

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN ICDS AND SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK: A MODEL OF GOVERNMENT-NON-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

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Partnership is a common term used in the era of globalisation where the partners get benefit out of the tie-up. There are different forms of partnerships and different settings wherein partnership operates. Partnership under the present discussion is the one between an educational institution in the non-government sector and the central government sponsored scheme of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The partnership was experimented with the involvement of the students of the school of social work at the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences in providing social service under the ICDS.

### ICDS Scheme

The ICDS is a scheme introduced by the Government of India for early childhood care and development. It has had the challenging task of breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, low learning capacity and mortality among children in India. The expected beneficiaries of the scheme have been children up to the age of six years, pregnant and lactating mothers, and adolescent girls especially from the disadvantaged section of the society.

The objective of the main services (nutrition and health) under the ICDS is the holistic development of the children below six years. The supplementary nutritional service under the scheme provides food for healthy growth of the beneficiaries. The health services of the ICDS include health check up, immunisation, identification and treatment of *common childhood*

illnesses and minor ailments, and referral service. Other services under the ICDS scheme are preschool education and certain supportive services. Preschool education is provided to children in the age group of 3-6 years. The supportive services include safe drinking water, environmental sanitation, women empowerment and adult literacy.

A team of workers provides the services under the ICDS through the childcare centre called *anganwadi*. The team comprises of the *anganwadi* worker (who performs the key role in the delivery of the various services), the *anganwadi* helper, the supervisor and the child development project officer. The medical officer and para medical staff of the primary health centre provides the health services.

The *anganwadi* centre (AWC), located within the community, is the focal point for the delivery of all the services under the ICDS programme in an integrated manner to children and women. It is run by an *anganwadi* worker who is supported by a helper in the delivery of the services. It functions as a centre of the convergence of services for children and women, and also as a platform, where groups of women and mothers can come together with other frontline workers to share views and promote action for women and children.

### Participation of Schools of Social Work

The ICDS is an excellent social service programme wherein educational institutions can meaningfully participate through the student community. The association of the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences with the ICDS started in 1982 when the Middle Level Training Centre and the *Angwanwadi* Workers Training Centre were set up at the college for the training of the various functionaries of the ICDS scheme. Following this, the students of the college pursuing studies in social work have been actively involved in the ICDS at the grassroots.

The students have been adequately oriented to the ICDS scheme and its activities before they are actually involved in the activities at the grassroots. The topic of the ICDS forms part of the theoretical curriculum of the students of social work in the college. In order to further enhance their knowledge about the ICDS, a resource person from the ICDS project gives an orientation session to the students as well as faculty members before

they are on to the field. After giving a thorough training on the field level activities of the ICDS scheme, students are placed in the community for participating in the implementation of the activities related to women and children under the guidance of the ICDS personnel. The tasks to be given to the students are clearly defined. This joint venture helps these programmes to be result oriented.

### **Adoption of Anganwadi**

The ICDS scheme provides for the adoption of AWCs by non-government organisations. The adopting agency is expected to contribute to the programme through improved infrastructure facilities, mobilisation of resources, and innovative programmes. The Rajagiri College of Social Sciences has adopted AWC No.34 of the Edappally ICDS project in the vicinity of the college. This has provided the college better scope for getting the students involved in the programme. The first thing that the college did after adopting the centre for improving the quality of the services was to procure permanent premises for the centre which had been functioning in a rented building.

Apart from the regular activities, the centre organises other programmes in the community with the help of the social work students placed there. They include observance of special days and festivals, such as senior citizens' day, human rights day, Christmas and Onam (the regional festival). The centre is utilising the services of the students in conducting classes for mothers, adolescent girls and senior citizens. This has provided the students an excellent opportunity to practise the skills that they have learned in the classroom. The students mobilised materials like toys, picture charts, teaching aids etc. to make the centre well equipped. They have also been involved in introducing innovative projects like rainwater harvesting and income generating activities for women (like catering, tailoring etc). Adoption of the AWC by the college and involvement of the students have not only helped better delivery of the ICDS services to children and women, but also transformed it into a community centre facilitating holistic development of the community.

### **FieldWork**

From the point of view of professional training in social work, the partnership with the ICDS has provided the students good opportunities in fieldwork. Fieldwork is an integral part of social work training as it envisages field level practice of the theoretical input gained from the classroom. Social work education, confined to classroom sessions, is grossly incomplete. Placement of students in the community for fieldwork provides them the setting of a social laboratory where they can apply whatever theoretical knowledge they have gained. Students placed in the AWC, have got the opportunity to practise the various methods of social work to develop their professional skills, such as working with individual and group, resource mobilisation, organisation of community based activities etc.

#### *Working with Individual, Group and Community*

Students have had good opportunities for working with individuals in the AWC. They have identified adolescent girls with problems through home visits and counselling classes arranged in the project area. In this context, they have addressed problems such as school dropout, anti-social behaviour, drug addiction and alcoholism, depression, suicidal tendency etc. Serious cases were referred to the Family Counselling Centre of the Rajagiri College.

With regard to the practice of group work, students placed in the AWC have got the opportunity to work with the self-help groups of women formed for women empowerment under the programme of the *Kudumbasree*, the poverty alleviation scheme of the state government of Kerala. Students have been involved in organising the self-help groups, creating awareness among women, identifying income generating activities, constructing biogas plants, producing vermin compost etc. which help women to become self reliant.

#### *Resource Mobilisation*

Although the ICDS as a major scheme of the central government is spread throughout the state of Kerala, the scheme has its own limitations with regard to resources for improving its various activities. So the community should come forward to make the AWC an effective centre of community

service. For organising innovative programmes, resources have to be mobilised from the community in addition to what is provided by the government. Students placed in the AWC have got involved in mobilising resources, such as funds, materials and human power. This has been a good learning experience for them. During the year 2007 the students collected toys from the nearby public schools and donated them to the newly started AWCs of the Edappally ICDS project. They have also been involved in setting up library in those centres.

### *Field Action Programme*

The students have organised field action programmes regularly in collaboration with the nearby ICDS projects. During the year 2006-2007 a two-day residential campaign was organised for girls of the adolescent clubs of the Edappally ICDS project under the initiative of the students. About one hundred girls participated in the programme held on 31 July and 1 August 2006. Awareness classes related to maintaining healthy body and mind, yoga, skill based training, picnic, campfire etc. were part of the programme. It was a fruitful experience for both the participants and the students. They reported that they learned a lot from the group living.

Similarly a *kumari sangamam* (adolescent girls' meet) was organised for a group of adolescent girls under the leadership of the students in collaboration with the Kalamassery municipality and the Edappally ICDS project during the last two years. Awareness classes by experts, nutrition assessment, group activities and assessment of adolescent club performance were part of the programme. According to the participants it was a memorable event in their life.

Programmes have been organised by the students for the senior citizens on the first of October consecutively for three years under the auspices of the ICDS project. The objective of this programme has been to throw light on the various issues of ageing, to create awareness on how to age gracefully and to identify areas wherein intervention of social work colleges are needed. Awareness classes, open discussions, games, oath taking of both the senior citizens and the younger generation, and gift distribution were part of the programme.

Another innovative programme that attracted the attention of the public and media was *Poothumbikal* organised for the pre-school children of the various ICDS projects of the area on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2007 at the Children's Park, Ernakulam. The objective of this programme was to encourage creativity in children and develop the hidden talents in them. The programme was conducted with active participation of the students who are also members of the Rotaract Club.

Active participation in such programmes has helped the students acquire the skills in organising various awareness programmes in the community. Students have been involved in organising workshops, seminars and other activities on the occasion of women's day, nutrition week, breast feeding week, world AIDS day, day of the disabled, human rights day etc. Exhibitions and rallies have been organised in which banners, placards and posters were displayed. Discussions and debates have been initiated on burning issues related to women and children like female foeticide, HIV/AIDS, family counselling, environmental pollution etc.

### **Other Learning Experiences**

Promotion of research in the field of the ICDS has been another outcome of the association of students with the ICDS. Every year two or three students of social work select topics related to women and children for their dissertations. They could collect data easily from the AWCs. Research topics are usually related to various services delivered through the ICDS scheme, job responsibility and job satisfaction of various functionaries of the ICDS, situation analysis of the adolescent girls, senior citizens etc.

Another learning experience of the students placed with the ICDS for fieldwork has been in documentation. Students have prepared audio and video documentaries in the regional language for broadcast and telecast under the guidance of the faculty. There is scope for expanding the student participation in documentation for the preparation of newsletters, children's magazines and media coverage on special programmes of the ICDS.

### **Benefits of the Partnership**

The partnership between the students of the social work college and the ICDS functionaries was proved to be mutually benefiting. The

experiment has generated awareness among the students about the national level child welfare programme and its functioning. It has given the students an opportunity to practise the theories they have learned and also to gain through their own observation an insight into the functioning of the ICDS programme at the grassroots level. Their association with the ICDS has helped the students refine their skills in conducting seminars, organising meetings and taking classes for various sections of the community. It has also helped them develop skills in mobilising community resources required for organising innovative programmes.

The partnership has been beneficial to the ICDS programme in so far as the professional support provided by the college has contributed to the improvement in the quality of the services of the AWCs. It has helped the ICDS programme elicit better community participation for its sustainability. It has also been helpful to initiate innovative activities in the implementation of the programme. The research studies and documentation undertaken by the students have also benefited the scheme.

### **Experience of Vimala College**

Beside the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, there are other educational institutions of social work in Kerala that are engaged in the partnership with the ICDS. For instance, the Vimala College, Trissur has come up with innovative practices in carrying on the partnership. The students of social work in Vimala College are regularly placed with various ICDS projects for their concurrent field level training. They organise different activities for AWCs, such as the adolescents' clubs, awareness classes, health check-ups etc. The special activities in which the students have been involved include preparation of the children's story book called *Kaliveedu*, research studies on issues related to children and adolescents, awareness programme on child rights, demonstration on preparing nutritious food, competitions for children, conducting mothers' meetings and programmes for the elderly, and mobilisation of additional resources for improving the functioning of the AWCs. A rural camp of the students with the active support of the ICDS project was organised, which reflected a unique form of partnership with mutual benefit. Their innovative project titled *Thanal* conducted in collaboration with Ollukkara Block Panchayath for the welfare of the senior citizens needs special mention.

### **Conclusion**

The AWCs and schools of social work are 'mutual benefit institutions'. AWCs are an excellent platform for social work students to apply their theoretical knowledge and develop their professional skills and schools of social work have the resources to help the AWCs function more effectively. So the schools of social work and AWCs should mutually collaborate and co-operate in order to make the best use of the wide spectrum of activities available under the wings of the ICDS and social work institutions. This calls for awareness on the part of the government and educational institutions - the authorities, teachers and students - as well as the desire in them to participate in this joint venture. It is important that the focus of the partnership is on a mutually beneficial relationship. Effective partnership will find ways and means to meet challenging tasks and conflicting situations. There is enough scope for the involvement of medical colleges in improving the quality of the health services provided through the AWCs. The long-term sustainability of the ICDS projects depends greatly on community participation, and the educational institutions especially the schools of social work can play an important role to ensure better results from the scheme.