

Toward Improved Nutrition: The Atal Bal Arogya Evam Poshan Mission

BACKGROUND

Madhya Pradesh is the second-largest state in India and has a population of approximately 72 million people. Half of the children in Madhya Pradesh under age 5 are stunted and 35 percent are wasted. Overall, 60 percent are underweight, which takes into account both chronic and acute undernutrition (IIPS and Macro International 2007).

In an effort to address this situation, in late 2010, the Government of Madhya Pradesh launched the Atal Bal Arogya Evam Poshan Mission (referred to as Atal Bal Mission) to bring about a systematic reduction in child malnutrition. The mission specifically aims to significantly reduce under-5 mortality from 94 to 60 deaths per 1,000 live births, the percentage of underweight children under 5 years from 60 percent to 40 percent, and the number of severely malnourished children from 12.5 percent to 5 percent by 2015.

The mission's strategic objectives include integrated planning by multiple government departments from various sectors, including women and child development, public health, rural development, tribal welfare, food and civil supplies, engineering, school education, and finance.

APPROACHES AND METHODS FOR COLLABORATION

As an initial step in launching the mission, the National Institute of Nutrition conducted a state-wide survey in 2009–2010 and submitted its report in 2011. The survey showed that the prevalence of undernutrition was significantly higher among scheduled castes or tribes, families with higher-order births, and laborers and their families. The

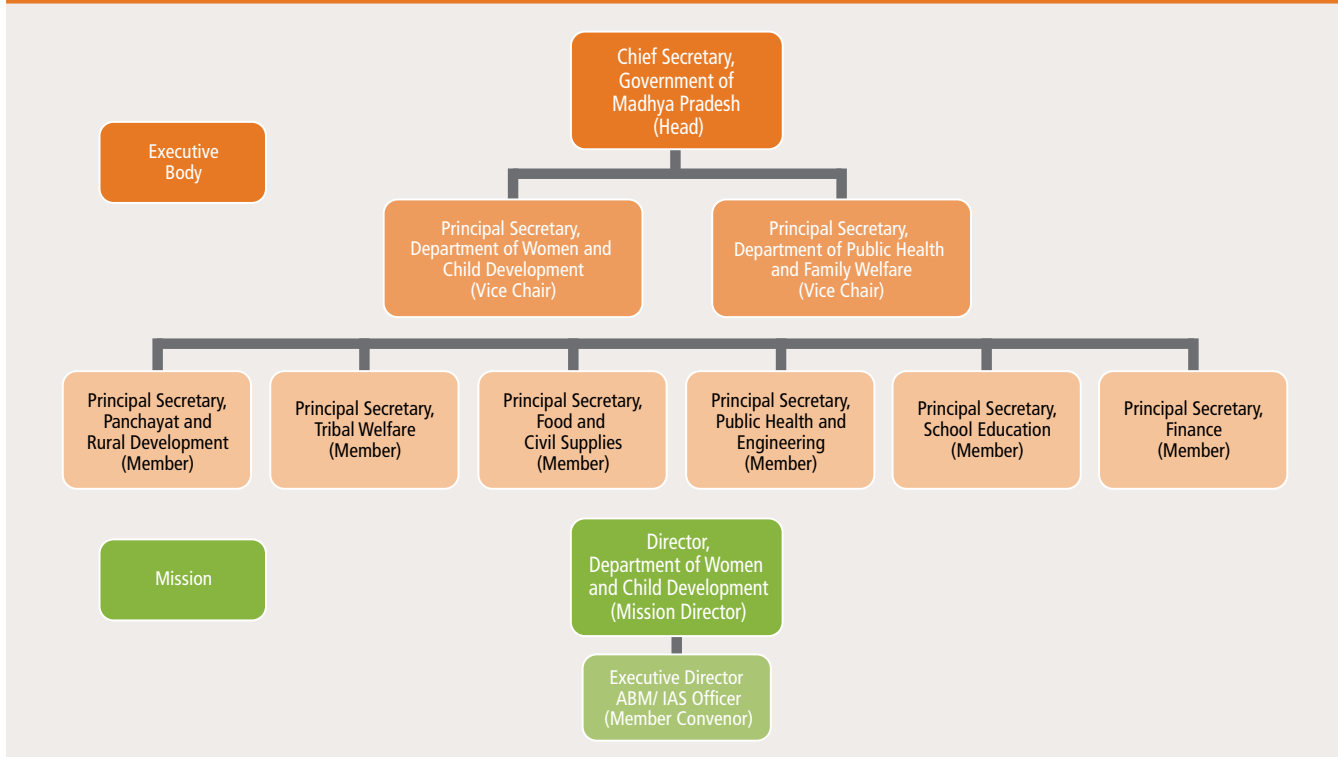
survey also noted that significant gender and district-wide variations in nutrition in the state. The findings were used as a baseline for the preparation of district and state implementation plans that included the vision of forming a nutrition mission to tackle the issue of undernutrition in the state.

A group of stakeholders prepared an operational framework and detailed strategy for the mission that incorporated the following elements: convergent action, evidence-based interventions, enhancement of human resources, community engagement and empowerment, research and innovation, and information management. This effort was led by the Department for International Development (DFID) with support from the United Nations Children's Fund, CARE, the Micronutrient Initiative, and World Vision.

Stakeholders designed the mission to focus on the following priority areas for the prevention and reduction of malnutrition:

- ▶ Enhancing household food security and intra-household food distribution
- ▶ Scaling up and improving the quality of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program
- ▶ Monitoring and promoting growth
- ▶ Promoting infant and young child feeding
- ▶ Strengthening existing supplementary nutrition programs
- ▶ Managing moderately malnourished children
- ▶ Integrating the management of severely acute malnutrition

EXHIBIT 1 Management and supervision of the Atal Bal Mission



At the state level, a general body was formed for the Atal Bal Mission, which is headed by the honorable chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, with the ministers of the Departments of Women and Child Development, Public Health and Family Welfare, and Panchayat and Rural Development as the vice chairs. The general body provides policy and strategic directions to the Department of Women and Child Development and allied departments for accelerating and implementing the mission's agenda. The general body met twice in the mission's first year and currently meets annually.

An executive body for the mission was also created, which is headed by the chief secretary of the Government of Madhya Pradesh, and includes the principal secretaries of the Department of Women and Child Development and Department Public Health and Family Welfare as vice chairs. Principal secretaries of the following departments serve as members of the executive body: Panchayat and Rural Development, Tribal Welfare, Food and Civil Supplies, Public Health and Engineering, School Education, and Finance. The executive body approves the annual work plan and budget of the mission; guides the mission's implementation; provides the technical, logistical, administrative, and financial resources required by the mission; and

monitors the mission's performance. The executive body meets once every quarter.

At the operational level, the director of the Department of Women and Child Development also serves as the director of the mission. The executive director of the mission is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer exclusively deputed to the mission. Contractual and on-deputation officials at the state, district, and block levels also work at the mission (Exhibit 1).

The State Government of Madhya Pradesh provides the resources needed to facilitate the smooth functioning of the Atal Bal Mission. Development partners, such as the World Health Organization, DFID, United Nations Development Programme, and European Commission, also provide technical, financial, administrative, logistical support, and other resources.

Since the mission's inception in 2011, the partners in the mission instituted a number of new programs, including:

- ▶ Providing additional or booster meals to pregnant women and severely underweight children.
- ▶ Promoting and constructing child-friendly anganwadi centres (AWCs).

- ▶ Counseling women to adopt improved behavioral practices, such as infant and young child feeding, kangaroo care, and institutional delivery.
- ▶ Identifying and managing anemia in pregnant and lactating women.
- ▶ Establishing daycare centers in select AWCs in tribal areas.

The mission analyzes, monitors, and oversees all programmatic components of nutrition and child health in the state using a monitoring and information system (MIS). In its meetings, the executive body reviews the MIS data and accordingly provides feedback for improvements to the mission.

KEY FINDINGS

Since 2011, the mission has

- ▶ Oriented 200,813 families of severely underweight children to participate in departmental schemes, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the credit scheme offered by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.
- ▶ Provided 563,260 severely and moderately underweight children and 34,172 pregnant women and lactating mothers with an additional meal.
- ▶ Converged all 50,000 AWCs in the State with the Health Department as village health Units (Anganwadi Sah Gram Arogya Kendra) for provision of basic drugs and antenatal checkups.

The frontline workers participating in the mission report a shift from merely identifying underweight children to actually referring them for care.

However, there have been a number of challenges to implementing the mission, including a lack of available technical specialists at the district and block levels and a lack of funds, particularly to provide a booster meal to severely undernourished children.

Regardless, the Government of India recommended the mission as a model in its National Framework/Guidelines circulated to all the states for formulating Project Implementation Plans under ICDS for 2013–2014. Among the best practices of the mission adopted under ICDS are decentralizing the review and planning process of nutrition and forming committees at the state, district, and subdistrict levels to manage nutrition interventions.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSION

Collaboration among different departments has led to providing more and better health services to address malnutrition. Decentralizing the planning process under the Atal Bal Mission resulted in the districts moving out of the routine and adding new initiatives based on local demands, with a special emphasis on the most marginalized and vulnerable segments of the population. The mission is now a benchmark for other states attempting to improve nutrition.

REFERENCES

International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International. 2007. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-06: India*. Volume I. Madhya Pradesh. Mumbai, India: IIPS.

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Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI)

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About Transform Nutrition

Transform Nutrition is a consortium of five international research and development partners funded by the UK government. Over 5 years, from 2012-2017, Transform Nutrition aims to transform thinking and action on nutrition and strengthen nutrition-relevant evidence in order to accelerate undernutrition reduction in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. For more information, please visit www.transformnutrition.org.

ABOUT POSHAN

Partnerships and Opportunities to Strengthen and Harmonize Actions for Nutrition in India (POSHAN) is a 4-year initiative that aims to build evidence on effective actions for nutrition and support the use of evidence in decisionmaking. It is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by IFPRI in India.

ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

Implementation Notes summarize experiences related to how specific interventions or programs are delivered. They are intended to share information on innovations in delivery and are not research products.

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