

UNICEF PROJECT

Early Intervention- A Step Ahead for Healthy Childhood

This project by Bala Mandir Research and Resource Center, in collaboration with UNICEF, and implemented by Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Center for Children with Intellectual Disabilities addresses the urgent need for early identification and intervention for children aged 0-6 with developmental delays and disabilities. With nearly 20.42 lakh children in India under six living with disabilities (Census 2011), and a significant proportion excluded from education and health services, the project aims to bridge critical gaps in awareness, screening, and support. Tamil Nadu alone records high rates of birth defects and infant disability, underscoring the need for targeted action.

The project, piloted in Gummidipoondi Block of Tiruvallur District, focuses on three objectives: (1) establishing an informed parent-caregiver network for peer support and advocacy, (2) capacity building of caregivers, health workers, Anganwadi staff, and educators in screening and early identification, and (3) creation of a comprehensive knowledge repository with print and digital materials on developmental milestones, early childhood care, and intervention practices.

Expected outcomes include improved caregiver knowledge, increased use of screening tools, stronger referral linkages to PHCs, DEICs, and ICDS services, and enhanced preschool readiness for children at AWCs. A toolkit will be developed for parents, AWC staff, PHC workers, and DEIC staff, simplifying milestone checklists, red flags, referral pathways, and caregiver engagement techniques.

Risks such as low parental participation and sustainability challenges will be mitigated through targeted outreach, accessible materials, and strong stakeholder engagement. Monitoring and evaluation will include training records, referrals, community campaigns, and parent support group activities.

The project emphasizes sustainability by embedding practices within government systems, building local capacity, and fostering partnerships. This initiative offers a scalable, community rooted model to ensure children with developmental delays are identified early, supported effectively, and included in society from the very beginning.