



Strengthening of Integrated Child Development Services Scheme

- ☑ India's high prevalence of stunting, wasting, and anaemia continues to pose public health risks for children and women. So, India must strengthen its existing social sector schemes, such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
- ☑ Recent finding suggests a significant first step towards fortifying the programme is to empower Anganwadi workers.

About Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)

- ☑ The ICDS is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It was launched in 1975.
- ☑ The ICDS targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers; addresses non-formal pre-school education; and breaks the cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality.



ICDS consists of 4 different components

- ☑ Early Childhood Care Education & Development (ECCED)
- ☑ Care & Nutrition Counselling.
- ☑ Health Services.
- ☑ Community Mobilisation Awareness, Advocacy & Information, Education and Communication.

Objectives

- ☑ Institutionalizing essential services and strengthening structures at all levels.
- ☑ Focusing on children under the age of 3.
- ☑ Providing early child care and learning environment.
- ☑ Promote decentralization and community based locally responsive child care approach.
- ☑ Vertical integration of training of all functionaries to strengthen field based joint action and teamwork to achieve desired results and objectives.
- ☑ Establishment of National Training Resource Centres at the Central and State levels.
- ☑ To ensure convergence at the grassroots level by strengthening partnerships with PRIs, community, civil society to improve child development services.
- ☑ To coordinate and network with all government and non-government organizations providing services for children.

Findings of Global studies on the performance of ICDS

- a. Empirical research highlights the correlation between early-life poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate stimulation, and later cognitive and economic challenges.
- b. The ICDS's positive impact on cognitive achievements, especially among girls and those from economically disadvantaged families.
- c. Children who were exposed to ICDS during the first three years of life completed 0.1-0.3 more grades of schooling than those who were not.
- d. Adolescents aged 13-18 in areas with ICDS implementation showed a 7.8% increase in their likelihood of school enrolment and completed an average of 0.8 additional grades compared to those in areas with ICDS implementation.

Poshan 2.0 Initiative

- ☑ As principal operatives in the Poshan 2.0 initiative, these workers bear the onus of advancing child nutrition, health, and education in their communities. Their roles vary widely from employing modern technology, like smartphones and applications, to practical tasks such as delivering health education, managing feeding programmes, and liaising with auxiliary nurse midwives and other healthcare professionals.
- ☑ The operationalisation of the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 proposal hinges on its status as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- ☑ State governments oversee its execution, including administration, management, and monitoring. Consequently, Anganwadi worker recruitment falls under their jurisdiction, guided by regulations and region-specific criteria.
- ☑ Considering the role of Anganwadi workers, their number should be increased.

Advantages of more workers

An additional Anganwadi worker could be added to each of India's 13,99,661 Anganwadi centers to lessen the load of these workers. Implementing this approach could yield at least five advantages.

- ❖ **First** - It would lead to better health and educational outcomes. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the addition of a half-time worker effectively doubled the net preschool instructional time, which led to improvements in math and language test scores for children enrolled in the programme.
- ❖ **Second** - Children who remained enrolled also exhibited reduced rates of child stunting and severe malnutrition.
- ❖ **Third** - The cost of a nationwide roll-out of this model is relatively insignificant in comparison to the potential advantages it offers.
- ❖ **Fourth** - The new Anganwadi worker can be given the responsibility of concentrating only on preschool and early childhood education.
- ❖ **Fifth** - Apart from improving the well-being of rural communities, this would create job opportunities for local residents, particularly women. It would lead to the creation of 1.3 million new jobs for women across India.

Drawbacks

- ☑ Despite four decades of relentless efforts, the ICDS still faces the herculean task of ameliorating the nutritional and health outcomes for children aged 0-6 years.
- ☑ A disconcerting 2.5 lakh centres operate without functional sanitation facilities and 1.5 lakh centres lack access to potable water. Approximately 4.15 lakh Anganwadi centers do not possess their own pucca building.

Way Forward

- ☑ To unlock the ICDS' full potential and address persistent issues, it is essential to revisit and re-evaluate its strategies and implementation. Empowering Anganwadi workers is just a start.
