

## General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

### Making Anganwadi Centres Smart

#### Anganwadi centres (AWCs) in India

- According to government data, the country has 13.77 lakh AWCs.
- Anganwadi centres deliver a bundle of services such as supplementary nutrition, pre-schooling, non-formal education, health check-ups, immunisation, referral services and nutritional education.
- These centres have expanded their reach, but they need to play a much larger role in anchoring community development.

#### Status of Anganwadi Centres

- AWCs do not seem to provide the environment that encourages parents to leave children at these centres.
- Only a limited number of AWCs have facilities like creche, and good quality recreational and learning facilities for pre-school education.
- Not much has been done to improve the career prospects and service conditions of anganwadi workers (AWWs).
- Kerala, Telangana and Tamil Nadu are amongst the states that have done relatively better in this respect.

#### Government Efforts

- The Centre's **POSHAN Abhiyaan** has taken important steps towards building capacities of AWWs.
- AWWs have been provided with smartphones and their supervisors with tablets, under the government schemes.
- Apps on these devices track the distribution of take-home rations and supplementary nutrition services.
- In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, anganwadi centres have been geotagged to improve service delivery.
- Gujarat has digitised the supply chain of take-home rations and real-time data is being used to minimise stockouts at the anganwadi centres.
- The Centre has acknowledged the need to improve anganwadi centres. Its **Saksham Anganwadi Scheme** aims to upgrade 2.5 lakh such centres across the country.

#### Anganwadi centres (AWCs) for the delivery of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme

- The economic fallout of COVID-19 makes the necessity of quality public welfare services more pressing than ever.
- Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme caters to the nutrition, health and pre-education needs of children till six years of age as well as the health and nutrition of women and adolescent girls is one such scheme.
- Recent reports have shown gaps in the utilisation of services.
- ICDS beneficiaries do register for services but because the anganwadis lack adequate facilities, they turn to paid options.
- Privately-run centres come at a price, hitting low-income families the hardest.
- Anganwadi centres could become agents of improved delivery of ICDS's services.
- **Infrastructure development and capacity building of the anganwadi** remains the key to improving the programme.
- Effective implementation of the ICDS programme rests heavily on the combined efforts of the anganwadi workers (AWWs), ASHAs and ANMs.

- Technology can also be used for augmenting the programme's quality.
- States have much to learn from each other's experiences.
- Research has shown the significance of the playing-based learning approach in the cognitive development of children.
- An approach that combines an effective supplementary nutrition programme with pedagogic processes that make learning interesting is the need of the hour.

## Concerns / Challenges

- Programme such as digitisation of Anganwadis would be challenging and vague.
- The current change in the attendance system has added pressure on the workers.
- According to media reports, 362,940 anganwadis centres did not have toilet facilities and 159,568 centres did not have drinking water.
- The report claimed that Anganwadi workers felt overburdened with extra work.
- Community engagement is often neglected due to lack of motivation, relevant knowledge and training, studies have found.

## NITI Aayog recommendations

- In 2015, the NITI Aayog recommended better sanitation and drinking water facilities, improved power supply and basic medicines for the AWCs.
- It also suggested that these centres be provided with the required number of workers, whose skills should be upgraded through regular training.

## Way Forward

- An **active participation of the civil society and community** can ensure improvement and innovation.
- The Indian state must **recognise and appreciate the contribution of frontline workers** as they play a crucial role in delivering basic services even during a pandemic.
- Improving the existing capacity of workers through integration of skills, knowledge, perception and experience should also be factored in.
- Training of anganwadi workers is crucial to ensure that health and nutrition services are effectively delivered to the beneficiaries.