only for the sake of the good food, they get here which has bilateral advantage one in the nutrition of the children and another in the enhance of learning ability which assist the quality education. Student retention can be enhanced by providing a midday meal program in schools. This has created a good impact on children the nature of quitting school has also gone down. So it helps to reduce the dropout rate of small children

Children from laborer communities when coming to school they are provided with a good meal Ramesh; Students in this school mostly belong to laborers' families. As the children don't get good food at home, come to school to have a good meal too. Even if they come to school for the sake of good food spending time in school the whole day provides them a good and quality education. The nature of quitting school is also in on the verge of getting down the school didn't provide mid-day meals to students they went to a home for the daytime meal and didn't return back to school. This incident has decreased these days.

This has not only contributed to the development of good education it has also contributed in physical and mental development. Again Ram;

Not only the quality education, but the dropout rate among the students and malnutrition in the children have also significantly reduced the poor condition and situation of the government school has also improved. The meal contributes to the development and growth of children both physically and mentally. The financial burden of feeding children a nutritious diet has also been reduced among the parents which has helped with the poor economic condition of the house. Creating an environment that supports students' educational pursuits requires understanding and addressing the various elements related to retention.

. This campaign has expanded up to class 6, since last year and it has been implemented in all 77 districts in Nepal. The midday meal has been implemented in 77 districts in Nepal as well (MoEST, 2077 BS). The mid-day meal has made the children come to a government school which were in the verge of downfall. Students come to school for 6 days a week, And because of this the dropout rate has significantly decreased and the quality of education they gain has also improved.

Discussion

In recent decades, social science projects have gained prominence, especially in educational policy studies, in which social problems are identified and educational policy solutions are evaluated (Ozga,2000). Among them, the midday meal is an educational policy process in Nepal.0zga, (2000, p 2) Added here policy as a process rather than a product. which is implemented in Nepal since 1957 from the Joomla district with a small amount of budget.

Now, in my opinion, the amount provided by the government, which is Rs 15 per meal per student, is insufficient. As the inflation rate is going up and the cost of everything is going higher, schools have collected funds from different means for the mid-day meal of the students and are feeding them continuously. According to Maslow (1954) a humanist, people naturally desire to be their best selves, a concept called self-actualization. However, they must first fulfill basic needs such as food, safety, love, and self-esteem to reach this goal.

This program has somewhat indirectly helped the growth of government schools which are in the verge of downfall. Community schools have come to be where children from poor and underprivileged families get their education (Budhathiki,2077). Amongst the group of children with a poor economic background who do not get a nutritious and balanced diet every day and the parents who

work as laborers and earn only a limited amount, they cannot take care of their children properly and provide enough meals and diet to the children this program has got a very decent impact on direct health of the children who are provided with enough and nutritious meal in the school to be it only a day time one" Not only does hunger and poverty affect children's health and development, but it also affects their learning ability and poor attendance" (Chisala, 2017, P. 209). In Hungary, students lose both physical health and mental focus on schoolwork. The midday meal program is perceived by many as just another welfare program that benefits everyone in society (Nagaraju,2014). When utilizing Maslow's framework in educational settings, it is argued that offering mid-day meals to undernourished children in schools promotes heightened attendance and sustained involvement in learning activities. Consequently, this fosters improved concentration and tackles immediate hunger concerns, as proposed by Ramadhni (2014). Locally produced foods and vegetables are also being utilized properly and local farmers are also motivated as the crops are utilized amongst the children and they are benefited too by getting a good price for their products. This has reduced the effect of malnutrition among children living in poverty. But it is for the sake of food as the children come to school, they are provided with quality education. By improving learning standards, we can increase equitable access to quality basic education for children and increase children's participation in teaching and learning. Creating an environment that supports students' educational pursuits requires understanding and addressing the various elements related to retention. In addition, by increasing consumption of local agricultural produce in mid-day meals, schools can link with agricultural production, increasing agricultural yields and expanding local economic markets (MoEST 2077). As children don't have to starve all day due to lack of food, they stay at school for the sake of food which has reduced the dropout rate of the students. And the number of students is on the verge of increasing year by year in schools.

Conclusion

Mid-day meal policy is an important policy of the educational policy. Though the given amount is not sufficient, this policy is better for community school students, since many students in community schools come from working families or poor backgrounds. Their meals aren't delivered on time and they don't have access to nutrition as a consequence of the day meal, parents send their children to school, so the dropout rate decreases as well. Creating an environment that supports students' educational pursuits requires understanding and addressing the various elements related to retention. On the other hand, it emphasizes local production will be utilized like vegetables, grants, and rice. In this way, local production and farmers' income also increased, despite this, increasing the quality of education, increasing the enrollment rate of community schools, and increasing local production, decreasing malnutrition

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