

Participation of rural women in ICDS programme in Assam

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■ **ABSTRACT :** Integrated child development scheme (ICDS) is one of the world's largest and most unique programmes for the development of women and children. In order to see the participation level of rural women in ICDS, an attempt has been made to know the awareness and perception about different activities of ICDS. The study was carried out in twenty five Anganwadi Centres of ICDS programme of Dhakuakhana Development Block in Lakhimpur district of Assam on which the ICDS project was first introduced in the year 1975-76. There has been found schedule caste, schedule tribes and low income families in this sub division with various problems like illiteracy, poverty, destitution of children etc. in the locality for which the development programme requires strengthening. The findings clearly indicated that although a higher percentage of women were aware about the need of this programme but they were ignored about the various activities that were carried out at Anganwadi Centre and the extent of their participation was woefully inadequate.

■ **KEY WORDS :** Rural women, Development, Awareness, Participation, Programme, I.C.D.S.

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The community development programme is an integral part of five years plans which aimed at developing the rural sector. The programme aims at developing human potential to its maximum capacity as a member of the community by promoting a progressive outlook, self-reliance and a cooperative way of life that is vital for the whole democratic process. There are various development programme which are implemented by the government of Assam for the development of women, children, youth, farmers etc. Integrated child development scheme (ICDS) is one of such community development programme response to the challenge of meeting the holistic needs of the women and children (NIPCCD, 1992). Today the ICDS is one of the world's largest and most unique programmes where the target groups are children under six years, pregnant and lactating women. Therefore, their involvement and participation in various activities are very important for the success of the ICDS programme in the villages (NCAER, 2001). The target group should feel that it is their programme and is meant for the benefit of them (Ghosh, 2004). The Government agencies are responsible for the implementation of the programme and

therefore required to organize some publicity campaign to create awareness and carried out a sense of confidence and zeal in the minds of the target group to come forward and reap the benefits of the programme (Dasgupta *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, an effort was made to see as to how the beneficiaries were made aware and participate in this programme with the specific objectives: to know the awareness and perception of women about the programme, to know the extent of participation of women in the programme and to highlight the suggestions for better participation of women in the programme.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was carried out in twenty five Anganwadi centres of ICDS programme of Dhakuakhana development Block in Lakhimpur district of Assam. The beneficiaries of each selected Anganwadi center were interviewed as per as categorization of the ICDS programme, *i.e.*: pregnant women, lactating women, and mothers with pre-school children. From the list of the beneficiaries registered at the twenty five

Anganwadi centre, three Beneficiary from each categories were taken as sample *i.e.* nine beneficiaries from each Anganwadi centre made the total number of beneficiaries two hundred twenty five were respondents for the present study. Since the age groups of pre-school children were minor to take them as respondents, therefore instead of them their mothers were considered as respondents for these categories. The addresses of the beneficiaries household were noted from the records and they were interviewed.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings obtained from the present study have been discussed under the following sub-heads:

Beneficiaries perception about the ICDS programme:

It is needless to say that when the beneficiaries involved in various activities of the programme, they made aware about the various aspects of the programme. The views of beneficiaries enrolled in the Anganwadis were taken to assess their awareness about the ICDS programme. The findings in this respect showed that a higher percentage of women were aware about the need of this programme. An analysis of the responses of women beneficiaries regarding their awareness about the need of ICDS programme, different activities of ICDS programme revealed the beneficiaries perception of ICDS programme. Reacting to the query above, the respondents came up with varied answers that are appended in different tables.

Table 1 shows that 74.66 per cent beneficiaries made aware about the need of ICDS programme while only 25.33 per cent beneficiaries were aware about the various activities such as need of immunization, importance of pre-school education,

various health services of the ICDS programme. Although the majority of beneficiaries found that ICDS programme was needed for the development of the children but most of them were ignored about the various activities that were carried out at Anganwadi Centres.

Beneficiaries perception regarding pre-school education:

Contrary to the investigator assessment regarding the pre-school education of ICDS, it was found that there was an increase awareness of the importance of pre-school education among the mothers. Further, on the basis of the assessment made by the investigator regarding the implementation of pre-school education and the rating assigned to the implementation of pre-school education programme in the Anganwadi centre recorded in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals that out of the total 225 sample beneficiaries, only 10.22 per cent beneficiaries rated the implementation of pre-school programme in their Anganwadi centres which was unsatisfactory where 24 per cent of beneficiaries rated it as satisfactory. Majority of beneficiaries rated the implementation of pre-school programme in their Anganwadi centres as good while 21.77 per cent beneficiaries could not give any answer in this respect.

This finding indicated the misconception of beneficiaries regarding the pre-school education. The concept of inherent in early childhood education that the child learns through play does not seem to have been grasped by them. Practical expectation from pre-school education does not seem to match with what the scheme has envisaged. Learning of numbers and alphabets that should get the last priority in the programme was over emphasized in the Anganwadi Centre. The workers might be doing this to satisfy the parents. The Anganwadi

Table 1: Beneficiaries perception of ICDS programme

Sr. No.	Dimensions	Number of beneficiaries reported (n=225)	Percentage (%)
1.	Need of ICDS programme	168	74.66
2.	Awareness of different activities of ICDS programme	57	25.33

Table 2 : Rating assigned by beneficiaries regarding pre-school education programme in anganwadi centers

Sr. No.	Assessment	Number of beneficiaries	Percentage (%)
1.	Unsatisfactory	23	10.22
2.	Satisfactory	54	24.00
3.	Good	99	44.00
4.	Do not know	49	21.77

Table 3 : Ratings assigned to anganwadi center by beneficiaries

Sr. No.	Beneficiaries assessment of anganwadi center	Number of beneficiaries	Percentage (%)
1.	Unsatisfactory	44	18.66
2.	Satisfactory	78	34.67
3.	Excellent	38	16.88
4.	Do not know	65	28.88

Table 4 : Beneficiaries participation in ICDS programme

Sr. No.	Areas of participation	Total no. of eneficiaries	No. of beneficiaries helping	Percentage (%)
1.	Conducting pre-school education	225	11	4.88
2.	Collecting children to the Anganwadi center	225	18	5.18
3.	Organizing pre-school activities	225	11	4.88
4.	Distributing supplementary food	225	24	10.66
5.	Cooking food in Anganwadi center	225	0	0.0

workers in this regard should attempt parent's education. Mothers capabilities need to be built up to provide cognitive and linguistic stimulation to the children at home as well, so that conformity is maintained between learning at the Anganwadi centre and at home.

Beneficiaries assessment of anganwadi center:

An attempt was made to ascertain the beneficiaries assessment on the functioning of Anganwadi centres in their villages. Whether the Anganwadi centres of their village were running unsatisfactory, satisfactorily, excellently or have no knowledge. The responses received in this regard are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that out of the total 225 beneficiaries, a small percentage constituted 16.88 per cent rated the Anganwadi centres as excellent; the majority of beneficiaries *i.e.* 34.67 per cent rated their Anganwadi centres as satisfactorily running. According to 18.66 per cent beneficiaries the Anganwadi centres were running in their villages as unsatisfactorily and 28.88 per cent beneficiaries could not give any answer regarding these aspects.

Beneficiaries participation in ICDS programme:

Beneficiaries' participation in the activities of ICDS is very important. They can involve in every activity of Anganwadi centre like conducting pre-school activities, collecting their children to the non-formal pre-school education, organizing pre-school activities, helping in distributing supplementary food etc. The responses of women beneficiaries regarding their participation in pre-school education component, when analyzed, revealed a disappointing situation. Table 4 shows this aspect.

From Table 4 it is found that out of the total 225 sample beneficiaries, only 4.88 per cent helped the Anganwadi workers in conducting and organizing pre-school education, 5.18 per cent beneficiaries helped Anganwadi workers in collecting children to the Anganwadi Centres. Regarding participation in supplementary nutrition, the contribution made by the beneficiaries was slightly better for this component than that for the other pre-school education component. Out of the total sample beneficiaries, only 24 (10.66%) beneficiaries rendered help in distributing food. There was no provision of cooking the supplementary food in Anganwadi centres, the distribution of food in most of the Anganwadi centres were

done as a dole giving exercise. The beneficiaries were provided food in the utensils brought by them and had to carry it back to home again.

Anganwadi workers reported that since the families are very poor they were unable to contribute the fuel, food staff etc. It can be noticed in this respect that their help received was far below the extent visualized in the scheme. Therefore, it can be concluded that the extent of their participation was woefully inadequate. This trend was understandable as the women might be busy in doing the household activities.

Suggestions and conclusion:

Such a minimal involvement of the respondents highlights two things. First, the respondents, it seems, that they were not aware of their role in the scheme. The programme obviously is perceived as a programme of the Government and not that of the community. Secondly, the Anganwadi worker with her limited abilities, in most cases, is not able to elicit the community participation. Since community's awareness towards the programme and participation are very important for the success of the ICDS programme. Therefore, the Anganwadi worker should organize a meeting to make every family – mother and father – make aware about the ICDS programme before its implementation. She should tell them about the objectives of this programme in general and explain to them in detail the services that are provided to women and children at the Anganwadi centre. Supervisors and CDPO should take necessary measures to further involve the community.

In general, more human resources need to be devoted to monitoring and evaluation activities. An awareness of its importance needs to be created at all levels of implementation so that, in the portions of their tasks that are allocated to monitoring and evaluation-related activities, functionaries give it the attention it deserves. This is challenging and requires a substantial mind-shift for functionaries – towards outcomes, results and performance. In addition, some strengthening of community monitoring is desirable, either through existing community institutions or more informally, *e.g.* through encouraging community members to be alert to AWC opening hours and attendance, and to demand improvements where needed.

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