EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, launched in 1975, is a flagship Scheme of the Government of India (GoI), which provides nutritional meals, preschool education, primary health care, immunisation, health check-ups and referral services to the children up to the age of six years, Pregnant and Lactating Mothers (P&LMs) aged 15-45 years and Adolescent Girls (AGs) aged 11-18 years.

In the State of Gujarat, the Scheme is being implemented by the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department through a network of 53,029 Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), which serve an estimated population of 5.53 crore people, as of March 2023.

Audit Framework

A Performance Audit of "Implementation of Integrated Child Development Services Scheme" for the period from 2015-16 to 2022-23 was conducted to assess whether:

- All targeted beneficiaries were covered and provided with qualitative services under the Scheme;
- Infrastructure was adequate for the effective delivery of services; and
- Funds were used efficiently and the monitoring and evaluation mechanism was in place.

The Performance Audit involved a thorough review of documents within the WCD Department, Health and Family Welfare Department and the Commissionerate of the WCD Department. Additionally, the audit covered eight Districts out of a total of 33. It included interactions with 10 District Programme Officers (DPOs) from the eight selected Districts, 22 Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) from specific Blocks and 99 AWCs from 22 Blocks at the grassroots level.

The Performance Audit Report is structured into four Chapters as under:

Chapter – I: Introduction

Chapter – II: Coverage and Service Delivery

Chapter – III: Adequacy of Infrastructure Facilities

Chapter – IV: Resource Management and Governance

Audit Findings and Recommendations

Chapter – II: Coverage and Service Delivery

This Chapter focuses on the delivery and coverage of key components within the ICDS Scheme. The findings reveal a mixture of successes and challenges across the different programme areas, highlighting the need for sustained efforts to improve service delivery and outcomes for the beneficiaries. The key observations from the assessment are as follows:

- *AWC Shortage and Coverage*: Audit identified a shortage of 16,045 AWCs in the State. Further, the average number of enrolled children (zero to six years of age) from 2015-16 to 2022-23 was 40.34 lakh against the 77.77 lakh children as per Census 2011.
- Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP): Among the 4.63 crore beneficiaries enrolled under the SNP, 3.99 crore (86 per cent) received the benefits of the SNP.
- *Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):* The ECCE programme fell short in providing preschool education (PSE) to 18.79 *per cent* of children aged from three to six years enrolled in AWCs during the period from 2015 to 2023.
- Nutrition and Health Education (NHE): The shortfall in household visits increased by 16 per cent (32.93 to 48.76) during the period from 2015-16 to 2020-21. However, the department picked it up well and showed significant improvement in reducing the shortfall to 14.76 per cent in 2021-22 and further to 5.38 per cent in 2022-23.
- *Immunisation Programme:* The State achieved immunisation for 94 *per cent* of the targeted number of children aged up to one year under the Universal Immunisation Programme.
- Infant and Child Health: The percentage of low-birth-weight infants decreased from 12.33 per cent (2017-18) to 11.63 per cent in 2022-23. However, the department is yet to achieve the target of reducing the proportion of low birth-weight newborns by two per cent per annum as per the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) guidelines, 2017.
- Under-registration of Pregnant Women (PW) and inadequate antenatal and postnatal services: The coverage of Antenatal Check-ups/Care (ANC) / Postnatal Check-ups/Care (PNC), immunisation, and administration of IFA tablets for Pregnant and Lactating Mothers (P&LMs) was notably insufficient from 2015 to 2023 when compared to the total P&LMs registered with the Health Department.

Chapter – III: Adequacy of Infrastructure Facilities

This Chapter assesses the adequacy of AWCs buildings and essential infrastructure within the department. The assessment highlights significant challenges in terms of AWCs' infrastructure, amenities and equipment, which have implications for the overall quality of services delivered under the ICDS Scheme. Key observations from the assessment are as follows:

 AWC Building Suitability: Among the total 53,029 AWCs in the State, 3,381 were operating from temporary structures and 30 were located in open spaces. Additionally, 8,452 AWCs had dilapidated buildings, indicating that the WCD Department is yet to ensure safe and secure pukka AWC buildings for service delivery under the Scheme. None of the AWCs, including those built between 2015 and 2023, met the specified requirement of a covered area of 600 square feet per 30 children, leading to overcrowding.

- Basic Amenities: In the State 1,299 AWCs (2.45 per cent) had no toilets, and 1,032 AWCs (1.95 per cent) lacked drinking water facilities. Additionally, in 2019-20, the WCD Department released grants of ₹200.13 lakh to 11 districts for the construction of ramps with railings for easy accessibility for children with disabilities at 807 AWCs, of which only 220 AWCs (27.26 per cent) had constructed ramp facilities (as of September 2024).
- Infrastructure Shortages: During visits to 99 selected AWCs, it was observed that cooking and serving utensils, storage facilities for Take-Home Ration (THR) packets, growth measurement devices and medicine kits were lacking. Furthermore, 6,709 water purifiers costing ₹382.29 lakh were unused due to inadequate infrastructure for water and electricity connections.
- Contamination and Pest Control: Inadequate storage facilities in several AWCs resulted in contamination of Take-Home Ration packets by rodents in 11 AWCs. Inefficient pest control measures compounded this issue.

Chapter – IV: Resource Management and Governance

This Chapter assesses the efficiency of fund utilisation and manpower allocation for the implementation of the ICDS Scheme. It also evaluates the functionality of monitoring and control systems at various administrative levels. The audit findings reveal several significant issues, which have implications for the overall effectiveness of the Scheme in delivering crucial services to beneficiaries:

- Unspent Grants: In seven of eight selected Districts and 12 out of 22 selected Blocks, a substantial amount of ₹242.39 crore remained unspent as of March 2023. These funds were held in the Personal Ledger Accounts of District Development Officers and Taluka Development Officers. These unutilised funds were not factored into the budget preparation by the WCD Department.
- Inaccurate Utilisation Certificates: The WCD Department submitted inaccurate Utilisation Certificates (UCs) to the GoI. Over the period of 2015-19, grants worth ₹69.73 crore were parked but shown as spent in the UCs provided to the GoI. As of March 2023, unspent grants of ₹5.05 crore remained parked with the Department.
- Human Resource Shortage: Shortage of human resources was identified, particularly within Blocks. Notably, 56.70 per cent of CDPOs positions and 14.35 per cent of Lady Supervisor positions were vacant.

This shortage adversely affected the effective functioning of the ICDS Scheme.

- Implementation of New Insurance Schemes: The Department is yet to switch over (from 30000 and 75000) to the new insurance schemes *i.e.* Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) offering enhanced benefits (two lakh) to Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) of the State despite GoI notification in July 2018.
- Training Shortage: There was a shortage in providing Job/Orientation/Refresher Training to key personnels. Specifically, 17.04 per cent of Lady Supervisors, 29.30 per cent of AWWs and 33.96 per cent of AWHs did not receive the Refresher training.

Best practices: In January 2020, the WCD Department introduced an online system to monitor the supply of THR from Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Limited to AWCs. This real-time mechanism ensures timely deliveries, prevents misuse, and involves OTP verification by AWWs to streamline distribution.

The Chapters of the Report contain following Recommendations:

- 1. The State Government may conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current AWC network, and develop a strategic plan that outlines clear targets for establishing new AWCs and upgrading existing ones, along with timelines and resource allocation.
- 2. The State Government may launch targeted awareness campaigns to inform potential beneficiaries about the SN Programme, its benefits and use a mix of traditional and modern communication channels, including community meetings, local media, mobile apps and social media, etc. to reach a wider audience.
- 3. The State Government may ensure annual procurement of PSE kits based on the number of AWCs, expected students' enrollments and historical demand to prevent last-minute rushes.
- 4. The State Government may ensure better integration of target groups i.e. P&LMs, Adolescent Girls and Children with the Health Department to provide essential services of ICDS Scheme.
- 5. Steps may be taken to shift the AWCs running in open spaces to community buildings/rented premises. An assessment with respect to basic infrastructure facilities in the AWCs may be carried out and corrective actions may be taken in case of deficiencies.
- 6. The Department may evaluate the basic infrastructure amenities available within AWCs and implement necessary measures for improvement.
- 7. The State Government may ensure submission of Utilisation Certificates in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant release orders of the GoI, so as to safeguard financial integrity, accountability, and transparency in the allocation and use of public funds.

- 8. The State Government may conduct a comprehensive assessment of the required manpower based on the workload, population, and specific needs of each region. This assessment will help in identification of the critical areas where additional manpower is needed and enhance the overall delivery of the ICDS Services.
- 9. The State Government needs to strengthen its inspection and monitoring mechanisms to enable timely interventions and elevate the quality and effectiveness of the services rendered under the ICDS Scheme.