

Fighting under-3 malnutrition....

Phulwari programme report (FY 22-23)

Jan Swasthya Sahyog



Background

Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS) is a not-for-profit organization working in rural and tribal areas of Bilaspur and Mungeli districts in Chhattisgarh in central India since 2000. The population is largely tribal and OBC. JSS aims to provide low-cost, high-quality care with compassion to the most

marginalized. It believes that no one should be denied health care due to their inability to pay for it.

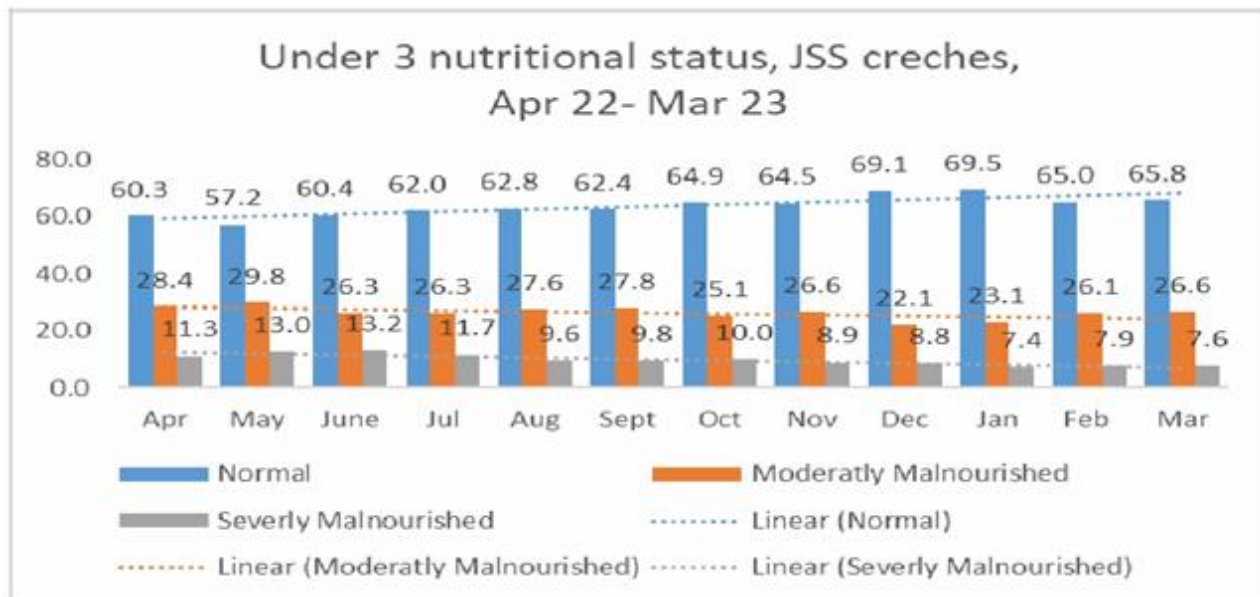
JSS runs a service programme covering 72 villages with a population of 44,000. Villages are scattered among the forests, and many are cut off during the rainy season by streams and rivers and are difficult to access. Activities include maternal and child health care services; chronic disease care; control of communicable diseases like TB, malaria and leprosy; support to women's self-help groups; agriculture and animal health services. Development and promotion of appropriate technology is also a focus.

JSS had started running creches for children between 6 months to 3 years in the year 2006 in response to the high prevalence of childhood malnutrition and child mortality in the programme villages. Running creches also allows both parents to go out for work to earn their wages where otherwise one parent would need to stay at home to take care of the child.

Highlights of 2022-23

Running 85 creches

At the end of March 23, JSS continued running 85 creches in 43 programme villages with 838 children cared for by 114 creche workers. Most villages are forest villages in the Achanakmar tiger reserve. 372 children joined the creches in this period and 430 children either graduated or discontinued from the creches. Following is the nutritional status of creche children in the period from April 2022 to March 2023.



The number of severely malnourished children reduced from 11.3% in the month April 22 to 7.6% in the month of March 22. There is 2 % reduction in the moderately malnourished children and there is 5 % increase in the normal children in the creches.

Early childhood education



Children having food in a creche



Creche worker demonstrating learning activities

In this period creche workers prepared some more toys from trash and locally available materials. Colours, charts and other stationery were made available to creche workers to prepare the toys. This year, JSS included local songs and stories in the learning activity bank for children under three.

Children liked to stay for longer periods in the creche because of these learning and entertainment activities.

Kitchen gardens

A kitchen garden is developed in every creche. Seeds for vegetables are made available to crecheworkers. Creche workers maintain the kitchen garden in terms of fencing, watering the plants etc. A team of Self-Help Group supervisors and Agriculture assistants supported the creche workers for growing these kitchen gardens. A total of 76 kitchen gardens have been developed in 85 creche

Additionally, parents of 49 children have developed kitchen gardens at home. In some creches, a kitchen garden could not be created as there is no land available.



Kitchen garden developed by creche

Awareness among parents



Creche supervisor conducting monthly parent meeting

Creche supervisors continued monthly parents' meeting to increase the awareness among the parents about proper nutrition, childhood illnesses, importance of early child education and so on. Every year we see more attendance of women than men. This year we started including parents of non-creche children in these monthly awareness meetings.

Last year, JSS witnessed an increase in junk food consumption by children in the villages. As they are cheap and easily available in the village, parents often allow their children to buy them on a daily basis.

This takes away their appetite to eat healthy food. This year creche supervisors demonstrated healthy food recipes like making a laddu of pea nuts and jaggery, jaggery and puffed rice, ragi laddu etc. to the parents and discussed the ill effects of junk food on the body. In some creches, mothers get together at the phulwari to jointly prepare healthy snacks for their children.

Increasing demand for creches

This year there was a demand from 6 more communities to start creches in their villages.

We could not start the creches due to limited resources. Running these 85 creches with 838 children, we are catering to only a quarter (26%) of the total under-3 child population in our programme villages.

Growth monitoring of children



Creche supervisor doing monthly anthropometry

This year we started the bi-annual growth monitoring of children who are not attending the creches with the help of creche supervisors and village health workers. We thus get an idea of vulnerable children not attending creches, as well as see how they fare in comparison to children in creches. Monthly growth monitoring is done for creche children.

The number of children with growth faltering increased after the COVID pandemic. To understand causes of growth faltering, JSS followed 15 children from 7am to 7pm to know their food pattern, socio-economic status and role of sickness episode in growth faltering. Identified issues included junk food consumption, breast-feeding before a meal and poor dietary diversity at the family level. The suggested recommendations for the creche programme were, to educate parents about the junk food, encourage mothers to bring whatever vegetables they grow to creches, spread awareness among the parents about importance of feeding at home and the need for a variety of food. Refresher training for creche supervisors on some of the programme aspects was also recommended.

Implementation research

Last year in the month of June we actively started using growth faltering as one the indicators of undernutrition in our phulwari children. We conducted qualitative study to understand the various reasons for growth faltering in phulwari children. 15 phulwari children with and without growth faltering were shadowed at their home and phulwari each for whole day to understand their eating practices at home and in phulwari. Results showed that parents lack awareness about the diet and nutritional requirements of the children at a particular age. Mothers were not cooking separately for the children. It was observed that all the children were given a small bowl full of plain rice and sometimes poured with watery dal and they were meant to eat it on their own. As a result, they could consume half quantity and half quantity used to waste on floor. Almost all the 15 children were given only 3 meals a day, whereas their dietary requirement and frequency of meal needed was more than what was given. Thus, intensive parent meetings were planned to overcome the lack of awareness about nutritional requirements in children under 3 years of age and recently we are conducting Nutrition meetings as new forms of meetings for the parents and the families.

Advocacy

During the year JSS became a part of an alliance supported by Azim Premji Foundation to operationalize thousands of creches in the tribal belts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha. Such an alliance and scale are required to advocate the issue of malnutrition among children under 3 years at state and central government level. JSS will act as a technical partner and will be providing training support to various project implementation partners who are willing to run creches in these three states. Other major organizations running creches who are part of this alliance are Ekjut, PHRS, and Delhi Mobile Creches.

What does it cost?

To ensure a healthy start of life for a child with comprehensive development (physical, mental and social). It just costs 40 rupees per day, which we think is not a very high cost when it comes to securing a better future for the younger generations.

Future plans

- Further we plan to introduce finger snacks items in the creches to bring variety
- Increase dialogue with the community including parents of under -3s about nutritional requirements of young children, common illnesses in children under 3 and early childhood education, among other topics related to health
- Increase coordination with Women and Child Development department to avail various entitlements for the severely and moderately malnourished children, provided by the department under their Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)
- Continuing bi-annual growth monitoring of non creche children in programme villages
- To be part of an alliance for running thousand creches and supporting various organisations who are interested in running creches in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha
- Addition of 15 new creches in the needy villages who have approached JSS
- More training and support in early child education and decorating creches

OUR SUPPORTERS

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