

NATIONAL

Mothers in MP will turn warriors against malnutrition

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Move aimed at strengthening community response

The Madhya Pradesh government has issued an order for appointment of committees led by mothers to ensure better monitoring of services delivered at anganwadis or daycare centres. The mothers will keep a watch on weekly ration distribution to beneficiaries as well as suggest nutritious and tasteful recipes for meals served to children at the centres. The move is aimed at strengthening community response to the problem of hunger and malnutrition.

Called 'Matru Sahyogini Samiti' or Mothers' Cooperation Committees, these will comprise 10 mothers at each anganwadi, representing the concerns of different sets of beneficiaries under the Integrated Child Development Services, or the National Nutrition Mission -children aged between six months and three years, children between three years and six years, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers .

According to the order issued earlier this month, the committees will include mothers of beneficiary children as well as represented by pregnant women and lactating mothers, who are enrolled under the scheme. The scheme includes a package of six services, including supplementary nutrition, health services including vaccination, early education, among others.



The committees will also include a woman ‘panch’ (elected village leader), women active in the community and eager to volunteer their support to the scheme, teachers from the local school, and women heads of self-help groups.

The mothers will monitor the weekly distribution of take-home ration as well as coordinate with self-help groups engaged in preparing hot cooked meals for daily distribution to beneficiaries at anganwadis to ensure good quality. They will also suggest ways to make such food tasteful and nutritious; ensure that all children as well as pregnant women and lactating mothers due for vaccines receive them; stay alert about malnourished and severely malnourished children in the community, ensure they receive benefits from anganwadis and make parents of such children aware about the benefits available to them through the government.

Community health system

“With the help of mother’s engagement, we will be able to turn anganwadis into a community health system, a nutrition management centre, spread awareness against social evils like child marriage and female foeticide. These will turn into a model for local governance as well as allow for greater engagement between communities and the government. Our commitment to this also shows that we are opening ourselves to public scrutiny and improving accountability”, Swati Meena Naik, Director, Women and Child Development Department, told *The Hindu*.

their feet. We are trying to do the latter, she stated.

The move is being taken as per the mandate of the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), which provides for vigilance committees as well as social audits or collective monitoring and evaluation of planning and implementation of a scheme. The mother's oversight will have a legal sanctity through the NFSA. While they will not receive any remuneration for their engagement, Ms. Naik said that in months to come they would devise ways to given devolve monetary powers so that they could take decisions on expenses on food and health services as well as the infrastructure.

To ensure fair and equal representation of beneficiaries from different caste, tribe and religion, the Mothers' Cooperation Committees will be selected from different sub-committees, which consist of members of the ward, village and caste and tribe-based colonies known as *manjra* and *phaliya*.

Malnutrition levels in the State are higher than the national average, according to the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey, 2018. 39.5% of children under five in the State are stunted, while the national average is 34.7%. Similarly, in wasting 19.6% of under-five children are wasted, whereas the national figure is 17.3%. 38.7% of children under five are underweight in the State, compared to 33.4% in the country.

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