

### **ICDS in Mewat: Gaps and Furtherance**

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#### **Abstract**

It is often believed that the schemes in India are not sufficiently imparted on the grounds to the beneficiaries as they aim to bring in theory. This paper aims to look at one of such schemes, ICDS, Integrated Child Development Services and analyse its functioning in retrospect to the abovementioned belief. The study was done in 15 anganwadicentres, central focus of the ICDS scheme of the villages spanning over 5 blocks of the district Mewat in Haryana. The study was conducted during June-July 2014 under the purview of S M Sehgal Foundation, Gurgaon. The results hence obtained are solely true to the data collected in the study. The study was made with the intention to look into the functioning of the Scheme and to bring out the loopholes to be further worked upon.

Keywords: Anganwadi, Mewat, ICDS

#### **1. Introduction**

Malnutrition is currently one of the biggest challenges facing the modern India. The relationship between health and poverty is multifaceted and multidimensional. Determinants of child undernutrition are interlinked to situation of poverty and hunger along with factors such as poor access to health care, education, asymmetry in gender relationship. Amartya Sen has pointed out that actual undernutrition is higher in India as compared to South Africa. Undernutrition is considerably higher among the underprivileged social groups living in rural areas- in the drought prone pockets, in particular and in urban slums than among the more affluent classes and higher castes.<sup>1</sup>

Government of India proclaimed a National Policy on Children in 1974 declaring children as supremely important asset. Launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1975, ICDS scheme represents one of the world's largest and most unique programmes for early childhood (0-6 years) development and it seeks to provide an integrated package of services in a convergent manner for the holistic development of the child. ICDS is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented through the state governments.

##### **1.1 Objectives of the Scheme**

- improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0-6 years;
- reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout;
- achieve effective co-ordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development; and
- Enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education."<sup>2</sup>

The ICDS team comprises of Anganwadi workers, Anganwadi helpers, Supervisors, Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) and District Programme Officers (DPOs). Besides, the medical

<sup>1</sup>Amartya Sen, Pratichi Child Report – A study on the delivery of ICDS in West Bengal.

officers, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) form a team with the ICDS functionaries to achieve convergence of different services

## **2. Methodology:**

Five blocks of Mewat district in Haryana were selected i.e. Tauru, Nuh, Nagina, Firozpur Jhirka and Punhana covering 15 Anganwadi centres. The study is largely based on the primary research and is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Primary data were collected during the field visits with the help of structured questionnaire and observation methods. The target group included pregnant and lactating mothers, children within the age group of 3 to 6 years, Anganwadi workers/helpers and important villagers.

Focused group discussions with the villagers were done to get more insight about the implementation of the scheme. Adequate attention has been paid to ensure that the participants for focused group hail from different strata of society.

## **3. Findings from the villages:**

### **3.1. Infrastructure:**

The infrastructure of the centres becomes one of the essential pre-requisites for the effective delivery of the services to beneficiaries under the ICDS scheme. 80% of the anganwadi centres visited had a pucca structure. It was also found that none of the centres visited had fan or sanitation facilities. Almost 87% of the centres had posters and charts and other study material but 40% were in bad conditions either torn or faded. Only 4 centres had the gas stove connection, rest were still working on the old style cooking system of Chula.

All 15 centres had the storage vessels but AWW workers find the trunk allotted to them to be scarce in space and hence has to buy other storage vessels on their own. Also, the funds for cooking utensils has only been received in one of the 15 centres visited, rest have expended their own money.

66% of the centres had issues with water. The helper would have to carry water from long distances or from their homes to cook food. There is no water in these centres to be given to the beneficiaries. 6 out of 15 centres had leakage problems in times of rain. The construction of the centre is so that the rain water would seep in and sometimes destroy the grains in some cases and in some cases the water would come through the windows as they are broken.

Also, in certain centres, because of the lack of locks and door in the centre, there was a danger of theft of grains and hence has to be kept in some other place which posed problems transporting the grain every day to cook food.

### **3.2. Supplementary Nutrition:**

One of the integral parts of a regular day at an Anganwadi Centre is to provide supplementary nutrition. It was found from the survey that almost 90% of the AWCs had cooked food when we visited them but as per the findings from the villages it is seen that only 60% actually cook food every day. Although, it was noticed that there was no uniformity in the supply of basic food material to these centres, some of the centres get extra endowments from the government while some centres don't.

The ration allotted by the government is found to be irregular in 25% of the centres but overall this issue didn't seem to be a problem for the centres. Mostly centres are getting the ration in 3 months except for oil. On the other hand, all the 15 centres had issues with the money allotted for fuel and vegetables. Every centre visited receives this money on yearly basis and even more than that in some of the cases. While the AWWs were aware of the day-wise menu of food, it was seen that only few stick to it.

### 3.3. Pre School Non Formal Education:

The AWW's are supposed to teach the alphabets, counting, recite poems, tell stories etc. it was although observed that this part of the scheme stays mostly untouched. Having said that, there were few AWW's who seemed to have taken an effort to teach kids in a creative way as one of them made stuffed toys in the shape of vegetables to teach their name to the kids. In almost 80% of the AWCs the mothers of the beneficiaries have given a negative reply in the respect of education in these centres. The AWCs also came out to be the centres of social and moral teachings but the impact of the same is a question

### 3.4. Human Resource:

75% of the AWWs have said that they don't receive their wages on time and even when they receive it is not complete. There has been upgradation in the salaries from 2014 but the workers haven't yet received the updated salary except for one out of the 15 centres. Since, the salaries are often clubbed together and that too not in full amount, it creates a whole lot of confusion to the AWWs. On the grounds of the same excuse, around 35% of the workers do not know their exact salary amount.

The AWWs are given a training course before they are appointed and they are also given refresher course training. All the 15 workers who were questioned have received the training be it before or after joining the AWC. Almost 40% found it useful and has seen changes in their way of conduct after coming from the workshop while the 30% feel it was the same, the rest don't remember the contents properly.

### 3.5. Regulatory Mechanism:

There needs to be a stringent regulation mechanism by the government and the community for effective implementation of any programme. The workers and villagers were asked about the frequency of visits made by the Child Development Project officers and supervisors. The following findings are obtained from the 15 centres visited. Sarpanch has been majorly involved in visiting the centres as 7 out of 15 centres have seen their sarpanch coming more than 3 times in a month. Majority of the centres have seen CDPO coming to the centres only once a month and supervisor twice or thrice a month.

It was seen that the number of supervisors were lesser as compared to the number of villages they were handling making the system more tough to operate effectively.

The mother's committee that looks after the functioning of the AWC comprising of the beneficiaries was missing in these centres but some groups were present in only 25% of the centres that hold meetings and come up with solutions in cases of problems in the functioning of the AWC.

## **4. Recommendations:**

### 4.1. Increased Community Monitoring:

It has been observed that there is an impish behaviour by the villagers, not falling in the group of beneficiaries while collection of supplementary nutrition which often barges the actual beneficiaries from getting desired amount of food. The AWWs lack the authority to refuse them food because they face social misbehaviour and thefts and damages in the AWCs by the villagers if they refuse them the food. Hence, to avoid the cluttered situation and to make the scheme reach the real beneficiaries, a three step practice should be followed simultaneously

1. There should be a small monitoring group (including members of panch and mothers of beneficiaries) authoritative in nature that should specifically look into this matter.
2. All the villagers and not just the beneficiaries should be mobilized and made aware about the scheme and its beneficiaries.

3. The goal of the scheme should be extended to feeding the mouths of the beneficiaries and not just distribution of food to them. This implies that the AWWs should practice feeding the beneficiaries in the AWCs; they shouldn't give the food to somebody related to the beneficiaries on excuses of taking the food home and feeding there. The beneficiaries should receive and eat the food right there in the AWCs.

#### 4.2. Stricter and Regular Government Monitoring

It was also observed there were only 2 supervisors who were handling 2 blocks of Mewat which would mean a lot of villages and hence a lot of anganwadi centres. The system of regulatory mechanism hence gets bungled because from the practical aspect, these supervisors do not get enough time to look into the problem of all the anganwadi centres. Hence there is a need to employ and officiate more supervisors who can make the redressal system more pertinent.

Monthly visits only for infrastructural checks should be made by the government officials and desired supplies should be approved in the quickest possible way.

#### 4.3. Monthly allocation of funds from the government:

Another distinct issue observed in these AWCs is the lacking incentives for the AWWs to work because of the late receipt of wages. Besides the wages, they don't even get money for fuel and vegetables on time. Most AWCs haven't received the rents since years. The funds for cooking vessels also have not been allotted. All the money for these expenses hence has to go from the worker's pockets. On top of that when the workers don't receive their monthly wages; it leads to discouragement and hence breaks the very fortitude of successfully carrying out the services. All the incomes and funds should be supplied every month without any breaks.

#### 4.4. Greater emphasis on Pre-School Non Formal Education:

Pre-School Non formal Education which is considered to be a significant service of the ICDS scheme was found to be almost absent in the Anganwadi centres. It was also found that few workers didn't have enough qualification and some just didn't have any incentive to teach the kids. Besides, the kids and their mothers themselves do not feel the need to get education. They only come to AWC for food, so there needs to be a stricter agenda for the centres to impart the non-formal education.

#### 4.5. Comprehensive Training Programmes for AWWs:

The AWWs should be given a training course specifically to make them learn how to teach the kids. The training programmes should be more regular and refresher courses should be provided from time to time to make the workers stay in touch and updated. There can be annual incentivisation for the best AWW initiated by the government to make it competitive amongst them to work in their best level possible which in further aims to solve the issue of incentives as discussed earlier in the paper.

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