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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Just Rs 4/day to feed a poor kid?

Himanshi Dhawan, TNN, Jan 31, 2011, 04:22am IST

NEW DELHI: **Inflation** has made the fight against malnutrition harder. In a country where 46% of the country's children below three years are underweight and inflation has spiralled to above 15%, a meagre allocation of Rs 4 per day to feed a child is a mockery of the food programme. Small wonder then that states have demanded an increase in allocation and linking the government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) with consumer price index.

On paper, the 36-year-old **ICDS** programme is targeted at about 7.3 crore children between 0-6 years who are required to be given between 500-600 kilo calories a day with a spending of Rs 4-Rs 6. However, the government's own study has said that only 31.1% of the intended children receive supplementary nutrition and that no significant difference has been found in the nutritional status between children who have been beneficiaries of the scheme or otherwise.

Women and child development (WCD) minister **Krishna Tirath** said, "We are concerned about providing adequate nutrition and have asked for an increase in spending on supplementary nutrition." The **ministry** has estimated that a 15% increase or about Rs 350 crore would be required to bring ICDS back on track.

The **ministry's** data says states including Assam, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and Bihar have not been able to give supplementary nutrition regularly due to rise in food prices while Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Puducherry, UP, Rajasthan and Maharashtra are giving fewer calories than prescribed under nutrition norms. Take-home rations have not been distributed for over nine months in Uttarakhand while morning snacks are not being given by Puducherry, West Bengal, Bihar, Chandigarh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

People's Union of Civil Liberties general secretary Kavita Shrivastava said, "The situation is grim and the per child spending on nutrition must be raised." She added that the government lacked commitment to implement the **Supreme Court** order to provide hot cooked meals and locally produced take-home rations to children.

Right to Food campaigner Arun Gupta said that in principle, it would be useful to link supplementary nutrition programme with the price index instead of interim revisions if the government was serious about improving malnutrition and mortality indices.

A recent meeting of the Prime Minister's Nutrition Council had underlined the growing problem asking the ministry to concentrate on nutritional demands of children below two years. However, with poor funding and increasing demands, giving nutritious food to every child is a mammoth task.

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