

Foreword

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called India's state of child undernourishment a curse. Despite rapid economic growth India contains a third of the developing world's undernourished children. At current slow rates India will reach the MDG by 2046. This performance is all the more puzzling. India's rapid economic growth indicates that the country should be perfectly capable of tackling the problem. Besides going beyond recognition, it has already proposed expansion and redesign of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

But this *IDS Bulletin* suggests that these reforms may not be enough. Additional reforms are needed in institutions, governance and in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ICDS and other such interventions. This will call for moving from a 'food alone' focus to true integration of the programme across sectors, a shift from a cookie-cutter approach to one which takes into account India's diverse socio-political and cultural realities on the ground, and a sharp focus on outcomes. The capabilities of the institutions in charge of demanding and delivering good quality services need strengthening, together with independent evaluations of the programme on a routine basis to fine tune approaches. The *IDS Bulletin* contains many suggestions along these lines. With a strong mandate from the recent election, the Government of India has an exceptional opportunity to hurry and tackle the 'curse'.

Dr Uma Lele, IDS Trustee, Special Advisor to the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, and former Senior Advisor, the World Bank
