

Additional Opportunities for Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in India

Swaroop Kumar Sahu · Gautam Roy

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To the Editor: Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) are provided through a network of “Anganwadis” catering to the health and nutrition needs of children below 6 y, pregnant and nursing mothers. While monitoring the Anganwadis in Puducherry under the Central Monitoring Unit (CMU), we have realized that the infrastructure and functioning of Anganwadis can be improved further by undertaking additional responsibilities as listed below:

- Anganwadis can act as *crèches for under-5 children* where they could be left when mothers go to work. Such a recommendation has been made by the Working Group on Development of Children for the Eleventh Five Year Plan [1].
- They could serve as Community Libraries for children who cannot afford to buy reading materials. If such a facility is provided through the Anganwadi, construction of a separate library may not be necessary. However, collaboration with the Ministry of Education will be crucial for facilitating such services.
- Anganwadis can be used as shelter homes for the population in emergencies / disasters. Constructing separate disaster relief shelters may not be necessary. Inter-sectoral collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs is necessary for facilitating such services.
- The Anganwadi workers can undertake additional responsibilities like distributing financial assistance to elderly and disabled persons, as is already being done in many states including Puducherry.

- ICDS services are not yet made universal as ruled by the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India [2]. Under existing norms it is mandatory to provide services to eligible population residing in the service area of an Anganwadi. Because of this, migrant populations who perhaps require the Anganwadi services the most, are failing to avail services.

Delivering additional services through Anganwadis with necessary policy and infrastructure support could further improve the importance of Anganwadi network and this could also decrease the cost of erecting multiple buildings under various Ministries.

Conflict of Interest None.

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References

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