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Title: Improving Child and Maternal Nutrition through Community Managed Nutrition cum Daycare Centers – Experience from Fulwari Initiative in India

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Chhattisgarh state in India has high levels of child and maternal under-nutrition. A big share of population is impoverished and lacks access to adequately diverse diets. Shortage of caregiver time is another key problem.

The state initiated a Community-managed intervention called the Fulwari program to aid in reducing malnutrition by combining elements of health, nutrition and care. The program relies on caregivers and communities coming together to contribute time and physical space for running feeding centers collectively. Government funds them through local elected bodies to provide three quality hot cooked meals daily. Community-Health-Workers carry out community mobilisation and capacity building along with education on health and nutrition. 2839 Nutrition centers are operational since 2013. They currently cover 35,000 under-3 year children and 16000 pregnant or lactating women.

Bringing together the children of this age group has helped the reach of health service providers to them. A significant proportion of communities have managed to provide day-care along with feeding. Women get in Fulwari, along with quality meals, more rest and mutual-support more frequent contact with health workers and reduced burden of child-care.

Independent assessments have indicated effectiveness in improving anthropometric indicators. The initiative is cost-effective and community-involvement has helped in avoiding leakages. But, the program being based on community-ownership and multi-sector convergence faces tougher challenges in drawing sustained support from government departments.

Community-managed feeding and day-care public programs can be effective in addressing under-nutrition in resource-poor settings and need to evolve methods to negotiate governance challenges of inter-sector action.