



Strengthening ICDS

This editorial is based on [Strengthening the Integrated Child Development Services scheme](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 15/06/2023. It talks about the issues of Integrated Child Development scheme and ways to strengthen it.

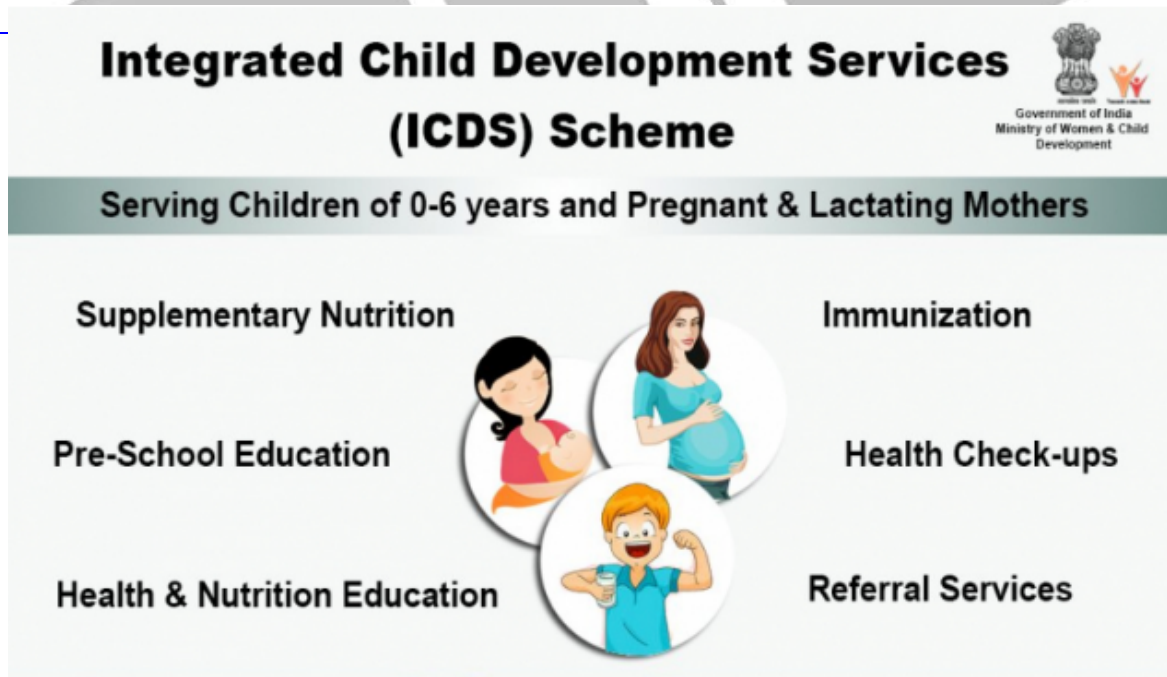
Prelims: [ICDS Scheme](#), [15th Finance Commission](#), [Poshan 2.0](#)

Mains: ICDS Scheme - Challenges and Way Forward

It is true that India's high prevalence of stunting, wasting, and anaemia continues to pose public health risks for children and women. India must strengthen its existing social sector schemes, such as the [Integrated Child Development Services \(ICDS\)](#), to tackle this. The ICDS targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers; addresses non-formal pre-school education; and breaks the cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality.

What is Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme?

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- The [Integrated Child Development Service \(ICDS\)](#) Scheme providing for supplementary nutrition, immunization and pre-school education to the children is a popular flagship programme

of the government.

- Launched in 1975, it is one of the world's largest programmes providing for an integrated package of services for the holistic development of the child.
- ICDS is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by state governments and union territories. The scheme is universal covering all the districts of the country.
- The Scheme has been renamed as Anganwadi Services.
- The services are now offered as part of the [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#) - an Integrated Nutrition Support Programme for the duration of the [15th Finance Commission](#) period i.e., from 2021-22 to 2025-26.
- **Objectives:**
 - To improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0-6 years
 - To lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child
 - To reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout
 - To achieve effective co-ordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development
 - To enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.
- **Beneficiaries:**
 - Children in the age group of 0-6 years
 - Pregnant women and Lactating mothers
 - Adolescent Girls (14-18 years) in Aspirational Districts and North-eastern States

What Studies Show about the Success of ICDS?

- A study published in World Development demonstrated the ICDS's positive impact on cognitive achievements, especially among girls and those from economically disadvantaged families.
- Another peer-reviewed study in The University of Chicago Press Journals found that children who were exposed to ICDS during the first three years of life completed 0.1-0.3 more grades of schooling than those who were not.
- In a study published in the Natural Library of Medicine, it was found that adolescents aged 13-18, who born in villages with proper ICDS implementation, showed a 7.8% increased likelihood of school enrolment and completed an average of 0.8 additional grades compared to their peers who did not have access to the ICDS.

What are the Challenges in Effective Implementation of ICDS?

- **Infrastructural Issues:** A disconcerting 2.5 lakh centres operate without functional sanitation facilities and 1.5 lakh centres lack access to potable water. Approximately 4.15 lakh Anganwadi centers do not possess their own pucca building.
- **Supply Network Planning (SNP) and Administrative Challenges:** The food and micronutrients provided to children and mothers are often irregular, poor, inadequate, and corrupt. There is no clear policy or guidelines for SNP.
- **Availability of Human Resources:** There are not enough Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs), who are the main service providers at the AWCs. They are also overworked, underpaid, and poorly trained.
- **Low Focus on Early Childhood Education:** The pre-school education for children aged 3-6 years at the AWCs is often ignored or poorly done. There is no proper infrastructure, curriculum, materials, or monitoring for pre-school education.
- **Challenges of strengthening training, monitoring:** The training, monitoring, Management Information Systems (MIS), and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) for ICDS are weak or missing in many places. The training is outdated and inadequate. The monitoring is irregular and incomplete. The MIS is manual and unreliable. The ICT is underused or unavailable.
- **Week Monitoring:** The monitoring and evaluation of ICDS is weak and inconsistent, with gaps in data availability, reliability and utilization. The MIS is not updated regularly and does not capture all the relevant indicators and outcomes of ICDS. There is also a lack of feedback and corrective action based on the monitoring data.
- **Anganwadi Workers are burdened with non-ICDS functions:** Each Anganwadi worker, which is the basic unit of service delivery under ICDS, has to perform multiple tasks such as nutrition, health, education, record keeping, etc. This affects the quality and coverage of services.

- Moreover, AWWs are often assigned non-ICDS duties by other departments or authorities, such as census, elections, surveys, etc., which further distracts them from their core functions.

What should be Done to Strengthen ICDS scheme?

- **Improve Infrastructure:** The government should allocate more funds and resources for improving the infrastructure of Anganwadi centres, such as building pucca structures, providing sanitation facilities, potable water, electricity, cooking equipment, etc.
 - The government should also involve the local community and panchayats in the maintenance and management of Anganwadi centres.
- **Streamline Supply Network Planning (SNP):** The government should streamline the procurement, distribution and monitoring of food and micronutrients for ICDS beneficiaries and ensure timely and adequate supply. The government should also adopt transparent and accountable mechanisms to prevent corruption and leakage in SNP.
 - The government should also issue clear policy guidelines and standard operating procedures for SNP.
- **Increase Availability of Human Resources:** The government should recruit more Anganwadi workers and helpers and ensure fair and regular payment of their salaries and incentives.
 - The government should also provide them with adequate training, supervision, support and recognition for their work.
 - The government should also ensure that they are not overburdened with non-ICDS duties by other departments or authorities.
- **Focus on Early Childhood Education:** The government should enhance the quality and coverage of pre-school education for children aged 3-6 years at Anganwadi centres, by providing proper infrastructure, curriculum, materials, and monitoring.
 - The government should also promote early stimulation and learning activities for children under 3 years and involve parents and caregivers in their development.
- **Strengthen training, monitoring, MIS and ICT:** The government should strengthen the training, monitoring, MIS and ICT systems for ICDS, by using modern technology, such as smartphones, applications, biometric devices, etc.
 - The government should also update the training modules and methods and ensure regular and effective training for all ICDS functionaries.

Case Study: Advantages of Additional Workers in Anganwadis

- An additional Anganwadi worker could be added to each Anganwadi centers to lessen the load of these workers. Implementing this approach could yield following advantages.
- It would lead to better health and educational outcomes. A large-scale randomised controlled trial in Tamil Nadu, conducted to evaluate the effects of increasing staff levels within the ICDS framework, revealed significant outcomes.
 - The addition of a half-time worker effectively doubled the net preschool instructional time, which led to improvements in math and language test scores for children enrolled in the programme.
- The cost of a nationwide roll-out of this model is relatively insignificant in comparison to the potential advantages it offers. The estimated long-term benefits, based on expected improvements in lifetime earnings, would be around 13 to 21 times the expenses.
- The new Anganwadi worker can be given the responsibility of concentrating only on preschool and early childhood education.
 - This would allow existing workers to dedicate more time to child health and nutrition.
 - It would also enable the Anganwadi workers to expand their outreach and serve a larger number of families.
- Apart from improving the well-being of rural communities, this would create job opportunities for local residents, particularly women. It would lead to the creation of 1.3 million new jobs for women across India.

Drishhti Mains Question:

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme faces several challenges in terms of coverage, quality, impact and governance. Critically examine the performance and challenges of ICDS scheme and suggest measures to strengthen it.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains:

Q. Hunger and Poverty are the biggest challenges for good governance in India still today. Evaluate how far successive governments have progressed in dealing with these humongous problems. Suggest measures for improvement. **(2017)**

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