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Recognise the Critical Role of the Childcare Worker

Context

- The adoption of the **International Day of Care and Support** by the United Nations General Assembly in 2023 marks an important milestone in the global recognition of care work.
- By acknowledging the need to reduce, redistribute, and properly value **unpaid care and domestic labour**, predominantly performed by women and girls, the resolution draws attention to an often-invisible foundation of social and economic life.
- These issues resonate powerfully in India, where historical legacies, institutional gaps, and new **socio-economic pressures** continue to shape the landscape of childcare and care work.
- Together, these factors underscore the **urgency of a systemic transformation** grounded in social justice, gender equality, and high-quality care for all children.

Historical Foundations and the Evolution of Childcare Services

- India's engagement with organised childcare dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when educationists such as **Tarabai Modak** and **Gijubai Badheka** developed innovative, developmentally appropriate early childhood practices.
- However, these pioneering initiatives gradually lost prominence as post-Independence childcare became largely privatised and inaccessible to low-income families—the very groups most in need of such support.
- A paradigm shift came with the **1972 Study Group on the Development of the Preschool Child**, led by **Mina Swaminathan**, which articulated a holistic and equity-driven framework for early childhood care.
- This approach culminated in the creation of the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** in 1975, today one of the world's largest early childhood programmes.
- With **1.4 million Anganwadi centres** reaching **23 million children**, and a projected need to expand to **2.6 million centres** by 2030, ICDS remains central to India's commitment to child nutrition, development, and welfare.

Undervaluation of Childcare Workers

- Despite the scale and social importance of ICDS, care-workers continue to be **underpaid, undervalued**, and treated as informal caregivers rather than skilled professionals.
- Rapid programme expansion has weakened emphasis on training and competency building, reinforcing stereotypes that early childhood work is limited to feeding, hygiene, and immunisation rather than complex

developmental nurturing.

- Their wages, often **₹8,000-₹15,000 per month**, barely match minimum-wage benchmarks for unskilled labour, revealing a profound mismatch between responsibilities and remuneration.
- The **devaluation of care work** manifests in multiple ways: insufficient social security, poor working conditions, limited career progression, and inadequate institutional representation.

Climate Change, Migration, and Intensified Care Burdens

- **Climate change**, through floods, droughts, and extreme weather events, disproportionately harms women and children, reducing access to healthcare, nutrition, and stable livelihoods.
- Male migration from rural to urban economies further exacerbates gendered care burdens, leaving women with little support as they juggle caregiving, wage work, and household survival.
- Urban migration creates its own dilemmas: high rents and precarious employment push migrant women into domestic labour in wealthier households, while their own children often lack access to safe and affordable childcare.
- Notably, only **10% of Anganwadi centres** operate in urban areas, leaving a significant care vacuum.

Policy Transformations and the Path Ahead

- Recognising care-workers is only the first step; systemic reforms must follow. India currently invests only **0.4% of its GDP** in childcare, far below the **1%-1.5%** standard upheld by Scandinavian countries with universal childcare systems.
- Strengthening childcare provision, especially for children under three years, demands significant budgetary increases, infrastructure expansion, and robust training systems.
- Currently, only **2,500 of 10,000 approved crèches** under the **Palna Scheme** are functional, revealing implementation gaps that undermine coverage.
 - Achieving high-quality, equitable childcare requires:
 - Decent wages and labour protections for caregivers
 - Comprehensive skill development and professionalisation of care
 - Expanded urban childcare coverage
 - Stronger decentralised and community-led governance
 - Convergence across health, nutrition, labour, and social welfare systems
 - Policies that promote shared household care responsibilities
- Crucially, the childcare agenda is inseparable from the rights of women and children.
- It demands a shift from viewing care as a private responsibility to recognising it as a **public good** essential for inclusive development.

Conclusion

- As global and domestic pressures, from climate change to migration, intensify existing inequalities, the need to invest in care infrastructure and care-workers has never been more urgent.
- The historical legacy of **inclusive childcare**, coupled with contemporary demands for gender justice and child welfare, necessitates a bold reimagining of policy and practice.

- Universal, high-quality childcare is not merely a social service; it is a **nation-building imperative** that strengthens families, empowers women, and gives every child a fair chance at a healthy, secure, and dignified future.
- By valuing and **professionalising care work**, India can build a more equitable society where the rights of caregivers and children are fully recognised and realised.

Recognise the Critical Role of the Childcare Worker FAQs

Q1. Why did the UN declare October 29 as the International Day of Care and Support?

Ans. The UN declared this day to recognise the importance of care work and to address the undervaluation of unpaid domestic and caregiving labour.

Q2. What major contribution did the 1972 Study Group led by Mina Swaminathan make?

Ans. The Study Group led by Mina Swaminathan laid the foundation for the Integrated Child Development Services by promoting a holistic and equity-focused childcare approach.

Q3. Why are childcare workers in India often undervalued?

Ans. Childcare workers are undervalued because their work is seen as unskilled caregiving rather than professional developmental support.

Q4. How does climate change affect childcare needs among poor families?

Ans. Climate change increases childcare needs among poor families by worsening health, nutrition, and livelihood conditions and increasing male migration.

Q5. What level of investment is required for India to achieve universal, quality childcare?

Ans. India needs to increase its childcare investment to between 1% and 1.5% of GDP to achieve universal, high-quality childcare.

Source: **The Hindu**

Redefining the Narrative of TB Eradication Worldwide

Context

- The **history of tuberculosis (TB) control** has been shaped by periodic scientific breakthroughs, but few have been as transformative as the advent of point-of-care molecular diagnostics.
- For decades, TB detection depended on **insensitive sputum smear microscopy** or prolonged culture processes conducted in centralised laboratories.
- These methods not only delayed diagnosis and treatment but also disproportionately affected populations living in remote or resource-limited settings.
- The introduction of **portable, battery-operated polymerase chain reaction (PCR) platforms** has radically altered this landscape, making timely and accurate diagnosis accessible to those who need it most.

A Diagnostic Game Changer

- Rapid molecular diagnostic systems such as **Truenat**, endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO), have emerged as vital tools in global TB control.
- Their capacity to detect tuberculosis and drug resistance in under an hour has fundamentally reshaped screening and treatment pathways.
- Evidence from Nigeria illustrates this impact: after integrating Truenat into its national TB program, the country **nearly doubled its detection** of rifampicin-resistant cases.
- Equally significant is Nigeria's innovative adoption of stool-based testing for children, a solution that bypasses the difficulty of obtaining sputum samples and enhances diagnostic accuracy in paediatric TB, historically an under-diagnosed segment of the disease burden.
- Further validation comes from a **multi-country study published in The Lancet**, evaluating the use of on-site molecular diagnostics in primary healthcare settings in Mozambique and Tanzania.
- The results were striking: rapid testing coupled with swift result dissemination substantially increased the proportion of patients who began treatment within seven days of their first visit.

Global Recognition of Indian Innovation

- The transformative potential of point-of-care diagnostics gained worldwide recognition when Goa-based **Molbio Diagnostics** received the prestigious **Kochon Prize**.
- Awarded by the Kochon Foundation in partnership with the Stop TB Partnership, this prize honours pioneering contributions to **TB control**.
- Molbio's recognition signifies more than the success of a single organisation; it represents a milestone for India's scientific and technological ecosystem.
- **Indian innovations are now influencing TB eradication** efforts globally, proving that affordable, scalable solutions developed in India can reshape health outcomes far beyond its borders.
- In 2020, the **WHO endorsed India's portable molecular diagnostic platform** after evidence from diverse studies across Asia and Africa demonstrated performance comparable to central laboratory systems, with the added advantage of deployability in remote settings.
- This was a **defining moment** when innovation aligned with accessibility. Since then, a growing number of Indian enterprises have entered the TB diagnostics space, enriching the range of point-of-care tools available worldwide.

India's Role in Decentralised TB Control

- India's **National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)** has been pivotal in scaling these innovations domestically.
- By installing thousands of molecular testing units across the country, the programme has significantly reduced the time from suspicion of TB to treatment initiation, strengthening the overall TB management framework.
- The success of these efforts reflects **India's broader collaborative model**: a synergy between government systems, private innovators, academia, and community health workers.
- In a nation that accounts for nearly a quarter of the global TB burden, such **cross-sector cooperation** is more than beneficial, it is essential.

- The repeated recognition of Indian contributions with the **Kochon Prize, in 2006, 2017**, and again today, underscores India's growing leadership in global TB control.
- The widespread **deployment of India-made diagnostic tools**, from sub-Saharan Africa's mobile clinics to Eastern European refugee camps, further exemplifies this leadership.
- These developments affirm that India is not merely participating in global health innovation; it is driving it.

The Way Forward: The Need for Holistic TB Care

- Despite these achievements, the fight against TB is far from over.
- Diagnostic advancements must be matched by **equitable access to treatment**, social support, nutritional interventions, and stigma reduction.
- Research indicates that malnutrition accounts for roughly **40% of TB cases in India**, an alarming figure that highlights the deep connection between disease and socio-economic inequity.
- TB is, fundamentally, a disease of disadvantage. Successful elimination, therefore, requires addressing the **structural determinants** that sustain the epidemic.

Conclusion

- As the world stands at a **critical juncture in the battle against TB**, it is essential to maintain momentum.
- **Continued investment** in integrated innovations, combining diagnostics with nutritional support, digital adherence technologies, expanded contact tracing, and vaccine development, is vital.
- Only through this **comprehensive approach** can global health systems move beyond piecemeal interventions and forge a truly equitable path to TB elimination.

Redefining the Narrative of TB Eradication Worldwide FAQs

Q1. What major innovation has transformed TB diagnosis in recent years?

Ans. Point-of-care molecular diagnostics have transformed TB diagnosis by providing fast and accurate results.

Q2. How did Nigeria benefit from adopting the Truenat platform?

Ans. Nigeria nearly doubled its detection of rifampicin-resistant TB cases after adopting the Truenat platform.

Q3. What key finding came from The Lancet study in Mozambique and Tanzania?

Ans. The study found that on-site molecular testing significantly increased the number of patients starting treatment within seven days.

Q4. Why was Molbio Diagnostics awarded the Kochon Prize?

Ans. Molbio Diagnostics received the Kochon Prize for developing innovative TB diagnostics that improved global TB control.

Q5. What major non-medical factor contributes heavily to TB cases in India?

Ans. Malnutrition is a major non-medical factor that contributes to about 40% of TB cases in India.

Source: **The Hindu**