Spare a thought for our kids

Let our children, including those at the margins of territory, identity, services, social and economic interventions, find themselves future-ready.

The pandemic-induced lockdown witnessed a rise in vulnerability of anganwadi and ASHAs/Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) working as they emerged to be the first line of defence in the crisis. However, the ASHAs’ report notes, they are otherwise marginalized — seen as a professional cadre, trained as part-time workers, paid well below the minimum wages in most States. There is a pressing need for their critical role in the children’s ecosystem to be recognized, acknowledged, and be their remuneration and incentives increased.

The professionalization of this service will also enable adequate training for these workers and can strengthen the Early Child Care and Education (ECC) component, which remains a weak focus of the NCM.

All children in the age of three to six should have a right to quality ECE, irrespective of whether they are located in anganwadi centres, pre-primary sections of Government, private schools, or any other pre-school centres.

For the country, prioritizing ECD can translate into fulfilling of Sustainable Development Goals and its international commitments towards child rights. While data on multiple dimensions of child well-being has facilitated the indexing process and a more accurate insight in certain areas, the budgetary allocations need to reflect the current situation, undernutrition, lack of nutritional intake, and underestimation of services to the needs of children.

The per child expenditure in the country for 2018-19 was about ₹31.25 in ECD. This must be enhanced to ₹350 billion annually to cover funding gaps and ensure holistic child development services.

Coronavirus has significantly altered the world we thought of, our work, and our very support systems. It has taught us lessons, tragic ones at that.

Yet, it is in this moment that we recognize the deprivation, neglect, and denial that marginalizes vulnerable groups, including children, to essential services. Let our children, including those at the margins of territory, identity, services, and social and economic interventions, find themselves future-ready for the future.

This article is a conversation starter on child care and an early childhood development activity.

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