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**Impact Assessment of Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme in
Kumargram Block of West Bengal**

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Abstract

The childhood period of any child is very important physical and mental development or growth. But, the inevitable changes like women entering the work field have an effect on the child care and development. So, childhood requires protection, care and support from the society and the state also. Government frames and gets various legislations, policies, and programmes implemented through its machinery and other organizations. Due to slow growth of different child care facilities, it was felt that women among all socio-economic groups in both the organized and unorganized sectors need support in terms of quality, substitute crèche/day care services for their young children while they are at work. Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme launched to accomplish these objectives. The present study is an outcome of an in-depth fieldwork on the impact assessment of seven crèche centres' functioning as well as the beneficiary families. These centres of Kumargram block of Alipurduar, West Bengal were operated by an NGO named KREDA. As this work is totally based on primary data. Pre-structured questionnaire was used for data collection from crèche centres, while villagers were probed with survey schedule, FGDs, and observation tool. Simple statistical tools were used to analyse and interpret the data.

Keywords: Crèche, Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme, Impact Assessment.

Introduction: Early childhood is the underpinning period of life. Basic attitudes and behavior patterns get developed in the first five or six years of life (Hangsing, 2011). National Policy on Education (1986) has explicitly recognized the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) as a crucial input for human development. In this regard, Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for the children of working mothers (launched in 2006) was one of the pioneer programmes which strongly articulated the need and importance of early childhood education. It was proposed to provide day care facilities

to the children of working mothers. The reason behind approaching this particular scheme in action can be traced with social need rather than just providing basic education foundation to early childhood. Since last few decades of the twentieth century, there has been observed dual inevitable changes in Indian society which justified the need for these type of service. Firstly public and private sectors have started to provide increased opportunity to them. On the other hand, the breaking up of joint family system and the increased phenomenon of nuclear families, working women need support in terms of quality, substitute, and care for their young children at working hour. There were existing services from private enterprises, but with the limited number and very slow growth rate resulting in failure to meet the needs of working mothers in terms of extent, content, and quality of services. Apart from this, women belonging to poor families also required support and relief from childcare as they struggle to cope with the burden of activities, within and outside the home (WCD, 2012). It is well understood that life success, health, and emotional wellbeing have their roots in early childhood. Effective day care for young children is essential and a cost-effective investment as it provides support to both the mothers and young children. Investing resources to support children in their early years of life brings long-term benefits to them and to the whole community. Early childhood development is very important for every kind of children and it can predict the future welfare of every child. (Awofeso and Rammohan, 2011). Studies by Reynolds et al. (2001) and Young(1996) revealed that early childhood development programmes benefit children with higher and timelier school enrolment, higher school completion rates, improved nutrition and health status, child morbidity and mortality, improved social and emotional behaviour, and increased earning potential and economic self-sufficiency as an adult. Apart from this, these types of programmes also act as a protection measure as it addresses issues such as child labor, school drop outs, child prostitution, outreach for medical and health programme female literacy etc.

Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS), Mid-Day-Meal, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme were the flagship programmes working with child development, protection, education etc. However, there has been the low priority in programme child development for children care & protection. Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) scheme focuses on the basis of services provide to the children group. Through this scheme, the community workers & helpers provide supplementary nutrition, non-formal, pre-school education, health check-up etc. While Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche scheme working mother is providing comprehensive day-care services to young children (0-6 years) of working other deserving women belonging to the low-income category.

The word ‘Crèche’ originated from French word which means infant bed. A crèche is defined as provide occasional security and protection for less than 8 years old children, and these facilities are provided on by Crèche worker in particular platform. According to its French origin, crèche refers to the crib. The crèche has been displayed in churches during the period from Christmas Eve since the Middle Age. It is a kind of tradition of Cristian

home even before the custom of Christmas Trees. The crèche has become popular in modern days in several countries as it provides proper care and protection to young children. The crèches structurally maintain and provide a safe environment for young children, for their healthy growth, nutrition, play materials, cradles, sanitation, beds and a supervisor of the crèches provide support and take care of every child in absent of their parent. (Supath Gramyodyog Sansthan, 2013).

The history of crèche scheme in India is not the very old concept. In 1969 at a construction site in Delhi first mobile crèche was set up (Pattnaik, 1996). Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche scheme was implemented during 2006 throughout India. The scheme was implemented through the Central Social Welfare Board and a national level Voluntary Organisation, namely Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW). Emphasis was particularly put in the BPL areas. The structure of the scheme was specially designed for children of working mother. The main objective of the scheme is to provide the good quality child care facility. The space required for a child is 6-8 sq.ft. in a crèche center. All facility like electricity (fans, lights), sanitation, toilet as well as the sleeping facility was to be present in a crèche center. The scheme also proposed for a free space for playing with playing materials as well as teaching material present in the centre. Conversely, several studies have been conducted by scholars to benchmark the real impact of crèche schemes (Sharma et al., 2013; Supath Gramyodyog Sansthan, 2013). Crèche services have been recommended also in different studies on health and nutrition status of working mothers' children. (Abbi et al., 1988; Nyberg, 2000). According to Das (2014), the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for the children of working mothers sets an example for other programmes that are not up to the mark to take good care of the children's nutrition. In fact, this scheme has been considered for convergence as a social security scheme for the elimination of child labours (Nath et al., 2013). In this backdrop, the present study has been conducted in Kumargram block where an NGO named KREDA is running centres under this scheme for working women of different tea estates. The study aims towards assessing the impact of the scheme by measuring the achievable goals. Moreover, a socio-economic study was carried out with the families whose children were attending the crèche centres.

Context, Community, and Method: The study area was selected with the prior direction of the project director of Khagrabari Rural Energy Development Association (KREDA). It operates in mainly three districts of West Bengal namely Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar. KREDA took the scheme as implementing agency and started the centres in 2008 in selected tea estate areas of Kumargram block where the labours live in colonies. Kumargram community development block is situated in Alipurduar sub division of Alipurduar districts. This block consist 11 Gram Panchayats. The total population of this block is 199,609 with a sex ratio of 945. (2011 Census) The total literacy rate is 63.79%. The entire block has 36.77% SC population while ST population is 30%. Seven crèche centres studied in this work belong to Turturi and Rydak panchayat. Entire study area commonly comes under Dooars region of North Bengal. Undulating, hilly topography covers the region along with forest and seasonal rivers. As labours of local tea estates have

migrated from their ancestral homes in different parts of Jharkhand and West Bengal decades ago for the cause of employment, they have developed a unique culture. They reside in spaces provided by tea garden enterprises with houses constructed of wood, bamboo and tin. Communicative languages of the villages are Saadri and Bengali. Nepali language is also observed in some villages. There is no space for agricultural operation in the villages. In some cases, the villagers cultivate some climbers and other horticultural crops in their small kitchen gardens. They collect timber and non-timber forest products from adjoining forests. Almost all the families have at least one tea garden employee which is the main source of income.

This independent study is based on primary data which was collected through several tools. Fifteen each family were randomly selected from all the households whose children are enrolled in the centre. Household survey schedule was primarily used to collect data on general information, livelihood pattern, parents' perception of the scheme, their satisfaction level and general suggestions for the betterment of the scheme. Subsequently, focused group discussions were conducted with each centre beneficiary families to find out problems and their suggestions to make the centres run better. Contrariwise, crèche workers (recruited by KREDA from colony families) were probed with pre-structured questionnaires. Inferences, results, and conclusions have been drawn out from the analysis of data with simple tools. Repeated and same type of queries was asked from respondents to validate the data.

Demographic Profile of the Villages: The villages under study area are mostly tribal dominated except the two of Fashkhawa and Jayanti Tea Estate. During field survey, it was found that all centres enrolled 25 each child in their register. In some families, there was more than one child. Therefore, 25 separate families were not evenly present in each centre. Accordingly, 15 each household were randomly selected from whatever number of guardian families were there with the help of crèche workers.

Table 1: Literacy status of the surveyed households

Name of the Village	Male		Female		Total
	Illiterate	Literate	Illiterate	Literate	
Fashkhawa	23	13	21	23	80
Jayanti	16	24	21	17	78
Rahimabad	18	22	25	15	80
Turturikhand	18	17	24	13	72
Kartik Poulus line	18	25	15	25	83
Kartik Jaduline	22	19	25	15	81
Rydak	20	24	27	17	88
Total	135	144	158	125	562

There were total 105 families surveyed consisting 562 souls with sex ratio of 1014 in part of male. Literacy rate was 47.86% which was more in male members of the

households. Village children usually go to nearest villages or small towns for high school education.

Table 2: Family wise information of surveyed households

Name of the Village	Family type				Family size	BPL Card Status
	Nuclear	Joint	Extended	Total		
Fashkhawa	8	5	2	15	5.33	7
Jayanti	11	1	3	15	5.20	5
Rahimabad	13	1	1	15	5.33	0
Turturikhanda	14	1	0	15	4.80	7
Kartik Poulus line	9	2	4	15	5.53	6
Kartik Jaduline	9	4	2	15	5.40	3
Rydak	9	4	2	15	5.87	8
Total	73	18	14	105	5.35	36

About three fourth of the families being nuclear, joint families are more than the number of extended families. Family size is largest in Rydak village. Most families have at least one case of migration to nearby cities. 36 families have BPL card issued by panchayats, among which Rydak village is maximum. There are some families whose BPL Card status is pending for years. 74.28% of families' belonged to tribal communities (mostly Santhal, Oraon and Munda), 19.05% OBC and remaining from general caste. About one-third of families are associated with SHGs formed in the village. Among them Jayanti village has one family linked with SHG and Kartik PL do not have such families. During the study, it was found that the labours of tea garden get the wage of Rs. 90 per day along with the facility of electricity, drinking water etc. in most areas. As they do not have any agricultural land for cultivation, they grow some fruits and vegetables in their home garden. Apart from this most of the studied families have domestic animals. Rahimabad village does not have any electrical connectivity and sanitation facility. The villagers of Rydak do not have drinking water supply facility from the factory. They have tube wells instead. Total 65.71% families have the electricity facility while one-fourth of them have the facility of the low-cost latrine.

Perception of the Key Stakeholders of the Crèche Centres: As crèches are to provide a warm, welcoming, safe and stimulating environment for young children, they must meet the required standards. According to the norms, the parents are obliged to pay (Rs. 20/months and Rs 60/month per child) for additional facilities in the crèche. The centres studied in the research started after formation of a local sub-committee with educated peoples in the society as well as from NGO. Then, it was decided in the meeting that, the villagers will pay Rs. 20 for services at monthly basis. Nevertheless, the system did not last longer. Soon, the parents stopped funding. Throughout the study, it was observed that the children brought study materials from their homes. Villagers' perception on the scheme respondents were

enquired about their perception on the scheme through schedule as well as in FGDs. The centers usually run in the houses of crèche mothers if they are from the same village. As at least one family member is engaged in tea garden labour works, all mothers are not full timely working whose children are enrolled in crèche centres. Rather, they get employment seasonally. But, whether the mothers go to work in the factory or get engaged in unpaid household works, their children go to centres regularly.

Table 3: Time of sending children to crèche centres

Age of child for sending to centres	6-9 months	9 months to 1.5 year	1.5 -3 years	3-5 years
Frequency	20	38	31	16

During the household survey, the parents were asked about the age in which they send their children to centres. They were provided the option to respond freely. Later their responses were categorized consequently. Most of the guardians send their children in ages from 9 months to 18 months. According to them, in this age, their children learn to be separated from mothers for few hours. Nearly one-fifth of guardians send their children even before 9 months. 31 respondents told that they send their children in 18 months to 3 year age as in this age children become keen to interact with fellow children.

Table 4: Major reason behind sending children to crèche

Childcare at work	Education	Safe environment	Sanitation and health care practices	Supplementary nutrition	Following neighbours
37	28	7	12	16	5

The respondents replied that they have been motivated by multiple reasons for sending their kids to crèche. Right from the inception of those centres in the tea estate labour colonies, they observed its benefits. Table no. 4 states the major reason emphasized take them the decision of enrolling their children in respective centres. Most of them responded that they get relief at work if their children are at crèche. According to one-fourth of parents, basic education and inculcation of study habit are the major reason which helps children in future to get success in life. Other good habit developments, safe environment, and neighbours' activity are also motivating factors in this.

Table 5: Source of money for expenditure on children

Labour work	Service	Forest product	Animal rearing	vegetable cultivation
54	11	29	8	3

Though the guardians were not paying money for crèche services during the study, they were spending money on educational expenditure of children. Most of them used to save some amount from their wage. Apart from this, they spend money from their services (Government, private and entrepreneurial), marketing their forest, animal and vegetable produce.

Crèche Workers' Perception on the Scheme: Most of the members have been working since 2008. After recruitment, they were taken for training on basic teaching methods, childcare, health and hygiene, and nutrition. They were personally interviewed about the functioning of the centres. The primarily responded that they were not satisfied with the salary provided to them. It was Rs 1000 per month which often paid irregularly. Therefore, they usually get engaged in other part time jobs. Moreover, the fund for supplementary nutrition is not satisfactory and irregular and villagers have stopped their contribution, therefore, tiffin for children is not time and again prepared and children of elder age group rush to ICDS centres for food. Project implementing NGO has also complained the same problem of the irregular recurring grant from state authority. Crèche mothers had several suggestions to improve the scheme like regularization of fund flow, updating of teaching learning material, improvement in centre building and additional basic facilities.

Assessment of Crèche Centres: Implementing agencies are accountable to provide the basic minimum facilities to ensure that the children in the centre have a hygienic, healthy and child-friendly environment for their proper growth and care. In the present study, the crèche workers were probed with the pre-designed questionnaire regarding the functioning of the centres.

Table 6: Centre wise functioning of different centres

Centre	Fashkhawa	Jayanti	Rahimabad	Turturikhand	Kartik PL	Kartik JL	Rydak	
Crèche unit no	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	
Starting year	2008	2008	2008	2008	2008	2008	2008	
Location changed	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	
Willing to change location	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	
Timing	8:30 am to 12:00 pm	8:30 am to 12:30 pm	8:00 am to 11:00 am	7:30 am to 11:30 am	8:00am to 11:00 am	9:30 am to 12:30 pm	7:30 am to 11:00am	
Facilities	Play area	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Sleeping	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	Play materials	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Cooking utensil	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided
	First aid kits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Drinking water	Supply Water	Supply water	Handpump	Supply Water	Supply Water	Supply water	Handpump
	Foods provided	Suji, biscuit, <i>khichri</i>	Suji, biscuit, <i>khichri</i>	Biscuit, suji	Suji, biscuit, <i>khichri</i>	Suji, biscuit, <i>khichri</i>	Suji, biscuit, <i>khichri</i>	Suji, biscuit, <i>khichri</i>
Mothers linked to SHGs		35%	11%	40%	43%	0%	50%	40%
Link to PHC		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tie up with Anganwadi		No	No	Very good	Good	No	Good	No
Local sub committee		Not in proper function	Not in proper function	Not in proper function	Yes	Yes	Not in proper function	Yes
Display board		Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

As all the centres started functioning soon after recruitment of the crèche workers with 25 children, most of them have remained in same place. The location of crèche centre has been changed in Kartik Jaduline due to frequent elephant attack. Fashkhawa centre has been shifted to Chuniyajhora. But the change has yet not been registered in WBSWB. In Turturikhand the center was changed for a time but later it running in the extra room near MSK where it started earlier. Most of the centres were found to be running with one single room. The play area is there in most of the centres but it is not adequate anywhere. As per utensils, one dekchi, one bucket, 25 plates, and stove were provided during starting and no replacement has been done later. As Tiffin, the mentioned items are provided but due to the irregular release of the recurring grant, it has been stopped. So the children are not provided adequate food every day. Most of the centres collect water from supply water. But there is not any separate water source only for a crèche centre. The local subcommittee was formed in every centre but due to the problems in supplementary nutrition arrangement, the mothers have reduced their interest in meetings. The crèche workers were found to maintain attendance register on a regular basis. They keep first aid box for emergency use. All of them had convergence with Primary Health Centres and Anganwadi Centres.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Children need access to nutrition, basic social services, such as health, education, protection, and care to improve their welfare and their capacity. They are the asset for future. Delivery of social services requires increasing financial resources and particularly, the quality of public expenditure in these areas. Additionally, Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model is also required along with administrative reforms and children's centric development approach. The study reveals that the families are economically poor as well as they spend very less in education. Though crèche is not the only place to take care of their children, the parents keep their children during the morning to noon time and use the benefit of the scheme well. The centres face several problems during bad weather and natural calamities too. Nonetheless, the guardians

were found to be satisfied with the educational improvement of their children. They recognized the benefit of the scheme on developing better habit and culture in their kids. During guardian- crèche worker meeting of most villages, they were found to be motivated in later stage and were willing to improve the situation. They proposed several recommendations in this regard:

1. Recurring grant should be regularized from government and NGO side.
2. Parents should contribute an amount for the development of the centres at a regular basis which will be acceptable and bearable by all.
3. Local government bodies (panchayat) should support the centres by facilitating their emergency needs.
4. Convergence should be strengthened with the schemes like ICDS, ASHA, Mid-day Meal etc.
5. Separate room should be constructed for each centre to ensure protective environment during all weather.

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