

Framework for Improving the Effectiveness of the ICDS

Background:

It is estimated that 150 million children, below the age of 6, live under conditions of acute poverty, disease and illiteracy, as a consequence of inadequate access to primary health care, child rearing and basic education. Left unattended, these would lead to issues that have a lasting impact on the well being of millions of families for decades ahead.

The Integrated Child Development Services programme symbolizes the country's commitment to its children. The Govt. of India spends roughly Rs. 1000 crores per annum on this programme and reaches around 30 million beneficiaries. It provides a package of services to children below the age of 6 and mothers (ante-natal and post-natal), consisting of:

- a. supplementary nutrition
- b. immunization
- c. health check-ups & referral services
- d. non-formal pre-school education
- e. nutrition & health education

The ICDS is implemented in Bangalore through around 400 Anganwadis (AWs) reaching roughly 160,000 children. Each AW is staffed by one AW Worker and one Helper (Ayah). A recent review by FORCES, a Bangalore city based NGOs network, working with the urban poor indicated the following:

- a. ICDS activities have low visibility in the development efforts in the city, and that the impact may be very meager
- b. Data available regarding ICDS is about investments and infrastructure, and very little on impact or benefits
- c. Accountability for performance and service delivery is very poor at all levels of the ICDS
- d. Large size of infrastructure makes it difficult to address local administrative issues in a timely manner
- e. Low level of awareness among beneficiaries regarding entitlements and the long-term value of these inputs.

FORCES has taken the initiative to address these issues, and has sought to work with PAC to design an intervention that could address these issues in a systematic manner.

FORCES (Forum for Creche and Child Care Services) is an informal network of organizations and individuals committed to advocacy on behalf of the young child. It has 47 member organizations across five states in India. The Karnataka Chapter of FORCES has come into existence, with SUTRADHAR as Convenor. Three clusters of interest appeared at the first discussion:

- a. Pre-school education and ICDS functioning
- b. Health and nutrition
- c. Perspectives on policies, laws and legislation pertinent to the pre-school child in Karnataka.

PAC is a not-for-profit institution based in Bangalore working on improving the quality of governance in India. The focus of PACs work is on strengthening civil society in its interaction with the state. The Centre is best known for its "Report Cards on Public Services", which have served to provide civil society groups and state agencies with tools and direction to improve services.

FORCES and PAC have come together to design an intervention with the ICDS, to address the issues outlined above.

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Objective: The focus of this intervention would be the ICDS programme in Bangalore, which would provide learning for scaling up the effort to the rest of the State of Karnataka. The main objective of the intervention is to improve the impact of ICDS on its targeted beneficiaries by:

- a. improving awareness of entitlements among beneficiaries
- b. identify mechanisms to improve service delivery at the AW level
- c. generate suggestions that would help the programme better manage service delivery

Approach:

The intervention would seek to improve the impact of ICDS on its targeted beneficiaries through the following steps:

- a. preparation of a short white paper on the perspective of FORCES regarding ICDS and issues affecting its effectiveness
- b. a diagnostic survey with ICDS beneficiaries and staff on:
 - service parameters in operation at present
 - difficulties encountered
 - suggestions for improving effectiveness
- c. interactive workshop/s with AWs and WC Dept.
- d. design of awareness and capacity building component for beneficiaries
- e. recommendations to Task Force/WCD/ BATF on policy and administrative measures

White paper: The White Paper would outline the operating modalities of the ICDS in Bangalore and the issues to be highlighted. The Paper would

- a. address both Health and Education issues
- b. help in defining the areas on which interventions are required
- c. define the variables on which information is to be collected for proposing changes and actions
- d. outline issues on which deliberations are to be carried out with Health Task Force, WCD and **BATF**.

Diagnostic survey: The survey will be modelled on the diagnostic survey carried out by PAC on the IPP VIII and BMP Maternity Homes, covering 30 AWs spread over 3 blocks. The survey is expected to provide empirical evidence on poor standards and issues related to health and education of the pre-school child, that need to be addressed in the intervention, and provide the basis for dialogue and problem solving action.

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Interactive workshops: The workshops would involve the FORCES team and other stakeholders working in the 3 blocks, to deliberate over the findings of the diagnostic survey. The deliberations could lead to assessments of underlying factors as well as exploration on measures that could help in tackling them.

Awareness & capacity building plan: This plan would be developed by FORCES, and would build on the experience gathered by other chapters too. The emphasis would be on creating capacity among beneficiaries and within the ICDS system in the three Blocks. The learning from this experience could be shared with a wider audience and provide the starting point for a scaled up **intervention**.

Recommendations: The document would be prepared by the FORCES team, and would consolidate the learning from the diagnostic phase as well as the subsequent advocacy/ capacity building phase. The emphasis would be on providing focused and actionable inputs to ICDS implementors on:

- a. steps to improve service delivery at the Centres
- b. measures to encourage better utilization of ICDS infrastructure and services
- c. changes in design which would address supply side issues as well as required discretion
- d. measures to improve accountability for performance

Steps Ahead:

FORCES, Karnataka would need to lead this project - a suitable sub-committee would need to devote time to this project. The other decisions to be taken are:

- a. agreement in FORCES and PAC on this plan of action
- b. detailed activity plan and time frame
- c. resources required for each component of the detailed plan