

National Policy for Children 2013

High on Promises, Low on Budget

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India is home to the largest number of children, 43 crore, in the world. Their care situation is in a shambles. Although, the new National Policy for Children reaffirms that they are “national assets”, the budgetary outlays are not sufficient to take care of their health, education, protection and development.

India is home to the largest number of children in the world. Nearly every fifth child in the world lives in India. It is estimated that there are about 43 crore children in the age group of 0-18 years. But, their care situation is in a shambles. The State of the World's Mothers 2013 report has found that 3,09,000 children die on the day of their birth in India (Save the Children 2013). Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) report on the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) informed that the infant mortality rate (IMR) was 48 per 1,000 live births and child mortality rate (CMR), 63 per 1,000 live births in 2010, as against the targets of 30 and 31, respectively (CAG 2013). These indicators (IMR and CMR) for the neighbouring countries were much better (China IMR: 16, CMR: 18 and Sri Lanka IMR: 14, CMR: 17). The HUNGAMA Survey Report – 2011 pointed out that 42% of children under the age of five are stunted and malnourished (Naandi Foundation 2011). Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, “it was a matter of national shame” (Mishra 2012). To address the multifaceted challenges that our children are facing, the government has revamped the National Policy for Children (NPC) as NCP 2013.

Targets and Measure

The new NPC reaffirms that children are an important “national asset”,¹ and that through a rights-based approach

the government will have a long term, sustainable, multi-sectoral, integrated and inclusive approach for the overall and harmonious development and protection of children. The NPC constitutes a comprehensive set of measures to ensure the development of children that is divided into four sections: (a) survival, health and nutrition; (b) education and development; (c) protection; and (d) participation (MOWCD 2013). Survival, health and nutrition are the bases of a child's development. Even the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (FYP) has prioritised this. The Twelfth FYP set the following monitorable targets (Planning Commission 2013):

- Reduction of IMR to 25 by 2017.
- Reduction of maternal mortality rate to 100.
- Reduction of under-nutrition in the 0-3 age group to half of National Family Health Survey – 3 (NFHS) levels, i.e., 27% by 2017.
- Raising child sex ratio in the 0-6 age group from 914 to 950.

There are 12 necessary measures ensured by the government to help a child survive and grow healthy. The NPC also recognises the needs of the differently abled, the girl child and HIV-affected children. However, it gives a miss to ensuring measures to stop discrimination based on religion and caste, although, the NPC's guiding principle talks about non-discrimination. India contributes 29% to the global total of first-day death of children, but the NPC in this section sticks to its as usual “improve maternal healthcare”. Improved maternal healthcare is not possible without the necessary infrastructure and skilled health workers. This sector is also marred by shortage of staff at all levels of service delivery. Twenty-four per cent of doctors'

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posts are lying vacant at primary health centres (PHCs) at the all-India level (India.com 2012). According to CAG (2013), at the all-India level, there is a shortage of 0.54 lakh *anganwadi* centres (AWCs), and a shortage of 1,92,388 *anganwadi* workers, i.e., 14.08% of the total sanctioned strength. According to Save the Children's 2011 report, India lacks 2.6 million health workers (Das Gupta 2011).

The fund flow and shortage of funds is another problem that the survival and health of children is facing. Annual Budgets 2012-13 (budget estimate (BE)) and 2013-14 (BE) allocated 15,850 crore and 17,700 crore, respectively, for the ICDS (child survival and development). However, these allocations are far less than the 36,600 crore (annual) as has been projected by the Twelfth FYP. If that would be the case, how can the government ensure safe delivery by skilled health personnel and quality health service to the poor sections, especially in rural India.

Education and Development

Section 4 of the NPC deals with education and development of children. This section ensures 22 measures to promote education and development. This has been prioritised by the government. Continuously, the union budget has allocated more than 70% of the total child budget to the education sector (Table 1). The SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) (now

Table 1: Sector-wise Allocation (Plan and Non-Plan) for Child Welfare (Rs in crores)

Years (Budget Estimate)	Total Allocation for Child Budget	Edu- cation	Develop- ment	Health	Protection
2008-09	-	72	17	10	1
2009-10	-	71.8	16.2	11.2	0.80
2010-11	44,961.41	75	20	4	1
2011-12	56,748.60	76.4	18.6	3.6	1.3
2012-13	71,028.11	72	23	4	1
2013-14	77,235.95	72	24	3	1

Source: Union Budget of each year, Volume 2, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, New Delhi.

Right to Education (RTE)),² mid-day meal and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) are the major constituents of elementary education. The NPC (Section 4.6 – iii) argues for the promotion of affordable and accessible “quality” education up to the secondary level for all children.

Now, we have to think of what constitutes quality education. The definition is not very clear. Whether the Kendriya Vidyalaya will be the standard marker of quality, or something else, is not known. If we look at the Twelfth FYP, the government is planning to introduce public-private partnership (PPP) in the child education sector. Plan documents propose to set up 2,500 model schools.

Table 2: Proposed and Allocated Budget for the Department of School and Secondary Education (in Crores)

	Proposed Allocation for 12th FYP	Annual Allocation for 2012-13	Annual Allocation for 2013-14
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan	1,92,726 / (38,545.20)	23,645	27,258
Mid-Day Meal	90,155 / (18,031)	11,500	13,215
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan	27,466 / (5,493.20)	3,172.63	3,983

Source: Planning Commission (2013).

If we look at the implementation of Section 12 of the RTE Act, which has made it compulsory for every private unaided school to admit at least 25% of its entry level class children belonging to weaker and disadvantaged groups, the record has been very poor despite the government assuring reimbursement of the expense incurred. Instead, the apprehension has been raised that its implementation might get stuck in a bureaucratic entangle, leading to inadequacy of funds and non-inclusion of underprivileged students. Not only that, but the ideal pupil-teacher ratio of the RTE Act is yet to be reached even after three years of its implementation. “Statistics show that a shortage of 12 lakh teachers in primary schools, 20% of the teachers employed are untrained, and the student-teacher ratio falls short of the prescribed norms” (Dhar 2013). Although, the education sector is allocated a major share of the child budget, it has fallen short of the proposed allocation by the Twelfth Plan (Table 2).

Apart from financial and institutional problems, child education is suffering from non-cooperation between converging institutions. Education is controlled by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), whereas the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), monitor agency of the RTE, is under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MOWCD). After resigning, the national coordinator of RTE in NCPCR, Dhir Jhingran, said “I don’t think there is enough commitment on part of NCPCR as an organisation to

be an effective agency to monitor RTE” (Kaur 2013).

Protection of Children

The next section deals with protection of children. It says, “Children have the right to be protected wherever they are” and “The State shall create a caring, protective and safe environment for all children” (MOWCD 2013: 9). The Twelfth

FYP too argued for updating of the NPC 1974 and making the protection of children a right. But, if we consider the priority of child protection, it always has been at the receiving end, getting a mere 1% of the total child budget. In fact, in the Union Budget 2013-14, the allocation to the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) has seen a 25% decline since the previous year. In 2012-13, it was Rs 400 crore. This has been much below the annual projection of Rs 1,060 crore by the Twelfth FYP. Recently, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 was passed to provide a protective environ to the children. Many civil societies, such as the HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, feel that it needs improvement. Bharti Ali, HAQ representative, said that

POCSO is lacking several important provisions that would have helped bolster the prosecution in such cases. ‘The recording of the victim’s statement before a magistrate under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code happens after 2-3 days now. That is a crucial period in which the child victim and family can be influenced and threatened to withdraw his/her complaint. This is especially true in cases where accused are known to the victims. The recording of statements under Section 164 should be immediately done. Evidence collection has to improve. Lastly, a victim-protection scheme was badly needed which was not included in POCSO. This would help ensure that the victim does not turn hostile during the trial’ (Kattakayam 2013).

There is another side to this law. Our society is patriarchal in nature and a relationship between a boy and a girl has never gone down well. The girl’s family

may pressurise her to lodge a complaint against the boy once their relationship is disclosed to them. In that case, the boy has to go to jail, as the Indian Penal Code's (IPC) Section 354 has become non-bailable. This will remain a bone of contention for long time.

Conclusions

Overall, this new NPC 2013 has promised a lot for children's survival, protection, education and health. It has at times used lofty, but vague, terminology, whose effects are beyond the control of any agency and the state's institutions. For instance, in its preamble it says that "all children have the right to grow in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (MowCD 2013: 2).³ Further, "health care of highest standard" and "quality education" are terms used without defining them.

The children and their issues cannot be treated in isolation. They are very much part of society. Many things in society affect individuals. In the case of children, policies like Right to Food and RTE, the definition of poverty,

budget allocation to the social sector, etc, are of vital importance. Any macro-level policy cannot succeed without keeping in mind the disadvantaged sections of society.

Hence, as part of a necessary investment, I would suggest that the government should allocate more funds for children, at least matching the figure suggested by the working group on children or by the Twelfth FYP. Second, although different constituents require different spending, there should not be wide gaps between the allocations across health, development, protection and education. Third, there should be maintenance of religion-, region/state- and caste-wise data of child beneficiaries at the national level.

NOTES

- 1 The First National Policy on Child Rights, 1974, recognised that children are a supremely important asset. Their nurture and solicitude are our (State) responsibility.
- 2 The National Policy for Children, 1974, envisioned that the state shall take steps to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14.
- 3 This has been taken from the Twelfth FYP.

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