Citizen Monitoring of ICDS in Brahmapur

Brahmapur like other old urban centers in India is growing fast and haphazardly. Being the second largest city in Odisha, its population in 2010 is estimated to be 3,80,000, of which 97,018 are living in 100 slum pockets all over the city. This situation poses a great challenge for the city to cope with basic social needs of its residents which is further exacerbated by a corrupt and inefficient implementation of government programmes by the local bureaucracy. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is one of the national programmes aimed to respond to the basic social needs of children and mothers by providing supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, referral services, pre-school non-formal education and nutrition and health education. ICDS is potentially helpful to disadvantaged families such as those living in urban slums. Despite its high promises, implementation of ICDS in the Brahmapur has been found wanting.

The Youth for Social Development has embarked on the project Enabling Citizen Monitoring of Public Services: Preventing Bribery to Foster Effective Service Delivery in Brahmapur city of Orissa. Phase 3 of the Project takes on monitoring of ICDS implementation in select slum communities in Brahmapur. Similar to its past two phases, the project uses the Right to Information Act of 2005 and social auditing to facilitate acquisition of information from government agencies regarding ICDS, the provision of services with the citizen monitors and, most importantly, to accelerate provision of entitlements to beneficiaries in a corruption-free manner.

Case Study 1: Somanath Nagar

One of the communities working with YSD in the Project is in Somanath Nagar located on the northern periphery of the city. The community is composed of 35 households, majority are Muslims families and some scheduled caste. Prior to YSD’s intervention, the Anganwadi Center (AWC) in the area was providing supplementary feeding to children, pregnant and lactating mothers. However, upon consultation with community members through a focused group discussion, it was found out that they were getting lesser amounts of food items than what is stipulated in the programme. Further, the Angawadi worker opened the AWC 2-3 days a month instead of the required 6 days a week. Ignorant of the details of the ICDS programme and their rightful entitlements, the beneficiaries did not complain about the amounts of food item they were receiving and the irregularities of the AWC’s services.

Knowledge on entitlements under ICDS spurred Mr. Satar Khan, a local businessman and one of the 5 citizen monitors tapped by the Project in Somanath Nagar, to file an RTI application at the Child Development Project Office (CDPO) in Brahmapur on 18 October 2011. He demanded for (1) the list of beneficiaries enrolled at the AWC in Niladri Bihar 1st Lane, (2) quantities of food items provided by the government to the AWC in September 2011 and (3) the daily quantities distributed to the beneficiaries during the same period.

Mr. Khan received the response to the RTI application after 45 days which surpassed the 30-day response requirement. The information they got from the CDPO showed that some of the food items were not distributed to the beneficiaries. They suspected that the Anganwadi worker was selling them to the market. The Anganwadi worker denied this and told Mr. Khan that she distributed all that was provided by the government.

Despite the delay, changes were made at the AWC. The Anganwadi worker and helper started opening the AWC from 9AM-12NN for the pre-school education activities with the young children 6 days a week. They also conduct home visits to enrolled beneficiaries. The ICDS guidelines are now followed as to the quantity of food items distributed to each beneficiary.

Together with other citizen monitors, Mr. Khan takes on the challenge of sustaining the gains from using RTI as a social accountability tool. He regularly checks with the beneficiaries to make sure that they are receiving proper quantities of food items and services from the AWC. On the one hand, the Anagwadi worker and helper report to Mr. Khan the status of service delivery at the AWC.