

ICDS WG update

We have begun reviewing literature on young children, women and child development as well as documents pertaining to the ICDS. We have also started consultations with stakeholders.

Consultations: The WG has started discussions with government representatives, researchers and civil society organizations working with young children and women. We have met the Minister for WCD, and Secretary and Joint Secretary, WCD. We had also invited the WCD ministry and the Planning Commission to make presentations on their views for restructuring of ICDS. We participated in a national consultation with 15 organisations working with young children organized by FORCES—Forum for Early Childhood Care and Creches—a network that grew out of the Shramshakti report (Commission on Women Workers in the Informal Sector) in 1988. FORCES members shared the needs of young children and working women across 12 states in India.

Next steps: A national consultation with government representatives, health and child development experts as well as civil society colleagues running child care centres and working on issues of the young child will be held in New Delhi on **April 11th**. The consultation shall address, to begin with, two subjects: (i) pre-school education; and (ii) the health of infants and children under 3 and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers. The focus will be on the first 1000 days and particularly on infants and under three's—the most vulnerable age-group as well as providing all 6 services of the ICDS, and not just feeding. Some of the issues that are emerging and on which we will have to take a collective view are:

Anganwadi Centres:

- **Space:** how best to use existing infrastructure (schools, panchayat, health centres) or construct new buildings
- **Duration:** whether 3 hours as at present or full-day
- **AWWs:** Selection of AWWs and helpers and their remuneration; appropriate and ongoing training and capacity-building of AWWs and helpers; how best to utilize 2 Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and a helper, especially if full-day and full complement of activities; coordination with ASHA, etc.
- **Feeding:** Modifications that are needed to freshly cooked, hot meals and snacks for the children; milk for infants at the centres, dry rations if at home
- **Other activities and better outreach** including home based care

Pre-school activities—what, how, where, when (age appropriate)

Other issues to address include:

- Accountability systems and structures, decentralized control, implementation
- Convergence with health services and system (ASHAs, ANMs), Total Sanitation Programme and primary education
- Dealing specifically with malnutrition— food plus strategies
- Adolescent girls—their nutrition, health and general support
- Pregnant and breast-feeding women—their nutrition, health, education and general support
- Converting ICDS centres to Women and Child Development Centres—as suggested by ministry of WCD
- Involvement of parents, community in the entire programme