

## *Summary of the NAC Recommendations on ICDS*

The NAC's recommendations for reforming and strengthening ICDS recognize the urgent need to improve the nutritional status of India's children. They call for new strategies as well as a comprehensive package of reforms that address institutional, programmatic and managerial gaps in the delivery of ICDS. Some of the key recommendations are listed below:

**Core strategies:** ICDS can deliver outcomes only if a **genuinely integrated life cycle approach** to early childhood care and development is adopted. The package of services must provide sufficiently for **all** components, by focusing, apart from offering balanced and nutritious diets, on the 1000-day window of opportunity for children under 2, child survival and growth through assured health care and nutrition, early childhood care and development, provision of crèche facilities and effective early childhood education. Other elements of the strategy should include decentralized management and flexible architecture, home-based nutrition counselling and related services, enhanced training and capacity building, community ownership extensive public education, and convergence at different levels (village, block, district, state and national) and across sectors.

**Programmatic reforms:** The anganwadi centres (AWCs) are envisaged to become vibrant centres providing day-long crèche and early childhood care facilities with flexible timings, where in addition to providing balanced and nutritious foods, children they will also offer early childhood education and effective nutrition and health counseling.

**Management reforms:** We have also made a number of recommendations to improve the administrative and managerial efficiency of ICDS. These relate to accountability, convergence of services, active engagement of non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, research and academic institutions, improved record-keeping and IT tracking systems, and assessing progress and performance. Special financing arrangements are also suggested to ensure flow of resources and allow for flexible mechanisms for financing ICDS to enable experimentation and universal coverage.

**Institutional reforms:** The NAC recommends the setting up of an appropriately empowered and well-resourced **Nutrition Mission of India** (NMI) to accelerate effective and efficient delivery of ICDS and develop a time-bound plan of action to reduce child malnutrition across the country. The NMI should be headed by a Chairperson (with the rank of Cabinet Minister) and have officials from relevant ministries who have a stake in reducing malnutrition as its members. The NMI should, over the next six months, hold broad-based consultations with stakeholders to develop a Mission Document where the vision, goals, strategies and detailed time-bound plans of action (including piloting in 200 districts and roll-out of the revamped ICDS across the country).

The NAC further recommends that the MCWD and Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD) should jointly **develop a comprehensive national policy for early childhood and pre-school education**. Following the growing support for and lead taken by some states, the NAC further recommends the **addition of a pre-primary section in all government primary schools**. This would pave the way for examining, over time, the feasibility of bringing pre-school learning under the purview of the Right to Education Act so as to prevent gaps, and ensure continuity in the child's educational growth.