

Panchayati Raj and Child Care Services

An action - research study

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Chennai

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Conducted by

Gandhigram Trust, Gandhigram, Dindigul District

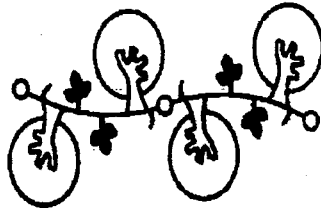
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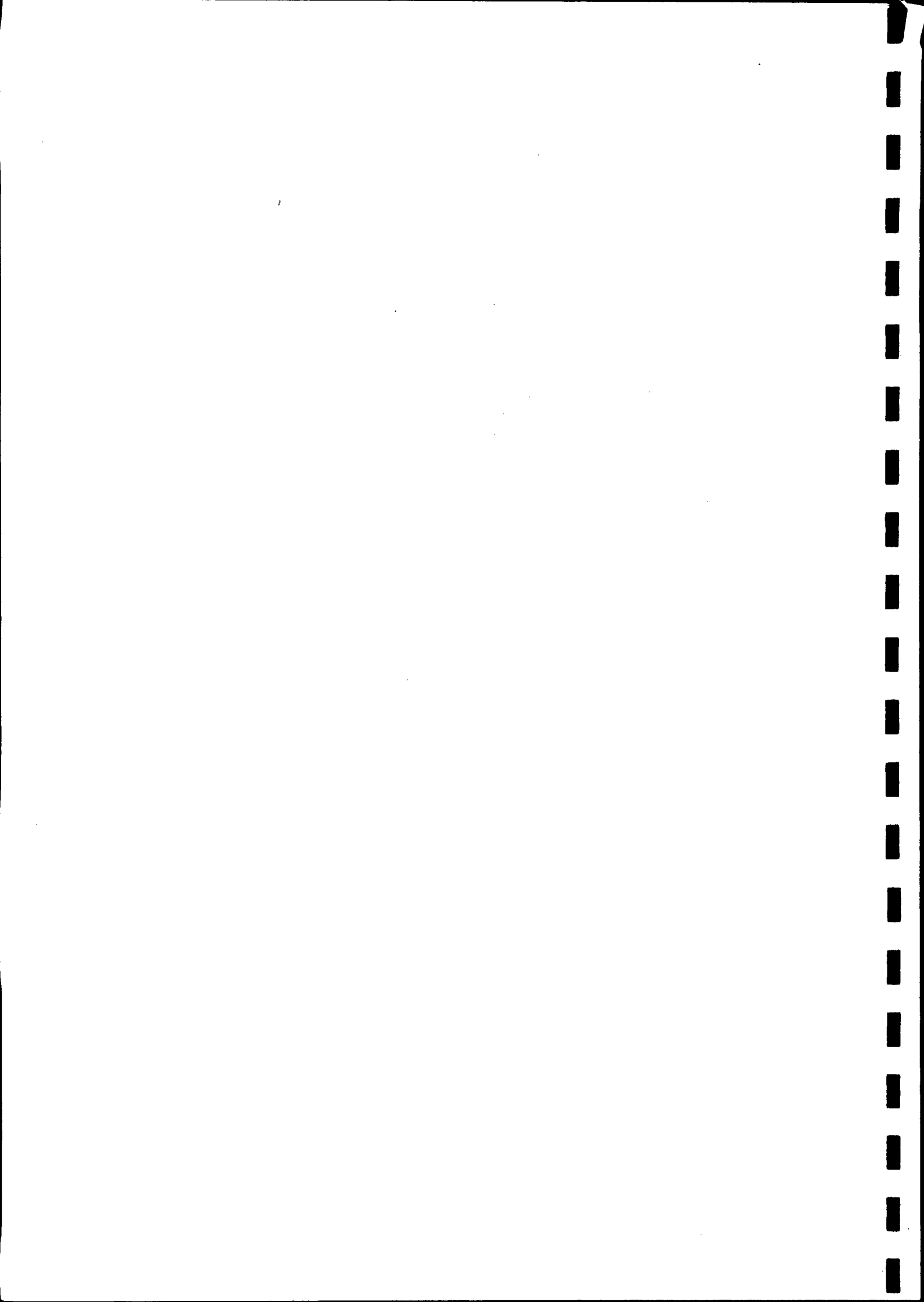
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A. Christina

PART - I



Panchayati Raj and Child Care Services

Part - I Introduction and Theoretical Background

Children constitute the nation's future human resources. Childhood is the most important period in an individual's life when the most rapid growth and development of the child occurs. This is the stage when the child should be provided maximum opportunities in the environment for optimum growth. India provides for this growth and development through various programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). In Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project (TINP) and the Noon Meal Programme (NMP) are additional programmes for children from 0-6 years, and provide scope for the holistic development of the child.

Child Care Services in India

The first mention of creating a system of childcare support goes back to 1939-40, to the sub-committee of the National Planning Committee of the Congress Party, which visualized it as a programme for the benefit of both women and children. The necessity for child care services is reiterated in several documents thereafter. The Constitution of India, in its Directive Principles, guaranteed the right to education and to protection for the child within the family. The establishment of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1953 was followed by the development of an extensive network of rural balwadis.

The National Policy for Children (1974) was an attempt to translate into action the directives set out by the Constitution. Affirmation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Conference on Education for All (1990), the World Summit on Children (1990), the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children (1990) are proofs of the nation's concern for young children.

Proceeding with the principles embodied in the National Policy for Children where government declared the nation's children "as supremely important asset", the Ministry of Social Welfare evolved the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in 1975 during the Fifth Five Year Plan period. The focus shifted from child welfare to child development and the emphasis to integration and co-

ordination of services. The ICDS package consists of six services : provision of supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups, referral services, non-formal pre-school education, and nutrition education and care of pregnant and nursing mothers. The present coverage of children under ICDS in the country as a whole (government run programmes) is summarised in Box 1.

Box 1. Coverage of Children in India (ICDS) -1999

Services	Centres	Beneficiaries	
		In Numbers	Total
Supplementary Nutrition			
Anganwadis providing supplementary nutrition	3,61,506		
Children receiving supplementary nutrition (0-3 yrs)		1,24,80,739	
Children receiving supplementary nutrition (3-6 yrs)		1,40,05,239	
Children receiving supplementary nutrition (0-6 yrs)			2,64,85,978
Mothers receiving supplementary nutrition		55,87,797	55,87,797
Total beneficiaries			3,20,73,775
Pre-school Education			
Children attending pre-school education (3-6 yrs)			1,35,70,703

Source : Government of India, Annual Report 1999-2000 and the attached supplement of the Status Report for December, 1999. Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Child Care Services in Tamil Nadu

The government of Tamil Nadu has always been in the forefront with regard to new policies and programmes for women and young children, implementing them extensively through out the entire state. It was the first state to establish a "Department of Women's Welfare" (presently Department of Social Welfare) in 1947 even before the formation of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB). The earliest child welfare programme which involved the community was the Applied Nutrition Programme (ANP), started in the sixties and intended for children below five years. Some of the nutritional needs of the children, like eggs and vegetables, were met through a common poultry farm and kitchen garden, and often the space for the balwadis was provided by the community. Though the programme later became defunct in the country, in Tamil Nadu it was responsible for the establishment of an astonishingly large number of balwadis in rural areas.

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) came into existence in the year 1975-76 with its package of six services. The year 1980 witnessed the introduction of yet another programme for the young child, i.e. the Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project (TINP) funded by the World Bank that focussed on growth monitoring, selective supplementary feeding, an integration of health and nutrition services, with health and nutrition services also extended to pregnant and nursing mothers. The objective of this programme was to improve the health and nutritional status of children between 0-3 years. In the year 1982, the popular Noon Meal Programme (NMP) for school children started in 1967 by the then Chief Minister, Mr. M.G. Ramachandran was extended to provide nutrition, education and health care to pre-school children.

Tamil Nadu government is presently managing what has been described as the largest school and pre-school feeding programme in the world. (Harris, 1991). The overall extent of child care services and coverage is summarised in Box 2 below.

Box 2

Coverage of Children in Tamil Nadu (1999)

Programme	Category	Number	Total
Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project (TINP)	Centres (19,500)		
	Children (0 -3 yrs)	14,23,014	
	" (3 -6 yrs)	5,70,888	19,93,902
	Children (0 - 6 yrs)		
	Pregnant and Nursing Women	2,75,347	2,75,347
	Total beneficiaries		22,69,249
Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)	Centres (10,477)		
	Children (6 months - 2 yrs)	1,66,740	
	" (2-4 yrs)	3,04,616	4,71,356
	Children (6 months - 4 yrs)		
	Pregnant and nursing women	1,35,383	1,35,383
	Total beneficiaries		6,06,739

Source: Government of Tamil Nadu. (1998). Demand No. 29, *Social Welfare Policy Note*, 1998-1999, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department.

Highlights

Centres (29,977)	
Children (0-6 yrs)	24,65,258
Pregnant & nursing women	4,10,730
Total beneficiaries	28,75,988

The above refers to government run programmes only. There is a small but vibrant programme in the NGO sector which is not included here.

Need for Decentralisation

The need for decentralised planning in India has been emphasized for a long time. The large size of the country, its uneven resource endowment, the highly differentiated nature of the society in terms of language as well as institutions and the varying levels of social and economic development in different areas have created a need for decentralised planning. In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions

have been playing an important role in rural development in general. Since Panchayati Raj establishes a linkage between local leadership enjoying the confidence of local people and the government, and translates the policy of the government into action. Panchayati Raj conceived as development through democracy at the grassroots and aimed at power to the people, is the single most important institutional reform to transform rural India and involve people in their own development. The introduction of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has led to strengthening the Panchayati Raj system, and recognition of the importance of integration and convergence of various sectional inputs to bring about total development. Being among the 29 subjects listed under the eleventh schedule "Women and Development and Child Welfare" have gained status under the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The approach of the Eighth Five Year Plan clearly envisages that "substantial part of the responsibility for planning and implementation of economic and social development programmes should be transferred to elected representatives, institutions of local self government" (A.K.Gopal). The mandatory legislation enacted in all states throughout the country dealt with major aspects such as the Gram Sabha, tier-wise composition, one-third reservation of women, scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and backward classes in respect of seats and Chairpersons etc. However the holding of elections have been on different dates in different states. Tamil Nadu has been the last state to conduct panchayat elections (Oct.1996) and to implement local self-government (Nov.1996).

Decentralisation of Child Care Services

A heavily centralised and impersonal administration is unable to make services responsive to the varying needs of the community of women, children and girls in different situations.

Decentralisation of child care services can primarily help to make the programme more flexible and adapted to local needs of mothers and children, and in the maximum use of local resources, thus reducing overheads, leakage and waste, also enables community participation. With the advent of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and with the introduction of 33 percent reservation for women, there is greater likelihood of pressure for appreciation and understanding of, and interest, in childcare services as a programme intimately affecting the welfare of women, children and girls.

In the context of child care services, the term decentralisation, implies that the management of child care centers should be handed over not only to the elected local bodies or panchayats, but refers also to the involvement of diverse local groups such as mahila mandals, women's groups, educational institutions, trade unions, co-operatives, etc. Local bodies, elected members and other groups have to be empowered through training, orientation, providing resource materials, information and guidance.

For any programme to be successful and the gains to reach the grassroots, there is a definite need for collaboration among all the stakeholders at the grassroots. A partnership is essential between the elected panchayat presidents, community and the NGOs, parents and employers.

Past Efforts at Dcentralisation.

FORCES (Forum for Crèche and Child Care Services)

FORCES is committed to advocating and campaigning for the need for day care services for children (0-6 years) of the poor and underprivileged in India. Set up in 1989, FORCES was formed as a joint front of some women's organisations, women's wings of trade unions, child care institutions and research institutions committed to childcare and development. The forum submitted a Memorandum demanding a National Programme for child care services under the Minimum Needs Programme in the Eighth Five Year Plan, to the then Planning Minister (Mr.R.K.Hegde) in April 1989. In the Memorandum, the FORCES demanded immediate action by the government on (a) inclusion of child care services under the Minimum Needs Programme (b) setting up of special fund for crèche and child care services (c) allocation of adequate funds for the year 1990-91, to initiate preparatory work and mount a national campaign. It included, among several points, the need for developing structures at the grassroots through voluntary agencies, trade unions, co-operatives, panchayats, mahila mandals etc. to run the services. FORCES have been lobbying for decentralisation of childcare services at the national level (Appedix I).

TN-FORCES (Tamil Nadu Forum for Crèche and Child Care Services)

ACCESS, as the founder member of FORCES had taken steps to set up a state-level forum along the same lines as the national body. On 3rd January 1992 after a meeting with about 50 institutions, TN-FORCES was launched.

In the year 1992, TN-FORCES submitted a Memorandum on "Panchayati Raj and Child Care Services" to the government of Tamil Nadu (Appendix 2). TN-FORCES in their recommendations for decentralisation of effective child care services stated that the best way to improve and sustain child care services was to decentralise the management of services to the level of elected local bodies in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu, providing the necessary funds and including child care services in the core civic services. They further recommended for a sustained financing by setting up a state-level child care fund that could be accessed by the local bodies, ensure maintenance of specified nutritional norms and enhance quality, provide for local bodies to raise resources locally and provide training for both elected representatives and functionaries at all levels.

Following the elections (Oct.1996) and the implementation of the Panchayati Raj system (Nov.1996) a two-days national-level brainstorming meet was held on 24th -25th January, 1997 on developing and devising programmes and strategies for decentralisation, with focus on the strategies and action plan needed for the change. Participants from West Bengal, Delhi, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu attended the meet, the purpose of which was to promote a better understanding of a whole range of issues, including finance and administration, monitoring, evaluation and community participation. The outcome is available in the form of a report offering guidance on the process of decentralisation of child care services. Following the meet, a Memorandum was submitted by TN-FORCES to the Chairman of the State Finance Commission suggesting that in addition to devolving financial powers, sufficient resources should also be allocated to the local bodies to run the child care centres. (Appendix III). A fixed percentage of the panchayat funds could be allocated for a core fund for child care services. These recommendations have been forwarded to the government of Tamil Nadu. In 1999, TN-FORCES brought out a briefing document for legislators entitled "Tamil Natil Thai Sey Urimai-Oru Paarvai" - Tamil (Women and Child Rights in Tamil Nadu -An Overview) on laws and schemes in Tamil Nadu that enable the fulfillment of the rights of the young child. The document, which was prepared by ACCESS, has been widely circulated to MLAs and others.

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation

During the years 1991-93 an action-research programme on involvement of parents in child care services undertaken by Project ACCESS in villages of Kattankulathur block of the Chennai-

MGR district concluded that, though parents, especially women workers were articulate about their child care needs, there was little opportunity for them in the absence of properly constituted local bodies, to have these needs addressed effectively at the local level. During the year, 1994-95 (Swaminathan, 1994) Project ACCESS undertook the task of preparing a training module for elected Panchayati Raj presidents with special focus on issues relating to women and children. Prepared in collaboration with UNICEF, this module was intended to help elected representatives play an effective role in planning and decision making.

Earlier Activities with Panchayat Presidents

In support of TN-FORCES theme for 1997, *Decentralisation of child care services*, a one-day workshop was organised by MSSRF in collaboration with Gandhigram Trust for the elected women members of the Athoor panchayat union on 14th March, 1997 at Gandhigram. Out of the seventy seven members invited, (women ward members, and women Chairpersons of Gram Panchayats) fifty five participated. The objective was to dialogue on issues related to women and children and generate awareness among the elected members, and to find out through discussion to what extent panchayat presidents can help in improving the quality of child care services. The subjects were the multiple roles of women, identification of problems faced by women working in the unorganised sector, the importance and need for child care centres and the role of panchayat presidents in the betterment of child care services. The following major problems were identified by the participants

- ◆ child care and child care services

(lack of water facilities, toilet etc. at the child care centres. The elected members were requested to raise the quality of child care services by seeking community, especially parents' participation in sharing their land produce with the children at the centre)

- ◆ women and social problems

(atrocities committed against women such as violence, dowry harassment, problems faced at the workspot, problems of working women and the like were discussed. The need was felt to raise the issue of bias against women in all women's forums and meetings, and seek support of elected women representatives)

- ◆ women and health
(while discussing the need and importance of a good health care system, the elected members were asked to improve health care services at the child care centres)
- ◆ women and employment
(women's employment did not receive necessary recognition and women are still paid less than men for the same nature and amount of work done. No more is women's income supplementary but constitutes the main source in many of the households today. With this in mind, elected members were advised to include more women in government schemes at village level and increase job opportunities within the village for women.
- ◆ 29 subjects under the eleventh schedule of the Constitution
(the elected representatives were explained about their powers under the eleventh schedule where there is provision for the welfare of women and children. The elected members were concerned about getting women pattas, land on lease, and receipts all of which should be in their own names).

Some of the possible courses of action suggested on these issues at the local level were ;

- ◆ to meet the Rural Development Officer in order to know and clarify their powers
- ◆ to become aware of the financial allotment for women's programmes under the various government schemes so that job opportunities for women could be increased.
- ◆ to arrange monthly meetings and discuss the activities to be carried out
- ◆ to supervise crèches, balwadis and schools
- ◆ to create and establish rapport with (Directorate of Social Welfare) officers in order to improve quality of services of the various child care centres within their jurisdiction
- ◆ to create awareness on the problems of women through women's groups
- ◆ to reduce water scarcity by installing pump sets within the community using the funds already allocated and raising extra funds to meet the deficit.
- ◆ to concentrate on improving the health of the village people

Similar orientations for women councillors/ward members were organised in March, and June, 1997 at Chennai, Alandur and Tambaram municipalities and at Alwarkurichi at Tirunelveli. The purpose of the one-day meet in all the three places was to discuss with the councillors/ward members the multiple roles of women, problems of working women, the necessity for child care services and how they can help towards raising the quality of child care services. The outcome was the identification of possible courses of action at the local level, where the councillors/panchayat members volunteered to supervise the child care centres within their jurisdiction, establish good rapport with the Programme Officers to improve programme quality and create public awareness on the rights of the child.

Study materials were developed on the theme (English and Tamil) to be used by panchayat members, NGO personnel, councillors and women's groups.

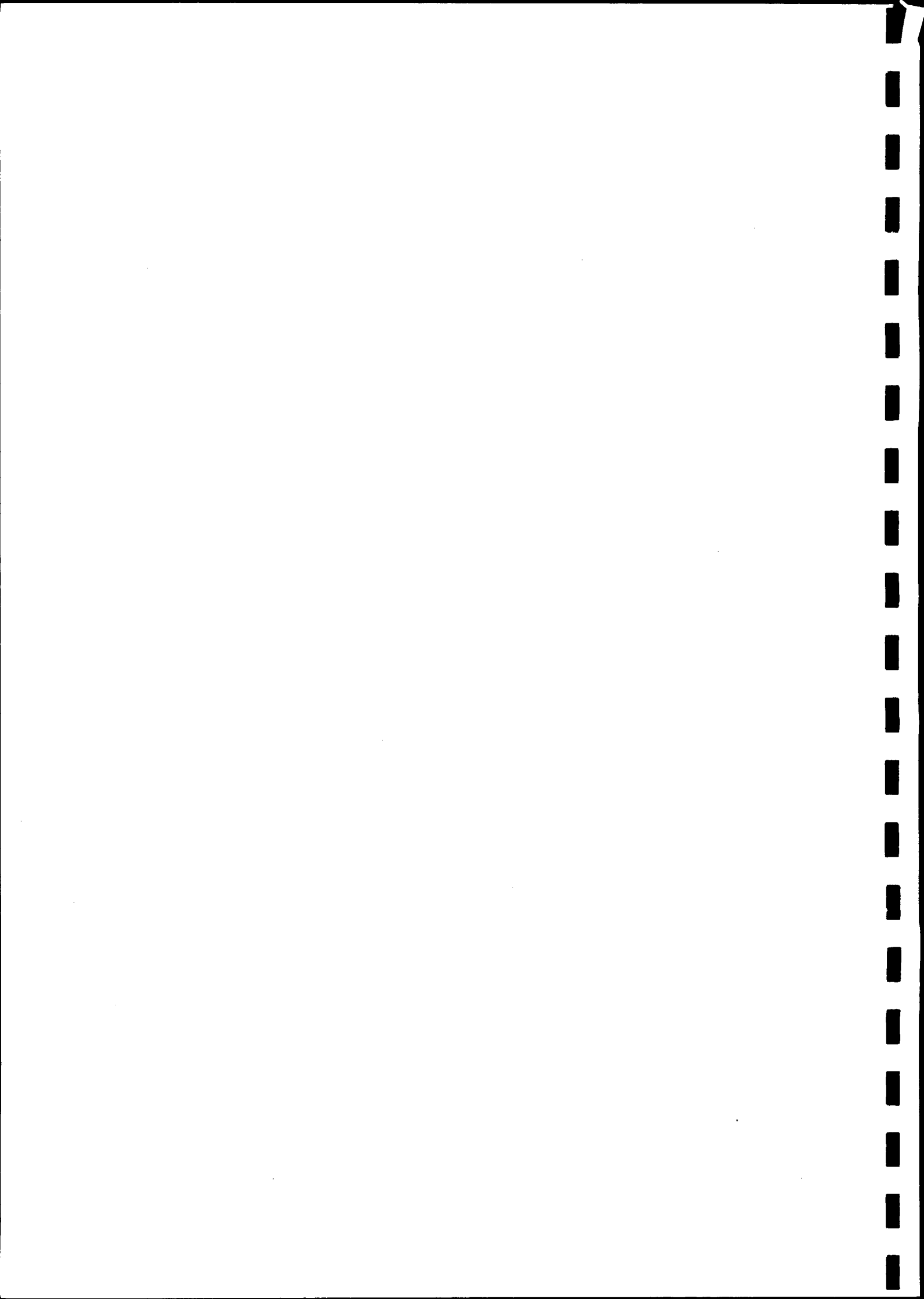
Rationale for the Study

With several years of working experience of trying to motivate the government on the issue of decentralisation of child care services, it was realised that there has to be a simultaneous demand from the bottom (people's level) to create pressure for change towards decentralisation. Hence it was decided to work directly with the elected panchayat presidents and ward members with two objectives in mind :

- ◆ to see how best, when oriented and motivated, panchayat presidents could actually involve themselves in the betterment of child care services within the existing constraints, and
- ◆ to create pressure/demand from below (people's level) for decentralisation of child care services.

With this purpose in mind, it was decided to initiate an action-research to develop, monitor and study the possibility of involving panchayat presidents in child care services.

PART - II



Panchayati Raj and Child Care Services

Part II - The Action-Research Study

The two members of TN-FORCES, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and Gandhigram Trust decided to undertake an action-research study in March 1999. The Athoor block of Dindigul district was chosen as the area of study for this small local-level study since one of the partnering organisations (Gandhigram Trust) was based at Athoor block, where accessibility was easy. The Trust has recorded years of familiarity and working with the panchayats (11 panchayats consisting of 29 villages) in earlier and present programmes.

Goal and Objectives

The goal: To help Panchayati Raj Institutions to recognise the importance of childcare services and motivate them to take up issues related to the delivery of childcare services.

The objectives were spelled out as follows:

- ◆ to empower the elected panchayat presidents through orientation, resource materials and information.
- ◆ to help the presidents initiate and develop local activities to improve the quality of child care services within the existing framework
- ◆ to help the presidents mobilise community support in their efforts towards betterment of child care services
- ◆ to facilitate interaction and co-operation between TINP Officials and local presidents with a view to improving child care services.
- ◆ to document these experiences for the purpose of advocacy

Methodology

The methodology was not pre-planned but evolved by the partners through a cycle of action-review-strategy-action over a period of one year. The process involved three phases. Each phase started with a workshop, and went on to a period of observation and concluded in review cum strategy meeting between the partners, which led to the next action-intervention and the next phase of the cycle. The entire process, which was a participatory one, emerged from the search for a strategy.

Phase -1

The Workshop

As a first step, a two-day workshop was conducted on 26th - 27th March, 1999 at Gandhigram Trust for the elected panchayat presidents (from eleven panchayats) and women ward members of Athoor block of Dindigul district. Two district council members, five panchayat presidents, twenty eight women ward members participated on the first day.

A participatory process was used through out the two days workshop. Resource persons were invited to handle sessions on both the days. Two different sets of objectives were formulated for each day.

The objectives on the first day were:

- ◆ to create awareness among the elected panchayat representatives on the importance of early childhood, mother and child health, girl child and the problems of women.
- ◆ to help them identify the lacunae in the implementation of the existing programmes at the various child care centres and to come out with appropriate solutions.

At the outset, Dr. G. Pankajam, Treasurer-cum-Associate Secretary of Gandhigram Trust welcomed the gathering and gave a brief introduction referring to the earlier one-day workshop conducted on 14th March, 1997 of which the present one was an outcome.

After some brief inputs from Ms.Mina Swaminathan (Hon. Director, Project ACCESS) and Ms.Rama Narayanan (Project Co-ordinator, Project ACCESS) on the importance of the earliest years of life, the multiple roles of women and the need for child care services, all the participants were divided into three groups to discuss, identify and find appropriate solutions to the problems at the child care centres existing within their area of jurisdiction and based on their community needs and resources. Almost all the groups expressed as problems the lack of basic facilities like water, toilet etc at the centres, the need for play materials, mats, the poor quality of food, teachers late comings, location and safety, and the exodus of children from balwadis to primary schools. The consolidation of points for discussion with the presidents for the next day, referred to three main sets of issues:

- ◆ problems at the centres (infrastructure)
- ◆ gaps in services (quality of services) and
- ◆ lack of community participation

Ms. C. Mounam (Project Co-ordinator, Society for Integrated Rural Development - SIRD) and Ms. Lucy Xavier (Women's Activist, Trainer) were other resource persons that day. While the former spoke on the issues of female foeticide and infanticide, the mushrooming of pre-diagnostic centres in the state and the intensity of the problem affecting the male-female ratio, the latter spoke on sexual harassment problems, violence against women and the suppression of women both at home and society.

On the second day a district council member, the block Chairperson, ten panchayat presidents and one panchayat vice-president and two ward members representing the eleven panchayats of the block participated in the planning meeting.

The objectives on the second day were:

- ◆ to create awareness among the presidents on the importance of early childhood care and child care services.
- ◆ to share with the presidents the problems and solutions identified by the previous day's participants
- ◆ to formulate appropriate plans for the betterment of the centres.

The session began with an introduction on the importance of early childhood development during which period 80% of the child's brain growth is completed. Dr. A. Suriakanthi (Director, Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension, Gandhigram Rural University) summed up the problems identified the previous day, highlighting the three areas of concern. Dr. G. Palanithurai (Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Development Administration, Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies, Gandhigram Rural University) spoke on mobilisation of financial resources, how funds could be drawn from various sources like M.L.A and M.P funds, other government and private sources and the need for formulation of schemes and submission to the appropriate departments. Dr. G. Pankajam (Gandhigram Trust) highlighted the need for people's participation in planning for the improvement of the balwadis. Possible ways to ensure people's participation could be to form mothers groups for taking care of children's health and in mobilising community resources.

As an outcome of the workshop, each of the eleven panchayat presidents, drew up a plan of action for the improvement of the centres. The steps to be taken could be broadly classified into:

- ◆ improvement in the infra-structure facilities at the child care centres
- ◆ improvement in the quality of services provided. They also appreciated the need to call for people's participation and support at every point.

Observation through Field Visits

For the next few months the partnering organisations were jointly involved in observing the process through regular field visits. At the beginning of this period, photographs of 25 child care centres in all the eleven panchayats were taken as a baseline documentation. It was felt that it could be compared with the situation later on to see how far improvements to infrastructure could be brought about by the panchayat presidents. The photographs depicted the condition of the centres before the intervention.

Over a period of six months it was found that presidents had taken initiatives to improve infrastructure facilities at the childcare centres with whatever funds they had.

Panchayat presidents had taken interest and had started visiting the centres quite often, keeping track of the activities happening there, which they had never done in the past.

Achievements

Achievements pertaining to improvements in infra-structural facilities		
S.No.	Tasks	No. of centres
1.	White washing of walls	1
2.	Painting of walls with pictures of animals and birds	3
3.	Provision of drinking water near the centre	4
4.	Provision of mats	2
5.	Provision of cooking utensils	1
6.	Provision of water jugs	1
7.	Cleaning of surroundings	3
8.	Renovation of centres	2
9.	Construction of new centre	1
10.	Shifting of centre to another building for children's safety (Danger of a tree falling on the roof)	1
11.	Repair of water taps	2
12.	Rectification of electrical connection	1
Achievements pertaining to improvements in quality of services		
13.	Provision of fruits and greens whenever possible	2
14.	Provision of play materials	2

In certain centres more than one task has been achieved.

It was observed that while the presidents were able to take up tasks involving one-time expenditure, they were unable to work upon improving the quality of child care services which demanded recurring expenditure, for which there was no provision in the budget. Community contribution like fruits, vegetables, greens, milk etc can help in increasing the nutritional value of the food served at the balwadis. Provision of play materials equally demand a regular attention. Community participation could not be enlisted for the programme which was perceived by the community as a government one for which there were sufficient funds. Community contribution seemed out of the question for the moment.

The panchayat presidents felt they had neither the authority in terms of powers nor resources, both material and non-material, which gave them the opportunity to improve child care services. When it was realised that the presidents were unable to move beyond this stage, the partnering organisations decided to have a review meeting. It was clear that the strategy had to be changed to suit existing realities.

Phase-2

Strategy Change

In a review meeting held on 19th November, 1999 the problems were reviewed and a new strategy worked out. It was decided that there was a need to facilitate links with TINP Programme Officers in order to strengthen the efforts taken to improve the centres and to give additional information on the following subjects:

- ◆ the powers, functions and responsibilities of the panchayat presidents as per the fourth schedule of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994 and in the eleventh schedule of the Constitution, with particular reference to child care services.
- ◆ ways and means to mobilise local financial resources

With the above mentioned objectives in mind a workshop was planned for the 7th December 1999 at Gandhigram Trust. Prior to the workshop a preliminary meeting was held with the TINP Programme Officers of the Dindigul district. The DPNO (District Programme Nutrition Officer), the CNI (Child Nutrition Instructress), the Zonal officer and five Supervisors participated.

The meeting was to orient the TINP Officers to the purpose of the workshop and to explore and initiate a participatory working process between the TINP Officials and panchayat presidents.

The Workshop

Seven elected panchayat presidents, twenty five ward members, two district council members and the block Chairperson and the TINP Programme Officers of Dindigul district participated in the workshop. The process of this workshop was different from the earlier one.

The major objectives were:

- ◆ to provide information on resource mobilisation
- ◆ to build linkages with TINP

The workshop started with eliciting responses from the presidents on the work during the last eight months, the problems faced and the strategy adopted to overcome the problems. This was followed by sharing of information by the two resource persons.

During the workshop Mr. S. Krishnamurthy (Retd. District Divisional Officer, Directorate of Rural Development - Tamil Nadu) explained the means to mobilise resources within the community.

The 29 subjects listed in the fourth schedule of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994 includes the topic "Women and Child Development" and provides scope for the panchayat presidents to draw on their powers to work for children, since this child component is very much embedded within the framework. But the funds allotted under "Women and Child Development" component are often utilised for fulfilling other tasks like laying of roads, construction of bridges etc. Very little importance is given to child care which is often taken for granted.

As per the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994 there is some scope for the local bodies to raise their own resources. Beyond the basic funding the rest should be raised locally.

In the short term, they can:

- ◆ avail central, state funds, area development funds, a part of the M.P and M.L.A funds and district Collector's funds.
- ◆ utilise the 8% funds allocated in the State Finance Commission for the panchayats

In the longer term, they can:

- ◆ can mobilise resources through the Village Level Committee
- ◆ utilise poromboke lands and barren lands for cultivation
- ◆ lease out the above mentioned lands

Other means of mobilising local funds could be through levying and collection of tax, donations from Lions and Rotary Clubs, other service organisations and philanthropists.

Panchayat presidents should demand their rights, plan according to the needs of the community, prioritise needs, and allocate funds for schemes. Since all child care centre buildings belong to the panchayat, it was the duty of the presidents to repair, maintain, provide water and toilet facilities for the centres. Moreover, for the construction of baby- friendly toilets sufficient schemes are already available with the government. Provisions are made in the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994 where section 110 E mentions about the construction of public toilets and section 111 K on community health, protection and entertainment. Such funds can be accessed by passing resolutions, then formulating schemes.

The District Programme Nutrition Officer, (DPNO) of TINP, Ms.P. Vasanthi explained the need and all possible ways of creating and establishing links with TINP.

The DPNO highlighted the following points:

- ◆ a child care centre should not be seen merely as a nutrition centre but a place which caters to the social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical needs of young child.
- ◆ the child care services are not only in terms of providing a balwadi for 3-5 year old children, but are expected to cater to the needs of mother and child from conception, starting with ante-natal care, childbirth and post-natal care
- ◆ the insufficient allotment of funds per child, per centre by the government in relation to the need. The need to increase this amount in order to improve the quality of child care services and the role panchayat presidents could play.

- ◆ the People's Participation Programme (PPP) already introduced in four panchayats. This new approach has not only enhanced community participation but has also provided the parents especially women, greater opportunity to plan, prioritise and implement schemes according to the needs of the centre and the community.

Some of the things the panchayat presidents could do were:

- ◆ to note if all pregnant women in their village are enrolled
- ◆ to contribute in purchasing of mats and play materials
- ◆ to offer food for children on special days
- ◆ to help balwadis find a place where it is required
- ◆ to check on the number of children being admitted into private schools.

Outcomes

At the end of the workshop, the panchayat presidents agreed

- ◆ to raise the issue of child care in the Gram Sabha meetings in order to pressurise the government for better services.
- ◆ to mobilise local material and financial resources within the existing framework since no allotment is made in the budget for the improvement of the child care services.
- ◆ to make resolutions and formulate schemes within the available funds.
- ◆ to form links with the TINP Officers for the improvement of child care services.

Since the panchayat presidents were convinced that the agenda for the Gram Sabha meet was to be set by the Collector, it was suggested by the DPNO to submit a petition to the Collector asking him to include child care services in the Gram Sabha agenda. Following this a petition was drafted and signed by the presidents. After a couple of weeks the petition was submitted to the Collector in person by the block Chairperson who took great personal interest and spoke to him on this issue. She tried twice to submit the petition when the Collector came on a visit to two different villages but was able to submit the petition in person to the Collector only on his third visit. The Collector promised to look into the matter.

It is noteworthy that none of the eleven panchayat presidents were involved in following-up with the petition given to the Collector since the block Chairperson from a higher tier of the system and with greater power, had already initiated the process.

Observation through Visits

Lessons learnt from observation in the next two months:

- ◆ the People's Participation Programme (PPP) could not be initiated in the six panchayats because neither side took the initiative.
- ◆ improvements in infrastructure facilities continued to a certain extent. One more centre was provided with drinking water tap from an overhead tank that was constructed newly for the purpose, and another renovated.
- ◆ panchayat presidents interest in visiting the centres and their concern for children increased.
- ◆ child care issue was not raised in the Gram Sabha meetings held on 26th January, 2000.

Gram Sabha is the best platform for people to express their views on any subject. In the year's first Gram Sabha meeting held in all the eleven panchayats monitored it was found that in almost all the panchayats, participation of women was less, and some were male-dominated. Meetings started with the usual note, with reading of the agenda that was quite broad-based, where presidents could discuss their plans, lay down schemes on paper and state the budget for the year 2000. In all the meetings the same items kept appearing. There was lots of discussion on basic facilities like water, roads, construction of bridges and bunds, lights, buses etc. There was hardly anything said on women and children's health, primary and elementary school education, leave alone pre-schools. Child care was not brought up in any of the panchayats except two where the presidents themselves explained the importance of child care.

During this period interviews with panchayat presidents were recorded on video by a student of Communication. These interviews threw light on their attitudes, experiences, efforts, difficulties, and proved a valuable source of information.

Phase-3

Strategy Change

A second formal review meeting was held on the 27th February, 2000 at MSSRF, where after review, it was decided to change the strategy again to suit field realities. It was realised that in order to create pressure from below it was necessary to activate the bottom rung of the democratic village institutions i.e people's organisations like the self-help groups, parents' groups madhar sangams, youth groups etc. raise the issue of child care services in the ensuing Gram Sabha meetings and other public forums. The need was also felt to facilitate and strengthen the link between TINP and panchayat presidents

It was decided that before the next Gram Sabha meeting on 1st May, 2000 Gandhigram Trust using its existing mechanism for contact would take up the issue of motivating some self-help groups and mothers' groups in the panchayats, and also facilitate meetings between the district TINP Programme Officers, Officers of related government department and the panchayat presidents.

Observation through Field Visits

Another meeting was organised on the 26th April, 2000 at the DPNO's office, Dindigul district in which TINP Officers and eight supervisors, two representatives of Gandhigram Trust and the five elected panchayat presidents participated. All the five presidents who participated expressed their willingness to initiate People's Participation Programme in each of their panchayat with the co-operation and support of the TINP Officers and staff.

The Gram Sabha meetings held on 1st May, 2000 were monitored in almost all the eleven panchayats. There was constant demand for basic facilities like water, electricity, roads etc. but child care was not raised by the people, many of whom were self-help group members, perhaps due to insufficient awareness on the importance of child care services. A longer period of motivation is obviously required.

Documentation

In order to share the entire process of this participatory action-research study with other stakeholders, it was decided to utilise the video documentation to make a video film for

advocacy. Additional material was gathered and views of some of the resource persons and key players recorded. The film, which is at 19-minutes duration entitled "Pennungal Oor Pillaigallai" - Tamil (Community Care for the Child) for orientation of various categories of stakeholders like panchayat presidents, ward members, NGO's academies, government officials, self-help groups, women's organisations and people's groups concerned with the documentation.

Advocacy Meet

On the 17th May 2000 an advocacy meet was organised at Gandhigram by the two partnering organisations. Participants included academicians, hospital staffs, extention workers, TINP officials, NGO personnel, the Chairperson and panchayat presidents and self-help groups leaders.

The purpose of the meet was:

- ◆ to orient and create awareness about the work done by the panchayat presidents.
- ◆ to motivate the self-help group leaders and other stakeholders.
- ◆ to create pressure and support for change among the stakeholder

During the discussion that followed several issues were raised. The question of child care and responsibility was discussed at length by the participants. Some of the participants strongly felt and expressed that child care should no more be seen as mother's responsibility, but that of the father's and the community as well. The various people's organisations in the community should identify breast-feeding mothers (in their groups) and provide them with the necessary support. On a larger level , these groups should create a popular demand for child care services in all Gram Sabha meetings.

Further, the focus of discussion shifted to the need for provision of facilities at the child care centres like drinking water, toilets etc. A few raised the point on improper maintenance of the centres. The discussion ended with a note on the need for co-operation among the teacher, parents and the panchahayt leaders.

Conclusion and Implications

This small participatory action-research study casts lights on the issues involved in decentralisation of child care services and points clearly to the type of actions needed in the future to further the cause. Some of the main conclusions and recommendations are:

- ◆ creation of demand from the bottom i.e grass roots, is essential. Unless there is pressure from the people, political parties and elected representatives government may not respond. To do this, it is necessary to work with coalitions like TN-FORCES which has been creating awareness state-wide through public hearings.
- ◆ development and institutionalisation of the links between existing child care services and local presidents (already initiated in one block)
- ◆ continuous lobbying with the state government to devolve appropriate powers and functions to the panchayat functionaries and government departments
- ◆ advocacy with all the stake holders, using available materials
- ◆ at another level, a study of the changed situation in Kerala, the only state where child care services have been handed over to the panchayats wholly. This would make it possible to look at both the strengths and weaknesses of decentralisation at the state-wide level and provide insights for all states.

It is only then that further progress can be made towards decentralisation of child care services, to which hopefully the first steps have been taken.

APPENDIX I

*Forum for Creche and Child
Care Services*

MEMORANDUM

(Submitted to the then Planning Minister,
Mr. R.K. Hegde on 5th March 1990)

It is half a century since the need for child care services for working women was recognized but national policy has still to be evolved. A plan for child care services as an essential support for women's participation in nation-building efforts was accepted by the National Planning Committee before Independence (1940); we regret that even 50 years later this is still a dream. 35 years later, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), while discussing the multiple roles played by women as home-makers, child rearers, and members of the labour force, suggested that provision be made for creches and nurseries. The Empowered Interminis-

terial Committee of the Government of India accepted this "in principle" as early as 1976.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) laid stress on the provision of support services, with special emphasis on child care services, a constant demand of women's organizations since 1975. Shram Shakti, the report of the National Commission on Women in the Unorganized Sector (1988) has also gone into the question in considerable depth and prepared proposals for a national network of child care services. More recently the National Front Election Manifesto has assured inclusion of child care in the minimum needs programmes as well as inclusion of the 'right to work' as a Fundamental Right in the Constitution.

Today the magnitude of the problem is greater than ever before. 15 crore women in families below the poverty line make up the female work force with 90% in the unorganized sector. They work long hours for low wages at the cost of their own and their children's health. As a result, the very survival and development of 4.5 crore young children below six are threatened by neglect and lack of essential care. Innumerable young girls are deprived of education because of the need to take care of younger siblings and carry out domestic chores.

Provision of Day Care as a support service for women becomes essential in order to:

- i) ensure equal opportunity to work for all women;
- ii) translate into reality the constitutional guarantees for the child under Article 39 (f); and
- iii) provide impetus to the enrollment and reduce dropout of girls from school, to achieve the objective of Article 45 of the Constitution.

However, very few children now receive such

- * The following organisations are members of the forum:
- All India Trade Union Congress (Women's Wing);
 - All India Women's Conference;
 - Bhartiya Adim Jati Sewak Sangh
 - Bhartiya Grameen Mahila Sangh
 - Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh;
 - Centre for Women's Development Studies;
 - Child-in-Need Institute;
 - Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU);
 - Family Planning Association of India;
 - Indian Council of Child Welfare;
 - Institute of Development Studies;
 - Mobile Creches;
 - Nari Samata Manch;
 - Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA);
 - Sewa Bharat;
 - SNDT Women's University;
 - Tata Institute of Social Sciences;
 - Voluntary Health Association of India;
 - YWCA of India.

care. The creches scheme of CSWB caters to a mere 2 1/2 lakh children. While statutory creches in the organized sector cater to less than 1/2 lakh. ICDS, with its wide outreach and high investment, does not offer day care for the hard pressed working mother. Nor does it relieve older girls to attend school. The absence of effective day care services in most parts of the country, compounds the problems of high infant mortality and high female illiteracy and leads to declining health status of a large proportion of the population. In 1989, the Forum for Child Care Services in India was formed as a joint front of some women's organizations, women's wings of trade unions and institutions committed to child care and development. The Forum submitted a memorandum demanding a National Programme for Creches and Child Care Services under the Minimum Needs Programme in the Eighth Five Year Plan to the then Planning Minister in April 1989.

Subsequent to the formation of the Forum, collaborative studies were undertaken in seven states to make an assessment of the existing services for child care and the need for these. Emerging from the studies there are recommendations for increasing their outreach, improving their content and quality so as to provide developmental—and not mere custodial—care; enhancing community participation in the setting up and functioning of child care services; and decentralization of the existing schemes, especially the government sponsored ones like the ICDS.

In this context, the Forum for Creches and Child Care Services demands immediate action by the Government on the following:

1. The inclusion of child care services under the Minimum Needs Programme.
2. The setting up of a Special Fund for creches

and child care services (see note enclosed).

3. The allocation of a minimum annual amount calculated as a fixed share of the GNP, for child care services, keeping in mind that, children below 6 constitute 18% of the population, and that day care workers must be paid at least minimum wages.
4. The allocation of adequate funds for the year 1990-91 to initiate preparatory work and mount a national campaign. This national campaign should include:
 - (a) expansion, upgradation and strengthening of all existing programmes at the field implementation level to meet the demands of developmental day care;
 - (b) creating public awareness and motivation;
 - (c) developing decentralized structures at the grassroots through voluntary agencies, trade unions, cooperatives, *panchayats*, *mahila mandals* etc. to run the services;
 - (d) developing the necessary training and support structures;
 - (e) promotion of flexible, innovative approaches.
5. Review and Amendment of existing labour laws to make child care services effective in both unorganized and organized sectors.
6. The setting up of an inter-ministerial group under the Planning Commission including the Departments of Agriculture, Industry, Labour, Education, Women and Child Development, Rural Development, Welfare, Works and Housing, Forests and others to work with the Forum in developing situation-specific and appropriate programmes of a diversified and flexible nature.

Annexure II

2. Extract from Memorandum submitted to Government of Tamil Nadu by TN-FORCES in 1992.

Decentralisation

The involvement of the community on a mass scale is essential if such a large scale and diversified programme is to succeed. It would be possible only with decentralised management and decision-making with accountability to the local community. The management of the child care centres which are able and willing to handle the job, for example, unions, voluntary agencies, educational institutions, social clubs, business houses, charitable trusts and other community-based organisations according to local circumstances. The State may provide the minimum shelter, food and workers' salaries, leaving it to the local management to raise additional resources to improve and develop the programme. Such a policy has already been visualised in the government directive to hand over the management of some ICDS projects to selected voluntary agencies.

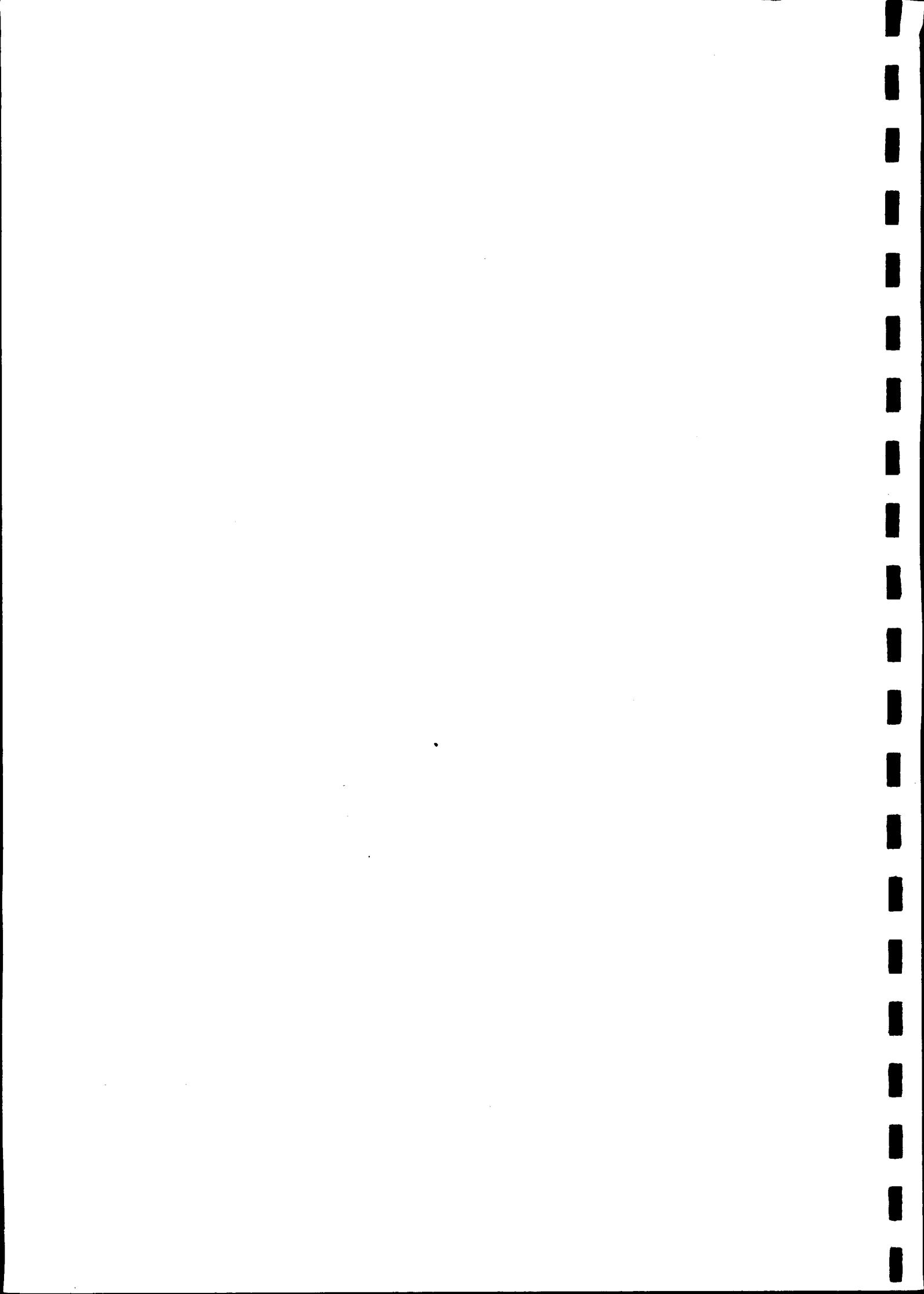
Special Child Care Fund

A special fund for crèches and child care should be set up by the government to finance the scheme. Contributions to this Fund may be from several sources, such as :

- a cess on all employment, regardless of the number and gender of workers employed
- welfare funds, labour welfare funds and other benefit funds
- insurance schemes, such as health insurance, LIC and ESI
- parents' contributions
- tax-exempt corporate and individual donations

Examples like the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra can offer useful lessons in this matter.

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Source: Negi, Elizabeth Francina, 1997 Decentralisation of Child Care Services-a dialogue Proceedings of the brainstorming session, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation- Chennai



Annexure III

A MEMORANDUM ON PANCHAYATI RAJ AND CHILD CARE SERVICES IN TAMIL NADU FROM TN-FORCES

TN-FORCES (Tamil Nadu Forum for Crèche and Child Care Services) is a non-political platform and loose network of organisations set up to advocate for the cause of the young child of the poorest sections of society. Its membership includes NGOs, child welfare and educational institutions, women's organisations, trade unions, professional associations, and academic and research institutions.

The Background

Child care services for young children 0-5 years are an essential social service:

- for the health, welfare, protection and development of young children who represent the future of the nation, especially the 6 crore children below the poverty line
- as a support service for the 9 crore working women, most of whom are in the unorganised sector and need support to handle their triple roles as producers, mothers and home-makers
- as a support service to enable girls, who are otherwise engaged in care of their younger siblings, to benefit from education, health, training and future employment.

Tamil Nadu is unique in the country in having a network of about 30,000 centres, providing almost universal coverage, through three linked schemes, namely ICDS, TINP and NMS. About 80 lakhs people, of whom about 22 lakhs are pre-school children, receive a free noon meal every day. In addition, Tamil Nadu has the largest number of crèches, balwadis etc. providing child care services in the voluntary sector.

Need for Decentralisation

While these services are spectacular in their scope and reach, and an impressive infrastructure has been built up over the years, the following problems plague these services as documented by numerous studies and evaluations.

- lack of flexibility and responsiveness to diverse and localised needs
- leakage and wastage of resources
- low quality of services
- lack of community participation
- lack of accountability
- not meeting parent and child needs
- lack of worker motivation

The advantages of a decentralised system of management of services of a permanent nature in which substantial resources are invested are as follows:

- flexible and adapted to local needs
- responsive to needs of mothers and children

- use of local resources and reduction of overheads
- community participation
- community monitoring
- local accountability
- reduction of leakage and waste
- access to human and material resources

Hence, TN-FORCES is of the view that the best way to improve and sustain these services is to hand them over to the local bodies. NGOs and professionals have been thinking along these lines for more than a decade. Therefore it is felt that efforts should be directed to:

- **Decentralise the management of child care services to the level of elected local bodies in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu**
- **Include child care services in core civic services**

Recommendations

For effective decentralisation of the child care services, it is felt that the following actions must be taken.

- Provide for the **transfer of all existing child care services** for 0 -6 years old children to the local bodies by providing the **necessary funds**.
- Provide for sustained financing by setting up a **State-level Child Care Fund** which can be accessed by local bodies. This may be a statutory fund with contributions from the corporate sector, tax-exempt donations, special cess, and a matching grant from the Government.
- Ensure maintenance of specified **nutritional norms** and enhance **quality**.
- Provide for elected local bodies to **raise resources locally** in whatever possible manner, to augment allocated resources, especially for quality improvement and flexibility.
- Provide for the **training** both of the elected representatives and functionaries at all levels on the various issues related to child care, working women and delivery of child care services, etc.

Modalities

Though the Government has not mentioned aspects of implementation, it is felt that the transfer of the child care services to the local bodies may have to be done in stages. As a first step, local committees including the elected representatives may be encouraged to monitor the services. The subsequent stages and implementation modalities may have to be gradually worked out. TN-FORCES would be most willing to collaborate in any initiative related to this.

Source: Negi, Elizabeth Francina, 1997, Decentralisation of Child Care Services- a dialogue Proceedings of the brainstorming session, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation Chennai

Annexure IV

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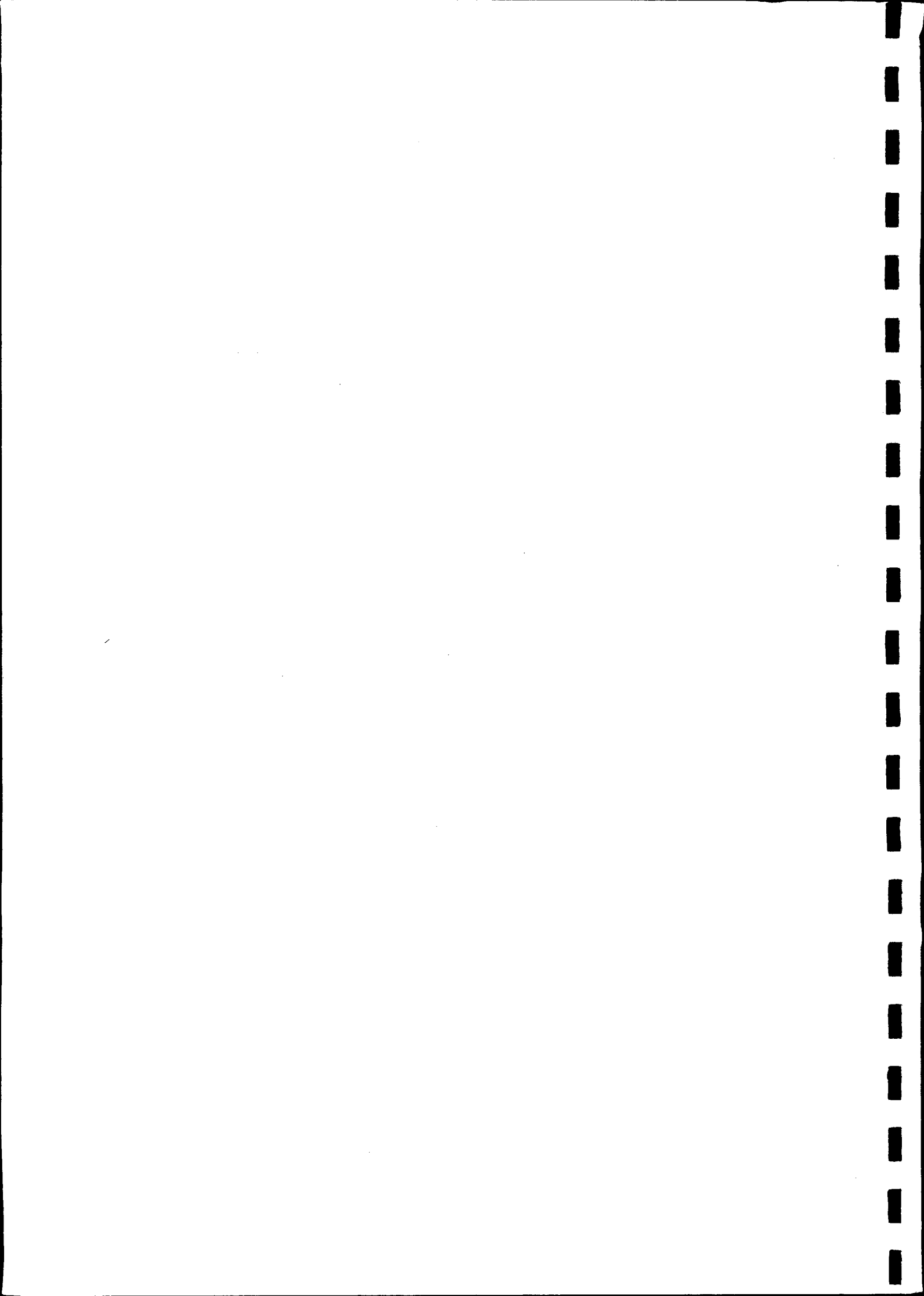
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