

Workshop on ‘Assessment of Bihar’s ICDS Supplementary Nutrition Programme’

March 9, ADRI, Patna

1. Welcome Note

Anjan Mukherji, Country Director, IGC India-Bihar welcomed all the participants of the meeting. He gave a brief overview of the IGC India-Bihar programme, stating that the intention behind setting up the programme is to undertake demand-driven research for policy-makers and other stakeholders to aid and sustain Bihar’s recent growth experience. He especially thanked Mr. Navin Kumar, Former Director, Centre for Good Governance, Government of Bihar for agreeing to chair the workshop.

2. Presentation by Ronald Abraham

Ronald Abraham presented the final results of the study ‘Quantitative assessment: Beneficiary nutritional status and performance of ICDS Supplementary Nutrition Programme in Bihar’, undertaken by IDinsight.

2.1. Aim and Methodology of Study

Ronald explained that the main purposes of the study were to quantify: 1. Missing expenditure from the Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP); 2. Quantity of nutrition actually received by the beneficiaries and analyse the quality thereof; 3. Nutritional level of beneficiaries.

He mentioned that the results of the study were based on a survey in three districts of Bihar (Gaya, Muzaffarpur, and Madhubani). In total, 200 Anganwadi centres (AWC), 143 Sevikas, 553 beneficiaries, and 157 shopkeepers were surveyed in these selected districts.

2.1.2 Key Results

Missing Expenditure

The survey data reveals that substantial proportion of the SNP budget is ‘missing’ due to leakage. There are two components of the SNP: a) hot cooked meal for children ages 3 to 6 and adolescent girls b) take home rations for children 6 months to 3 years, pregnant and nursing mothers, and adolescent girls

First, 71 percent of the funds received by AWCs for the hot cooked meal component are not spent on the beneficiaries. This is primarily due to five factors: 1. Closed AWCs leads to reduction in expenditure by 24 percentage points; 2. Meals not served when the centre is open, reduces expenditure by 18 percentage points; 3. Low attendance of children when meals are

served leads to 26 percentage points reduction in the expenditure 4. Ingredient underutilization accounts for 9 percentage points reduction in expenditure; 5. Higher ingredient cost than the rates approved under ICDS leads to increase in expenditure by 5 percentage points.

In case of take home rations component, the performance is relatively better as only 36 percent of the funds received by anganwadi worker are “missing”. The missing expenditure for this component is due to three factors: 1. Beneficiaries’ not receiving any rice leads to leakage of 17 percentage points. 2. Insufficient quantity of rice increases the leakage by 27 percentage points 3. Higher cost of rice decreases the leakage by 8 percentage points.

Nutritional quality of meals

The food samples of cooked meals served by the AWCs were measured for caloric and protein content and it was found that, on average, the meals had 77 % and 78 % of stipulated calories proteins, respectively.

Child Attendance

While the AWCs are provided funds to feed 40 children, on average only 17 children were present at the time of survey.

Staff Attendance

The survey data reveals rampant absenteeism among Anganwadi staff. Each AWC is staffed by a Sevika and Sahayika but only in 40 % of the cases were both found present. In 18 % of the cases only Sahayika was present, in 16 % of cases only Sevika was present, and in 25 % of the cases neither were present.

Nutrition Levels

The data show high levels of malnutrition among children under the age of 5. 43 percent of the children in the sample were found underweight for their age, 58 percent of children were suffering from stunting (low height-for-age), and 20 percent of children were suffering from wasting (low weight-for-height).

Policy Interventions to improve SNP performance

Having presented the main findings related to the performance of SNP and beneficiaries’ nutrition levels, Ronald Abraham put forward three interventions that the Government of Bihar is planning to implement in order to improve the functioning of SNP.

1. To let JEEViKAs self help groups administer the SNP
2. Technology-based monitoring by the beneficiaries and the ICDS officials such as Child Development Programme Officers (CDPO)/Lady supervisors
3. Providing subsidized rice and other high nutrient foods

He ended the presentation by requesting the participants to comment on the efficacy of the proposed interventions and/or suggest additional interventions that can help in making the SNP more effective in fighting malnutrition in Bihar.

Discussion

Navin Kumar thanked the speaker for a wonderful presentation and said that this report has several interesting findings that would be useful for the government. He requested Pravin Kishore, ICDS Director to comment on the presentation. Pravin Kishore said that the findings of the study confirmed the popular perception that there is huge amount of leakage in the ICDS programme. He found the study very useful as it quantified the extent of the leakage in different component of supplementary nutrition programme (SNP) and identified the main sources of the leakage.

Santhosh Mathew, Principal Secretary, Department of Social Welfare, had a couple of questions related to the estimation of the leakage. First, he queried whether the authors used the 'market' rates as opposed to the 'approved' rates to calculate the average anganwadi expenditure on Hot Cooked Meals or Take Home Rations. Second, whether the authors accounted for the administrative costs such as transportation that the AWCs incur to run the SNP.

Anjan Mukherji had a question on how the estimate of leakage was affected if the Anganwadi centres were found closed.

Ronald Abraham responded saying that the estimate of 'missing' expenditure reported in the study did take into account the difference between the 'market' rates and the 'approved' rates. The market rates tend to be higher than the rates approved by the government and therefore it leads to reduction in the 'missing' expenditure. Regarding the question on impact of closed Anganwadi centres on leakage rate, he explained that if a AWC was found closed on the day of survey, its expenditure was taken as zero which lowered the average expenditure and therefore increased the level of 'missing' expenditure.

One of the Child Development Programme Officer (CDPO) suggested that the missing expenditure due to AWCs being either closed or because of lower attendance of children should not be always seen as the Sevika's fault. First, while the Sevikas are supposed to cook for 40 children every working day, it is very difficult to ensure full attendance, as some of the households do not send their children regularly. Second, Sevikas are often absent at the AWCs because they are engaged in several other national programmes such as polio eradication etc.

Rupesh, a member of Right to Food Campaign, Bihar Chapter, said the results of this study further corroborate the findings of the social audits that suggest the ICDS programme is not working well in Bihar. He argued that one of the reasons for the poor performance of ICDS is severe shortage of support staff such as CDPOs and supervisors who are supposed to monitor the functioning of the programme.

N. Vijaylaxmi, Secretary, Backward Classes Welfare Department, made several useful suggestions to improve the functioning of ICDS in Bihar. First, the government needs to hire more lady supervisors (LS) as they play the critical role of monitoring the AWCs (Bihar needs 700 supervisors but in the last three years the government has hired only 300 LS). Second, instead of giving cash to the AWC, providing them subsidized rice, wheat/millet and other nutritious food would be a better option. Third, other functions of *Anganwadi Sevikas* such as health and nutrition education, immunization, health check-ups pre-school education should not be ignored. Fourth, Bihar could learn from other states which have outsourced the food component of the ICDS to NGOs which allows the AWCs to focus on other functions. Fifth, the government should pilot different models to identify which one works the best. Sixth, most AWCs don't have basic infrastructure and that prevents them from carrying out various functions for which they are responsible.

Ronald Abraham responded saying that while it is true that AWCs don't have necessary infrastructure which makes it difficult for them to carry out non-SNP functions, there is need to focus on just one or two critical functions as it would be difficult to get everything right simultaneously.

Navin Kumar asked the Department officials whether they were planning any interventions to improve the functioning of ICDS. Santhosh Mathew, Principal Secretary, Department of Social Welfare informed the participants that the Government is currently considering a few policy changes. First, the SNP component of the ICDS can be handed over to Jeevikaself help groups to see whether it curtails leakage. Second, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) can be given the job of monitoring the AWCs.

Shaibal Gupta responded to Mr. Mathew's suggestions by saying that PRIs in Bihar may not be in a position to monitor due to their limited capacity. He said that Bihar doesn't have a functioning PRI system and therefore their involvement in ICDS is unlikely to be effective in improving the performance of ICDS programme.

Santhosh Mathew agreed with Mr. Gupta that decentralization might not be the best solution as the empirical literature suggests that it tends to work only in the better-governed states. However, he added that even the top-down interventions haven't worked in Bihar. The Department has dismissed a large number of Anganwadi Sevikas against whom there were complaints of irregularities, but even such strong steps did not seem to act as a deterrent for other Anganwadi Sevikas. This is probably because the government doesn't have a reliable database on outcome indicators that can be used as an objective basis to reward or punish the ICDS staff. A good incentive structure can be designed only when one develops a reliable and cost effective way of collecting data on various outcome indicators.

Ronald Abraham also emphasized the need for beneficiary level data. He said that bottom up initiatives such as beneficiary report card for every AWC could be very useful in monitoring the performance of AWCs.

Navin Kumar ended the discussion by highlighting five points that had emerged from the presentation and the ensuing discussion.

- The findings of the study confirm the general perception that the ICDS programme in Bihar is not working well and the results indicate precisely the areas where matters have gone wrong.
- The performance of the programme should be monitored using outcome data rather the inputs; there is need to develop a reliable technique of measuring key outcomes.
- The *Jeevika* model should be tried out to see whether it is effective in improving the performance of the ICDS programme.
- Other aspects of the ICDS programme, especially the need for increasing awareness related to nutrition and health, should not be neglected.
- Greater use of technology to monitor the programme could be very effective.