

Nourishing India's Tribal Children

The nutrition situation of children
of India's scheduled tribes





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Chhattisgarh

Partnership with local civil society organization improves access to nutrition services in regions affected by civil strife



Chhattisgarh

**Food and supervised care for tribal children
in community-managed crèches**

Chhattisgarh is home to 25.5 million people. Three quarters of its population reside in rural areas with tribal communities comprising 37% of the population within these areas. Seven of its 27 districts have over 50% tribal population. One such district is Surguja, which is 90% rural and forested with a population of 1.9 million, 55% of whom live in tribal communities. Most of them (90%) depend on agriculture, collection and sale of forest produce and manual labour. Women are also engaged in work outside the home, resulting in long meal gaps for the child left back home due to lack of on-site crèches.

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) – India’s flagship nutrition programme – provides take-home rations to children aged 6-36 months. However, poor information and time constraints to cook the take-home rations at home is a problem. To address this problem, in 2012, the district administration of Surguja partnered with the gram panchayat (local self-government) and State Health Systems Resource Centre (an autonomous body of the Department of Health and Family Welfare) to start community-managed crèches in the district for children aged 6-36 months to provide two hot cooked meals daily to the children as well as pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers of infants aged 0-6 months.

Mothers join hands to run crèches

Locally called *fulwaris*, the formation and functioning of these community crèches rest on community participation. They are operationalized only in those habitations where parents/mothers agree to run it by contributing their time. Habitations with poorer communities are prioritized first. The community takes its decision over two to three habitation-level meetings facilitated by State Health System Resource Centre’s trainers and community volunteers called *mitanins*. The community also decides the place for setting up the *fulwari*, which is usually part of a house of a resident, voluntarily given for this purpose.

Chhattisgarh

Total population*	25.5 million
Tribal population*	7.8 million
Stunted tribal children (rural) aged under five years**, %	52.9%
Severely stunted tribal children (rural) aged under five years**, %	28.9%
Tribal children (rural) below poverty line#, %	54.7%

Source: *Census of India 2011;
**Study sample; #NSSO 2004-2005

Fulwaris are manned and managed by a group of mothers whose children attend the crèche, supported by the *mitanin*, who plays a crucial role in bringing the group of mothers together. Where the community agrees, gram panchayat representatives and community pass a resolution and send a demand note to the block panchayat, which is forwarded to the district panchayat for approval. The district panchayat provides an average fund of INR50,000 (US\$850) per annum per habitation to run the *fulwari* (assuming an average of 10 children in the age group 6 months to 3 years at INR6 (US\$0.10) per child per day and three pregnant/breastfeeding women at INR15 (US\$0.25) per woman per day per *fulwari*).

The grant is given to the gram panchayat, which in turn issues it to the mothers’ group in instalments through its village health, nutrition and sanitation committee. At least 80% of the grant in the first year are meant to be utilized to provide wholesome hot cooked food to children. The rest is utilized to equip the *fulwari* with essential utensils, toys, mosquito nets, durries, etc. The district panchayat pools and utilizes flexi-funds from various sources for *fulwaris* received from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, state government and corporations (as a part of corporate social responsibility).

There is no provision for a paid worker in the *fulwari*. The groups of mothers form a

three-member executive committee, which decides the timing, duty chart and menus, and maintains expenditure and records of the centre. The menu includes pounded rice, pulses, vegetables and oil with egg provided four days a week. In addition, the ICDS take-home ration is also cooked and fed to the children in the *fulwari* as a mid-morning snack. On rotation two mothers volunteer each day to take care of children at the *fulwari* for 6-7 hours, have meals there and let other mothers go to work while leaving their 6-month to 3-year-old children there.

The groups of mothers attending the *fulwari* are encouraged to engage in collective savings activities, and poultry rearing and vegetable gardening so that they can save their grant money, make a profit and the *fulwari* can produce diverse foods. Twice a month, counselling and demonstration meetings are also held with all mothers. Children are monitored for morbidities and referred by the *mitanin* to a nearby health centre.

Scale up based on positive results

Presently, there are 300 *fulwaris* benefiting 3,700 children and 650 pregnant women in Surguja district. Surveys conducted in February 2013 (by UNICEF) and August 2013 (by independent academic institutions) show that *fulwari* habitations started with higher proportions of underweight children (45%) compared to non-*fulwari* habitations (43%). But within 4-6 months of intervention, the proportion was the same at 43%.

Between February and August 2013, mean weight gain among children aged 6-23 months was 0.5 to 1.0 kg more for *fulwari* than non-*fulwari* habitations. Based on these encouraging results, in 2013-2014, the state government extended *fulwaris* to all 85 tribal blocks of the state. Programme reports show that 2,000 of the 2,850 sanctioned *fulwaris* were functional by December 2013.