

Convention on the Children's Right to Food

April 7th-9th, 2006

Hyderabad

The Convention on the Children's Right to Food brought together participants from all over India with a special commitment to children's right to food, to share experiences and plan future action. In the Convention, through intensely interactive session, experts and activists evolved a future plan of action to address child health and nutrition issues. The core issue was widening the reach and improving the quality of the ICDS -- universalization with quality.

At the inaugural session 'people's economist', Prof Jayati Ghosh, highlighted the grim situation, by pointing out that 47% of India's pre-school children are undernourished and regularization and improvement of facilities are necessary. She felt "money is not the problem it's really a question of political will. Shantha Sinha, Magsaysay awardee and child rights activist, spoke the need to celebrate the birth of every child, and give dignity to the mother. Addressing the issues of hunger and starvation, T Sundaraman, Director, State Health Resource Centre, Chattisgarh, spoke of the 'South Asian enigma' -- why countries with lower GDPs are doing better than India. He touched on how malnutrition precipitates disease and how disease leads to malnutrition. Dr Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission of India, quoted that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, said that India's IMR and MMR rates are "the black marks". She assured that the ICDS, the midday meal scheme and other means of protecting children's right to food, including maternity benefits will be given due attention in the XI Plan. Dr Syeda Hameed *was found very convinced with the results of the study from Ghana showing Promotion of early initiation of breastfeeding has the potential to make a major contribution to the achievement of the child survival millennium development goal; 16% of neonatal deaths could be saved if all infants were breastfed from day 1 and 22% if breastfeeding started within the first hour (Pediatrics, 2006;117;380-386) and said that these type of interventions if assured can definitely make there dent in improving the nutritional status of children in India.*

With the efforts of BPNI/IBFAN, Infant and Young Child Nutrition found it's right place in the recommendations and a separate resolution was also passed in support of Breastfeeding.

Recommendations of Convention on infant and young child feeding support:

- Each AWC should have two Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and one Anganwadi Helper (AWH) at the very least. One Anganwadi Worker should be in charge of looking after children below the age of three - the most vulnerable and neglected age group.
- Training programmes for AWWs also need radical improvement. They should include special training on child care for children under three, nutrition counseling, and pre-school education.
- For children below the age of three, nutritious take-home rations (THR) based on locally procured food may be provided. Supplementary nutrition should always be combined with extensive nutrition counseling and home-based interventions, particularly for children under 3.

Resolution on Support to Breastfeeding:

- Children's right to food cannot be realized without full support to breastfeeding. This includes guaranteeing Maternity Entitlements for all women.
- Specific mechanisms like creation of tripartite welfare boards and funds need to be developed for women working in the unorganized / informal sector. Arrangements for nursing breaks and crèches should be mandatory on all worksites.
- The National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) should not be discontinued or diluted. Instead, it should be expanded and enhanced.

IBFAN and BPNI participants

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