

Press Note

Ministry of Women and Child Development

September 17, 2014

Ministry of Women and Child is addressing the needs of over 70% of the Indian people. The Ministry's functioning is largely guided by the following two objectives:

- To empower women to live with confidence, dignity and economic & educational abilities
- To nurture children to develop to their full potential, make them safe and healthy in protective environments

In the last few months, Ministry has taken up new areas of activities, new processes and new ways of doing things. This is intended to produce more outcomes and results that impact positively on our mandated community which is women and children. This period has allowed us to review the past with a view to making future programmes and activities impactful and significant.

Over the last two months our Ministry has worked closely with the Ministries of HRD and H&FW to design and prepare for implementation of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) initiative. The adverse and declining child sex ratio (CSR) across the States is a major cause of concern as it has fallen from 927 in 2001 to 918 in 2011. The BBBP seeks to arrest the trend and over time to reverse it. A 100 critical low CSR districts in all States and UTs have been identified for focused and convergent action by these Ministries. The Ministry of WCD is the nodal Ministry for this initiative and will carry out training to stakeholders, community mobilization and sensitization. It will also embark upon a range of advocacy measures and activities, not limited to the 100 low CSR districts but all across the country. All forms of media and social media platforms would be used for this. The key to the success of the initiatives would lie with the communities, States, Panchayats and the local self-Government. On our part we would wish to appeal to the members of the press to

take up the cause, to enable the dignity, opportunity and equality with rights of the women to be realized. At the same time our partner Ministries would also be carrying out actions as per their part of interventions. The Health Ministry would focus on the implementation of the PC&PNDT Act and to curb the misuse of technology to the detriment of girl children and women. In a much wider role, the Health Ministry would promote, along with our Ministry, the early registration of pregnancy in the first trimester itself. Working together on these, the Anganwadis and the health Centres would monitor the CSR, nutrition and health status. The existing commitments to having all girls in the schools, to discourage and eliminate child marriage would continue. An important part of the programme is give reward and recognition – all schools, institution workers and volunteers will all be part of this mass campaign. The Department of School Education would intensify efforts to ensure universalization of enrolment of girls, decrease the dropout rates, establish girl friendly schools and to strictly implement the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

A comprehensive legislation has been drafted that provides measures for children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with law. For the first time, offences have been clearly defined and classified in the Bill as petty, serious and heinous. Special provisions have been made to tackle child offenders committing heinous offences in the age group of 16-18 years. The Juvenile Justice Board has been given the option to transfer cases of heinous offences by such children to a Children's Court, which is a Court of Session after conducting a preliminary inquiry. The Bill also proposes to place such children in a place of safety both during and after the trial till they attain the age of 21 years. After completing the age of 21 years, if the term of the child is still remaining then the Children's Court shall conduct an assessment of the performance of the child and if the Court feels that the child may become a contributory member of the society then the Court can release the child under probation. In case the child has not undergone any reformatory change then the child is to be shifted to a jail meant for adults.

It is expected that enactment of this Bill will act as a deterrent for child offenders committing heinous offences such as rape and murder and will also protect the rights of victim to justice. Several measures have been proposed for all children in conflict

with law such as education, health and nutrition, vocational training, de-addiction measures, if required, counseling, behaviour modification therapy, etc.

Several new offences committed against children which are so far not adequately covered under any other law, have also been included in the Bill. These include: sale and procurement of children for any purpose including illegal adoption, corporal punishment, use of child by militant groups, offences against disabled children and, kidnapping and abduction of children.

Several rehabilitation and social reintegration measures have been provided for institutionalization and non-institutionalization of children. Under the institutional care, children are to be provided with various services including education, health, nutrition, de-addiction, treatment of diseases, vocational training, skill development, life skill education, counseling, etc. to help them assume a constructive role in the society. The variety of non-institutional options provided in the Bill include: foster care including group foster care, open shelters and sponsorship for children in need of care and protection.

Child Line (1098) is an emergency outreach service for children in need of care and protection. Currently the service is available in 282 locations and is likely to be expanded to 343 locations by the end of Financial Year 2014-15. Approximately 38 lakh calls were received in 2013-14. The kind of calls received at 1098 include medical help, emotional support and guidance, protection from abuse, shelter, missing children, restoration of children in verdict with law. Currently Childline services are operated by a single centralized call center at Mumbai, catering to North and Western zones. Expansion of Childline services are being planned by establishing three other centralized call centers at Chennai, Kolkata and Gurgaon.

In the area of adoption the Ministry has taken significant steps in the last few months. In 2013 the number of adoptions was 1100. This year in the June to August period 1650 adoptions have been carried. Further process for improvements and simplification of procedures are being carried out. New guidelines have been prepared by the Ministry on the basis of the extensive consultations with the

stakeholders. These guidelines are now in the public domain and available for comments and suggestions. In the next few weeks, and taking into account the inputs received, the Ministry proposes to finalize the new guidelines. This will make adoption easier, simpler and speedier. An important change is that the entire process will be carried out online prior to placing the case finally before the court of law.

Financial assistance to the Children Homes under the Integrated Children Protection Scheme (ICPS) has been increased recently. For example, annual assistance to child care institutions have been increased from Rs. 25 lakh per annum to Rs. 50 lakh per annum and per child maintenance grant has been increased from Rs.750 per month to Rs. 2000 per month. The Ministry has initiated steps to integrate rapidly expanding Childline facility with the basic structure of Track-child. Through this effort, citizen initiated information on both missing and found children will be received by Childline and transmitted to the network of police stations and to the child care institutions in all parts of the country. The mechanism based on a telephone call to the childline is being tested and will be operational shortly. In addition, a mobile application of Track-child has been developed by the NIC and will also be brought into this integrated system.

For the first time in the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) the approval and release of funds has been linked to the detailed Annual Action Plans prepared by all States in a participatory exercise involving the States. This has laid the basis for our expectation that from next year the State plan in all States will be based on district level plans in which the line departments – Health, Drinking Water and Sanitation. Panchayati Raj institutions will also be involved besides, of course, the involvement of Ministry's own institutions.

As an integral part of our commitment to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, toilets will be constructed by the States in over a lakh Anganwadis. This is one part of our drive to a cleaner India. At the same time the Anganwadis will become the hub for good sanitational hygiene practices to be inculcated, for volunteer action to be carried by the Anganwadi community and by the larger community in which Anganwadi is covered. As a first step from 22nd September to 21st October each

Anganwadis has been requested to involve all related stakeholders in improving their surroundings by increased cleanliness to clean not only their Anganwadi, but their neighborhood, in partnership with all members of the community. This will not be a one-off drive. We expect the Anganwadis to establish norms of cleanliness and specific action to be carried out around the year.

Taking forward the commitment made by the Finance Minister in his budget speech earlier this year, the contours and content of a new invigorated National Nutrition Mission are being formulated. The process of the consultation has begun. On the 22nd and 23rd September at Delhi, stakeholders, academics, experts representatives of States and other stakeholders will meet to take forward the initial ideas and to prepare a rapid road map to finalize the mission in the next few months.

Under the ongoing scheme Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) the Ministry is examining the feasibility of introducing more employment oriented programmes for women such as IT, NITES, Gems and jewelry, transport and tourism, apparel and garment making, etc.

New awards have been instituted to recognise exceptional and selfless work done by women, at district and State levels (throughout the country). These awards will be decided at State/ UT level. The State award (Rajya Mahila Samman) to one woman in each State and UT consists of a cash prize Rs. 40,000 and a scroll / citation. The District award (Zila Mahila Samman) to one woman in each district consists of a cash prize Rs. 20,000 and a scroll / citation. The above awards will be presented on International Women's Day.

Earlier this year, in June, 2014 the High Level Committee on the Status of Women presented its report of family laws relating to women. The Ministry will take this report forward through a two stage process. The first involves consultations at different locations in the country with experts, activists, academicians and other stakeholders on the changes to be brought about, using the report as a base. The first such consultation was held on 16th September, 2014 at Bhubaneswar. The entire process will be completed by end of November. It will provide valuable advice

and inputs to the Ministry on the kinds of changes in laws related to women that need to be changed.

To revamp the activities of RMK, a committee of senior bankers, social workers and experts has been constituted. The committee has held a series of meetings. The Committee is in the process of preparing a road map for RMK so that it can reduce its non-performing assets and reach out more and more needy women without lose of time.