



A STUDY ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ICDS PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF PUNJAB STATE OF INDIA.

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Abstract

On October 2, 1975, the 106th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICSD) Scheme was launched in recognition of the critical importance of improving the health and nutritional well-being of women and children. Present study was conducted to examine the community participation in ICDS programme in Punjab state of India. For this study total eight districts selected from Punjab. Further, 05 Anganwadi Centers selected from each selected district. Here one Anganwadi center selected from one village. Therefore, a total of 40 Anganwadi Workers were selected for the study those were running Anganwadi Centers involved for the study. Then 01 Village Sarpanch also selected from each selected Anganwadi Center area. Therefore, total 40 Village Sarpanches from selected for this study. Under the present study, it was disappointing to find that majority 65% of the AWWs in Punjab did not receive any help from anyone in running the AWCs at village level. It was sad to find that majority 72.50% of AWWs in Punjab faced various problems regarding involvement of community to conduct the Anganwadi activities. It was extremely disappointing to find that majority 57.50% of the village Sarpanches did not make any visit at all to the AWCs. A high majority 97.50% village Sarpanches did not form any local committee to help the AWWs to conduct different activities. Overall, the community participation in ICDS program was very poor in Punjab.

Key Words: *Integrated Child Development Services (ICSD), Anganwadi Worker (AWW), Anganwadi Centres (AWC), Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI).*

I. Introduction

Recognizing the significant importance of enhancing the health and nutritional well-being of children and women, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICSD) Scheme was introduced on October 2, 1975, coinciding with the 106th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Government of India launched a comprehensive strategy to provide healthcare, nutrition, and educational services at the village level through Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). ICDS is a key initiative of the Indian government and is considered one of the largest and most distinctive programs globally for early childhood care and women's welfare. Initially, ICDS was rolled out in 33 selected community development blocks across India and has since significantly expanded. As of March 31, 2024, there are 7075 approved and operational projects across India. In Punjab, the ICDS program has experienced rapid growth, with 338 approved and operational projects currently.¹ Vijay Rattan provided a detailed account of the origins, development, and components of ICDS, outlining a set of seven services including supplementary nutrition, immunization, health examinations, and medical referrals, treatment of ailments, nutrition and health education, and informal preschool education that are delivered under ICDS. The primary location for providing ICDS services are an Anganwadi, which is a child care center situated within the village or slum itself. An Anganwadi Center (AWC) typically serves a population ranging from 400 to 800 individuals in urban and rural regions, and 300 to 800 individuals in tribal and mountainous areas. Each Anganwadi Center is managed by an Anganwadi worker (AWW), who is an unpaid part-time worker selected from the local community. The AWW is usually



a woman from the same area and possesses educational qualifications of at least a matric or graduation degree in certain regions. She receives assistance from a helper, who is also a local woman and receives a small payment.

The key objective of ICDS is to enhance the parents' abilities to care for their children and engage the community in promoting self-help initiatives to enhance the well-being of both the child and the family. ICDS is designed as a program rooted in the community, necessitating active involvement from the local community in its implementation process through the utilization of local resources. Its goals go beyond just providing services and focus on starting a process to create social change within the community. This change is expected to result in increased awareness, shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Designating the Anganwadi Worker as a volunteer at the grassroots level rather than a paid employee highlights the community-oriented nature of the program. It is believed that a local female Anganwadi Worker would be more effective in delivering services due to her familiarity with the community. This familiarity is likely to encourage the community to embrace the program and actively participate in it. Despite the intention for community involvement, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) has struggled to engage the community to the extent desired throughout its more than forty-five years of operation. An Anganwadi Worker providing various services to the beneficiaries at grass root level but she can achieve the targets of the ICDS programme with the active involvement of the local community. There are many studies which are conducted on the community participation in the ICDS programme as, T.N. Seema (2001)ⁱⁱ reported that poor location and physical set up of Anganwadis, lack of weighing machines, lack of community participation, majority of the Anganwadi teachers themselves belonged to the below poverty line category, lack of supervisor, etc. were some of the factors which hamper smooth implementation of ICDS in Kerala. The study also suggested that for improving the performance of Anganwadis, co-operation with Panchayati Raj Institutions and local community are required. Arun Shrivastava (2005)ⁱⁱⁱ found that poor physical set up of Anganwadis, village level politics, lack of Supervisors, lack of community participation, delay in food supplies, shortage of storage space, wastage and misuse of material and poor or irregular attendance in Anganwadis were some of the serious difficulties faced by ICDS functionaries in Rajasthan. Samridhi Arora and Madhu Burma (2009-2010)^{iv} performed a survey to determine community leaders' awareness about ICDS services and their engagement in the programme. Sarpanch/Panch and President of Mahila Mandal were chosen as the study's sample, depending on their availability. Nutritional and educational services of ICDS were known by 77 percent of respondents. The remaining 33% of the sample was unable to attend the meetings due to a lack of notification, heavy workloads, scheduling constraints, and the absence of someone at home. Community leaders supported the programme by encouraging women to attend AWC, assisting in the planning of activities, and providing raw resources for supplementary nutrition and wood for fuel, all of which need to be improved in order to boost the programme. Jagbir S. Jakhar and Raj Kumar Siwach (2010)^v conducted a field study, to evaluate the implementation and impact of ICDS in Sirsa district of Haryana. It was discovered that AWCs play an important role in providing children with non-formal education. The immunization and supplementary nutrition program had shown overwhelming response, but referral services suffered due to unavailability of medicines at Primary Health Center and follow up measures. The study also suggested that for improving the performance of ICDS Program, co-operation with Panchayati Raj Institutions is a must. Shazia Manzoor and Shabana khurshid (2014)^{vi} made an attempt to determine the level of Panchyat leaders' participation in ICDS services. Sarpanch/ Panch and Mahila Mandal presidents made up the study's sample. The information was gathered through the use of an interview schedule and observation. The majority of Panchayat leaders, according to the survey, are unaware of ICDS services. The majority of Panchayat



leaders do not attend meetings due to a variety of issues including a shortage of time, heavy workloads, lack of information, and a lower priority work area. Rituparna Das and Partha Bhattacharjee (2015)^{vii} conducted a study in Dukli, Agartala, Tripura to assess the utilization of ICDS Scheme among children less than six years in an urban area. According to the findings, 77.40 percent of children used any of the ICDS programmes, while 67.50 percent receiving supplementary nutrition and 28.10 percent receiving pre-school education. When asked why their children are not being served, 53.84 percent said parent send their children to a private nursery school, while 42.30 percent said that they were unaware of the services available to children under the age of three. Himanta Borgohain and Sahidul Ahmed (2018)^{viii} carried out a study to assess the social responsibilities and community participation towards AWC and evaluate non formal preschool education at AWCs in Sivasagar district of Assam. The sample of 90 respondents was selected from different AWCs located in Sivasagar district of Assam. The study revealed that people are not aware of what ICDS is and what programmes and benefits are there for them. There is no relationship or coordination between local clubs, youth organisations, or Mahila Mandal and the AWC, which is a critical flaw that must be solved in order to improve the community participation process. Keeping in view the relevance and effectiveness of the world's largest and most unique ICDS programme, the present study was conducted to examine the community participation in ICDS programme in Punjab state of India..

II. Objective and Methodology

The objective of present study was conducted to examine the community participation in ICDS programme in Punjab state of India. Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Ludhiana, Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar, Jalandhar, Faridkot, Firozpur and Sahibzadan Ajit Singh Nagar districts selected from the Punjab state for research study. Further, 05 Anganwadi Centers selected from each selected district for the study. Here one Anganwadi center selected from one village. A total of 40 Anganwadi Workers were selected for the study those were running Anganwadi Centers involved for the study. Here, only those Anganwadi Workers were selected for this study those have been working as Anganwadi Workers for at least five years or more. Under the present study to evaluate the community participation in ICDS program, again 05 villages selected from each district selected for the study. Then 01 Village Sarpanch selected from each selected village. Therefore, total 05 Village Sarpanches were selected from the one district for the present investigation. Eight districts were taken from Punjab to analyse the community participation in ICDS programme at grass roots level. So, total 40 Village Sarpanches from Punjab selected for this study. The data collected was analyzed manually and tabulated.

III. Results and Discussions

Personal interview with Anganwadi Workers and observation of Anganwadi Centres by the researcher brought important results and major are presented in the tabular form below. First four tables are related to the responses of Anganwadi workers and table number 5 to 7 are related to the responses of Village Sarpanches.

**Table 1: Who, among the following have helped you in running the Anganwadi Centres?
(Anganwadi Workers)**

Attributes	Responses of Total AWWs in Punjab
Beneficiaries mothers	-----
Village Panchayats	12(30.00)



Community leaders	02(05.00)
Not any one	26(65.00)
Total	40(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

The ICDS programme has been envisaged and conceptualized as a community based programme. The starting point for community participation is an appointment of a local woman as AWW. Further, efforts are being made to mobilise community support through involvement of Village Panchayats, beneficiary women and other community leaders. The data presented in the Table 1 clearly explains in Punjab that a majority (65%) of the AWWs answered that they did not receive any help from anyone in running the AWCs. Twelve (30%) of the AWWs reported that they received help from Village Panchayat in running the AWC's. The rest two (05%) of the AWWs viewed that they received help from Community leaders in running the AWC's. It shows that the performance of community participation in ICDS activities is below expectation and insufficient in Punjab.

**Table 2: Do you face any problem in involving community in the Anganwadi activities? If yes, what is the problem?
(Anganwadi Workers)**

Attributes	Responses of Total AWWs in Punjab
Indifferent attitude of community	20(50.00)
Superstitious beliefs	-----
People have no time	09(22.50)
Did not face any problem	11(27.50)
Total	40(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

The question regarding the problems faced by the AWWs to involve the community in the Anganwadi activities, as given in Table 2, found in Punjab that 50% of AWWs considered indifferent attitude of community towards Anganwadi activities as the main problem and about 22.50% of the AWWs said that people did not have any time to take part in Anganwadi activities as the main problem. The remaining 27.50% of the AWWs answered that they did not face any problem regarding involvement of community in the Anganwadi activities. It was sad to find that a majority 72.50% of AWWs in Punjab faced various problems regarding involvement of community in the Anganwadi activities. It is not very encouraging.

Now, the discussion shifts to the Village Sarpanches.

**Table 3: Have you in any way contributed to the Anganwadi centers? If yes, how?
(Village Sarpanches)**

Attributes	Responses of Total Sarpanches in Punjab
Yes, Getting space for Anganwadi centre's	21(52.50)
Yes, Storage facilities for ration	-----
Yes, Motivate the community	-----



No, Did not contribute	19(47.50)
Total	40(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

The original concept of the ICDS programme was to make it a people's programme, eventually becoming the most important programme for mothers and children at the grass-root level where the contribution from the community specially village sarpanch, had more relevance than in any other similar programme. The question regarding the nature of the contribution from Village Sarpanch is presented in table 3. It was sad to find in Punjab that near half (47.50%) village Sarpanches did not make any contribution to the AWWs due to petty reasons like AWWs did not ask him for help, lack of time with Sarpanches and they did not know in what way they could contribute to the AWCs. The rest 52.50% of village Sarpanches made efforts and got space for AWCs..

Table 4: Do you visit Anganwadi center? If yes, what do you do at the Anganwadi? Village Sarpanches)

Attributes	Responses of Total Sarpanches in Punjab
Yes, I observe the Anganwadi activities	04(10.00)
Yes, I solve the problems of Anganwadi workers	11(27.50)
Yes, I talk to ICDS beneficiaries	02(05.00)
I do not visit Anganwadi	23(57.50)
Total	40(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

Success of ICDS programme also depends on regular visits of village Sarpanches at AWCs. In Table 4, the extent of involvement of Sarpanch in the activities of the AWCs is indicated in Punjab that 42.50% village Sarpanches visited regularly the AWCs. Out of them, 10% of village Sarpanches observed the activities of AWWs at the AWCs, while 27.50% Sarpanches took initiative to solve the problems of the AWWs, and only two (05%) village Sarpanch talked to the ICDS beneficiaries about their problems.

It was extremely disappointing to find that a majority 57.50% of the village Sarpanches in Punjab did not make any visit at all to the AWCs. Thus, the participation of the village Sarpanches in ICDS activities was very pathetic. Only some Sarpanches came forward to make effective participation in the ICDS programmes.

Table 5: Are there any local committees formed to help the activities of the Anganwadi? (Village Sarpanches)

Attributes	Responses of Total Sarpanches in Punjab	Responses of Total Sarpanches in Rajasthan
Yes	01(02.50)	-----
No	39(97.50)	40(100.00)
Do not know	-----	-----
Any other	-----	-----
Total	40(100)	40(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.



Anganwadi Centre is the focal point for delivery of services to the community. Therefore, local committee at the village level is very important for the participation of community in ICDS programme. As per norms, AWWs, ANMs, local influential people, social workers and elected representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions should normally be included in the local committee. Replying to the question about the formation of local committee at village level, as Table 5 describes, shockingly, a high majority (97.50%) village Sarpanches in Punjab reported that they did not form any local committee to help the AWWs. Only one (02.50%) village Sarpanch viewed that he forms a local committee to help the AWWs. It was evident from the data in Rajasthan that all village sarpanches selected for the study answered that they did not form any local committee for the of AWWs at local level.

On this count, it was depressing to find that over a period of four and half decades to implement the ICDS programme, only a single local committee in Punjab and no any local committee in Rajasthan was formed to support the AWWs.

Table 6: Are there any other organization and school teachers at local level which help the Anganwadi activities? If yes, name the organization.(Village Sarpanch)

Attributes	Responses of Total Sarpanches In Punjab	Responses of Total Sarpanches In Rajasthan
Yes, Youth Club	01(02.50)	01(02.50)
Yes, School Teacher	-----	-----
Yes, Voluntary Organizations	-----	02(05.00)
Not Helped By Any Organization	39(97.50)	37(92.50)
Total	40(100)	40(100)

Source: Culled from Primary data. Figures in brackets are percentages.

Participation of different organizations at the grass-roots level is the cornerstone for success of any development programme. A programme like ICDS cannot achieve a lasting success if it does not have some in built mechanism for involving the organization like youth club, village school teachers and voluntary organizations at local level in planning, implementation and monitoring services. As Table 6 explains, it was again shocking to note in Punjab that a high majority (97.50%) village Sarpanches of the selected sample confessed that there was no organization like youth club or village school teachers and voluntary organization at the village level to help the AWWs to conduct the activities of AWCs. Only one (02.50%) village Sarpanch of the selected sample confessed that there was a youth club at the village level to help the AWWs to conduct the activities of AWCs.

It is indicated in Rajasthan that a high majority 92.50% of the sarpanches answered that there was not available any organizationat local level to help the Anganwadi activities, while merely one (02.50%)village Sarpanch reported that there was a youth club at the village level to help the AWWs and the remaining two (05%) of the village Sarpanch of the selected sample viewed that there was available voluntary organizations at the village level to help the AWWs.



IV. Conclusion

Community's active participation is the key to the success of a social and development programme which is aimed to bring about a change in the life of the people. But under the present study, it was disappointing to find that a majority 65% of the AWWs in Punjab did not receive any help from anyone in running the AWCs at village level. It was sad to find that a majority 72.50% of AWWs in Punjab faced various problems regarding involvement of community to conduct the Anganwadi activities. Near half 47.50% of the village Sarpanches in Punjab did not make any contribution to the AWWs due to various petty reasons like AWWs did not ask them for help, lack of time of Sarpanches and they did not know in what way they could contribute to the different activities of AWCs. It was extremely disappointing to find that a majority 57.50% of the village Sarpanches in Punjab did not make any visit at all to the AWCs. A high majority 97.50% village Sarpanches in Punjab did not form any local committee to help the AWWs to conduct different activities and again a high majority 97.50% village Sarpanches in Punjab admitted that there was no organization like youth club or village school teachers or voluntary organizations at the village level to help the AWWs. Overall, the community participation in ICDS program was very poor in Punjab. There is an urgent need to make strong efforts to mobilize community support, which should be freely available if a strong policy for this is adopted.

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