

DELHI LAADLI SCHEME: AN APPRAISAL

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By

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Executive Summary

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi launched the Delhi Laadli Scheme in 2008 amidst much fanfare. Even though the scheme is not very old, it has caught everybody's attention because it deals with a sensitive yet crucial issue- protection of the girl child. Most of us are aware that women in India are not treated very well and there is widespread discrimination against them. Parents engage in crimes like sex-determination, female foeticide and infanticide. Therefore, such a scheme that promotes the girl child and their education is a very positive step taken by the Delhi government. In this paper, I am going to give a brief overview of the scheme, followed by a critical appraisal. The critical appraisal includes the positive impacts and drawbacks of the scheme. I have made an effort to compare this scheme with others like Haryana's Laadli Yojana which have almost similar objectives. Finally, I will offer suitable and practical recommendations.

When I compared the literature written about this scheme and the information I obtained from the various stakeholders during field trips, I realized that the scheme suffers due to its ambiguous and complicated application process, ineffective service provision by the Department and other implementation problems.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my research guide Parth J Shah for his support, ideas and faith in me. I would also like to thank Shreya Agarwal, our research coordinator for always being very helpful, enthusiastic and supportive. Geetika Sharma, Joint Director, Department of Women and Child Development and officer in charge for implementing Laadli Scheme have also been very helpful. I also met Sumita Moza and Angela in the head office, DWCD who provided me with a lot of information about this scheme. I visited one of the district offices of DWCD in Lajpat Nagar, South Delhi where Shazia shared with me her opinions as well as knowledge on this scheme. I went to an *anganwadi* centre in Sangam Vihar, South Delhi where I met an *anganwadi* worker as well a young lady who had benefited under this scheme. I met many school principals and teachers who also provided me valuable information on this scheme and shared their ideas and opinions. Besides, I also interacted with many parents who had their daughters admitted into schools under this scheme. They shared their stories as well as grievances with me. The information I obtained during these field trips is invaluable and it helped me identify the positive impacts as well as the key drawbacks of this scheme.

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Introduction

Historically, women in India have suffered from inhuman social practices like *sati*, *pardah* system and child marriage, besides many other forms of social, educational, economic and political discrimination in comparison to their male counterparts. These social evils against women have been practiced over centuries and even today many people practice them and consider their sons to be superior to their daughters. While the birth of a boy in a family is considered to be a blessing, birth of a girl is perceived as nothing more than a curse for the family. A manifestation of this bias on the part of families is their engagement in sex determination, followed by abortion of the female foetus (Gupta, 2008). Despite being banned, its practice is rampant. In some rural states, parents who cannot afford pre-natal sex determination kill their newly born daughters. This is known as female infanticide. The government has estimated that up to 10 million girls have been killed, before or immediately after birth, by their parents over the past 20 years in our country.

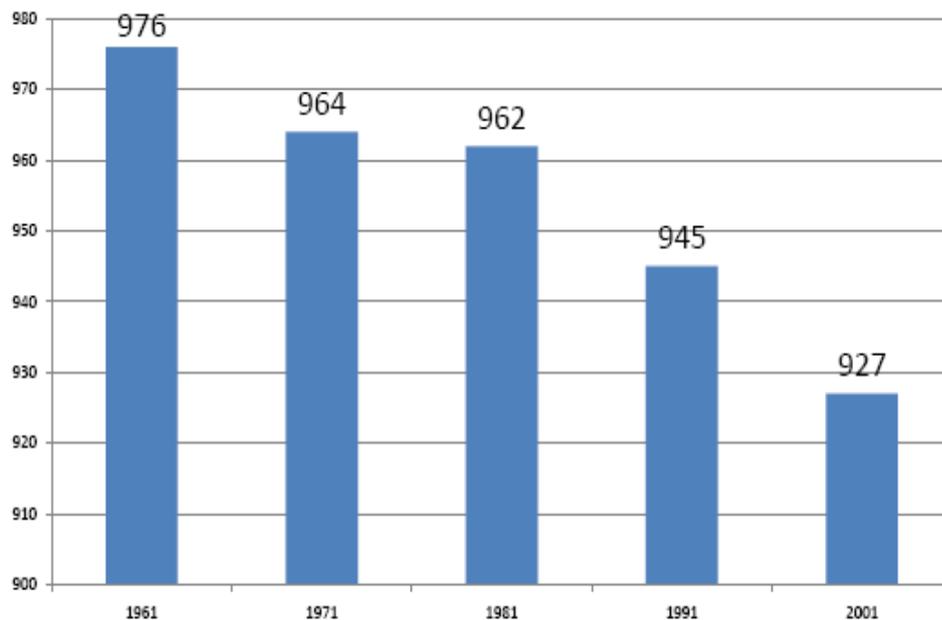
Even though the situation has improved over years, many parents still do not treat their children equally. While they send their sons to private schools as they are considered to be more worthy and superior, the girls are made to carry out the daily chores at home. And when parents decide to send their daughters to schools, they are sent to government or aided schools. The quality of education that is offered in government schools has no comparison with what is offered in private schools. So

the girls learn very little in comparison to their brothers. Even then they are made to drop out soon after the completion of elementary education and there is little emphasis on secondary education and higher education. Parents who are themselves uneducated are particularly not in favour of sending their daughters to schools to study. While they associate sons with long-term social security and pride, a daughter is associated with dowry and loss of honour in case the girl decides to run away, has an affair with someone or if she gets sexually molested. This can be corroborated by the recent cases of honour killings in Delhi (Rajalakshmi, 2010). While states like Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Bihar have always been infamous for practicing this vicious crime, the fact that it has reached even the national capital is very shocking.

What may be surprising to some is that this gender divide is rising and is as prevalent in urban areas as in rural areas (Kaur, 2009). The 2001 Census highlighted the dramatic decline in the Child Sex Ratio¹, which has come down from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, registering an overall decline of 18 points in a decade. In fact if we look at the graph depicting the Child Sex Ratio in India, we can identify this declining trend.

¹ Child Sex Ratio is defined as the number of girls per 1000 boys in the 0 to 6 age group

Child Sex Ratio In India



(Source: Nanda, not disclosed)

Looking at these figures, it is quite evident that there is an urgent need for the government to intervene and launch programs and schemes that help reverse this trend and motivate and empower parents to send their daughters to school and spend on their education, upbringing and health. One endemic pattern about girl's education in India is that the opportunity cost of educating a girl is quite high (Sen, 2007). Because a girl will be married into another family and not support her parents throughout their lives, investing in her education is not considered a wise decision by her family. Besides a girl who is not studying in a school can help her family members in doing the daily chores of the house or look after her siblings. She might even earn some money by doing some petty jobs. In order to reduce the cost

of educating a girl child, many state governments have launched different schemes for the protection of the girl child. The first such scheme was launched by the Tamil Nadu government in 1992 which was named the Girl Child Protection Scheme (GCPS). A similar scheme was also launched by the Andhra Pradesh government. In 2005 the Haryana government launched 'Laadli' Scheme. The Madhya Pradesh government launched its own girl child empowerment scheme which it called Laadli Lakshmi Yojana. Gujarat government launched a 'Dikri Bachao' Campaign on 5 March 2006. The Delhi government launched Laadli Scheme in 2008, in order to raise the status of a girl child in the capital city. The union government has also launched several other schemes, over the years, for protecting the interests of girl children such as 'Dhanlakshmi' Scheme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Mahila Samakhya Programmes etc.

Delhi Laadli Scheme- An overview

Meaning and objectives

The government of NCT of Delhi has launched a new scheme called the Delhi Laadli Scheme for the protection of the girl child against discrimination. The scheme is effective from 1 January 2008 (Department of Women and Child Development, Delhi 2008).

The main objectives of this scheme can be classified under three headings:-

1. **Educational objectives:** It promotes the education of girl children upto at least pre-college level. Knowledge and awareness will empower them and give them the strength to broaden their horizons and have better ambitions in life. This would lead to better career opportunities for the individual. Also they will become aware of their rights and will stand up for themselves and for other women who are not being treated well by the society.

2. **Economic objectives:** The scheme offers a monetary incentive to girl children while they are studying in schools. A girl child can earn upto Rs 1 lac in this scheme.

3. **Social objectives:** This scheme aims at curbing sex determination, foeticide, infanticide and discrimination against girl children. It also aims to improve the sex ratio of the city.

The scheme emphasises that a girl is an asset to a family and not a liability. The scheme is being implemented under the Department of Women and Child Development.

Eligibility criteria

The financial assistance to be given under this scheme is subject to the following eligibility conditions:-

(a) The parent/guardian/applicant must be a bonafide resident of the National Capital Territory of Delhi for at least three years preceding the date of application. Ration Card/ Voter ID Card or any other valid identity proof should be attached with the application form.

(b) The girl child must have been born in Delhi: Birth Certificate issued by the Registrar must be attached.

(c) The annual income of the parents of a girl child should not exceed Rs 100,000. Income certificate or affidavit should be attached.

(d) This scheme can be implemented in any recognised government school, MCD School, private school, public school, NDMC School or Delhi cantonment board school provided that the girl child satisfies all the above eligibility conditions.

(e) The financial assistance under this scheme can be availed by not more than two eligible girls in a particular family.

Application process

1. The parents of girls born after 1 January, 2008 can apply for the scheme within one year of the birth of the child.
2. Alternatively, girls taking admission in Class I, VI, IX or XII as well as those passing Class X can apply under this scheme within a period of 90 days from the date of admission, with the help of headmaster/ principal/ class teacher/ Laadli coordinator of the school.
3. The application form can be obtained from the nearest authorized branch of State Bank of India/ government schools/ deputy education officer/ deputy director education / Anganwadi centers and district offices, Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) and Department of Social Welfare. They have to duly fill up the form and submit the same at the nearest district office of DWCD. The form is available free of cost.
4. Upon receiving the forms, the officers will verify the details entered, check if all necessary documents are attached and then issue acknowledgement letter/ receipt to the selected applicants.
5. When an application gets sanctioned, the department will intimate the bank to open bank accounts in the name of the girl child where the money can be transferred.
6. It is mandatory to renew the application procedure at each stage.

Financial assistance

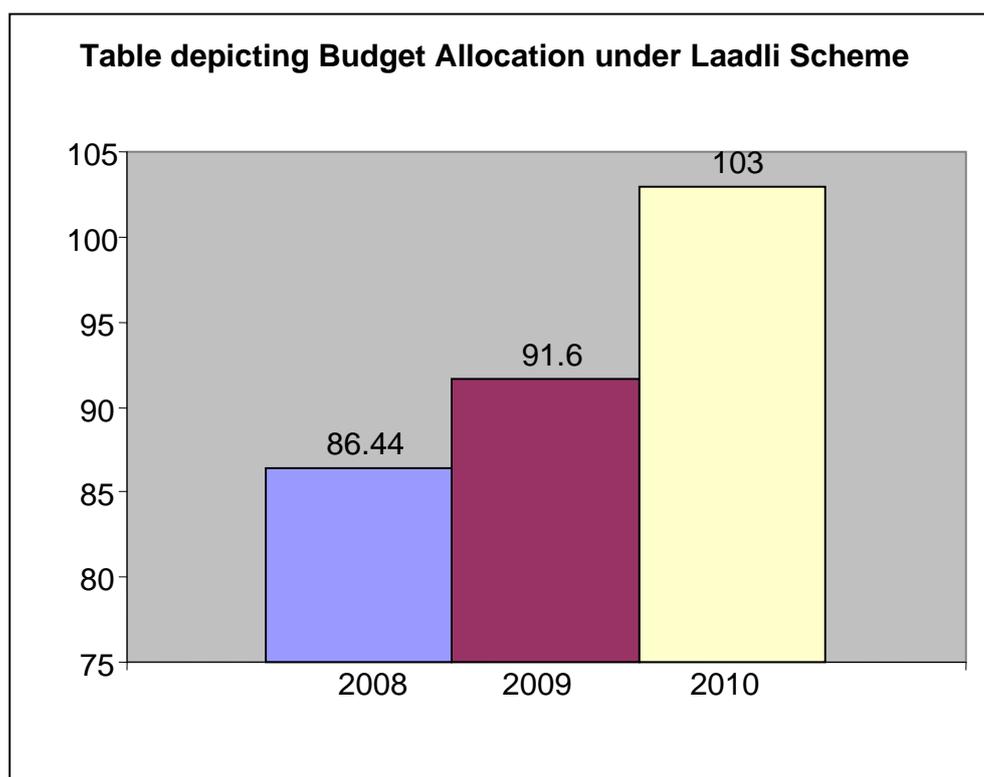
Under this scheme, the state government intends to deposit upto Rs.1 lac in an account opened with the State Bank of India in the name of a girl child by the time she attains the age of 18 or at least passes class X. The Government will deposit Rs 11,000 in the name of girl child at the time of her birth in case of an institutional birth and Rs 10,000 in case of a non-institutional birth. Thereafter it will deposit an amount of Rs 5,000 each at the time of her admission to Class I, VI, IX and XII. It will deposit another Rs 5,000 when she passes class X. The other girls born before this date will get benefits under this scheme w.e.f. the academic year 2008-09 on their admission to class I, VI, IX, XII class and after passing class X in a Govt. recognized School/ MCD school/ public or private school.

- A girl born on or after 1 January 2008, who gets registered under this Scheme right in the first stage and continues applying for it in the other five stages, will get approximately Rs 100,000 at the age of 18.

- Other girls born before 1 January 2008, who get registered under the scheme at a respective stage will receive the amount deposited in their bank accounts along with interest at the age of 18. This amount will therefore be less than Rs 100,000.

Budget allocation

The Delhi government allocated a budget of Rs 72.6 crores in 2008 when Laadli Scheme was launched. But the response was so tremendous that they had to increase the budget to Rs 86.44 crores. In 2009, the government allocated a budget of rest 91.6 crores but spent only 86.9 crores. In 2010, the government has allocated an all time high of Rs 103 crores for the scheme.



In the above table, x-axis indicates the year and y-axis indicates the amount allocated

Delhi Laadli Scheme: Critical appraisal

The Laadli Scheme launched by the Government of Delhi has earned a lot of critical acclaim by parents, NGOs and civil societies. The scheme has been widely publicised using the print and electronic media. Even government schools and MCD schools are playing a crucial role in creating awareness among the girl students in their schools as well as among their parents about this scheme. They further facilitate them by providing them the application forms and assist them in filling up the forms. It's been two and a half years since the launch of this scheme. The obvious question that everybody wishes to ask is how successful has this initiative been. The government of Delhi has awarded the responsibility of evaluating this scheme to the Community Health Department of St Stephens' hospital in North Delhi. Unfortunately, despite repeated calls I have not been able to contact anyone from the Community Health Department, who might have offered me some valuable information on this scheme.

I, with the support of my research guide and with the help of the information obtained during several field trips to government offices, schools, NGOs and Anganwadi centres, made a sincere effort to appraise the scheme critically. For examining and appraising this new scheme, I identified four key objectives, which were:

1. Identify the key positive impacts of the scheme which are supported by numerical figures.
2. Identify the main drawbacks/limitations in the design of the scheme and the way it is being implemented. I also analysed some case studies highlighting some peculiar problems with the scheme.
3. Compare the scheme with other schemes having similar objectives- Haryana's Laadli Scheme and Madhya Pradesh's Laadli Lakshmi Yojana.
4. Offer suitable recommendations in the design as well as the implementation of the scheme for improving it.

Positive impacts of the Laadli Scheme

Although a two and a half year period is too small to decide whether a scheme has been successful or not, nevertheless, we must consider the following figures as positive impacts of the scheme.

⇒ In 2007, the number of female births in Delhi registered was 848 per 1000 boys. This increased to 1004 per 1000 boys in year 2008, the same year when Laadli Scheme was launched (Sharma and Haub, 2010).

Year	Female births registered	Male births registered
2007	848	1000
2008	1004	1000

As stated earlier, it is mandatory to attach the birth certificate of a girl child while applying for this scheme. So there was an incentive for parents to get their daughters registered. Thus it helped in bringing a much-desired increase in the number of girl births registered, which is a positive development. As a matter of fact, birth registration of newly born children within 21 days of their birth has become compulsory by the government now.

- ⇒ Since 2008, 275,651 girls have registered under this scheme. Out of this, 83% of the girls are school- going while 17% are newly born girls.

- ⇒ 4635 girls have already received the money. These are those girls who took admission under the scheme in class XII in the academic year 2008-2009.

However, despite all these positive changes, there are several drawbacks in the design as well as the implementation of the existing scheme which need to be tackled or amended by the government swiftly. Similarly the government must continue encouraging parents and girls to apply for this scheme so that maximum people benefit.

Drawbacks with Laadli Scheme

The limitations or the drawbacks of this scheme can be classified into two broad categories: design problems and implementation problems.

Design problems

1. Very complicated application procedure

The procedure of applying for Laadli scheme is very complex. Although, the application form is very simple to fill and only requires parents to fill basic information, the process of getting it renewed in successive stages makes it very complicated. For example, the parents of a girl child who is born after 2008 will be required to apply for this scheme within one year of her birth. Then they will be required to renew their application each time when she takes admission into class I, VI, IX and XII. Also when she passes class X, they are required to reapply for the scheme. There is excess of paper work involved in the scheme.

2. Ambiguous scheme

The Laadli Scheme rules clearly state that a girl shall be able to receive the money only once she turns 18 as well as passes class X. However during some of my field trips I met parents who complained that their daughters have not yet received any funds under the scheme even when they have completed their schooling i.e. passed class X and XII and have attained the age of 18 years. Some of them have not even

received any acknowledgement letter from the department stating the date of maturity after which they can collect the money deposited into their bank accounts. Also the department has not clearly laid down whether or not the scheme will get forfeited in case the annual income of the parents rises from Rs 1 lac over the years.

Thus the complexity in the design and lack of clarity in the scheme are discouraging many parents to apply, even when they are eligible for doing so.

Implementation problems

3. Lack of adequate information among socially weaker and illiterate people

The government of Delhi spent Rs 3.83 crores in 2008 and Rs 2.39 crores in 2009 to generate awareness about the Laadli Scheme among the people of Delhi. They made use of mass media, print media, FM radio and outdoor publicity like putting up posters, hoardings and banners describing the scheme across the various government and MCD schools, inside metro trains and government offices. Around 90 Gender Resource Centres also organized programs like *nukkad nataks* in the slum areas and resettlement colonies of Delhi to explain the process and terms of this scheme to the poor and marginalised people through the medium of theatre.

However, despite all these publicity methods many parents are still not completely aware of the procedure and the terms and conditions of this scheme. There is

ambiguity in the way the scheme is being promoted. On one hand the government is claiming to award Rs 1 lac to a girl child when she passes class X and attains 18 years of age. On the other hand, it is stating that only those girls who are born on or after 1 January 2008 can receive the maximum amount. Besides parents are also not aware of basic details like who is responsible for opening the bank account, when will the amount be paid and how much will be paid to their daughters.

Case study: "How much am I getting under Laadli scheme?"

During one of my field trip, I came across a man who wished to remain anonymous. His daughter had taken admission in class XII under Laadli Scheme in the year 2008. He had assumed that she would be receiving Rs 1 lac as she turns 18. When he got to know that she will only receive Rs 5000 plus interest accruing on that amount, he was flabbergasted as he had planned to utilise the money on his daughter's wedding.

Thus communicating the objective, procedure and terms and conditions of the scheme to the poor and illiterate people who are the main target groups remains one of the biggest challenges for the government.

4. Ineffective service by the concerned department

The Laadli Scheme is also not being implemented effectively because of the acute shortage of infrastructure facilities in the government offices. I visited the head office as well as one district office in south Delhi of DWCD. I met several people who wished to seek information about the scheme or clarify their doubts. Many parents complain that the officers do not treat them well and are always callous and rude to them. They also complain that they do not give them complete information which leads to a lot of wastage of time, efforts and resources. The number of officers and staff employed to work on the Laadli Scheme is few and cannot handle so many parents and their queries.

The sheer volume of interested parties who apply for this scheme and wish to inquire more about it and the inability of the department to listen to each one of them is therefore another major problem.

5. Lack of cooperation from schools

Schools have to play a very important role in order to make Laadli Scheme successful. In 2008 when this scheme was launched, government schools and MCD schools were very supportive to the government in implementing this scheme. School principals used to make announcements in the morning assemblies on a regular basis and class teachers or the Laadli coordinator used to distribute the application forms to the girl students and even assist them in filling the forms. School teachers used to scrutinize the forms and then submit the forms to the

district offices of DWCD. However there has been a change in the attitude of schools since last year. Teachers complain that they hardly get any time to teach their students owing to the extensive process of getting forms filled and verified. Parents complain that school principals and teachers are not supportive and they brusquely ask them to arrange for the forms on their own and even deliver them into the district offices themselves. What is more disturbing is that most public and private schools are not facilitating parents or girls who might be eligible to apply in this scheme. The government reserves certain proportion of seats for students belonging to economically weaker sections in public/private schools and now with the Right to Education Act 2009, 25% of the seats will be reserved in schools for such children. If these children and their parents remain oblivious about this scheme, even when they are eligible for it, then they will not apply for it. The purpose of the state government in that case will remain unsolved.

6. Attitude of the parents towards the girl child

India is a conservative and even an orthodox country. Many lower income families do not value the purpose of education being given to their daughters. They consider women to be inferior to men and to educate their daughters at par with their sons is unwarranted for them. They prefer if they stay at home and help the other women in the daily chores. Besides this, parents are apathetic about the other schemes and programmes being provided in government and aided schools like the mid-day meal scheme. They complain about the sub-standard quality of food being provided and

also have problems when children belonging to a lower caste sit next to their children. The government is offering grants to the parents of students in girl's schools to purchase textbooks and school uniform. Despite this, many girls do not get to wear proper school uniform and read prescribed textbooks. Poor parents simply don't pay attention on their daughter's education, health and upbringing.

Unless parents change their attitudes towards their daughters and stop treating them as liabilities or *paraya dhan* (another's wealth), no scheme or incentive can survive in the long term.

Case study: Has there really been a change in the attitude of parents?

I met the principal of a government girl's school who very candidly told me that parents of some of her students got them married just weeks before their board exams. These girls had applied for the Laadli Scheme in 2008 when they entered class XII.

This highlights the fact that some poor parents have little or no concern for their daughter's education and that not even monetary incentives result in change in behaviour.

Laadli Schemes: A comparison

It was felt that there was a need to compare the Delhi Laadli scheme with some other scheme having almost similar objectives. In the above table, I am differentiating between the Delhi Laadli scheme, Haryana Laadli Yojana and Laadli Lakshmi Yojana. The three schemes have been distinguished on the basis of objectives, eligibility criteria, financial assistance under the scheme and their achievements.

Basis	Delhi Laadli scheme	Haryana Laadli Yojana	MP Laadli Lakshmi Yojana
Scheme effective from	The Delhi Laadli scheme is effective from 1 January 2008.	The Haryana Laadli Yojana is effective from 20 August 2005.	The Laadli Lakshmi Yojana is effective from 1 January 2006.
Objectives	The objectives of this scheme are to decrease female foeticide & infanticide and therefore improve the sex ratio of the city. It also promotes the education of a girl child.	The objectives of this scheme are to combat female foeticide, improve the dwindling sex ratio, to raise the status of the girl child and women in the city and to promote birth of a second girl child.	The primary objectives of this scheme are to improve the sex ratio and reduce school drop-out rate among girls, check child marriages and to promote their education upto pre-college level.
Eligibility criteria	(a) The applicant must be a bonafide resident of Delhi for at least three years preceding	(a) The applicant must be residing in Haryana. Any parent is eligible irrespective of caste,	(a) This scheme is only for those parents who restrict themselves to two

	<p>the date of application</p> <p>(b) The girl child must have been born in Delhi.</p> <p>(c) The annual income of the parents of the child should not exceed Rs 100,000.</p> <p>(d) The financial assistance under this scheme can be availed by not more than two eligible girls in a particular family.</p>	<p>creed, religion and income.</p> <p>(b) The second girl child should be born on or after 20 august 2005.</p> <p>(c) In case the second girl child is born twins, then the elder of the two girls will be eligible for the benefit.</p> <p>(d) Parents receiving benefits from any other scheme of the government are also entitled to apply for this scheme.</p> <p>(e) The parents should ensure proper immunization of the girl children and immunization record must be produced at the time of availing benefits.</p>	<p>children and adopt family planning. Also they must not be tax-payers.</p> <p>(b) This scheme also benefits orphan girls.</p> <p>(c) The girl child must be registered in an anganwadi centre.</p> <p>(d) the condition of family planning has been abolished in case of the first girl child.</p>
Financial assistance	<p>1. Payment of Rs. 11,000/- if the girl child is born in a Hospital/ Nursing Home/institutions in the NCT of Delhi.</p> <p>2. Payment of Rs. 10,000/- if the girl child is born outside the above mentioned Hospitals/ Nursing</p>	<p>1. Under this scheme, the government will give Rs 5000 to the parents who are raising a second daughter born on or after 20 august 2005 for five years.</p> <p>2. This money will be invested in Kisan Vikas Patras in the joint name of second girl child and</p>	<p>1. Under the scheme, the state government buys saving certificates of Rs.6,000 each year for five consecutive years for every girl born in a family.</p> <p>2. The girl gets Rs.2,000 after she completes the Class</p>

	<p>Homes/institutions.</p> <p>3. Payment of Rs. 5000/- on admission of the child in Class I.</p> <p>4. Payment of Rs. 5000/- on admission of the child in Class VI.</p> <p>5. Payment of Rs. 5000/- on admission of the child in Class IX.</p> <p>6. Payment of Rs. 5000/- on the child's passing the Class X.</p> <p>7. Payment of Rs. 5000/- on admission of the child in Class XII.</p>	<p>the mother.</p> <p>3. The first installment will be released within one month of the birth of second girl child. Successive installments will be released on the birthday of second daughter every year.</p> <p>4. In case of death of either of the girls, the incentive will stop with immediate effect.</p> <p>5. The accumulated amount will be released after the second girl child attains the age of 18 years.</p>	<p>V, another Rs.4,000 after she completes the Class VIII and Rs.7,500 after she completes the Class 10.</p> <p>3. While studying in class XI and XII, she will get Rs 200 per month.</p> <p>4. After the girl reaches 18 years, the parents are free to redeem the funds. It will be less than Rs 100,000.</p> <p>4. If the certificates are redeemed at the time the girl turns 21, then Rs 100,000 is paid.</p>
Achievements/results	<p>Till date, more than 275000 girls have applied for this scheme. The number of girls who have already received the financial assistance is 4635.</p>	<p>Till December 2009 as many as 86,820 girls have benefited under this scheme, as per official records.</p>	<p>In 2007, the state government had set a target of benefiting 30000 girls. But 40853 girls benefited . Till now as many as 3 lac girls have applied or benefited under this scheme.</p>

Recommendations

Taking into account all these drawbacks and challenges associated with the Delhi Laadli Scheme, I will make the following recommendations that will ensure that the scheme gets implemented effectively and efficiently, besides enhancing the usefulness and feasibility of the scheme. These recommendations have been classified into two categories- design and implementation.

Recommendations in Design

- **Issue Identity cards to all registered girls and reduce paper work**

The government should make an endeavour to reduce paper work involved in this scheme. For an applicant who first applied for this scheme when his/her daughter was born, reapplication of the form in the next successive stages is mandatory. Besides, parents are also required to attach a number of other documents along with the application form like voter ID card, ration card. Due to this, some applicants are unable to receive the benefits of the scheme if they are unable to produce all such documents. Also it is important to attach these documents every time the application form is filled. This leads to wastage of time, efforts and resources. Instead the department should provide a girl child an identity card when her parents first apply for the scheme. The card should have all the details about the applicant

and also a table depicting the six different stages of this scheme. When the applicant applies for the scheme, the parent, school principal and district officer should acknowledge by signing in the respective cell. Similarly when the applicant reaches the next milestone, instead of filling the form again, all the parties involved should sign in their respective cell indicating that the applicant has now reached a higher stage in the scheme. This can be better understood with the following illustration.

Stage	Description	Parent sign	Principal sign	District officer sign
1	After birth			
2	Class I			
3	Class VI			
4	Class IX			
5	Class X passed			
6	Class XII			

Suppose that a girl first applied for the Laadli Scheme in class IX. After her application got accepted, the department would allot this card to her and transfer the amount in her bank account. In the next stage when she passes class X, instead of refilling the form, she can just get the card signed by her parents. Then she can deposit the card to her class teacher who will further

pass it on to the school principal. The school principal will sign it and then all the cards brought to her can be sent to the district office, where they can update their records and transfer money in the bank accounts. The district officer will then sign it and then all the cards can be sent back to the school. This way a lot of paper work can be reduced and the problem of refilling forms in stages can be solved. In case there are any changes to be made in the details and information supplied by the applicant, a new application form can be filled by the applicant. Also, the department can maintain a computerised database of all the registered girls in this format.

- **Set up a grievance cell**

At present there is no grievance cell where parents can report their grievances or queries and get information or assistance regarding the same. The department should consider having a helpline number and a grievance cell in each district office where parents can approach the concerned officers who can assist them and help solving their problems. Similarly the department should include a complaints/ grievance section in its website.

- **Offer financial assistance in two installments**

A small amount of Rs 5000 can be given to the parents of the girl child when she takes admission into class VI. This amount can be transferred from the savings account into the current account of the girl child. The other amount

can be given to her after she attains 18 years of age and completes education till at least class X. This way there will be sufficient amount remaining in the bank account of the girl child so the parents will not make her drop out from school. At the same time, they will also get some assistance in between the long duration. This recommendation can be better understood with the help of the following case study.

Case study: Is 18 years too long a duration?

Many parents, teachers, civil societies as well as some of the government officers and staff I interacted with were of this opinion that 18 years is too long a period for any girl to receive the monetary incentive by the government. Stakeholders argue that if the parents make their daughters drop-out from schools, get transferred or migrate to a different city, then the scheme will get forfeited and they will not be able to get any money from the government. Similarly if the girl expires before she collects the money from the bank then the amount shall not even get paid to the parents. Also the more general and sympathetic opinion of the people is that since this scheme benefits economically weaker families, the government should provide financial assistance in regular intervals so that they are able to meet their expenses instead of providing a lump sum after the girl turns 18. Geetika Sharma, joint director, DWCD, Govt. of Delhi expressed the logic behind this condition. "The reason why we are giving money to the girls only once they attain the age of 18 years is so that they have some degree of control over the money. If we give the

money in intervals, there are chances that the money will never get spent on the girl. It is considered that when a person becomes a major, he/she has the ability to make rational decisions for himself/herself and the people around him/her. Similarly a girl, when she receives the money at the age of 18, will be able to decide rationally where she should invest this money in. If a girl receives the financial assistance when she is still a minor, she might not have the courage, strength and maturity to take charge of the money received by her. Parents might spend the money on the treatment of an ill family member. Or they might spend it on better education for her brother in a private school. The worst scenario could be if her father or uncle simply drinks away the money. Thus, there is every possibility that the parents will not save the money for their daughter's higher education or marriage. When she will receive the money at the age of 18 years, she will be able to take charge of the situation and decide for herself, what is best for her. However, if most parents and other stakeholders feel there is a need for amendment in the scheme, we shall do it."

In my opinion, ideally a girl child should receive the amount only after she completes her school education and becomes an adult to decide logically how the money should be utilised. But, the government should also provide some incentive to the parents in between the scheme. Therefore giving money to a girl child in class VI can be a good incentive for many parents to educate their girl children.

Implementation

- **Better coordination between the DWCD, Directorate of Education and schools**

Every government department has its own space and control over other institutes and offices. The main department responsible for implementing Laadli Scheme in Delhi is DWCD. However in order to make sure that the scheme gets implemented successfully, the Directorate of Education (DoE) must also involve itself in the process. DWCD has no control over the government or private schools in the city so it cannot force them to assist the parents or girls in filling up the forms and submitting the forms to the district offices of the department. However if the DoE makes it compulsory for all the schools in the city to promote this scheme and assist parents and students in the Laadli Scheme procedure, then more girl students will be able to avail the benefits of this scheme. If schools are involved in this scheme, they are helping the government and contributing towards the development of the country. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that DoE issues circulars to all girl's and co-ed schools in Delhi and make it compulsory for them to facilitate girls/parents in the procedure of applying for Laadli Scheme and receiving the amount deposited in their bank accounts.

- **Greater role of NGOs and civil societies**

NGOs and civil societies can contribute in generating information about the scheme among the poor and illiterate people. While the government might not be able to reach out to the marginalised people in remote areas, grass roots NGO'S can really help in this regard. They should organize camps in resettlement colonies and slums and invite the people who are interested to know about the Laadli Scheme. They should then explain the purpose and procedure of this scheme to these people. They may even provide them application forms and assistance in filling the forms. If some parents have not yet registered their daughter's birth and they do not know how to do it, they should assist them in doing that. Besides they can even organize *nukkad nataks* and use the medium of theatre to explain the procedure of this scheme to the target groups. There are NGOs like *Pardarshita* which is assisting such marginalised people in filling the form, obtaining the right documents and even filing an RTI application in case parents do not know the status of their application. More such organizations should come up and do their bit for the society. The government may even fund these organisations for their work, provided they have reasonable financial demands.

- **Enhance government's service provision**

The government must invest in its own offices and machinery in order to offer better services to the public. So much is being spent by the Delhi government on the Commonwealth Games 2010, but no emphasis is being given to improve the state of affairs of its own offices. The government should construct well-ventilated visitor's

rooms and cabins so that they sit comfortably before they get to meet the concerned officer. There should be facilities for clean water and toilets should be constructed for both women and men. Unless the government improves its own infrastructure, it cannot improve the services provided to the public by its departments and services.

- **Employ more staff**

I think the department must employ more workers to enhance its service provision. There is an acute shortage of officers and other staff working in the department's offices, especially in the district offices. I personally experienced the poor state of affairs of one of the district offices where a sole woman was dealing with the public, as well as maintaining database and verifying forms.

- **Increased role of Anganwadi centres**

Anganwadi centres are playing an important role in providing recreation and pre-school education to children upto the age of 6 years. They also maintain good relations with other women in the community or locality and provide valuable information to them. Their role in the Laadli Scheme is limited; they provide application forms to the parents of a newly born girl child and assist them in filling the forms if they ask for assistance. I will strongly recommend the department to increase their role in the Laadli Scheme. These workers can reach out to a lot of poor and marginalised people in the remotest corners of the city and spread the

message about the scheme to them. They should be allowed to collect the filled Laadli forms from applicants and then submit to the district office of the DWCD. This will help in the creation of a new registration centre where parents can submit the Laadli application forms besides schools.

- **Changing the attitude of parents**

Anganwadi centres, NGOs and government should collectively make an endeavour to bring about a change in the mindsets and the attitude of the parents towards their daughters. In order to promote the girl child among the people of the city, it is important that the government and non-government organisations set examples of women in India who have achieved tremendous success in their respective fields. By promoting them, they will spread the message that girls can also do very well in life and achieve great prosperity. So it is unethical to take their life and not give them the opportunity to grow up, learn and make a mark in the world.

- **Training of public information officers and staff in government offices**

The people appointed to provide information about the Laadli Scheme to the general public must be well-trained and well-informed about its procedure and other details. They should be genuinely willing to explain this to the parents, considering not many parents may be fully aware of the procedure. Also they must deal with them

in a dignified manner and respect them. They should clearly inform them what they themselves have to do and what is it that the government is responsible for doing in the scheme. This will lead to clarity of thought and clarity in action.

Conclusion

It is commendable on the part of Delhi government to launch an initiative that promotes girl children and their education. The scheme has achieved good results in terms of the number of girls who have applied for it. However there is a lot of scope for improvement in terms of the design of the scheme and the way it is being implemented. The department must reduce the ambiguity in the scheme by making its terms and conditions more explicit. It should make an endeavour to answer the "unanswered" questions about the income criteria, maturity period, etc. To improve the way the scheme is being implemented, the department must coordinate its efforts with other organisations and the civil society in order to reach out to a larger audience who can get a tremendous benefit from this scheme. Similarly, it must enhance its service by employing more staff and training all the workers. It is also important for all of us to change our crude and rigid attitude towards girl children and accept our daughters and sisters whole- heartedly. The government can launch various schemes for the welfare of the society. But unless the society is ready to accept these changes, no government scheme can be successful. It is therefore very important that each one of us promotes the education of girl children and make a contribution towards a better, empowered society.

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