

Kerala braces for war against hunger and malnutrition

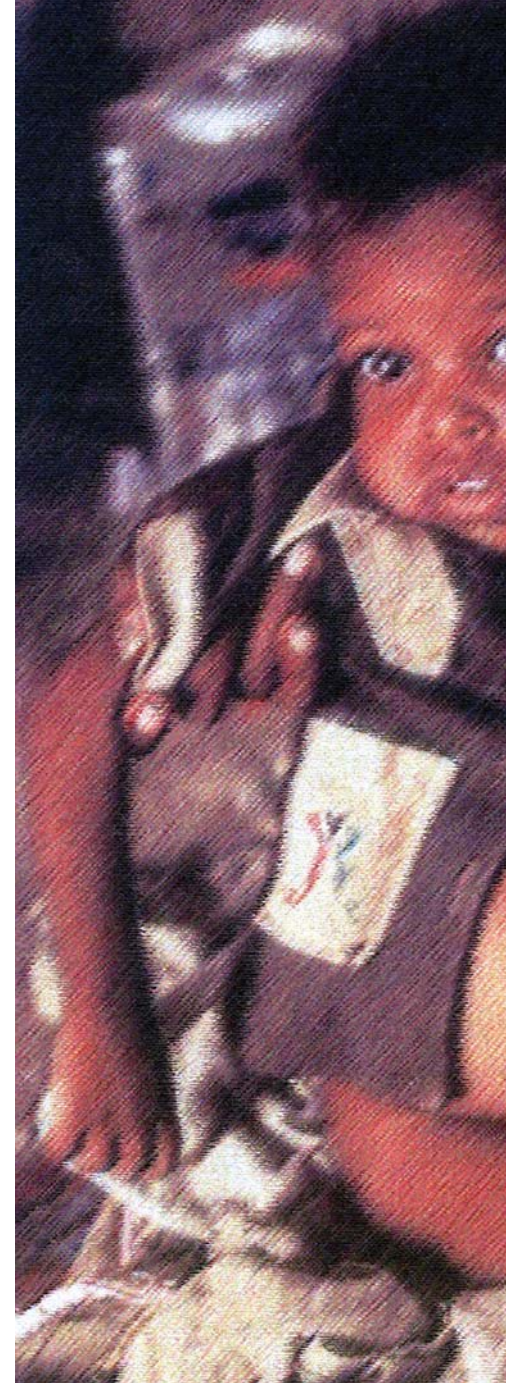
Hunger-free Kerala, is tipped as one of the most innovative projects being implemented in Kerala under the leadership of Chief Minister Oommen Chandy. Hunger Free Kerala, envisages an all out effort of the Government to completely eradicate hunger and malnutrition from Kerala with the active cooperation of the people. Though hunger and malnutrition in Kerala are not alarming problem as it is in various other States, the Government's programme is nip the problem in the bud and create a mechanism which does not allow hunger and malnutrition to raise its head in Kerala. According to experts, in the context of Kerala, chronic hunger, which means not getting two square meals a day, is confined to just 2 per cent of the population. But the construction boom that Kerala is witnessing today, every year the state is getting migrant workers and their families in large numbers. This is a group, which is clearly susceptible to chronic hunger and malnutrition.

The Government has drawn an extensive plan to implement its hunger free Kerala programme. As a part of this, the already applauded and acclaimed *Asraya* scheme will be extended to each panchayat,

municipality and corporation across the State, covering population cutting across the rural-urban divide. Efforts are being made to include a special component in the *Asraya* projects already being implemented in local bodies, which will focus on bringing down hunger and malnutrition. This will be incorporated in the new projects as well.

Kerala already has a wide network of ICDS project and under the Hunger Free Kerala project, efforts will be made to widen its delivery base so that the programme reaches out to the people across the length and breadth of the State. The *Kudumbasree* infrastructure will be utilised to ensure that every eligible child is included in this project. Also taking into account the Supreme Court direction, children in the age group of 0-3 will be brought under the ICDS coverage through take home ration and the adolescent girls would be brought within the extension of the food support services of ICDS.

What is significant is the government's resolve to not only detect malnutrition but also to prevent it at the right stage. In this connection full range ICDS services like growth monitoring, early detection of malnutrition, providing supplementary



nutrition and counselling would be provided to all those who are covered under the project. At the grassroots level an effective mechanism is also being put in place for community based monitoring of hunger and malnutrition and the existing *anganwadies* will play a crucial role as focal centres.

One area which the Government is seriously looking at is the mid-day meal scheme. Though it is being implemented effectively in Kerala, now the idea is to extend its coverage up to tenth standard. But the feeling is that implementing the mid day meal scheme in isolation would



What we plan to achieve

The expected numbers of beneficiaries:		
Asraya	-	6,50,000
Improved ICDS	-	
0-3 children	-	5,00,000
3-6 children	-	5,00,000
Adolescent girls	-	7,50,000
Improved mid day meal programme	-	10,00,000
Revamped PDS	-	All destitutes under Annapoorna Scheme
Food for work	-	All vulnerable pockets
Special assistance during natural calamities	-	All affected localities
Others	-	As required

essential commodities at the doorstep of the people. But still there are certain loopholes when it comes to targetting the beneficiaries, which needs to be plugged to make the system more effective. Plans are underway to rectify these anomalies especially focussing on the poorest of the poor and also the remote tribal settlements. Coupled with these measures are being taken to provide ration cards to those who do not have cards and bring all the eligible families within the purview of *Annapoorna*, *Antodaya* and *Anna Yojana* programmes, ensuring all benefits to them under these schemes.

The state experiences frequent natural calamities like floods, destruction in coastal areas due to high tides and also drought. Sometimes the problem is so acute that because of the sudden fury of nature it becomes difficult at times to carry out relief measures in full swing. This is an area which will have Government's top priority now with mapping of vulnerable localities and spotting of high risk households. In times of natural calamities these targetted areas would be provided food assistance through an effective channel which is being put into place.

Reaching Destitutes

Efforts are also being made to ensure that people like involuntary migrants, extremely sick, beggars etc who may not benefit from the above programmes, are identified through participatory process and their needs addressed through partnership with charitable organisations. A special intervention would be made in night shelters in urban areas with provision for cooked food to the aged who are immobile. This would be implemented through community effort. Also the existing care homes of the government would be upgraded with specially designed

programmes catering to this vulnerable group.

Clearly the aim of Hunger Free Kerala project is not merely to provide food items and funds. But it is a gigantic exercise under which the poor and needy will be identified and treated with respect, understanding and compassion. The attempt is to reach out to these sections, provide them utmost care and to sustain the programme by pooling in all the resources and services under the existing government schemes with the active partnership of all agencies engaged in this sector. But the most important objective is to put in place a planning and monitoring system specially designed for such programmes.

Monitoring Mechanism

The following indices would be monitored local government-wise on an annual basis.

- New born babies with low birth weight
- 0-3 children who are underweight
- 3-6 children who are underweight
- Adolescent girls with low BMI
- Anaemia in children, adolescent girls and pregnant women

The funds from the Central Government and the supplementary support provided by the State budget would be utilised for this purpose. But keeping in view the enormity of the programme an extra effort would be required in the form of a hunger mitigation fund to be set up at the level of panchayats, municipalities and corporations by mobilising resources from charitable people. Clearly Kerala is gearing up for a war against hunger and malnutrition, a war that can be won only with the active cooperation of each and every Malayalee. ■

not be as effective as it should be. So the idea to combine it with the existing school health programme is surely going to give immense benefit to the students thus taking care of their overall health and development. There would also be an attempt to scan the villages and urban areas to detect malnourished children and provide them with supplementary nutrition in selected and deserving cases.

Streamlining PDS

Kerala is known across the country for its effective Public Distribution System and its wide network is considered as the lifeline of the State when it comes to bringing