

Minutes of the Conference on "Implementation of National Food Security Act, 2013 in relation to Children and Lactating Mothers and Pregnant Women" held on 27 October 2017 at Vigyan Bhavan Annexe, New Delhi

A Conference on 'Implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013 in relation to Children and Lactating Mothers and Pregnant Women' was organized by National Human Rights Commission on 27 October 2017. The Conference was inaugurated by the NHRC Chairperson, Justice Shri H.L. Dattu, and was attended by the Secretary, Women and Child Development; Special Secretary, School Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, the senior officers of Central and the State Governments of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Members of the Core Advisory Group on Right to Food and Special Rapporteur of NHRC; representatives of State Human Rights Commissions and other National Commissions, NGOs and civil society organizations working at the grassroot level and the subject experts also attended the Conference. The objective of the Conference was to review the status of the implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013 across the states with special reference to provision of nutritional support to children and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Inaugural Session

Welcoming the participants, **Shri J.S. Kochher, Joint Secretary (T&R), NHRC** stated that the Conference holds importance considering the fact that the most important human rights such as right to life with dignity, right to survive and develop are closely interlinked with food and nutrition which the child receives. He further stated that the food mother gets also has a bearing on the nutrition of the child especially, in early stages of his/her life. He further mentioned that nutrition to women is very important in Indian setting as last priority is given to the lady of the house.

Shri Ambuj Sharma, Secretary General, NHRC mentioned that as per the report of IFPRI, India has been ranked at 100 among 119 developing nations. According to him, our country is robust on the growth front but has lagged behind in terms of nutrition and other aspects which is reflected in the findings of the National Nutritional Monitoring Bureau, National Family Health Survey etc.

Pointing to the facts reflected in the National Family Health Survey-4, he stated that there has been an overall improvement in the nutrition levels of children in the age group of 0-6 years and pregnant women and lactating mothers but the absolute levels remain high. Therefore, the nutritional level among women and children has not risen to the anticipated level. He mentioned that the improvement achieved is not up to the mark, considering the capacity build up over the years at the grass root level. He hoped that the pace of development matches the pace of reduction in malnutrition in the years to come.

The Secretary General, NHRC, further stated that there have been differences at the state level in terms of organizational structure and funding capacity. Taking this into account, the National Human Rights Commission has constituted a Core Advisory Group on Health and had earlier intervened to address hunger issues in the KBK districts of Odisha and made useful recommendations. In light of this, he stated that the

Conference has two special sessions with the expectation that the critical input would be received not only from the nodal Ministries and Departments but also from other stakeholders, and the Commission would be able to arrive at some actionable points. He stated that the suggestions received during the Conference can go a long way into effective implementation of the National Food Security Act.

Ms. Reena Ray, Special Secretary, School Education stated that the Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) has been running for many years and cover 10 crore children in 11 lakhs schools with over 25 lakhs of cooks (majority of which are women) involved in the Scheme. She apprised that 16 States and UTs in the country are adding items in the MDM over and above what Department of School Education Government of India is providing. Most of these States are providing eggs, bananas and even milk. There are six States that have extended the MDM Scheme to classes IX and X also. Puducherry is one such UT that has introduced breakfast and is providing two meals i.e., breakfast and MDM.

She highlighted some of the issues that have cropped up recently regarding the MDM Scheme. One of the issues has been linking of AADHAR with MDM Scheme. She tried to assuage any concern in this matter by stating that linking of AADHAR with MDM has not been made mandatory but there is consciousness of the fact that there are large number of ghost enrollment of school children. She apprised that five lakhs of ghost enrollment of children has been identified through AADHAR in four States and the same have been deleted from the list. Once this exercise is extended to the remaining States/UTs, definitely a large number of ghost enrollment of school children would be identified. Ms. Ray stated that there is a need to balance the obvious benefits of the MDM Scheme with clear ID, but it would be ensured that no child is denied of his right to food.

She also mentioned about the issue of a girl child reportedly died of starvation in Jharkhand. She stated that though the girl child was getting MDM but it was during holidays that she did not have access to food under the scheme. She enquired from the participants about what could be the best initiatives for the poorest of the poor who may have access to no other meal except the MDM. She further stated that the States do have sufficient funds as a result of devolution of funds under the 14th Finance Commission recommendations.

She also highlighted that there is a need to look at the issue of nutrition as a whole and not only the MDM alone and suggested that kitchen gardens should be promoted in schools. She stated that in convergence with Department of Agriculture and with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), free seeding and samplings would be provided to schools through Krishi Vigyan Kendra. Therefore, rather than giving food, facilities would be given to grow food.

Ms. Ray also mentioned that the Department has a very strong management system for monitoring the implementation of MDM in schools. Approximately, 20 per cent of the schools send unique SMS and regularly give information. The Department hopes to cover all the schools by 31 March 2018.

Shri Rakesh Srivastava, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India stated that currently the ICDS cover 14 lakh AWCs and 11 crore beneficiaries. As per the indicators of NFHS-4, the figures are not very encouraging for

stunting, wasting and malnutrition, though there has been an overall improvement in comparison to NFHS-3. He suggested that the successful implementation of the scheme is totally in the hands of the state government and therefore, it is necessary that the Collectors should be taken on board and among their many agenda points, malnutrition should be accorded importance. He apprised that directions have been issued from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), that at least in three months, it is compulsory for the Collector to review only malnutrition. He further stated that 113 backward districts have been identified by the Ministry. The Conference was organized on 19 September 2017 which was attended by all the Collectors of 113 districts and the Principal Secretaries of the concerned States to discuss the targets for nutrition, wasting, stunting and how the same would be improved by 31 March 2018. The Ministry hopes to make the country malnutrition free.

On the issue of availability of infrastructure for running ICDS, the Secretary apprised that presently 64 per cent of AWC have their own buildings, water supply and toilets. But 30 per cent of the Centres are functioning in rented buildings which are not as per the prescribed norms i.e., 600 sq. feet with kitchen and bathroom. Therefore, with the help of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, a programme for construction of 4 lakh AWCs has been launched. Also, with the help of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, AWC are being run in the Primary Schools and a joint circular has been issued to all state governments to ensure that within a habitation, AWC be shifted from a rented building to a primary school having vacant rooms.

He further apprised that under the 'ICDS Systems Strengthening & Nutrition Improvement Program' which has been launched in 8 States with the assistance of World Bank, the monitoring of the scheme is driven by a Common Application Software (CAS). Around 60,000 smart phones have been distributed to the AWCs and tablet to Supervisors for real time monitoring of the status of nutrition, attendance, distribution of take home ration or hot cooked meal.

He mentioned that Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued number of directions for the fortification of food provided in the AWCs in order to bridge the gap between recommended and actual dietary intake. The Ministry has also issued directions regarding the same.

Justice Shri H.L Dattu, Chairperson, NHRC in his inaugural address stated that Article 21 read along with Article 47 of the Constitution makes the State duty bound towards its obligations in effective realization of right to food of people of the country. He also stated that as India is an active member of the United Nations and is also a State Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, it all the more casts an obligation on the Government to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food to every citizen of India.

He reflected upon the fact that while faster economic growth has been made by India in the recent period, and the per capita income has increased, the nutritional status among children and women of the country has remained a matter of concern. The rationale for investing in nutrition is globally well recognized. He stated that the National Food Security Act, 2013 lays special focus on nutritional support to children and women. Accordingly, important provisions pertaining to nutritional support to women and children are incorporated under Section 4, 5 and 6 of the NFS Act.

Furthermore, inspite of the two biggest nutrition programmes, the ICDS for children under 6 years and Mid-day Meal Programme for school going children up to the age of 14, malnutrition continues to haunt India. This is evident from India being ranked 100 among 119 developing countries on International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) Global Hunger Index (GHI) in 2017. The recently published NFHS-4 results show progress, reflecting a decline in overall levels of malnutrition in both women and children. However, the pace of decline is far below the progress which numerous countries with similar growth trajectories. While NFHS-4 demonstrates improvements over NFHS-3 for many key indicators based on nutrition, there are considerable inter-State disparities. He further stated that overall there has been decrease in the underweight and stunting prevalence among children below 5 years in all States while the absolute levels are still high.

He also mentioned that the National Human Rights Commission has been emphasizing on the proper implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013 and also the flagship schemes namely, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Mid-day Meal Scheme. It has also been requesting its Special Rapporteurs to provide feedback on the status of implementation of these schemes as well as the Food Security legislation in the States.

In pursuance of its efforts in ensuring 'right to food', the NHRC had earlier organized two-day Conference on Right to Food on 28 and 29 April 2016. Major recommendations emanating from this Conference were sent to the Central and State Governments.

He concluded by stating that the deliberations during the Conference would help in identification of the best practices undertaken by the States for the effective implementation of the schemes. These recommendations would go a long way in improving the nutritional status of women and children.

Session -II: Implementation of NFSA, 2013 by States-Mid-day Meal Scheme for Children between 6 to 14 years-Steps taken, structural problems, operational issues and bottlenecks.

Ms. Dipa Sinha, Convener, Right to Food Campaign in her key note address stated that the MDM scheme already existed in the Tamil Nadu even before it came into existence in 1995. There were only a few states namely, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa that used to provide cooked meals. But post Supreme Court order in 2001, hot cooked meals started to be provided in all government and government aided primary schools (in the 'Right to Food' case). She stated that the MDM has led to the overall improvement in the enrolment, retention and attendance in schools and thereby has reduced the gender gap in school participation. It has been also effective in protecting children from hunger (including "classroom hunger", a mortal enemy of the school education) and has also undermined caste prejudices by teaching children to sit together and share a common meal etc. Mid-day meals can be seen as a source of economic support for the poorer sections of society.

Ms. Sinha then highlighted that in addition to the Supreme Court Order issued in 2001 regarding universalization of MDM Scheme, orders were also issued directing

governments to give priority to disadvantaged groups in appointment of cooks and helpers, make provision for kitchen sheds and improve quality of the meal.

By looking at the trends and coverage, data from the Ministry of Human Resource Development shows that the number of children getting MDM has gone down slightly in primary schools, but, at the state level, the scheme is well run in most of the States except in UP and Bihar where the coverage is 60 percent in terms of total number of enrolled children. She further stated that there has been overall improvement in the number of kitchen sheds but gap exists between the number of kitchen sheds available and sanctioned.

She also brought into notice the issue of Social Audit of MDM Scheme and stated that NFSA Section 28.1 provides that "Periodic social audits" be conducted by the state governments. **But as of now, there is no grievance redressal rule under NFSA, 2013 in most of the States.** Although in parallel process, MHRD has advised the state governments to conduct social audits and some States have also conducted these audits. Furthermore, any grievance redressal mechanisms like DGRO, State Food Commissions, etc. should not only apply to PDS but to all entitlements under NFSA, 2013. She concluded by stating that as linking of AADHAR has been made mandatory for number of schemes, it should not be used as a tool to reduce leakages that exclude children to access the Scheme. The key note address was followed by the presentations from the states.

A. Odisha

Shri Gangadhar Sahoo, State Nodal Officer cum Joint Secretary, School & Mass Education Department, Government of Odisha informed about the steps taken by the Government of Odisha regarding implementation of the MDM Scheme. He stated that in exercise of the power conferred by sub-section (1) of Section 40 of the NFSA, 2013, the state government of the Odisha has made Odisha Mid-day Meal Rules, 2016. The state has defined and notified roles of District Education Officers (DEOs), Block Education Officers (BEOs), Headmasters and School Management Committees (SMCs) to implement NFSA Act and Odisha MDM Rules, 2016. The State also conducts video conferences with BEOs and DEOs for sensitising about NFSA Act.

As per the office order of School and Mass Education Department, Government of Odisha, Project Director, District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of each district has also been notified as District Grievance Redressal Officer (DRGO) for redressal of grievances under the Act. Furthermore, the DEO of each District has been declared as Nodal Officer to assist and coordinate with the DGRO of the district in disposal of complaints under NFSA pertaining to school and mass education. Furthermore, Odisha State Food Commission has taken 03 Review meetings to assess the implementation of NFSA Act.

He further apprised that the government has been carrying out monitoring and supervision through SMS based App and Web having features of knowing non-service of MDM in any schools. It also reminds Collector, DEO and BEO for remedial action in case MDM has not been provided in the school.

The State also complies with the nutritional standards specified in Schedule – II of NFSA Act as the Government of Odisha provides for 493.63 calories and 13.8 grams of proteins for primary school children while 728.67 calories and 20.5 gm of proteins to upper primary school children;

He also highlighted some of the structural problems being faced by the Government of Odisha in implementation of the Scheme. He stated that the state does not have NABL accredited laboratory for regular testing of MDM random food samples.

B. Madhya Pradesh

Shri J.S. Chuahan, State Coordinator, MDM, P&RD Department, apprised that the State of Madhya Pradesh has communicated to all districts and blocks for strict implementation of the Mid-day Meal Rules, 2015, notified under NFSA, 2013. The nodal teacher has been directed to taste the meal before serving to the students. The State has ensured that utensils for serving and cooking the food have been provided to all the schools.

In Madhya Pradesh, more than 95% schools have separate kitchen shed for cooking food. The State also has a strong mechanism of grievance redressal and CM helpline, 'Samadhan online' and 'Parakh' are the platforms where citizens can register their complaints. The State has implemented Mid-Day Meal Program through MDM Portal. Payments towards honorarium of cook cum helper and cooking cost to agencies is being paid through EPOS, directly to their accounts.

He informed that the State has been providing flavoured milk to 65.76 lakh children attending AWC and primary schools across the State from July 2015. Milk powder is being provided in 5 flavors, 120 days in primary schools and 150 days in Anganwadi Centers in an academic year. 100% finances are met from the state funds. Chikki made of peanuts and jaggery is being served to primary school students in 85 undernourished blocks identified by the Health and Family Welfare Department of the State.

Some of the operational issues in the implementation of the scheme pertain to inadequacy of funds under monitoring and management system which has made it difficult to deploy quality monitors at least one in each block. Further, the honorarium of cook cum helpers has not been revised since long as a result they tend to switch to daily wages.

C. Assam

Ms. Aruna Rajoria, State Nodal Officer, MDM Scheme, Assam, informed that the State has translated the 'Mid-day Meal Rules, 2015 under NFSA, 2013 into three major regional languages viz. Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and the same has been made available to all schools. The State has also ensured that the Mid-Day-Meal Rules, 2015 under NFSA, 2013 and guidelines of food safety and hygiene for school level kitchens under Mid-Day-Meal Scheme are incorporated in the SMC's training module to acquaint them of the same.

In order to raise awareness among the common masses, the State has also initiated the process to prepare TVC (Tele Vision Commercial) on the gist of the MDM Rules, 2015 under NFSA, 2013.

She also highlighted some of the operational issues in implementation of MDM Rules, 2015. The State suffers from lack of man power at block level for proper monitoring of the scheme. There has also been no enhancement of cost under MME since its inception (1.8%) due to which implementing agency is unable to engage block level functionaries. There is no Food Research Laboratory/NABL Accredited Laboratory for collecting and testing of food samples. Further, there has been non enhancement of the honorarium of Cook cum Helpers since December, 2010 due to which the Association of cook cum helpers frequently stage protest/dharna which hamper the smooth implementation of the scheme. In schools, there is no provision of dining hall, seating mats and garbage bins for disposal of waste due to financial constraint.

Some of the new initiatives taken by the State for implementation of MDM Rules, 2015 include **a)** Group Hand Washing facility which has been provided to the 422 schools of Rani, Rampur and Kamalpur blocks of Kamrup district with support from UNICEF and the same would be extended in other districts with new toilet constructions. **b)** The *Akshaya Patra Foundation* (NGO) has been engaged to provide cooked food in 603 schools covering 42,194 children situated in urban areas of Kamrup & Kamrup (Metro) districts. **c)** In case of non-availability of cooking cost, the Headmaster/Headmistress of the schools have been asked to utilize the other fund of the schools or temporary loan (locally) for continuing the MDM. The State is also promoting kitchen gardens where children are encouraged to plant seeds.

The State presently has 2,080 schools that have been using LPG for cooking MDM and the process has already been initiated to provide LPG connection to another 11,394 schools in co-ordination with IOC Ltd., Guwahati. Due to financial constraint, remaining 43,385 schools are yet to get LPG connection.

D. Jharkhand

Shri Anand Mohan Thakur, Joint Secretary, School Education, Government of Jharkhand informed that the state has total number of 40,025 schools with 48,16,131 students enrolled. FCI has been contacted and asked to ensure the supply of rice in time. For the proper implementation of MDM, General Manager, FCI has been contacted by the State and has been asked to ensure quality and timely supply of rice in schools. He further apprised that a copy of National Food Security Act, 2013 to all District Collector and other functionaries.

The State has also appointed one Nodal Officer in each district for looking after the proper implementation of MDM Scheme. All Block Education Officers have been assigned responsibility to review the availability of cooking cost fund and rice in the Schools and send the report to the Department to ensure timely supply. Further, the State has also tagged schools to all Block Resource Persons (BRP) and Cluster Resource Person (CRP) for ensuring that MDM is being provided in school and reporting at district and national level.

The schools have also been directed that in case, sufficient funds are not available for cooking cost, the funds at disposal of School Management Committee can be utilized for the same which would be later reimbursed by the State Government. He further mentioned that at Block and District level, a Monitoring Committee has been set up to review at regular intervals, the provisions under NFSA, 2013. In order to ensure that quality food being served under Mid-day Meal, all the teachers have been issued necessary directions to ensure tasting of meals before serving it.

Shri Thakur also informed that once in every three months, from district to state level, schools in all 262 Blocks are evaluated in terms of availability of kitchen sheds, cooking cost, maintenance of cleanliness etc. and on the basis of the observations, report is prepared and sent to the State Government.

In his address, **Shri Raj Kishore Mishra, Director, Rupayan**, put forth some observations and critical areas pertaining to MDM, based on his experience in the State of Odisha. He highlighted the issue of 'infrastructural deficiency' which needs further attention and commitment. He stated that 46 per cent of the schools in the State of Odisha do not have storage space and thus no quality of MDM can be ensured. Furthermore, there only 24 per cent of the schools in the State that use LPG, 7 per cent do not have sufficient utensils, 9 per cent lack serving plates while 13 per cent of the school do not have drinking water facility.

Another issue he highlighted was the issue of 'quality and regularity of MDM'. The quality of MDM has been deteriorated in the inaccessible areas of Odisha, which need special attention. He further stated that there are complaints of less quantity of rice provided to schools. On the issue of 'monitoring, supervision and grievance redressal mechanism, he stated that the role of SMC, especially in Odisha needs to be further clarified in the context of MDM monitoring and functioning. He also drew attention to the fact that there has not only been the issue of meager remuneration of cook-cum - helper but also the irregular disbursement of honourarium. He concluded by stating that SMC based monitoring would be helpful in improving the functioning of MDMS but having a dedicated and independent District Grievance Redressal Officer (DGRO) holds importance.

Session-III: Implementation of NFSA, 2013 by States- Nutritional Support to Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers and Children up to 6 years-Steps taken, operational issues and bottlenecks.

Shri N.C Saxena, Former Secretary Planning Commission, and Ministry of Rural Development, in his key note address, stated that ICDS, unfortunately, after doing well in mid 90s (when focus was only on early childhood) has become dysfunctional ever since the focus has been shifted to nutrition. He stated that the ICDS requires changes at the level of design as well as implementation. Firstly, the scheme needs to be contrasted with the other countries that have been able to reduce malnutrition. Secondly, pregnant and lactating mothers hardly benefit from the programme and it is majorly the children between the age group of 3-5 years who get actual benefit under the Scheme. He emphasized that the focus on Supplementary Nutrition has led to a lot of corruption. He further pointed out that the number of children enrolled in the AWC is far less than the children registered. Not only this, there have been discrepancies in the

figures and facts provided by the government of India on nutrition indicators and by UNICEF. He suggested that there is a need to focus on the relevant age group and take home ration (THR) should be stopped. Further, the subject of nutrition should be transferred to Health Department of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with focus on older age group of children of 3-5 years. Shri Saxena concluded by stating that lack of people's participation, corruption, focus on irrelevant age group and lack of accountability has made the programme dysfunctional.

A. Kerala

Shri V.S Veenu, State Project Director, ICDS Department informed that presently, the state has total number of 11,16,274 SNP beneficiaries with 425657 under 0-3 years, 432631 under 3-6 years, 257986 under pregnant and lactating mothers. In the State, Supplementary Nutrition Programme through AWCs has been fully transferred to Local self-government institutions (LSGIs) such as gram panchayath, municipality and corporation concerned. Different varieties of food are supplied through AWCs, which are similar to the food prepared at home. Therefore, the Anganwadi beneficiaries like to take food issued through AWCs. The prescribed calorific value and protein content is strictly maintained.

SNP is provided for children in the age group of 6 month to 3 years as Take Home Ration. Nutrimix powder is prepared by the Self Help Groups of women of Kudumbashree Mission and 135 gms/per day of the said powder is being given to children in the age group of 6 month to 3 years. Further, for the children in the age group of 3 years to 6 years, feeding is provided three times per day through the AWCs as hot cooked meals. The meal prepared by the Anganwadi helper comprises the calorie and protein content exceeding the prescribed norms. In case of pregnant and lactating mothers, the State provides SNP as raw food grains which are being given twice a month as Take Home Ration. The SNP is provided throughout pregnancy and is also continued for six months after birth of the child. The State has ensured that ICDS functionaries conduct regular house visits to check adequate weight gain and proper Anti Natal Care.

Some of the Special Initiatives taken by the State is that in collaboration with United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP), Social Justice Department Nutrimix fortification is piloting in Wayanad district and would be further expanded to all districts after feasibility analysis.

The best practice adopted by the State for implementation of the ICDS Scheme is that the Kudumbashree (Women SHGs) has been made responsible for production and supply of Amrutham Nutrimix under Take Home Ration (THR) strategy for children under 3 years of age. The Nutrimix is being tested by the quality control laboratory, Chennai.

B. Tamil Nadu

Smt. Amutha Valli, Director, Social Welfare, Government of Tamil Nadu apprised that the State Government has taken some important initiatives in ensuring nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers which include early registration of

pregnancy in AWCs, provision of 220 gms of supplementary food as take home ration, IFA tablets and two doses of tetanus toxoid vaccine (TT) in convergence with the Health Department. The State also gives cash assistance of Rs. 18,000/- in 3 installments for first 2 deliveries.

The nutritional support has been extended to children below 6 years for whom the weekly schedule of food has been categorized under various heads namely, 6 months- 1 year children, 1-2 years children, 2- 5 years children and pregnant and lactating mothers. In the age group of 1-2 years in addition to complementary food, one boiled egg is provided once in a week. In the age group of 2- 5 years children, three boiled eggs per week are provided (Mon, Wed, and Thursday).

Considering the special nature and digestive capacity of children attending AWC, the state government has designed variety meals in consultation with nutritional experts. Training is being imparted to Anganwadi Employees by Expert chefs on the preparation of these variety meals. In order to ensure regular supply of supplementary nutrition and delivery to targeted individuals, food articles such as rice, dhal, oil, salt etc. are procured from Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation and supplied to AWC directly. The provision of supplementary nutrition to eligible beneficiaries is ensured by State/District/Block officials without any kind of interruption.

Further, 7 per cent of the weaning food is supplied to the AWCs by 25 weaning food manufacturing societies run by women including widows, deserted wives and scheduled castes women. Further, out of 54439 AWCs in the State, 46128 (85%) are functioning in pucca Government building and 8311 (15%) are functioning in Private Buildings. 70% (38338) of the AWCs are functioning with drinking water facility within the premises and the remaining are with potable water facility. 63% (34242) of the AWCs are functioning with toilet facility. 63% (34139) of the AWCs are functioning with electricity facility. 95% (51548) of the AWCs were modernised by provision of LPG connection, gas stove, pressure cooker, and kitchen platform through Member of Legislative Assembly Constituency Development Scheme (MLACDS).

The State has issued necessary directions to all District Collectors to construct toilets to AWCs wherever AWCs buildings are in good condition. This would be done by leveraging funds from Swachh Bharat Kosh, Corporate Social Responsibility and Panchayat Raj institutions etc. Toilets to 6677 AWCs have been constructed through State Balance Growth Fund whereas toilets to 5354 AWCs were constructed under the scheme of upgradation of AWCs.

Since, Anganwadi staff are the backbone of ICDS. Tamil Nadu Government is providing salary under special time scale of pay that range from 7700 - 24200 for Anganwadi Worker, 5700-18000 for Mini Anganwadi Worker and 4100-12500 for Anganwadi Helper. The employees are provided with DA, HRA, CCA, MA and other allowances along with 3% of the annual increment.

The State with an objective of providing assistance to poor pregnant women/mothers for nutritious diet, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme (MRMBS) has been implemented which provides cash assistance of Rs.18,000 in three installments on conditional basis. The Scheme has been restricted for 2 deliveries only. The assistance is directly disbursed from the treasuries through Electric Clearance Service (ECS) to the bank accounts of beneficiaries.

Smt. Amutha Valli also highlighted some of the best practices adopted by the State. She apprised that all AWCs have been registered under Food Safety and Standard Act 2006. Further, the children in the Early Intervention Centres functioning under the Department of Differently Abled are being provided with 190 grams of weaning food as take home ration and hot cooked meal. The State has also provided on pilot basis, 2 sets of color uniforms to Anganwadi children in 10 Districts.

She further elaborated some of the operational bottlenecks identified by the State of Tamil Nadu in provisioning of nutritional support to children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. She highlighted that the 5% GST on Supplementary food has further increased the financial burden of the State Government which is already incurring additional expenditure on providing Supplementary food to the beneficiaries. Further, early initiation of breast feeding and exclusive breast feeding has been difficult to achieve due to the C section deliveries in private nursing home and the mother's attitude in breast feeding. The State is also witnessing difficulty in ensuring consumption of atleast 100 IFA tablets and good nutritious food during pregnancy and lactation.

C. Uttar Pradesh

Shri Santosh Sharma, Deputy Director, ICDS informed that the State covers 82.50 lakh SNP beneficiaries under the age group of 06 months to 03 years, 39.11 lakhs under 03 years to 06 years, 17.79 lakh of pregnant women and 16.35 lactating Women.

He elaborated on some of the initiatives taken by the State for providing nutritional support to children, pregnant women and lactating mothers which include establishment of State Nutrition Mission in 2014. The said Mission aims to bring about reduction in the high under nutrition rates in the State.

He apprised that the State Nutrition Mission has initiated village adoption strategy. In this connection, Commissioners, District magistrates, CDOs and all district level officers have adopted two gram panchayats with an objective to turn AWC and villages into a 'model' AWC and model village respectively. Presently, more than 3600 districts level officers have adopted 7500 gram panchayats under the guidance of State Nutrition Mission.

The State also celebrates Vajan Diwas during which severely underweight children are identified. This initiative has led to the increased identification of severely underweight children which has increased to 21.5 lakhs in Dec, 2016 from 1.6 lakhs in December 2014. The State has also set up State Mega Call Centres to strengthen the VHND (Village Health and Nutrition Day) platform to improve services delivery of nutrition and health related activities.

Bachpan Diwas meant for children 0-6 years is celebrated on 5th of every month which include activities such as Annaprashan, birthday celebration of children, counseling of parent on nutrition. Furthermore, Mamta Diwas meant for pregnant and lactating mothers is celebrated on 15th of every month which include activities like God Bharai and cultural programme Counseling. The State also has a programme i.e., Laadli Diwas which is meant for adolescent girls and is celebrated on 25 of every month. This includes activities like Community meetings, Iron supplementation, personal hygiene /sanitation.

The State plans to reduce prevalence of underweight in children from current levels by 2 percent points by December 2018 in line with the concept of SHABRI in 39 high burden districts. The key features of the Abhiyan include strengthening of AWC infrastructure like toilets, electricity, water, improving service delivery from AWC through monitoring and operationalise monthly reviews through District and Divisional reviews.

D. Bihar

Shri Atul Prasad, Secretary, Department of Social Welfare, Government of Bihar, stated that Allotment of SNP funds as per Central – State Sharing Ratio 50:50, Regular AWCs – Rs. 15,700/-, Mini AWCs – Rs. 7,850/-, SNP Norms Normal Children Rs. 6/-, Severely malnourished Children Rs. 9/- and pregnant & lactating women Rs. 7/- as per FSA – 2013, Fund is transferred to Project offices (CDPOs) – further transferred to Joint Bank A/c of AWW & Chairman of Anganwadi Vikas Samiti (AVS), AVS members are responsible for purchase of food items & monitoring of SNP.

During the presentation, Shri Prasad also highlighted some of the administrative steps taken by the State of Bihar. He apprised that in order to ease the financial burden, the beneficiaries norms for each AWCs were set and the project offices have been instructed to demand for actual number of beneficiaries. He further stated that for universalization of ICDS, demand for more AWCs collected from project offices. The project offices demanded total number of 41188 AWCs, out of which, 23041 newly sanctioned AWCs have been operationalized. The State has also explored several models for food-fortification and a Jeevika model "Whetamix" has been piloted at one Project in Bodhgaya.

The State has taken some initiatives in order to provide effective services at ICDS AWCs. This include Angan app for ensuring monitoring/inspection to track SNP, Pre-School Education (PSE), attendance of AWC children by different officers (LS/CDPO/DPO). The software also provide information related to status of infrastructure, attendance register, water facility availability, sign-board, inspection register, Take Home Ration (THR) distribution register, details of AWW & AWH. The photographs captured during monitoring/inspection would be sent along with the report. Furthermore, the software provides the GIS location of the AWC inspected. The mobile app would send the report in the Monitoring cell at Directorate of ICDS where the information would be collated in a dashboard. The dashboard would be made available in public domain with generic reports

In her address, Dr. Vandana Prasad, Joint Convener, Jan Sawasthya Abhiyan put forth her suggestions based on her experience in the tribal states of the country namely, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and some parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and a little bit in Bihar. She stated that within states, districts and blocks, there has been huge variation in population and thus no single recommendation would fit all size. She stressed on the need to ensure all ICDS services should reach to the hamlets of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in particular. In these areas, for 90 per cent of the children, AWC is far beyond their geographical boundary. Even the State data presents aggregates of the population related to the anganwadi in a large village. During monsoons, people are completely cut off due to non-availability of roads.

She suggested that there is a need to use participatory processes and volunteers should be appointed who are provided incentives also. There has been long delay in payments to SHGs – sometimes as long as a year, thus there is a need to develop solutions like flexi-pools and advances.

On SNP quality and type, she stated that there is a need to focus on animal-based proteins (eggs, milk, meats etc.) She further stated that NFSA is inadequate to tackle hunger and malnutrition, as management of ICDS goes far beyond NFSA, and nutrition goes far beyond ICDS supplementation and PDS.

Session IV: Preparation of Recommendations

In this session recommendations were made by two working groups on **a)** Nutritional Support to Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers and Children up to 6 years **b)** Mid-day Meal Schemes which were chaired by Shri S.C. Sinha, Member and Smt. Joytika Kalra, Member, respectively. Their recommendations are enclosed.

Recommendations

Working Group-I: Nutritional Support to Pregnant and Lactating Mothers and Children up to 6 years.

1. State Governments should take proactive steps to adopt innovative mechanism to address the issue of coverage of the migrant population under the scheme.
2. To address the needs of left out/far flung/remote populations as far as possible, Anganwadi centre should be operated through innovative approach with community participation even for fewer numbers (e.g. Mobile units, mini Anganwadi centres etc.)
3. The recent move to go in for cash transfers rather than 'Take Home Ration' (THR)/hot cooked meal, may be counter-productive and must not be encouraged, except in very exceptional cases, as it will defeat the basic objective of providing nutrition as cash can easily be transferred to other expenditure.
4. The issue of sub optimal honourarium to Anganwadi workers and helpers in most States needs to be resolved by ensuring atleast minimum wage level, as Government has to be the model employer. Regular monthly payment of wages should also be ensured.
5. The coverage of children going to private schools also needs to be ensured as they may form a sizeable percentage, which otherwise would not be covered and would adversely affect the incidence of malnutrition.
6. The infrastructural gaps in terms of building, kitchens, drinking water supply/toilets should be resolved within a time limit of maximum three years in all the States through sourcing of funds from different schemes and departments, as has been successfully done in States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, etc.
7. Adequate food testing facilities should be created preferably at the District level by all States by utilizing public Health Department, Universities/Colleges, etc.
8. Dilution of the maternity benefits as provided in the NFSA should not be permitted by clubbing with Janani Suraksha Yojana or similar entitlements. Also, the conditionalities of Prime Minister's Maternity Benefit Scheme are in contradiction to the provisions under Section 4(b) of the NFSA and the previous recommendations of the NHRC to this effect.
9. Fortification of salt and edible oil may be encouraged while at the same time greater examination is called for in the case of fortification of wheat flour, keeping in view the production, supply, possible contamination, efficacy and cost of fortification etc.

10. Convergence of critical departments/agencies such as Health and Family Welfare, WCD, Education, Water and Sanitation and Rural Development/Panchayati Raj needs to be ensured through proper training, coordination meetings, synchronised funding, etc. under the direct leadership of District Collector.
11. Food diversity as a source of balanced diet and micro nutrients etc. needs to be encouraged including kitchen gardens, sourcing of locally available fruits and vegetables.
12. Innovative coordination and supervising mechanisms such as Mother's Committee at Anganwadi level and local coordination committee at ICDS available in several States can be extended to all States.
13. The food, presently being served under the scheme, does not guarantee the protein intake envisaged. Ways and means must be found and implemented to ensure that each child and pregnant women, who is beneficiary, gets his/her quota of protein everyday. A simple solution to protein intake is supplement of eggs as part of Supplementary Nutrition at Anganwadi Centres, and milk can be provided for those who are vegetarian.
14. Each Anganwadi must have all required arrangements including the pictorial charts/blocks/books etc. for the pre-school education of the children.
15. There should be proper and transparent selection of Anganwadi workers who must be imparted basic training in the beginning followed by regular refresher training. This will require setting up of the Anganwadi Training Centres in each State.

Working group –II: Mid-day Meal Scheme

1. Any unutilized fund of the MDM scheme due to the reasons like non availability of cooks, ration, natural calamities, absence of students, litigations, etc., should be utilized for the targeted beneficiaries in the same year. No fund in any circumstances should be diverted for any other scheme.
2. Cooking cost norms, honorarium of cooks and helpers, transportation costs, LPG, etc., to be rationalized and appropriately enhanced periodically.
3. The funds allocated for Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (MME) to be rationalized and appropriately enhanced periodically.
4. Social audit and evaluation by third party (like civil society/domain expert/social audit directorate under MGNREGA) should be conducted annually for each district.
5. The social audit reports should be published at the state portals and the action taken on these social audit reports should also be published at the State portal.
6. In the Social audits, special attention should be paid to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), SC/ST hamlets, nomadic and de-notified tribes, migrant workers' families, remote islands, desert settlements, frontier areas and forest villages and so on.
7. The site plan of the schools should have earmarked kitchen, water facility, sanitation facility and washing area for utensils.
8. In order to enhance the nutritional content of the food, protein rich food like eggs and milk should be included in the meal according to the local cultural preference.
9. No child should be excluded from the benefit of mid-day meal merely because of non-linking of Aadhaar since the child cannot be deprived for no fault of his/her.
10. As far as possible, the kitchen gardens should be encouraged to be developed in the school premises and the students should be involved in the cultivation of vegetables to be used for cooking hot meal. Children be also encouraged to take the seeds to grow vegetables at their respective homes.
11. A scheme to be evolved for providing Mid-day Meal during the vacation/holidays also.
12. The record of the students left-out from the Mid-day Meal coverage within the schools should be maintained and reasons for the same to be analysed.
