

Malnutrition and Mortality among Children in India: Need to Revisit ICDS Programme

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This paper examines the recent trends in infant and child mortality and malnutrition levels in India, first nationally and with a study of four selected states. Kerala and Tamil Nadu are among the better-developed states while Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are less developed. While mortality levels among children have declined significantly in all the states, a corresponding decline in malnutrition levels was not apparent. India's ICDS programme is the world's largest programme of its kind. One of its major objectives is to meet the nutritional needs of children from six months to six years through supplemental feeding in the Anganwadi Centres. This paper analyzes components of the ICDS programme including budgetary provisions to determine the extent to which the programme has been successful in reducing malnutrition. The study first analyzed state-level and then district level data in Tamil Nadu. Household-level data from NFHS-3 showed that while there is good nutritional impact on the beneficiary children, a corresponding impact on the population is not seen. This means large numbers of malnourished children are added to this group every year which neutralizes the positive effects of supplemental feeding.

I Introduction and Objectives

Recent studies in India and abroad have drawn attention to the country's poor ranking even among the developing nations in respect of malnutrition in children below the age of five years. This was not expected in view of its high GDP (averaging a yearly growth of seven per cent in the past two and a half decades) and rapid rise in its per capita income (Country Report of NFHS-3—2008' Global Hunger Index-2014), which should have made access to nutrition easier for most people. The per capita GDP of India in PPP \$ (price parity adjusted dollars at 2011 prices) was \$1973 during 1990-1994 and rose nearly three-fold to \$ 5473 during 2011-2015. During this period, the percentage of children below five years of age, who were considered "stunted" or lower than the expected

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