

**Decentralized Provisioning of Supplementary
Nutrition for the Integrated Child Development
Services (ICDS) in Mumbai
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The 'Best Practice'

This study is an attempt to examine the decentralized production of supplementary nutrition which has been instituted for the Integrated Child Development Services in urban Maharashtra, specifically, Mumbai. The 'best practice' under investigation is the local production of food by self-help groups from the community where the *anganwadi* centre (AWC) is located, which is believed to allow for better quality of food as compared to the centralized model, as well as have the added advantages of allowing for greater community participation, transparency and accountability. The engagement of women (by way of self-help groups) in the production process is also expected to contribute towards the economic and social empowerment of the contributing members.

The Context

The third National Family Health (NFHS 3) survey indicates that 46% of India's children under three years of age are underweight. Siva Kumar notes that when judged in terms of the proportion of underweight children, India exceeds China's levels of child malnutrition¹. A rapidly increasing economic growth rate and a concurrent decline in nutrition status is a contradiction that characterises India as well as Maharashtra in current times. While Maharashtra's economic growth rate increased from 6.2% in 1997-98 to 9.2% in 2007-08, the nutritional status of children in Maharashtra declined. According to NFHS 3, 71.9% of children are anaemic. Furthermore, 38% of children are stunted, 15% are wasted, and 40% are underweight. Contrary to popular belief, child malnutrition is not exclusive to rural areas. In the urban areas 34.8% of the children are stunted as against 40.3% in rural areas. In Mumbai city 39.8% of the children are stunted, higher than the state average of 37.9%. According to a survey conducted by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau, only 31% of children between one and three years of age in Maharashtra consume the Recommended Dietary Allowance of calories and proteins and NFHS 3 indicates that 72% of children under three years of age are anaemic.

It has been established that there is a direct link between the nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and their infants. It would thus be useful in this context to examine their nutritional status in Maharashtra. Here too, however, the findings are disappointing. NFHS 3 indicates that less than half the women between 15 and 49 years of age fall in the normal BMI category, with as many as 36.2% falling in the 'too thin category'². Half (49%) the women in Maharashtra suffer from anaemia as against 56.2% in the whole of India.

It is thus evident that marginal progress has been made with respect to arresting child malnutrition in the country, in spite of various institutional arrangements designed to address the issue. One such programme is the Integrated Child Development Services

1 Siva Kumar, A.K. 'Why are levels of child malnutrition not improving?'. Economic and Political Weekly. April 14, 2007.

2 NFHS 3

scheme (ICDS) introduced to meet some of the nutritional needs of children under six, and which also places focus on adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women. While the mandate of the ICDS extends to include pre-school education, nutrition counselling and support services, health care and daily nutrition entitlements, this report will focus solely on the provisioning of supplementary nutrition to beneficiaries, within the specific context of the decentralized production of food in Maharashtra, in compliance with the Supreme Court order banning contractors in the production and provisioning of nutrition under the ICDS. Being one of the first states to implement the Supreme Court order, Maharashtra's model has been touted as a 'best practice' for the decentralized production of supplementary nutrition.

Prior to the issuance of this order, in urban Maharashtra ready-to-eat food was provided in situations where AWCs did not have the space to cook food. What occurred in Mumbai, however, was the sub-contracting of food production by 200 contractors masquerading as *Mahila Mandals* (MM) who gained free reign over the provisioning of supplementary nutrition in the city. This period was marked by complaints from functionaries and beneficiaries regarding the quality of the supplementary nutrition provided, which was usually comprised of *vada pav* or *upma*. Doubts were also raised with regard to whether the food provided met the nutritional standards specified by the Department. The provisioning of food by contractors that did not meet the quality and nutritional norms as specified by the ICDS scheme has been reported from other states as well. For example, as the FOCUS Report points out, *dalia* became the staple food provided in some states, though it was not always culturally appropriate, often did not meet local tastes, and did not cater to age-specific needs³.

With respect to corruption and pilferage as well, similar trends were witnessed in Maharashtra and across the country where contractors who enjoyed a monopoly over the supply of food caused disruptions in the supply of supplementary nutrition provisioning (SNP). Until 2006, the costs of providing SNP were borne entirely from state funds and the

state governments invited tenders for contracts to supply and distribute food. The value of the contracts – between Rs. 25 crores to Rs. 250 crores – increased the vulnerability of the scheme to corruption and diversion of funds⁴. It was seen that ‘over time the tenders for these contracts’ were ‘drawn to favour key players and irregularities remain(ed) the norm rather than the exception’⁵. The absence of control of local communities and/or *panchayats* over the suppliers or the food provided also allowed the contractors to function relatively unchecked.

It was at this juncture that a need for decentralized production of SNP was voiced by academicians, child rights activists and civil society organizations to eliminate contractors from the system and allow for supplementary nutrition of better quality to be provided.

On 7th October, 2004 the Supreme Court Order passed an order which stated:

'Contractors shall not be used for supply of nutrition in anganwadis and preferably ICDS funds shall be spent by making use of village communities, self-help groups and Mahila Mandals for buying grains and preparation of meals.'

'Local women's self-help groups and Mahila Mandals should be encouraged to supply the supplementary food distributed in anganwadi centres. They can make purchases, prepare the food locally, and supervise the distribution.'

In keeping with the Supreme Court order, Maharashtra decentralized the production of SNP by inviting *Mahila Mandals* and Self-help Groups (SHGs) to supply food to AWCs. The decentralized production of SNP is deemed to have improved the quality of the food provided, with beneficiaries expressing higher levels of satisfaction post the change.

4 *ibid*

5 *ibid*

'The 'Best Practice' under study

This study will examine the premises on which this model has been based, whether it effectively addresses the issues raised by the previous model, the manner in which it has been operationalized, the factors which have influenced its operationalization and its overall contribution to meeting the nutritional needs of the beneficiaries of the scheme.

Given the assumed 'comparative advantage' that civil society organizations are believed to hold over the government in service delivery, private provisioning of public services has come to dominate policy space within the context of welfare pluralism. While non-governmental organizations have dominated policy discussion on the role of the third sector, informal associations have also come to occupy a significant space in this context. The decentralised production of supplementary nutrition for the ICDS in Maharashtra is a case in point.

In keeping with the Supreme Court order, Maharashtra issued a Government Order on 5th July 2007 stating that the provisioning of SNP in Maharashtra must be completely decentralized to Self Help Groups or *Mahila Mandals* by 30th July, 2009.

On 28th October 2005 the Department of Women and Child Development had issued a Government Resolution (GR ICDS 2004/233/5) regarding the supply and distribution of SNP. The key points of the resolution are as follow⁶:

a. Role of the *Mahila Mandal*/Self-help Group

The GR notes that supplementary nutrition for all the AWCs throughout the state in both urban and rural areas is to be provided through independent SHGs or MMs. A SHG/MM may supply between one and five AWCs, depending on its economic strength. In rural areas SHGs are to be granted preference over MMs,, the selection to be conducted by the *gram sabhas*. SHGs and MMs are selected based on a number of criteria such as being 'local', being registered bodies, financially strong and comprised of experienced women. In

⁶ This section draws heavily from Food to the Poor, a study conducted on the status of food schemes in Maharashtra for the Office of the Commissioners to the Supreme Court.

addition, SHGs/MMs selected are expected to follow prescribed norms regarding rates and recipes for the food items provided.

The guidelines also stipulated that the AWCs which are not provided food by an SHG/MM, should be provided for by the district committee which would arrange for the purchase of grains and other eatables from the Maharashtra State Cooperative Consumers Federation Ltd, at a reasonable price.

b. Payment

Considering the economic vulnerability of SHGs and MMs, instructions have been issued regarding the payment to SHGs/MMs by the 10th of every month. In case of delay of payment from the state to the SHG/MM, the *Zilla Parishads* (ZP) have been instructed to make the payment by the stipulated date in order to ensure that SHGs/MMs do not face a payment delay.

c. Preparation and Distribution of Food

The ICDS Commissionerate draws up an acceptable set of recipes of food items to be supplied, from which SHGs may choose. This list is revised periodically. The food can be cooked either in the AWC or at any place convenient to the SHG/MM, provided that the food is served fresh and hot. However, subcontracting of kitchen work is not allowed. The SHGs/MMs are expected to have a registered address and the kitchen address must lie within the project area, in order to ensure that professional MMs do not gain entry into the system by operating multiple kitchens.

An *anganwadi* worker (AWW) is not allowed to be a member of an SHG that provides SNP to AWCs.

The new providers, SHGs and MMs, introduced after the 2007 G.O. were expected to reverse the trends exhibited by the contractor raj and ensure better provisioning of food in terms of quality and satisfaction. The decentralised production model is based on four pillars:

1. *Community participation* Given that SHGs and MMs are expected to comprise women from the local community⁷ where the AWC is based, it was envisioned that since the members would supply SNP to their own children and/or children from their own community, a natural incentive and feeling of ownership would exist to ensure that only the best food was provided. Community involvement is thus expected to positively impact on the quality of SNP provided.
2. *Community monitoring and accountability* A related aspect is the accountability this model is deemed to ensure. Accountability in this context relates to the accountability of the SHG/MM to the beneficiaries, ensured by the Mothers' Committees (of women from the local community) instituted to conduct regular checks on the functioning of the kitchen as well as the quality of food. Accountability also refers to the financial accountability of the SHGs to the Department.
3. *Local production of food* The local production of food is believed to ensure that hot and fresh food is provided in a timely manner to beneficiaries, which in turn would result in higher levels of attendance.
4. *Empowerment* The SHG/MM model is also deemed in many quarters to have the added dimension of empowering women by providing employment, and allowing for economic and 'social capital' formation

Methodology

While primarily a qualitative study, the research process included collection of both primary as well as secondary data from a number of sources.

Sample and sampling

The study area comprised the Govandi project of the ICDS scheme in M ward which was

⁷ What constitutes a 'local' community has never been strictly defined, and this has led to considerable ambiguity in the interpretation of the order. While SHGs are expected to cater to AWCs within their geographic area of functioning, SHGs and *Mahila Mandals* are also known to be supplying SNP to AWCs located at a distance from their kitchens. This dilutes the 'community participation' principle of the initiative.

selected for convenience. Randomly selected SHGs/MMs and the AWCs they service were visited.

The kitchens were selected from a randomly generated list of kitchens in the area, provided by supervisors of the Govandi project. Eight kitchens in all were visited during the first phase of the study. During the second phase of the study, four of these kitchens were revisited to collect data with respect to the prices of inputs to calculate the financial viability of these kitchens vis-a-vis per child allocation.

While a project usually comprises only 100 AWCs, because of the high concentration of slum areas in M ward, this particular project in June 2007 covered 444 AWCs with more to be added in the following months. Out of the 444 AWCs in the project, 19 were visited as part of the study. However, of these 19 AWCs, only eight were open at the time of the visit. The AWCs were those catered to by the kitchens under study.

Tools of data collection

The study involved the collection of both primary and secondary data. In the case of the SHGs and MMs, discussions using semi-structured discussion guides were held with SHG members, combined with on-site observation and observation checklists. In the case of the AWCs, observation checklists were devised, and used alongside separate sets of semi-structured interview guides for AWWs, AWHs and mothers. Secondary data was compiled from various government documents, circulars, journals, online resources, etc.

Time-period

The first phase of the study was conducted between May 11th and June 20th for a period of five weeks. A follow up was conducted for a period of 4 days between 23th and 26th November, 2009 to fill in the gaps in the data collected during the initial period.

Findings

This section will study the operational feasibility of the model in terms of the following criteria:

- Financial viability
- Social and gender equity
- Quality and satisfaction
- Eligible beneficiary coverage

It will also evaluate the premises on which this model has been based, namely:

- Community participation
- Community monitoring and accountability
- Local production of food
- Empowerment

Financial viability

Though profit is not a stated objective for the shift to a decentralized mode of production (the objective being 'to provide nutrition with love and affection to small children'⁸), there is an understanding within both official circles as well as amongst the food production groups that the initiative should allow for some profit accumulation.

This section attempts to analyse the financial viability of the SHGs by taking into consideration a number of factors, including:

- access to credit
- cost of initial capital outlay
- cost of fuel, electricity, water, stationery
- transport costs
- per child per day allocation vis-a-vis per child per day cost (break even analysis)
- delay in payments
- economies of scale
- timely payment of bills

- labour costs

Access to credit

While all the SHGs/MMs surveyed confirmed access to bank credit, only two of the SHGs appear to have availed of institutional credit facilities. The other groups opted to borrow from informal sources, if at all. One SHG member noted that the SHG borrows money when required from a goldsmith⁹, another group noted that it mortgages jewellery (at a 3% rate). It is unclear how the SHGs that do not avail of any sort of credit facilities are able to meet their financial requirements given that payments of bills are usually made after many months have elapsed. Attempts to probe further were however met by responses of ‘managing somehow’, with one SHG head admitting to having contributed her own personal funds to the SHG to run the kitchen.

A common practice adopted to meet costs in the absence of funds appeared to be to buy raw materials on credit for one month. While some groups bought raw inputs from the APMC market at Vashi, one group indicated that it bought food from local traders, as it was unable to buy food on credit at Vashi.

Being SHGs, most groups have instituted a practice wherein individual members contribute towards the common pool anything from Rs. 10 to Rs. 100 per month. However given that the maximum size of the group is 15, it is unlikely that the quantum of funds raised thus could contribute in any significant way to the kitchens’ functioning.

Cost of initial capital outlay

Initial capital costs as reported by the groups varied from between Rs. 35,000 to Rs. 70,000. With the exception of one group which initially also provided for the Mid-day Meal Scheme, the rest of the groups had to recover costs from the production and distribution of food to the *anganwadis* under their charge. Some of the kitchens mentioned the need for procuring more vessels required to make the *chiwda* and the *laddoos* recently introduced in

⁹ This group avoided bank loans as they were of the opinion that the process of seeking loans from banks was tiresome and required too much of their time.

the state as a snack, which in turn will raise operational costs till the capital costs are recovered.

Cost of fuel, electricity, rent, water, stationery

Fuel costs

Fuel costs as reported by SHGs varied widely. As gas cylinders were often not obtained through registered connections and were instead obtained 'in black', they cost more than the standard rates. The per month gas cylinder costs were thus reported by the four SHGs surveyed in the second phase respectively as being Rs. 630 (for 8 AWCs), Rs. 1350 (for 5 AWCs) Rs. 1000 (8 AWCs) and Rs. 2200 (10 AWCs).

Other costs: SHGs noted that they were expected to bear costs of the registers to be supplied to each *anganwadi*, and printing paper for the printing of challans. There was however a wide variance between what the SHGs claimed were their monthly expenditures on stationary, varying between Rs. 15 to over Rs. 350.

Rent

SHG 1 functions out of the personal kitchen of the SHG's Director, and therefore no rent charges accrue with respect to kitchen space. The Director did however indicate that the SHG would shift its operations to a rented space, the monthly rental for which was approximated at Rs. 5000 a month. For SHG 2 the monthly rent amounts to Rs. 2000. In the case of SHG 3, the kitchen operates in a room hired for this purpose at a monthly rental of Rs. 800. SHG 4 operates 2 kitchens¹⁰, with each kitchen being rented at a rate of Rs. 2500 each.

Electricity:

As the Directors' kitchen doubles as the SHG kitchen, separate electricity charges do not accrue to SHG 1. Therefore electricity costs incurred by this SHG are nil. For SHG 2, the

¹⁰ The Director of the SHG was not very forthcoming about how the SHG was operating 2 different kitchens. On probing she stated that the kitchens belonged to two separate SHGs. However, a considerable overlap seems to exist between the SHGs in terms of membership.

monthly electricity bill amounts to Rs. 200. In the case of SHG 3, the room rented is located within an SHG member's house. While she does deduct rent for the kitchen, she does not charge for electricity. The monthly electricity bill for one kitchen run by SHG 4 amounts to Rs. 300.

Water

At the time of the survey, SHG 1 did not have to pay for water. However, the Director noted that once the SHG shifts operations to a rented space, the water charges that will accrue will amount to Rs. 200 per month. Water bills amounted to Rs. 150 per month for SHGs 2 and 4. In the case of SHG 3 no water charges accrue.

Transport

The transportation costs incurred by an SHG are based on a number of factors. These include

1. costs incurred to procure raw materials
2. costs incurred to distribute food depending on the number of AWCs serviced
3. the number of times the SHG has to make deliveries to an AWC in a month

Costs are also incurred to visit the CDPO's office, to deposit cheques, etc. However, due to unavailability of data and difficulty in calculation, this cost will be excluded from the analysis.

At the outset it must be noted that transport costs in urban areas are prohibitive. Furthermore, many SHG/MMs are allotted AWCs at a considerable distance from their kitchens thereby further increasing transport costs. Additionally, in M Ward many SHGs/MMs opt to procure foodgrains from the APMC market in Vashi, situated in an outlying area of the city, due to the lower prices of food materials available there.

Costs incurred to procure raw materials

SHG 1: SHG 1 incurs a total cost of Rs. 3000 to procure raw materials twice a month from the Vashi APMC market.

SHG 2: SHG 2 procures its raw materials locally from local traders. However, it does incur a cost of Rs. 360 per month to hire coolies.

SHG 3: SHG 3 incurs a transport cost of Rs. 250 for the goods bought. Additionally, coolies are hired to transport these bags from the truck to the house, at a total cost of Rs. 70 (Rs. 10 per bag). The total cost incurred for each trip is thus Rs. 320.

SHG 4: SHG 4 incurs a transport cost of Rs. 700 per month to transport raw materials from the Vashi market. In addition, coolies are hired to transport the bags from the truck to the kitchen, at a cost of Rs. 325¹¹.

Costs incurred to distribute food and number of AWCs supplied

The costs incurred to distribute food on a daily basis are listed below:

SHG 1: Apart from the cost incurred by the vehicle (Rs. 150), additional expenditure includes payments made to a woman hired to carry the food from the drop off point to an AWC not accessible by road (Rs. 150). and to women are employed to drop off the food to AWCs not accessible by rickshaw.

SHG 2: Rs. 65 per day rickshaw cost for eight AWCs. For two AWCs located nearby, a member of the SHG delivers the food herself.

SHG 3: Rs. 200 for five SHGs.

SHG 4: Rs. 500 for 10AWCs.

Number of times the SHG has to make deliveries to an AWC in a month

The food production agencies make daily trips to AWCs depending on whether the AWC is open on that day or not. Since a morning snack has been introduced in AWCs, SHGs and MMs have chosen to supply food earlier at around 10.30 am (than was previously the case when food was supplied around 11.30 am – 12 pm) so that the snack can be served at 10.30 (rather than make two separate trips which would raise transport costs). Alternatively, some food providers send the next day's snack with the hot cooked meal for the current day.

¹¹ The rate charged is Rs. 25 per *gond*. 13 *gonds* are procured on a single visit.

Cost of food items

This section attempts to calculate the costs of the ingredients used to prepare the various items on a per child basis based on the rates specified by the SHGs for the raw materials, with reference to the recipes specified by the Department.

Masoor/Peas Pulao

The specified ingredients for *masoor/peas pulao* (per beneficiary¹²) is as follows:

Table 1

Item	Weight (in grams/millilitre)
<i>Masoor/Peas</i>	20
Rice	40
Oil	2
Soyabean	5
Seasoning	
Total (uncooked weight)	67
<i>Total (cooked weight)</i>	100

The costs incurred by the SHGs per kilogram of raw input and the resultant cost per beneficiary as per the specified recipe is provided below¹³. It may be noted that some SHGs reported the use of ingredients not specified in the recipe provided by the Department. These ingredients have not been included in this analysis.

12 Beneficiary here refers to a 'normal child'.

13 With exception of coriander, curry leaf and green chilli, for which the SHGs were unable to provide a per kilogram estimation. The cost recorded is thus the cost incurred on a daily basis.

	SHG 1		SHG 2		SHG 3		SHG 4		Average Cost	
Masoor Pulao	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>
Masoor	60	1.2	90	1.8	48	0.96	68	1.36	66.5	1.33
Oil	57	0.1	67	0.13	60	0.12	90	0.18	68.5	0.14
Rice	18	0.72	23	0.92	17	0.68	20	0.8	20	0.8
Spices and Condiments	-	0.10	-	0.10	-	0.10	-	0.10	-	0.10
Total		2.12		2.95		1.86		2.44		2.37

* None of the suppliers reported the use of soyabean.

Lapsi

The specified ingredients for *lapsi* (per beneficiary) is as follows:

Table 3

Item	Weight (in grams/millilitre)
Broken wheat	50
Soyabean powder	5
Jaggery	20
Oil/Ghee	5
Salt	Not specified
Total (uncooked weight)	75
Total (cooked weight)	100

The costs incurred by the SHGs per kilogram of raw input and the resultant cost per beneficiary as per the specified recipe is provided below. It may be noted that some SHGs reported the use of ingredients not specified in the recipe provided by the Department. These ingredients have not been included in this analysis.

	SHG 1		SHG 2		SHG 3		SHG 4		Average Cost	
Lapsi	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefici-ary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefici-ary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefici-ary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefici-ary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefici-ary</i>
<i>Lapsi (broken wheat)</i>	20	1	30	1.5	34	1.7	25	1.25	27.25	1.36
<i>Jaggery</i>	52	1.04	40	0.8	40	0.8	50	1	45.5	0.91
<i>Ghee/Oil</i>	57	0.29	-	-	60	0.3	60	0.3	59	0.30
Total		2.33		2.3		2.8		2.55		2.57

*None of the SHGs/MMs reported including soyabean powder.

Usal

The specified ingredients for *usal* (per beneficiary) is as follows:

Table 5

Item	Weight (in grams/millilitre)
Pulses (different varieties)	50
Soyabean	10
Oil	10
Total (uncooked weight)	70
<i>Total (cooked weight)</i>	<i>100</i>

The costs incurred by the SHGs per kilogram of raw input and the resultant cost per beneficiary as per the specified recipe is provided below. While the recipe allows for the use of various pulses in different combinations, for simplicity of analysis, costs have been calculated using one pulse at a time. However, it may be noted that combining higher priced pulses with lower priced ones is likely to ease the financial burden, and SHG members indicated that their choice of pulse varies with prices.

It may be noted that some SHGs reported the use of ingredients not specified in the recipe provided by the Department. These ingredients have not been included in this analysis.

Table 6

	SHG 1		SHG 2		SHG 3		SHG 4		Average Cost	
Usal	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>
<i>Chickpeas</i>	-	-	40	2	70	3.5	43	2.15	51	2.55
<i>Gram*</i>	50	2.5	90	4.5	-	-	50	2.5	63	3.15
<i>Green gram*</i>	60	3	95	4.75	-	-	-	-	77.5	3.88
<i>Chowli*</i>	60	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	60	3
<i>Masoor*</i>	62	3.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	62	3.1
<i>Peas*</i>	-	-	-	-	80	4	-	-	80	4
<i>Oil</i>	57	0.57	70	0.7	60	0.6	90	0.9	69.25	0.69
Total (with only chickpeas)		N.A.		2.7		4.1		3.05		3.24
Total (with only gram)		3.07		5.2		N.A.		3.4		3.84
Total (with only green gram)		3.57		5.45		N.A.		N.A.		4.57
Total (with only chowli)		3.57		N.A.		N.A.		N.A.		3.69
Total (with only masoor)		3.67		N.A.		N.A.		N.A.		3.79
Total (with only peas)		N.A.		N.A.		4.6		N.A.		4.69

**Usal* is made using only one or two of the above at a time.

** In the case of SHG 3, usually *usal* is made of chickpeas.

*** None of the SHGs reported using soyabean.

Khichadi

The specified ingredients for *khichadi* (per beneficiary) is as follows:

Table 7

Item	Weight (in grams/millilitre)
Rice	40
Peas/ <i>Moong dal</i> / <i>Tur dal</i> / <i>Masoor</i>	10
Soyabean	10
Oil	5
Seasoning	
Total (uncooked weight)	65
<i>Total (cooked weight)</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 8

	SHG 1		SHG 2		SHG 3		SHG 4		Average Cost	
<i>Khichadi</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefic iary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefic iary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefic iary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefic iary</i>	<i>Per kg cost</i>	<i>Cost per benefic iary</i>
<i>Oil</i>	57	0.29	67	0.34	60	0.30	90	0.45	68.5	0.34
<i>Moong dal</i>	68	0.68	75	0.75	40	0.40	80	0.80	65.75	0.66
<i>Rice</i>	18	0.72	23	0.92	17	0.68	20	0.8	19.5	0.78
<i>Soyabean</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	0.40	40	0.40
<i>Chickpeas</i>	-	-	45	0.45	-	-	-	-	45	0.45
<i>Spices and Condiments</i>	-	0.10	-	0.10	-	0.10	-	0.10	-	0.10
<i>Total (with only moong dal)</i>		1.69		2.01		1.38		2.45		2.28
<i>Total (with only chickpeas)</i>	-	N.A.	-	1.71	-	N.A.	-	N.A.	-	2.07

*Some SHGs noted the use of seasoning such as bay leaf, cumin, *masala* powder, turmeric, etc. Details are provided in the annexure.

** A round figure of 10p has been added as the cost of spices and condiments.

Snacks:

Puffed Rice Laddoo

Of the five AWCs studied, only two were preparing the *laddoos* themselves, three groups were buying the *laddoos* from the market and supplying them to the AWCs. One group

was only providing *farsan*.

As per the Government of Maharashtra stipulation, each *laddoo* supplied to the children must weigh 60g, with equal proportions of puffed rice and jaggery.

Table 9

Item	Minimum cost (per kg) SHG 4	Maximum cost (per kg) SHG 1	Average cost (per kg)
Puffed rice	40	40	40
Jaggery	40	52	47

In this instance, the minimum cost estimated equates with the costs incurred by SHG 4, and the maximum costs estimated equates with the costs of SHG 1.

The cost to SHG 1 to produce a 60g *laddoo* is Rs. 2.76. The cost to SHG 4 to produce a 60g *laddoo* is Rs. 2.4.

Taking the average cost of the ingredients, the cost of making 1 kg of puffed rice *laddoo* would equal to Rs. 43.5. The cost of making a 60g *laddoo* (excluding all other costs) would then be Rs. 2.61.

SHG 2 noted that they bought *laddoos* at Rs. 120 per packet (each packet containing 25 *laddoos*). SHG 2 however admitted to the *laddoos* being less than the recommended 60g. Assuming each *laddoo* weighed 60g however, each *laddoo* may then be valued at Rs. 4.8.

SHG 3 noted that it bought *laddoos* at Rs. 48 per kg. Assuming that each *laddoo* weighs 60g, each *laddoo* would cost Rs. 2.88.

The table below indicates the cost to the SHGs/MMs to supply one 60g puffed rice *laddoo*:

Table 10

SHG/Mahila Mandal	Per 60g laddoo cost (in Rs.)
1	2.76
2	4.8
3	2.88
4	2.4

Chiwda (mixture)

The recommended composition of the *chiwda* is as follows:

Table 11

Ingredient	Weight (in grams/ml)
Puffed rice	25
Lentil	10
Peanuts	5
Oil	10
Iodised salt, green chilli, coriander	Not specified
Total	50

SHG 2 bought the *chiwda* from the market at Rs. 80 per kg. 50 g of *chiwda* would thus cost Rs. 4.

SHG 3 bought *chiwda* from the shop at Rs. 85 per kg, and added puffed rice (procured at Rs. 39 per kg) to the store bought *chiwda*, fried it in oil and then distributed the final product to the AWCs.

For every 1 kg of store bought *chiwda*, 250g of puffed rice was added. With puffed rice costing Rs. 40 per kg, 1 kilogram of the resultant *chiwda* would cost 103.75. The cost of providing 50g of *chiwda* would then be Rs. 5.19.

The cost of preparing 50g of *chiwda* for the two SHGs who prepare the *chiwda* in their own kitchens is estimated below¹⁴.

Table 12

Item	SHG 1	SHG 4	Minimum cost (per kg)	Maximum cost (per kg)	Average cost (per kg)
Puffed rice	39	40	40	40	40
Lentil	45	70	45	70	57.5
Peanut	50	60	50	60	55
Oil	57	90	57	90	73.5

Both SHGs noted that they add turmeric to the *chiwda*. However, as turmeric is not included in the prescribed recipe, it has been excluded from this analysis.

The cost of preparing *chiwda* has thus been estimated (in Rs):

Table 13

Item	Prescribed Norm (in grams/millilitre)	SHG 1 cost (as per norm in grams/millilitre)	SHG 4 cost (as per norm in grams/millilitre)	Average cost (as per norm in grams/millilitre)
Puffed rice	25	1	1	1
Lentil	10	0.45	0.70	0.58
Peanut	5	0.25	0.30	0.55
Oil	10	0.57	0.90	0.74
Total	50	2.27	2.90	2.87

The table below indicates the cost to the SHGs/MMs to supply 50g of *chiwda*:

Table 14

14 These calculations are based on the assumption that the norms laid out by the Department circulars are being met.

SHG/Mahila Mandal	Per 50 g <i>chiwda</i> cost (in Rs.)
1	2.27
2	4
3	5.19
4	2.90

Pausthic Aahar

Pausthic aahar is a take-home ration that is provided to children between six months and two years of age. The recommended composition and final cost of preparing the take-home ration is estimated in the table below:

Table 15 Take Home Rations (Pausthic Aahar supplied to children between 6 months and 2 years of age)

Item	Recom mende d Compo sition (in grams)	SHG 1 Cost per kg	SHG 1 Cost per benefici ary	SHG 2 Cost per kg	SHG 2 Cost per benefici ary	SHG 3 Cost per kg	SHG 3 Cost per beneficia ry	SHG 4 Cost per kg	SHG 4 Cost per benefici ary	Average Cost Cost per kg	Average Cost Cost per beneficia ry
Bajri	15	14	0.21	20	0.30	16	0.24	20	0.3	17.5	0.26
Pithi shakkar	15	45	0.68	40	0.60	50	0.75	44	0.66	44.75	0.67
Akka moong	15	58	0.87	70	1.05	40	0.6	80	1.2	62	0.93
Wheat	45	20	0.9	25	1.13	23	1.04	20	0.9	22	0.99
Total	90		2.66		3.08		2.63		3.06		2.85

Labour costs

SHG 1: A woman is hired to wash vessels, and is paid Rs. 800 per month. Two women cook the food and each earns Rs. 600. Incidentally, both the cooks are AWWs (though the Maharashtra Government has issued a government resolution prohibiting the involvement of AWWs in the supply and distribution of SNP). A young boy is hired to take the food in a rickshaw to the AWCs and is paid Rs. 400 per month. Rs. 600 is paid to a woman to carry the food to the top of a hill where two additional AWCs are located, and Rs. 150 is paid per month to another woman to carry the food from the rickshaw to an AWC. It must be noted here that this SHG hires women from outside the SHG to conduct its operations for the most part.

SHG 2: One woman washes the vessels used for cooking and the containers, for which she receives Rs. 500 per month. The women who cook and distribute the food receive Rs. 1500 a month on an average. Though only about three women are involved in the cooking and distribution of food, the profits are divided amongst all seven members of the SHG as the women who are not directly involved demand a share of the profits by virtue of their names being included when the SHG was registered. An agreement has thus been arrived at wherein they are entitled to 5% of the profit that accrues.

SHG 3: Five women from the SHG participate in the SNP production process. Two women help in washing the vessels, one of whom is paid Rs. 1000, and the other Rs. 700. One woman cleans the rice and is paid Rs. 1500. Another woman cooks and is paid Rs. 3000.

SHG 4: Seven to eight women from the SHG take turns to cook and clean. There is no fixed pattern, and therefore no fixed payment. The profits that accrue are distributed amongst the contributing members.

Cost analysis

This section will attempt to conduct a cost analysis of SHG operations. This section has been compiled using data collected from the four SHGs/MMs about their ingredient costs and the per child cost for the various food items prepared, to compare this with the per

child allocation. However, it must be noted that these are approximate costs, as when subsequent attempts were made by the researcher to reconfirm some rates of ingredients previously quoted by the various SHGs/MMs, the new rates quoted varied from the previous ones, at times widely. Thus this exercise may not be considered to be accurate, but does give an indication of the financial viability of the initiative in its present state.

To calculate the cost incurred per child by the SHG for one month for children in the two to six year category, and the costs for women, the average cost of the items provided as on-site feeding and the average cost of the snack have been added and multiplied by the number of children, and then multiplied by 26 (number of days on which SNP is to be provided as norm). To calculate receipts from the Department, the number of children/women have been multiplied by the per beneficiary allocation.

To calculate the cost incurred per child by the SHG for one month for children in the six months to two years category, the cost incurred per child by every SHG is multiplied by the number of children and 26 days. To calculate receipts from the Department, the number of children have been multiplied by the per beneficiary allocation.

Women are provided with 250 grams of cooked food. The cost of providing the food has thus been obtained using the costs of providing 100 grams of the same food to children as a base. This amounts to Rs. 3, Rs. 3.6, Rs. 3.25 and Rs. 3.3 for SHGs 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively per woman per day).

Similarly, children between two and three years of age are provided 125 grams of SNP as on-site feeding. The cost of this has been calculated using the cost of providing 100 grams of food per child as a base. This amounts to Rs. 6, Rs. 7.25, Rs. 6.5 and Rs. 6.7 for SHGs 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively per child per day).

Table 16

<i>Item</i>	<i>SHG1</i>	<i>SHG2</i>	<i>SHG3</i>	<i>SHG4</i>
(Average cost of providing <i>Pausthic Aahar</i> to children between 6 months and 2 years of age) – (subsidy received) * 26 days * number of children	(+)2125	(+)1340	(+)2529	(+)1824
(Average cost of providing SNP to pregnant and lactating women) – (subsidy received) * 26 days * number of women ¹⁵	(-)702	(-)3335	(-)705	(-)2608
(Cost of providing on-site feeding to children between 2 and 3 years of age) – (subsidy received) * 26 days * number of children	(+)1373	(+)3146	(+)2330	(+)4219
(Cost of providing on-site feeding to children between 3 and 6 years of age) – (subsidy received) * 26 days * number of children	(-)2457	(-)18704	(-)6422	(-)7774
Transport	7500	3192	4009	15,733
Fuel	630	1350	1000	2200
Electricity	0	200	0	300
Water	0	150	200	150
Labour	2750	5000	3200	N.A.
Rent	0	2000	800	2500
Stationery	15	50	100	200

<i>Total</i>	<i>-10,556</i>	<i>-29,495</i>	<i>-11,577</i>	<i>-25,422</i>
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As table 16 indicates, if SHGs do provide SNP as per the norms, they stand to incur substantial losses. Losses are likely to be higher if we consider interest on capital expenditure. Since SHGs are unlikely to continue functioning in a scenario where losses are so high, it can only be assumed that the beneficiaries are not receiving their due. The losses appear to accrue from the cost of the SNP per beneficiary, which in the case of women and children in the three to six year category is much less than the allocation. In such a situation, increasing the number of children being catered to will not improve the situation and the losses will only multiply. Unless the per child allocation is improved or SHGs are given subsidies to reduce the cost of food inputs, the situation is unlikely to improve. Furthermore, given that it is the cost of food inputs which is primarily responsible for inflating the costs, switching to a centralized system will not serve to eliminate the problem.

Economies of scale

Under the new norms, SHGs are expected to provide supplementary nutrition to a maximum of five *anganwadis*. However, there exists an unofficial consensus within government circles that five AWCs per SHG/MM may not be a financially viable proposition, and that 25-30 AWCs per SHG may be more advisable as well as profitable. Therefore a certain laxity exists in the monitoring of the number of AWCs associated with a kitchen. The actual number of AWCs per SHG/MM may vary from a situation where eight AWCs are under the umbrella of a single SHG/MM to a situation seen in some areas of Mumbai where two SHGs provide nutrition to the same AWC. During the course of the field study it was seen that in some instances a single group of members operated two separately registered SHGs and provided for two different sets of AWCs. Officials noted that the quality of food supplied by groups that provide to only one or two AWCs shows a marked difference from those that supply to larger numbers given their inability to spread out costs.

Timely payment of bills

Given the limited financial capacity of SHGs/MM the government issued instructions stating that they are to be paid by the 10th of every month. While earlier the funds were

transferred from the *Zilla Parishad* to the CDPOs who then distributed the funds, it was observed that very often funds were held up at the *Zilla Parishad* level. Furthermore as CDPOs were not District Development Officers (DDOs), they were not in a position to access the funds directly. Now, however, CDPOs are also DDOs and in a position to withdraw funds themselves and ensure payment on time. Furthermore, earlier the government transferred funds for six months at a time, and there were delays in receiving funds when the six months had elapsed. Now the entire estimated amount for the year is transferred, and resides with the district functionaries.

In spite of this, all the SHGs complained of having received payments late. During the first phase of data collection, all the kitchens surveyed noted that their payments had been delayed by two to four months. During the second stage of data collection, the five kitchens visited all noted that they had received payments for the months of March, April and May at the same time in November. Typically, there are delays in payments in the months of April, May and June after the budget has just been approved, as it usually takes two to three months for the budgetary allocation to percolate from the Budget Distribution System to the SHG. Why the delays extended beyond the time frame noted above was unclear.

As this section indicates, SHGs and MMs are currently facing the risk of high losses. The high input costs make the operations infeasible if norms are strictly met. SHGs indicated to this researcher that because of the high costs they resorted to supplying less SNP than mandated while claiming money for the entire amount that should have been supplied. Furthermore, the delays in payments of bills are likely to have further exacerbated the situation. Unless greater support is provided to SHGs in the form of subsidies for raw materials, etc., children and women are going to continue to be deprived of their benefits.

Social and Gender Equity

One of the aims of the decentralized production of SNP under the ICDS relates to employment generation for women, especially women belonging to marginalized

communities. It was observed during the field study that in four out of the six kitchens that were open at the time of the visit, food was cooked solely by women. However in one kitchen it was observed that an SHG member's husband cooked the food, and in another kitchen, while the spices used were made by a member of the SHG, the rest of the cooking was performed by a man hired as a cook. The number of cooks in each kitchen varied, from a single woman who cooked only for four AWCs to a kitchen that employed five women to cater to the ICDS, apart from separate contracts for the provisioning of food to the MDM and to local hospitals.

With respect to the involvement of Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in the cooking process, it may be noted that there are no directives from the state government requiring that the cooks engaged in the preparation of the SNP should belong to the SC/ST. While a circular had been drafted to this effect, no further action was taken on it.

It is significant that though the members of SHGs and MMs providing food to AWCs were unhappy with the way in which the scheme was functioning (with specific reference to delayed payment of bills and what they perceived to be inadequate per child allocation), they were very keen to continue providing SNP to AWCs, and viewed the initiative as a preferable alternative to other employment options open to them, if any. As one woman put it – 'we are tired of washing vessels'.

While no order has been passed as yet with respect to according preference to the employment of women from SC/ST communities for the provisioning of SNP, it may be noted that the Supreme Court in its order on 20th April, 2004 stated in the context of the Mid-day Meal Scheme that 'In appointment of cooks and helpers, preference shall be given to Dalits, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes'. Extrapolating from this order, and given that a similar circular was to have been introduced in Maharashtra, it may be recommended that the proposed circular be formulated and implemented. Furthermore, it is also necessary that the groups be monitored to ensure that only women are employed or are members, in keeping with the Supreme Court order.

Quality and Satisfaction

Composition of SNP

Children between six months to one year of age are given a nutritious powder made of corn, soyabean, sugar and milk powder (Take Home Ration). Pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent girls are entitled to the food distributed to normal children.

During the initial phase of data collection, five items including *pausthic pulao*, *khichdi*, *kheer*, *usal* and *lapsi* were being provided as part of the supplementary nutrition programme. During the second phase of the study only *khichadi*, *lapsi*, *masoor pulao* and *usal* were being provided. During the course of the study many mothers complained about the lack of variety in the food being provided. One mother noted that her child sometimes threw the food away because the items kept being repeated. Some mothers were of the opinion that dry foods such as *chikki*, soya biscuits, *laddoos* etc. should be introduced. Including fruits as a regular component of the SNP was also suggested. With the increase in the per child allocation to Rs. 4 and the introduction of a mid-morning snack as an entitlement under ICDS, *chiwda* or puffed rice *laddoo* has also been introduced in Maharashtra.

Quality of SNP and satisfaction

On observation the food provided at AWCs appeared to be edible and of reasonably good quality and taste. Mothers of children from the AWCs were satisfied with the quality of the food provided and found the SNP being provided at the time of the survey to be far superior to what was previously available. It was, however, not possible to ascertain whether the pre-defined recipes stipulated by the ICDS Commissionerate which listed out the quantities of various inputs, were, in fact, being followed. One SHG member admitted to following her own recipe while preparing the food.

The only mechanism in place to monitor compliance is the Mothers' Committee. There is also a perception within officials circles, that unlike in the previous system where the *anganwadi* worker could be held accountable for the quality of food provided, in the new

system the Department has no control over the provisioning of food. Similarly, with the production agencies procuring raw inputs from the open market, officials were concerned that this system does not allow for a check to be kept on the quality of raw materials used, and that a better alternative would be to appoint one or two SHGs to procure and distribute the raw materials to those SHGs and MMs producing the SNP.

Apart from concerns about the quality of the SNP distributed, a related concern is the quantity of SNP distributed. Currently there is no measurement system in place for the distribution of food. The quantity of food distributed varies, depending on the AWW, the size of the plate, amount of food supplied for the day, the size of the ladle used, etc. Furthermore, given the fixed proportions of calories and proteins required to be provided to each child, the quantity of food to be given to each child would vary depending on the item of food being provided. However, AWWs reported distributing 150g of all food items to normal children. In the absence of a fixed measurement system, there is no way of ensuring that nutritional norms are being met. While the Deputy Commissioner Health and Nutrition noted that attempts were made by the Commissionerate to introduce a measuring system comprised of a cup with measurements for different food items marked on it, the proposal was shot down by officials in the state government.

The decentralized provisioning of SNP has resulted in better quality of food being provided as compared to the previous entitlements. It may, however, be useful to explore the possibility of introducing greater variety in the kind of food provided in keeping with beneficiary preferences. There is also a need to ensure that nutritional norms are being met, by pre-specified recipes being followed, by a greater variety in the kind of food provided, and by distributing the proper quantities of food. A fixed measurement system needs to be put in place to ensure that the quantity of food supplied is not arbitrarily decided as is currently the case.

Eligible Beneficiary Coverage

With respect to the perceptions of AWWs as to who constituted the eligible beneficiaries, it was seen that all the AWCs included pregnant and lactating women as well as adolescent girls in their list of beneficiaries, along with children between six months to six years of

age. At one AWC, however, lactating mothers were not included in the list of beneficiaries. Grade 3 and Grade 4 children were entitled to double portions.

It was difficult to ascertain whether all the beneficiaries were getting their due share, as the survey was conducted in the summer months when attendance was lower than that claimed as the average at other times of the year, as children were believed to have accompanied their parents out of town. There was some confusion amongst academics, NGO personnel and even some ICDS staff with respect to whether AWCs were supposed to be operational during the summer vacation, with many stating that AWCs remained closed when schools were shut. AWCs were thus observed to be largely empty, or in many instances, shut altogether. On the other hand, in many instances this researcher found that attendance was marked as 100% even where the AWC had been closed on the day in question. Two of the AWCs did not have records filled in. Furthermore, when the researcher visited it was found that the the kitchens still prepared large quantities of food , even though attendance was low or AWCs were closed altogether. When asked what would be done with the food that had been sent from the kitchens, which was often much more than needed for the number of beneficiaries physically present at the AWC, the AWWs responded that they would visit the homes of the children and distribute it.

It was not always possible to observe whether children were consuming all the food at the AWCs. However, in at least two AWCs children either had elder siblings pick up their food for them if they were too young, or took home the leftover food.

If SHGs/MMs do in fact cut corners and/or provide less SNP than the norms to children, adolescent girls and women, it shows that the eligible beneficiaries do not receive their due quantities.

Officials have noted vast increases in the number of beneficiaries being covered under the ICDS since the introduction of decentralized SNP. This in itself is a positive effect. Further study needs to be conducted, however, of the reasons behind this trend. While improved quality of food may be one reason attributed to this change, officials were of the opinion that SHGs/MMs were responsible

for the increased number of beneficiaries availing of the ICDS services. This may also be seen as a positive impact, unless the increase in the number of beneficiaries has not been matched with an increase in the supply of SNP. It is a matter of concern however, that beneficiaries do not receive their entitlements during the summer months of the year when schools are closed.

Community Participation

Before exploring community participation in the decentralized model of SNP production in urban Maharashtra, it would be useful to consider the theoretical premises on which the participatory paradigm has been based. Participation has widely been accepted as a 'good thing', and development strategies, whether civil society or state-led, have increasingly come to adopt participatory methods as part of their framework. While some see participation as a means to an end, others view it as an end in itself.

The concept of 'participation in development' gained currency from the 1980s in reaction to the development strategies prior to that, deeming them to be irrelevant, top-down and technocratic in nature, isolated from the contextual needs and realities of the intended beneficiaries. The term has, however, remained ambiguous, which has allowed the concept to be appropriated by various interests for their own ends. The participatory development/governance paradigms have sought to include, in varying degrees, the 'community' and/or 'beneficiaries' in the design, implementation and/or monitoring of development projects and programmes, whether state or donor initiated. The focus on 'community' is a significant component of the participation paradigm. However participatory development has come under fire in many quarters for its inability to recognize wider power structures (Mohan and Stokke 2000 cited in Tyranny), its positioning as a technical solution rather than as a political methodology of empowerment (Cleaver 1999, Rahman 1995 cited in Tyranny) and its romanticization of the 'community'. As Frances Cleaver notes 'Development practitioners excel in perpetuating the myth that communities are capable of anything, that all that is required is sufficient mobilization (through institutions) and the latent capacities of the community will be unleashed in the interests of development' (Cleaver 2001 cited in Williams).

While the discourse on participation was initially confined to questions of 'community participation' in donor led projects, post the 1970s, participation came to also be conceptualised in terms of citizen engagement in the policy formulation and implementation process, broadening its mandate to include ways in which citizens can be directly involved in the policy process and hold governments accountable (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999 cited in Cornwall and Gaventa). The involvement of citizens in the decision-making process found expression in the constitution of user groups (also known as user committees), a practice that was widely adopted in the South. The present conceptualisation of participation as demonstrated by the ICDS in Maharashtra includes an intrinsic component of 'user committees' which in this context has taken the form of mothers' committees, described by some as constituting the 'second wave of decentralisation' (Manor). The concept of user committees derived primarily from the enthusiasm of donor agencies to delegate micro-management of programmes to local communities, a growing consensus amongst these agencies that local communities should be allowed to directly influence the nature of the interventions constituted for them and thus allow for the prioritisation of 'local knowledge'. The 'bottom up' approach to interventions was believed to induce local communities to display greater levels of involvement and interest in the development project.

Cornwall and Gaventa, however, feel that the function of these committees usually remains confined to monitoring and does not extend to articulating the kinds of services they require. Cornwall and Gaventa note 'by denying people the agency to make choices outside the frame of reference afforded by their role in these programmes and by overlooking the complexity of relations of power between service providers and community members, and within communities themselves, they operate with a very limited conception of 'participation'. They go on to emphasize the need for most initiatives based on community participation to go beyond being 'cosmetic' and 'tokenistic'.

Community participation in the Maharashtra model refers to two aspects of the model – the actual production of food by members of the community, as well as monitoring of the

scheme by the community. The scope of community participation in this context includes service delivery and ensuring accountability. It is significant that the concept of community participation here does not include any aspect of citizen engagement in the policy formulation process at the state (or national) level. While Mothers' Committees theoretically do have a role to play in decision making for the selection of menu items, their actual participation has been minimal. Thus it is unlikely that community participation will lead to the political empowerment of the community .

Furthermore, it must be noted that communities are not homogenous entities, and not all the actors in a community act with the same interests. While the women who operate the SHGs may belong to the community where the AWC is located, to expect them to function with no consideration for profit and solely for the benefit of the beneficiaries is a somewhat utopian belief. While the requirement of profit is in no way detrimental to the operation of the scheme, in the absence of adequate institutional and financial support, SHGs may have to cut corners which in turn affects the quality of food provided (as this study indicates). Given the limited financial capacity of the SHGs which are comprised of poor women, the need for adequate institutional and timely support is evident.

While the inclusion of the community in the production process is a laudable initiative, in the absence of adequate support to the SNP producing agencies, the state is effectively transferring the responsibility and burden for providing SNP to the SHGs. The cost analysis of the functioning of the SHGs surveyed demonstrates that it is not financially viable for any service provider, let alone SHGs, to meet these costs. Placing responsibility on 'community' and 'participation' without putting in place measures such as subsidies on raw materials from the Food Corporation of India (FCI), assistance towards meeting capital requirements and timely payments will not in the final analysis allow for better quality of services. Furthermore, the concept of 'participation' as employed in this context is very limited. Greater involvement of the people in the formulation of the scheme would allow for a more meaningful use of the term.

Community Monitoring and Accountability

The monitoring mechanism in the decentralised model in Maharashtra relates to two

aspects: the quality of the food supplied, which is monitored by the Mothers' Committees; and the finances and the quantity of the food supplied, monitored by the AWW.

Mothers' Committees

The responsibility for monitoring the quality of food supplied has been delegated to Mothers' Committees. A Mothers' Committee is comprised of women from the area where the AWC is located. It consists of a mother of a child between 0-3 years of age, a pregnant woman, a lactating mother, an SC woman, an ST woman, and a female school teacher. Mothers' Committees may be likened to the 'user committees' described previously in this report. As with other user groups, Mothers' Committees are seen as intrinsically constituting a bottom up approach to development, their significance deriving from the fact that members are drawn from the local community and likely to be more involved in the enterprise, and also able to command higher levels of accountability from members of the production agency, given that both sets of members belong to the same 'local community'. Questions that arise at this juncture include who constitutes these committees and how much power do the members enjoy? While some committees may in theory wield considerable power, others may exist solely as nominal bodies.

Before examining the functioning of these committees it will be useful to lay out their role and the processes followed in the monitoring process.

The role of Mothers' Committees relates primarily to the checking of the food while it is being prepared, and ensuring that norms with respect to recipes are being followed, that the cooking is done in hygienic conditions, and that the food supplied is of reasonably good quality in terms of taste and variety.

Twice a month Mothers' Committees are expected to fill forms attesting to the fact that a number of requirements specified with regard to the SNP have been met by the kitchen (after visits to the kitchen while the food is being prepared), which is then to be attached to the kitchen's monthly bill submitted to the ICDS project office, payment of which, in principle, is made only on the receipt of the accompanying forms. However, of the eight

AWCs that were functioning at the time of the visit, less than half had Mothers' Committees in place. Some AWWs were unaware even of the existence of Mothers' Committees and said they had received no instructions from Supervisors regarding them. The field visit thus seemed to indicate that Mothers' Committees are relatively inactive or absent. Some ambiguity also existed as to whether Mothers' Committee reports were required by order. While the Deputy Commissioner Health and Nutrition attested that Mothers' Committee reports were required to be submitted, the CDPO of the concerned Project stated that there was no order to that effect, and that it had only been *suggested* that such reports be filled. Given the confusion that exists in official circles and the apparent non-functioning of the Mothers' Committees, there is effectively no method by which it can be ensured that nutritional requirements are being followed.

Another concern is the level of awareness a Committee enjoys regarding its role and power. Since it is assumed that mothers would have an interest in the quality of food provided to their children, the apparent lack of interest by the Committees is puzzling. Reasons for this may be that the Committees do not exist at all or are simply unaware of their role. Given that most AWWs themselves were unaware of the need for Mothers' Committees to be constituted, the low level of functioning of the Committees is unavoidable. The mothers who were interviewed also seemed to be relatively unaware of the role and power of the Committees.

A related aspect is the very limited nature of participation required from the Mothers' Committees. Both these Committees and the kitchens are understood to be functioning *outside* the ICDS framework, and thus not viewed as integrated within the official structure. The role of Mothers' Committees remains restricted largely to that of monitoring the quality of food provided and does not, under ordinary circumstances, extend to setting agendas or influencing the design of the programme. The only evidence this researcher could find of an active role being played by Mothers' Committees relates to the time when *moong dal bajra usal* was introduced in the menu. The Mothers' Committees were so opposed to this that the item had to be removed from the menu. While this is an encouraging example, this appears to be an exception rather than the norm.

It must also be noted that without taking into consideration the power structures within the community, and between the service providers and the user committee, assumptions about the efficacy of monitoring groups cannot be made. Unless prevalent imbalances in power are addressed, little progress can be made in terms of redressing malpractice and financial mismanagement.

Financial accountability and the anganwadi worker

With respect to monitoring, AWWs have two responsibilities – to ensure that the correct quantities of food are delivered, and to ensure that the food provider is reimbursed for the actual quantity of food provided. At the time of delivery AWWs are expected to weigh the food delivered and make entries in the register provided by SHGs to the AWC for that purpose, as well as fill a *challan* where the weight of the food received is recorded. Payments are made on the basis of the cost of the weight recorded. Though a 'demand' for a fixed amount of food to be supplied in the following month is submitted by the AWWs to the Supervisors at the end of each month, the weight of food supplied is measured on a daily basis by the AWW to ensure that the correct amount is provided. The bill supplied by the SHG to the CDPO is thus based ostensibly on actual quantities of food delivered to AWCs for every day that it has been open. To cross-monitor this, Mothers' Committees have been instituted to monitor (apart from the quality of food) that the stipulated amounts of supplementary nutrition are provided.

Whether registers are filled on the basis of the actual quantities of food received is questionable. In many AWCs it was observed that weighing machines were not available. In none of the eight AWCs studied was there evidence of the weight being actually measured, whether within the AWC or outside. Furthermore, it was apparent that the records did not match what had actually been received. While many of the AWWs and AWHs stated that the weight is required to be taken, most of them admitted to simply recording the demand submitted on a monthly basis as the daily weight supplied. Instances of false recording were noted during the study as follow:

- In one AWC it was seen that no entries had been made for the entire year. Furthermore, the AWW acknowledged making entries in the register on the basis of demand, and not actual supply.
- In another AWC that had not been functioning regularly during the month in which the study was conducted (verified with follow up visits), attendance in the food register was 100%.
- In one AWC the AWW said the weight of the food for the day was going to be measured when this researcher arrived. However, some of the food had already been distributed by the time of the researcher's visit. A closer inspection of records indicated that the weight of food received every day was recorded as 7.9 kg per day, with no variations.
- Another AWW noted that she receives the *challan* only at the end of the month, and she therefore records the weight of the food received on the 1st of the next month for all the days of the previous month.

The AWWs also spoke of logistical problems they face in taking the weight as they have not been provided with weighing machines to weigh the food containers, and only have the weighing scales used to weigh babies.

There also appeared to be some sort of understanding between SHGs/MMs and AWWs with respect to the obfuscating of food registers, a view shared by the Commissioner ICDS who notes that the number of beneficiaries enrolled showed a surprisingly marked rise with the introduction of SHGs in the supply of SNP. The exact nature of this relationship cannot be defined nor can it be said that such arrangements exist everywhere. For example, one SHG member noted that her SHG provided less food than was required (while entering the full amount in the *challan*), with the compliance of the AWW. An AWW confided to this researcher that the weight of the food received only amounts to 2-3 kgs per day, while her requirement is 10 kgs. On one occasion though she received take home rations only once that month she was asked by the kitchen staff to record that she had received the powder twice. When she attempted to complain about it, the Supervisor

became hostile.

It is thus possible that arrangements between Supervisors and SHGs/MM exist as well. Evidence of this was supplied by one SHG member who noted that the SHG was required to make a payment of Rs.50 to Supervisors for every AWC served (in addition to the box of sweets and Rs. 500 paid to both the AWW and AWH during Diwali).

The current structure of the ICDS and the attendant monitoring mechanism has not found favour in some official circles. The Commissioner ICDS and the Deputy Commissioner Health and Nutrition were of the opinion that the decentralized system, wherein raw materials are procured from the open market, prevents the Department from keeping a check on the quality of the food provided. Doubts were also raised regarding the maintenance of nutritional and hygiene norms during the cooking process. While previously the AWW could be held responsible for lapses, in the current system it was felt that the SHGs could not be held accountable as they do not comprise a part of the official ICDS structure. Thus the overall feeling amongst officials was that the decentralized system was not conducive to effective monitoring, and that the operations of the SHGs/MMs were outside the sphere of control of the ICDS Commissionerate.

While the introduction of Mothers' Committees has the potential to allow for greater involvement of society (or the 'community') in the monitoring process, unless greater efforts are made to generate political awareness, and awareness of the role and power that Mothers' Committees enjoy, these groups – if they exist at all – will remain nominal bodies. There is also a need for a fundamental restructuring of the role of the Mothers' Committee, beyond viewing them solely as instruments to allowing their greater involvement in policy formulation, enabling them, as Cornwall and Gaventa suggest, to articulate their needs.

The structure put in place to ensure accountability seems to subvert its own objectives, with SHG/MM members and AWWs found to be colluding with each other to allow for misappropriation of funds and failures in providing entitlements to the beneficiaries. Rather than put the blame squarely on both parties however, the financial burden placed on service providers

must be noted. As this report has indicated, the operations are not financially viable due to low allocations, late payments and lack of support structures, which give service providers no option but to resort to various methods to cut costs in order to stay afloat. In addition, the need for both third party evaluations and a stronger role for monitoring by the Department are evident.

Local Production of Food

One of the aims of the decentralized model of production is to ensure local production of food, using locally available ingredients and keeping in mind local tastes. With the model being based on the ideal of participation, SHGs and MMs are expected to cater to the communities where they are themselves based. While ensuring better quality of food, this directive also was aimed at eliminating the politically based contractor system that prevailed prior to the new directives. While it is not possible to definitively state whether the large politically based MMs have been completely eliminated, it would be safe to say that their grip over the system has loosened, given the rapid proliferation of SHGs/MMs who now supply to the ICDS in Mumbai¹⁶. Table 17 depicts the increase in the number of SNP providers between 1996 and 2008.

¹⁶ A discussion with the ICDS Commissioner indicated that the previous *Mahila Mandals* may have sub-divided to form smaller groups that now provide to the ICDS under their new guises.

*Table 17***Increase in number of providers of SNP between 1996 and 2008**

S. No.	Name of project	No. of AWC functioning	No. of contractors 1996-2006	MM/SHG 2006-07	MM/SHG 2007-08
1	Worli	281	22	49	35
2	Ghatkopar 1	159	6	12	41
3	Kurla	365	19	20	64
4	Aarey-Jogeshwari	119	8	10	21
5	Andheri	114	5	9	12
6	Vikhroli-Kanjurmarg	150	10	55	34
7	Ghatkopar 2	150	8	23	82
8	Bandra	175	9	14	25
9	Khar-Santa Cruz	235	14	16	27
10	Andheri 2	125	10	12	26
11	Andheri 3	128	11	7	12
12	Goregaon (E)	159	21	12	27
13	Goregaon (W)	150	21	18	43
14	Mulund (E)	125	6	20	26
15	Mulund (W)	100	19	19	21
16	Bhandup (E)	100	4	29	14
17	Bhandup (W)	150	5	44	133
18	Govandi	392	9	31	83
19	Mankhurd	232	16	10	21
20	Khar-Santa Cruz (New)	64	New	13	5
21	Borivali 1	120	New	31	36
22	Borivali 2	150	New	21	74
		3743	214	475	862

The table above indicates a large increase in the number of service providers of SNP in the

period post the introduction of the October 2005 GR. As recently as 2006 only 475 SHGs/MMs providers existed, in 2008 the number jumped to 862.

The large number of kitchens operating does not necessarily mean that those kitchens supply to AWCs in the community where they operate. During the course of the study it was observed that SHGs/MMs sometimes catered to AWCs at a considerable distance from their kitchens. However better management of the allocation of SHGs to various wards can rectify this situation.

Almost all the respondents interviewed were of the opinion that the quality of food provided had shown great improvement with the introduction of decentralized service provision. There remains room however for greater variety in the type of food provided. This is an aspect of the scheme that requires greater study, given the financial implications it will have. Ensuring that SHGs are allotted AWCs close to their kitchens will also allow for better use of resources and cut down transport costs.

Empowerment

Whether the decentralized SHG/MMs scheme allows for empowerment of the women involved cannot be conclusively stated, especially given the ambiguity around the term 'empowerment'. Given that the scheme does not allow SHG/MM members to participate in the decision making process, it is not clear on what basis it be claimed that the system facilitates empowerment of women. In terms of financial empowerment, while the women did consider the venture to be preferable to other forms of employment available to them, it is seen that the enterprise is not financially viable in its current incarnation.

Unless the structure is overhauled to make it more financially viable, it is unlikely that the contributing members will be able to make any profit, and use the profits for their own personal ends or for further ventures. The rapid increase in the number of SHGs providing SNP and the consequent rise in the number of women provided employment through this scheme is, however, an achievement in itself.

Recommendations

This report indicates that the supply of good quality food is possible even in a decentralized model. However, no model, centralized or decentralized can function effectively independent of government support. Therefore this section will set forth recommendations that will hopefully serve to strengthen and improve the system of SNP delivery.

- Ensure timely payments to SHGs. The production of SNP requires a substantial amount of working capital. If payments are delayed SHGs who do not usually command great resources will be forced to stop supply of the SNP or compromise on the quality of food supplied.
- SHGs should be assured access to soft loans to cover the initial capital costs.
- Credit must be provided two months in advance so as to ensure that delays in payments do not negatively affect operations.
- Foodgrains should be provided at subsidised rates through the FCI.
- Availability of weighing machines must be ensured in all AWCs in the city. Regular checks must be conducted by Supervisors as part of their regular inspections to ensure that weighing machines are in working order.
- Measuring devices must be employed in all the AWCs, with specific markings for each food item on the device to ensure that at least minimum nutritional norms are met.
- Greater variety must be introduced in the menu. No item should be repeated within the span of a week.
- Apart from the quantity of food supplied, checks must be kept on the quality and content of food supplied. Periodic testing needs to be conducted on samples of food collected from the kitchens of service providers to ensure that nutrition norms are being met.
- Greater awareness about Mothers' Committees needs to be created.
- The sphere of operation of Mothers' Committees must be extended to include checks on the financial aspects of the provisioning of SNP.
- The sphere of operation of Mothers' Committees must be expanded to include their

participation in decision making processes, such as selection of items on the menu. Greater involvement of Mothers' Committees in the decision making processes is likely to stimulate greater interest and involvement in the monitoring process.

- Third party monitoring and evaluation must be conducted on an annual or bi-annual basis.
- Kitchens must operate from independent units. Kitchens must also be required to obtain health and fire certificates.
- Service providers must be provided sufficient training with respect to maintaining high standards of cleanliness and hygiene in the kitchen and during the cooking process.
- AWCs need to be kept open even when schools are not functioning and it must be ensured that food is supplied during these periods as well. During the course of the study it was observed that even though food was not being provided, bills were being prepared.

Conclusions

A review of the functioning of the SNP component of the ICDS in Mumbai reveals mixed results. While the quality of food supplied has improved, going by beneficiary reports, a number of concerns have been raised, especially with respect to siphoning off of funds and adherence to norms. Given the potential that the decentralized production of SNP has to create employment for women in SHGs/MMs, who can supply it to the 11,04,262 operational AWCs in the country, it would be worthwhile to consider how this model of food production can be strengthened both to ensure that the beneficiaries receive their entitlements, and to provide support to the thousands of women contributing towards its functioning.

First of all, there is a need to curtail the siphoning off of funds taking place because of poor monitoring of the scheme and thus the monitoring mechanism needs to be strengthened. While increased involvement of beneficiaries would serve to strengthen the

monitoring system, in the absence of greater devolution of powers to the beneficiaries and their greater involvement in the decision making process, their participation and effectiveness in the monitoring process is likely to continue to be minimal, as is currently the case. Apart from beneficiaries and ICDS staff, third party monitoring and evaluation needs to be introduced. Defaulters must be dealt with strictly and contracts terminated immediately in the case of SHGs/MMs found to be violating the terms of the contract or engaging in corrupt practices. However, the need for stronger monitoring systems does not preclude the need for providing greater support to service providers.

There is an overarching need to make the model financially viable and thereby reduce incentives to seek payment for false bills etc. The model should not be based on the premise that the role of the Department is solely to provide the per child cost and leave SHGs/MMs to fend for themselves. Currently the model appears to be a loss-making one. Furthermore, it is unlikely that scaling up the model to reduce the marginal costs incurred and thus increase financial viability will be sufficient, given that the food input costs are a major culprit. Instead, a very precise estimation of costs based on current market rates needs to be conducted to determine per child allocations and additional support to be provided to SHGs/MMs.