

To
Member of the Standing Committee of Parliament

Subject: Request for an appointment to make a presentation in front of the Standing Committee to provide recommendations on the Young Child's Right to Food and Nutrition Security

Respected Members,

Mobile Creches is a forty two year old organisation based in Delhi working with the vision of a just and caring world for young children of marginalised and mobile populations to enable them to develop into competent and confident individuals. As the Executive Director/Chairperson of the organisation I express deep concern about the "National Food Security Bill", on behalf of our organisation, with regards to the period of early childhood .

We request you to give us a hearing and also provide a note on the key issues we feels needs to be looked at on a priority basis.

The National Food Security Bill provides an opportunity for our country to eliminate the curse of hunger and malnutrition that stares at our face. While the Bill is a progressive step on many fronts it has a number of weaknesses with regard to the food entitlements and nutrition security of young children.

The age cohort of conception to 6 years of age is critical and damage done during this phase is irreversible. This is the period when the foundations of health, cognitive development, language, personality and confidence are laid. 90% of brain growth takes place during this time period and also the period of maximum vulnerability when neglect and deprivation of appropriate nutrition and childcare results in irreversible damage.

Our recommendations are based on four decades of working on the issue of early childhood and running crèches in vulnerable settings. Through our programme of crèches on construction sites and slums that runs for eight years and provide supplementary nutrition, preventive and curative health and age appropriate learning through trained workforce had been able to improve nutritional grades for 2 out of every three children. Our experience shows a comprehensive

strategy of maternity entitlements, ICDS and Creches is required to intervene into the intergenerational vicious cycle of poverty and hunger.

Hence we propose the following three essential components to be incorporated within your Bill:

- Maternity Entitlements
- Universalised ICDS with Quality
- A network of Creches across villages, urban slums and worksites to meet the child care needs of the children of women working in the informal sector

By addressing only one or two of the above elements in a fragmented manner, we run the risk of repeating the errors of past national policies. It would not be wise to let the children fall through the cracks specially during a time when one out of every two children under six is malnourished.

We would like to provide the following rationale in support of the above:

Tackling malnutrition requires nutritional care of women in pregnancy, support to exclusive breastfeeding till six months, continued care of the infant and provision of nutrition till the age of six. While this is well understood and is being partially provided through the ICDS programme, crèches should be an integral part of any strategy for nutritional security of the young child and bring together through one structure – nutrition for the mother, support for continued breastfeeding, complementary feeding and stimulation for the child.

We therefore recommend the following:

1. NFSB must consider a network of crèches in multiple models in rural areas and in urban slums in order to ensure that the essential nutritional support and care reaches the young child. During this vulnerable period of childhood crèches would ensure provision of feeding of appropriate food at frequent intervals, and the care and safety necessary for the normal development at this tender age.

This network of crèches needs to be of different models and flexible enough to respond to the needs of women working in different sectors (such as Construction, agriculture, paid domestic workers, artisans, home based workers and safai karamcharies, vendors etc.) – who comprise the vast pool of informal sector women engaged in paid and unpaid work. Crèches should be provided a space, trained workers and should be equipped to ensure essential care and nutritional support.

In a country of widespread poverty, crèches are the one structure essential for Food Security, and through which, the issue of malnutrition and child development can be comprehensively addressed. At least 25% of AWCs, depending on community needs, must be extended to function as Anganwadi-cum-crèches with proper infrastructure, as well as adequate financial and human resource support. Of particular concern is ensuring

that special groups, like migrant families and urban slum dwellers, have access to AWCs cum crèches.

2. The entitlements of children mentioned in the Supreme Court orders in the Right to Food case (PUCL vs State) be fully included in the Bill (See annexure). All young children, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls in India must have access to the full range of quality anganwadi services.

The Bill, by considering only the order on SNP negates the holistic development of the young child which is so closely linked to his/her nutrition security. We propose that the National Food Security Bill includes all services mentioned under the Supreme Court Order in the form mentioned in the Order.

A strengthened structure for ICDS for an intervention in malnutrition and food security would require the following:

- Appointment of a second AWW to ensure adequate focus on 0-3 and 3-6
- Training of staff and provision of infrastructure
- Provision of all six services
- Provision of hot cooked meals and a diversity in the quality of diet (both at the centre and through Take Home Ration). The enhanced diet should be enhanced to include animal products like eggs, milk etc and other locally made food
- Growth monitoring should be an essential guaranteed service

We hope the Standing Committee will look at the above on a priority basis.

We look forward to an opportunity to make a presentation in front of the Committee.

Thank you,

With best wishes,