

MEETING GENDER PARITY

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In India, women constitute 48 per cent of the total population. Government concerns for gender equality focus on the need to address the problems faced by women and girls in day-to-day life. This disadvantaged position of female population pervades social and economic sphere, starting with the birth preference for male children.

On 25th September 2015, UN General Assembly declared 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets to complete the work of Millennium Development Goals in next 15 year. The first five goals talk about poverty in any form, hunger, food security, healthy lives, education for all and gender equality, as depicted in Table 1. They are indivisible and balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions. These goals can be realized only by fostering gender equality, and not otherwise.

Table 1, Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote

- inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

(UN 2015)

Recently IMF chief, Christine Lagarde advocated the role of women participation in growth and development. In her address, she emphasized on giving pace to economy by empowering women. IMF has estimated that, **if we raise the number of**

female worker at par with the number of men, GDP of United states would expand by 5per cent, Japan by 9per cent and of India by 27per cent (IMF, 2015). Development due to gender equity is observed in western countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States the ratio of women to men exceeds, i.e. 1.05. But in regions of Asia and Africa, demographic scale does not favor women. The number of women is considerably less in these regions, especially in Asia and North Africa, the female: male ratio may be as low as 0.95 (Egypt), 0.94 (Bangladesh, China, and west Asia), 0.93 (India), or even 0.90 (Pakistan) (Sen, 2009).

In India, women constitute 48per cent of total population. Government concerns for gender equality focus on the need to address the problems faced by women and girls in day-to-day life. **This disadvantaged position of female population pervades social and economic sphere, starting with the birth preference for male children.** Differences are seen within the intra-household between girls and boys in investment on nutrition, health and education, resulting in malnourishment and lack of education in the girl child.

To address the problem related to women and children, the Government has set a separate ministry in 2006. It has the nodal responsibility to advance the rights and concerns of women and children, who jointly constitute 67.7per cent of the country's population (Census, 2011), through its various cross-cutting policies and programs and provides support for enabling them to grow and develop their full potential.

Our children comprise 158 million of the population. The IX five year plan (FYP) is committed to empower women as the agents of socio-economic change and development and reaffirm its priority for the development of early childhood as an investment in the country's human resource development through Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS).

With more than 35 years of implementation, ICDS is one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development. It shows the government's commitment to its children and nursing mother.

This program includes a network of *Anganwadi* Centers (AWC), [literally courtyard play centre] with *Anganwadi* workers providing package of six programs. ICDS was conceived as a response to the challenges of providing preschool and non-formal education on one hand and breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity and mortality on the other. The children aged between 0-6, pregnant women and lactating mothers are the beneficiaries of this universal scheme.

To make the ICDS program effective, government has modified the budget sharing pattern between the Centre and the State governments. In respect of North-Eastern states, new sharing pattern is 90:10 and for remaining states/UTs it 50:50 (Centre : State). Initially started with 33 blocks (Projects), with 4891 AWC in 1975, today ICDS has 7,076 Projects and 14 lakh approved AWCs, with provision of 20,000 AWCs 'on demand'.

In X and XI FYPs, there has been a notable growth recognized in terms of number of AWC and coverage of beneficiaries. As depicted in Table 3, 4.59 lakh new AWCs/mini-AWCs became operational during XI FYP as compared to 2.99 lakh AWCs/mini-AWCs during X Plan. The number of operational AWCs/mini-AWCs increased from 13,04,611 in March, 2012 to 13,42,285 in December, 2014. Number of beneficiaries [Children (6 months to 6 years) and pregnant & lactating mothers] for supplementary nutrition increased from 705.43 lakh at the end of X Plan to 972.49 lakh at the end of XI FYP; an increase of 37.85per cent.

Number of beneficiaries [Children (3-6 years)] for pre-school education increased from 300.81 lakh at the end of X FYP to 358.22 lakh at the end of XI FYP meaning thereby an increase of 19.09per cent.

In XII FYP, ICDS has come up with multi-sectoral program for malnourished child and mother. Total 200 high burden districts have been selected for special intervention out of which, 100 district selected from 8 Empowered Action Group (EAG) states and Assam.

Table 2, Trends in coverage during X and XI Plans

| Year of ending | No. of operation project | No. of operational AWC | No. of Supplementary Nutrition beneficiary | No. of Pre- School beneficiary |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 31/03/2002 | 4608 | 545714 | 375.10 lakh | 166.56 lakh |
| 31/03/2003 | 4903 | 600391 | 387.84 lakh | 188.02 lakh |
| 31/03/2004 | 5267 | 649307 | 415.08 lakh | 204.38 lakh |
| 31/03/2005 | 5422 | 706872 | 484.42 lakh | 218.41 lakh |
| 31/03/2006 | 5659 | 748229 | 562.18 lakh | 244.92 lakh |
| 31/03/2007 | 5829 | 844743 | 705.43 lakh | 300.81 lakh |
| Achievement during X Plan | 1221 | 299,029 | 330.33lakh (88.06per cent) | 134.25lakh (80.60per cent) |
| 31/03/2008 | 6070 | 1013337 | 843.26 lakh | 339.11 lakh |
| 31/03/2009 | 6120 | 1044269 | 873.43 lakh | 340.60 lakh |
| 31/03/2010 | 6509 | 1142029 | 884.34 lakh | 354.93 lakh |
| g31/03/2011 | 6722 | 1262267 | 959.47 lakh | 366.23 lakh |
| 31/03/2012 | 6908 | 1304611 | 972.49 lakh | 358.22 lakh |
| Achievement during XI Plan | 1079 | 459868 | 267.06lakh (37.85per cent) | 57.41lakh (19.09 per cent) |
| 31/03/2013 | 7025 | 1338732 | 956.12 lakh | 353.29 lakh |
| 31/03/2014 | 7.067 | 1342146 | 1045.09 lakh | 370.70 lakh |

Source: WCD, 2015

Impact on child sex ratio and female literacy

With all this efforts, we can observe positive sign at national level sex ratio which was 943 in 2011 from 933 in 2001. But in the case of child sex ratio, result is not satisfactory as it came down to 919 in 2011 census from 927 in 2001. Only 11 states/UTs have shown positive sign of improvement in sex ratio along with child sex ratio as shown in table 3, and of these 11 states/UTs, Punjab and Haryana are doing very good on both the fronts as sex ratios have improved to 895 and 879 in 2011 from 876 and 798 in 2001 respectively, while child sex ratios have also increased to 846 and 834 in 2011 from 798 and 819 in 2011 (Census, 2011).

Research suggests that pre-primary education (PSE) is very important for the development of young children before they enter formal school (Kaul,2002). It is well known that the age of 0-6 years determine child's survival and thriving in life, and lay the foundation for her/his learning and holistic development. During the early years, children develop the cognitive, physical, social and emotional

Table 4: Trends of Sex Ratio and Child Sex Ratio

| Census State | 2011 | | 2001 | |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| | Sex Ratio | Child Sex Ratio (0-6 Year) | Sex Ratio | Child Sex Ratio (0-6 Year) |
| India | 943 | 919 | 933 | 927 |
| Kerala | 1084 | 964 | 1058 | 960 |
| Puducherry | 1037 | 967 | 1001 | 967 |
| Tamil Nadu | 996 | 943 | 987 | 942 |
| Mizoram | 976 | 970 | 935 | 964 |
| Karnataka | 973 | 948 | 965 | 946 |
| Goa | 973 | 942 | 961 | 938 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 972 | 909 | 968 | 896 |
| Gujarat | 919 | 890 | 920 | 883 |
| Punjab | 895 | 846 | 876 | 798 |
| Haryana | 879 | 834 | 861 | 819 |

Source: Census of India, Office of Registrar General, India

skills that they need to survive and succeed in life. Recognizing the need to provide quality pre-primary program, Government of India in its 86th constitutional amendment introduced Article 45 to urge states to provide ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) for all children until they complete six year of age.

Through PSE programs, ICDS provides pre-school kit to children which contains play book and learning material. It helps in cognitive development of children at the early grades of primary education and has strong bearing on attendance and participation of children once they enter primary school. Encouraging results are visible in female literacy in 2011 Census. The female literacy shows a positive change of 22per cent in 2011 over 2001 census. In rural areas, female literacy rate went up by 26per cent while in urban areas, it went up by 9per cent. Females in SC and ST categories have also done well as their literacy rate went up to 56.5per cent and 49.35per cent from 41.9per cent and 34.76per cent respectively.

Table 4, Female literacy rate in 2011 over 2001

| Year | Rural | Urban | Combined | SC | ST* |
|----------------|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| 2011 | 58.75 | 79.92 | 65.46 | 56.50 | 49.35 |
| 2001 | 46.7 | 73.2 | 53.67 | 41.90 | 34.76 |
| Rate of change | 26% | 9% | 22% | 35% | 42% |

*Source: Census of India, Office of Registrar General, India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

International Assistance

World Bank: To strengthen ICDS policy and program framework at National and State-level World Bank has been supporting India to improve nutritional status of children and to strengthen convergent actions for improved nutrition outcomes through ICDS Systems Strengthening and Nutrition Improvement Project (ISSNIP). ISSNIP project will continue to be implemented in 162 highest malnutrition burden districts of the country, concentrated in eight low income states of India, namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (World Bank, 2015).

UNICEF: Within the framework of ICDS program, UNICEF, takes responsibility for extending technical assistance to support project design, planning, administration, monitoring and evaluation of Nutrition program/project activities.

DFID (Department for International Development): DFID provides technical assistance to ICDS in three states (Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar)

Challenges for ICDS

Despite recognising importance of women in socio-economic development, the challenges in implementing the programme for women empowerment and early child care program are huge. There is still high percentage of undernourished children in the world, while substantial number of children are not enrolled in pre-schools. ICDS program is well-conceived and well-placed to address the major causes of child under nutrition and leveraging the pre-school enrollment. However, in the scheme more attention has been given to increase the coverage than to improve the quality of service delivery and distribute food rather than changing family-based feeding and caring behavior. Failure to invest in combating nutrition reduces potential economic growth. As per the World Bank report observation, malnutrition in India is a concentrated phenomenon. Quite a few number of states, districts, and villages account for a large share of the burden—five states and 50 per cent of villages account for about 80 per cent of the malnutrition cases (World Bank, 2006).

Conclusion

Since its inception, ICDS is continuously working for the women and child care in India, and lot of success has been achieved. However, changes are needed to bridge the gap between the policy intentions of ICDS and its actual implementation. This is probably the single biggest challenge in international nutrition, with large fiscal and institutional implications and a huge potential for long-term impact on human development and economic growth.

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