



INITIATIVE FOR WHAT WORKS TO ADVANCE WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE ECONOMY

Note on IWWAGE findings

Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) aims to build on existing research and generate new evidence to inform and drive an action agenda for women's economic empowerment. IWWAGE is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and is housed within the Institute of Financial Management and Research (IFMR) ecosystem.

IWWAGE promotes, synthesizes and generates evidence on **'What Works'** for women's economic empowerment in India. The initiative focuses on moving from **'How'** to **'What Works'** to improve women's participation in economic activities through access to decent work and economic resources, strengthen social protection networks, and facilitate gender transformative policies.

To take the agenda of evidence generation forward, in the last one year, three studies have been undertaken by IWWAGE in India. These include:

- a. Study on Centre based Child Care as a solution for Maternal Employment and Early Childhood Development,
- b. Study on SHG digitization, and
- c. A rapid assessment of 181 Helpline scheme.

This document summarises the findings from the three studies and lists the key policy concerns and recommendations that emerge across each of them.

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Cover image: A Self-Help group in Chhattisgarh



CENTRE-BASED CHILD CARE AS A SOLUTION FOR MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

About the study:

Recognizing the complex and synergetic relationship between access to childcare facilities and women's economic empowerment, a secondary review of global practices was undertaken to put together evidence on how accessible, affordable and quality center-based childcare can support women by reducing and redistributing the unpaid care work, and how it impacts maternal employment as well as early childhood development for children under 6 years.

Key findings:

- Evidence from developed countries highlight the positive effect of formally trained childcare professionals on children's cognitive development, language and socio-emotional skills.¹ However, there is lack of recognition of women as active members in the economy especially among LMIC (lower middle income countries) with exception of few Latin American countries. The global analysis also indicates that access to early child development through preprimary schools and day care service centers, along with trained workers, and staff and parental engagement has a positive impact on children's academic success and socio-emotional development in later years.
- In the Indian context, policies and schemes have been put in place by the government to address the issue of women's employment and to provide adequate benefits to women workers. However, these policies and schemes have not been able to achieve the desired

outcomes due to challenges associated with its implementation and budgetary allocations. For example, analysis of the Maternity Benefit Act suggests that this policy move may have an adverse effect on women's jobs and influence in hiring practices, due to the costs associated with providing childcare facilities.

- The Integrated Child Development Scheme(ICDS) is the primary early childhood development programme in India for children in the 0-6 age group. However, most studies like ICDS reflects that Anganwadi Centres struggle with activity-based teaching due to non-availability of teaching material and lack of awareness regarding its need. The low enrollment rate of children in AWC (only 50-60% of children are registered in the ICDS system) can in part be attributed to sub optimal standards of services.

Recommendations:

- **Improve access to centre-based childcare service** - There is a need to expand access to centre based childcare or pre-primary schools and regulate the quality of services provided by the multiple private sector facilities in India. The experience of European countries suggests that provision of centre based child care facilities can crowd out private/informal child care provision and have a positive impact on women's employment.
- **Take social norms into account** - Given the deep rooted social norms that influence women's labour force participation in India, social and cultural factors must be taken into account while designing programs and policies.²
- **Focus on quality of services** - The study highlights the need to evaluate and improve the quality of childcare services in line with monitoring and evaluation guidelines recommended by the World Bank, IDB and UNICEF.

¹ Parental employment and children's academic achievement (Quality of parental time spent with children is more important than quantity), IZA, world of labor economics, Hannah Schildberg-Hörisc, 2016.

² Mammen, K., & Paxson, C. (2000). Women's work and economic development. Journal of economic perspectives, 14(4), 141-164.

STUDY ON DIGITIZATION OF SELF HELP GROUPS

About the study:

A rapid landscaping assessment on the functioning of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and federations, and the level of digitization was carried out by IWWAGE IFMR-LEAD. The purpose of this study was to understand the role of technology in promoting effectiveness and efficiency of SHGs and its networks. As part of this assessment, an in-depth analysis on the readiness of different programs for digitization of these SHGs/federations was undertaken, along with understanding the tools in place along with initiatives undertaken for innovation and communication. The study assesses the current usage of data/MIS and the scope for broader usage in the future. The study includes findings from Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.

Key findings:

The study highlights that the majority of focus has been on MIS digitization, followed by monitoring of SHGs. Linking of facilitators and group members to digital tools is in early stages of piloting and digitization of livelihoods data is a distant goal. The other findings include:

- Currently, with the functioning of SHGs, there is lack of adequate governance, quality and transparency while conducting meetings and do not have a system in place to track its functioning.
- SHGs often do not keep record of credit histories of members, due to which access to entitlement from welfare programs such as National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) becomes a challenge.
- A manual process for book keeping is tedious and requires calculations to be done by the book keeper that can be extremely time consuming and lead to errors. There is also a lack of readiness in using digital tools for such recording and documentation purposes.
- There are a number of gaps in the current uses and foreseeable uses of data in terms of

measuring impact for end users; monitoring benefits to stakeholders; informing regulatory stances; and more importantly gaps in using data, digitization for capacity building measures (online training modules and performance monitoring based on trainings) and livelihood entitlements.

Recommendations:

- **Need for long term sustained support to digitization:** Current large scale digitization initiatives within the SHG landscape largely function through grants and is implemented by the frontline service providers, most of whom are women community workers. Once this support is withdrawn, issues of viability and sustainability are foreseen. Thus, long term sustainability requires effective community level participation.
- **Promoting Institution Sustainability:** There is a need to scale up digital initiatives through institutions such as NGOs and SHPAs and address the issues around their:
 - » Ability to finance/ manage the cost of scaling up digital programs after withdrawal of external support.
 - » Internal capacity building and resource allocation to facilitate expansion.
 - » Clarity in defining value proposition from digital initiatives to the organization and measuring impact.
 - » Clarity in defining and prioritizing aspects within the trajectory of digitization.
- **Community Resilience:** The following challenges on how capacities of communities needs to be built to improve digitization efforts:
 - » Transmitting the value proposition and benefits accrued from digitization to community members.
 - » Building trust and ownership within communities on the use of digital initiatives through capacity building.
 - » Willingness and ability of the community to internalize financing cost of digitization initiatives.
 - » Mitigating external infrastructural issues in terms of data connectivity and uninterrupted power supply that hamper the use of digital mediums.

RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE 181 HELPLINE FOR WOMEN

About the study:

IWWAGE was commissioned by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to undertake a rapid assessment of the implementation of the helpline scheme across different states in the country. The study was carried out across 11 states and aimed to understand the current status of implementation of the scheme along –

- i. Functionality of the 181 helpline;
- ii. State level MIS/databases;
- iii. Responsiveness of Centre staff, and
- iv. Integration between 181 Women's helpline (WHL) and One Stop Centre (OSC).

The assessment used a mixed methods approach to collect data and information, through key informant interviews, audit calls, feedback calls with beneficiaries, and in-person observation of call centres. The data and information collected was thus used to construct a performance index, where each state was ranked.

Key findings:

The study found that the performance and effectiveness of the WHL was determinant on the state level design of WHL since there are primarily three distinct implementation approaches of the WHL:

- i. WHL as a referral service - Cases are referred to appropriate agencies e.g. police, child welfare committees, district legal services authority etc.
- ii. WHL as an emergency and first responder service - Apart from being a referral agency, in this model, the WHL operates rescue vans in which there is a counsellor and a female police constable stationed.
- iii. WHL – OSC integration - In this model, the OSCs and the WHL have a common backend dashboard, which is used by both these services to continuously update the status of a case, including referral, follow ups, resolutions etc.

The Composite index reflected state performance on various indicators – Telangana scored highest with a perfect score in infrastructure sub index which shows that the helpline facility is well equipped with rescue vans, a web based MIS; and integrated with OSCs.

Lastly, there is scope to improve beneficiary experience, which is reflected in low scores even in well performing states in other sub-indices (strong administration and infrastructure).³ For example, even in well performing states such as Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the findings suggest that callers, who called the helpline felt a need for a more empathetic approach to problem solving.

Recommendations:

Based on the assessment study of the 181 Helpline, there are a few recommendations that emerged and are important to consider for strengthening the services and improving effectiveness in terms of its functioning and overall purpose.

- There is a need for **standardisation of the women's helpline services** across the states and setting up of minimum basic services that are offered through the helpline.
- Set up a **minimum budget level** for implementing the scheme since present allocations vary from state to state thereby affecting the outreach and functioning of the helpline.
- Include mechanisms to **capture beneficiary satisfaction levels** so that it can be referred for improving the services.
- Create a common **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework** to report progress of cases, level of reporting, how cases are handled, what are type of cases, among others.
- **Improved training mechanisms** by creating Training of Trainers (ToT) module, which can be used by all the states. The respective states can also build upon these modules depending on local context.
- **Common Dashboard for all Helplines** that will help in redressal and follow up of cases.

³ This observation has to be taken with caution due to low sample size.





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