

Government Programmes to Reduce Malnutrition among Children and to Ascertain Livelihood of Tribal Women

Dr. Haseena V.A., Dr Gigi Elias

Associate Professor, Department of Economics MES Mampad College Mampad Kerala

Associate Professor and HOD, Department of Economics St Peter's College Kolenchery

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ABSTRACT

Tribal communities are still facing multi variant issues even today. They possesses a distinct dialect and cultural traits. One of the most significant feature of the Tribal economy is that they have been restricted to low position on many occasions physically and socially and they lead a remote life instead of being engrossed in the social life due to many reasons away from mainstream population. On minute terms these variations are inbuilt and it is not visible. But when we count them together this may lead to a deprivation of their life from social, economic and educational and occupational aspect. Their land deprivations, lack of assets, acute debt, exploitation both mental and physical etc severely affect their livelihood. Ultimate result is all these leads them to alcoholism and drug usage, misuse of their women etc. government introduced many schemes and programs for the empowerment of tribals.

People's Plan Programmes, Gram Sabhas, OoruKootams, Ayalkootams, VanaSamrakshanaSamithies (VSS) and a plethora of social institutions under AHADS were all built up for inclusive participatory, just and sustainable development. Yet Attappady still retains its prime position in the media for environmental destruction, poverty, Tribal right violations of every conceivable kind and so on. In addition to poverty, starvation and every sort of exploitation, malnutrition of pregnant women, infant mortality, especially death of newborn babies swallows this once rich land. Perhaps the single-most important contributory factor to the child malnutrition deaths, and the cause for the overwhelming poverty of the Tribals, which fails to be addressed to date, is the alienation and loss of most of their fertile agriculturally suitable land, total destruction of their indigenous mixed cropping system, change in diet and lifestyle, and loss of hope.

Attappady Comprehensive Tribal and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (ACT and PVTG) Development Project got its sanction for work on 3rd September 2014. On 18th February 2014 the Empowered Committee of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India approved the project. For duration of seven years these project got support from National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

The project was formulated in the context of the incidents of child deaths reported from the block during 2012-14. With 58 malnutrition deaths reported over a short period, Attappady had gained nation-wide attention. It has been pointed out that land alienation and the loss of traditional food security systems had led to acute poverty and widespread malnutrition. Questions were raised on the effectiveness of the development projects implemented in the area over the last few decades.

Objectives

The project endeavors comprehensive integrated development of Tribal families of Attappady block. It aims at reducing vulnerabilities of the communities and improving their socio-economic and livelihood status. Another objective of the project is to maximize the communities' access to their rights and entitlements. Sustainable livelihoods like agriculture and allied activities need to be developed where the community can be self-reliant and self-sufficient in food. Women's institutions would be built up for total financial inclusion leading towards poverty alleviation and social development. Awareness generation would be enhanced on all issues for the

communities to be able to access all entitlements and schemes. The institutions would enable women to access credit, engage in sustainable livelihoods, build up entrepreneurship, marketing and negotiation capacities and capacity to assert their agency in all realms from the domestic front to the various forums like the area of work, panchayath and various departments. The social, economic and political status is to be enhanced and they should be able to assert their cultural identity as Tribals.

Aims and expected achievements of the project are:

- Building up of powerful and effective exclusive institutions of women from the Tribal communities who should develop negotiation power, ability to critically analyze their own situation and collectively work towards social transformation
- Institution at the Ooru (hamlet) level and Panchayath level for Tribal women to enable them to access all entitlements and schemes of each department and engage in the proactive process of preparation of Tribal sub-plan.
- Institutions to ensure availability of nutritious food, access to health care, education, etc.
- Institutions should have the ability to prevent social issues like child marriage, domestic violence, trafficking and other forms of violence which affect the status of women
- Skill training to youth to save them from unemployment, despondency and alcoholism.
- Livelihoods in agriculture and micro-enterprises that would lead to economic development
- Funds disbursed to the community

Attappady will ultimately developed as the immersion site for the community resource persons and professionals working in the extremely vulnerable Tribal areas of the country

Project Strategy

The project strategy involves social mobilisation and building exclusive community network of Tribal women. There are project apparatus aimed at improving the social, economic, and livelihood status. There are also components that attempt to improve community entrance to rights and entitlements. Another set of components are for capacity building and skill development. All the components are being implemented through the community network. The institutional structure envisioned in the project comprises Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, *Ooru Samities* at hamlet level, and *Panchayat Samities* at the Grama Panchayat level. NHGs are women's collectives formed at Neighbourhood level within hamlets. These are the building blocks of the community network. *Ooru Samities*, which are federations of NHGs at the hamlet level, have General Bodies comprising all the NHG members of the respective hamlets. The General Body of the Panchayath Level *Samiti* consists of office bearers of all the *Ooru Samities* in the Grama Panchayat.

First Step - Formation of Neighbourhood Groups

Sustainable socio-cultural and agricultural development cannot succeed without the full participation and collective action of the community as a whole. In order to develop the community kitchen into a real space and forum for community empowerment, social mobilization and information dissemination, newspapers were distributed in the hamlets. Mathrubhumi and Manorama, the two leading newspapers as well as ThozhilVartha and ThozhilVeedhi, two magazines that provide information on employment opportunities are being distributed in adjacent hamlets. It was also an instrument for institution building.

The success of the institution building among Tribal women is all the more remarkable because it broke most of the ingrained prejudices and myths about Tribal women as "ignorant, incapable of saving money, keeping accounts..." Some data's shows that there are NGHs having 10-15 members, with savings of Rs. 85, 06387, internal lending to the tune of Rs. 38,05773 and repayment to the tune of Rs. 15,0867. All of them manage

their books of accounts brilliantly. Majority of the groups have savings in between Rs. 10,000 to 20,000 followed by savings below Rs. 5000. Majority have taken loan below 5000 followed by those in between 10000 to 20000 and by those in between 5000 to 10000. Majority of the groups have in between 15 to 20 members and others have 10 to 15 members.

Second Step – From NHGs to Oorusabhas and Panchayath Samithies

Following the formation of NHGs, they were consolidated at the ooru or hamlet level to form the “Oorusamithi” (Hamlet Level Group) and the Oorusamithies were consolidated to form the Panchayat Samithies (Panchayat Level Group). The Oorusamithi formation takes place after all the women in a hamlet have joined NHGs.

An Oorusamithi comprises of 5 to 10 NHGs. If a hamlet has a small population and only 2 to 3 NHGs, then two adjacent hamlets come together to form the Oorusamithi. The Oorusamithi is formed through a workshop in which all members should present. In the meetings Group participatory exercises and presentation about the relevance of the institutions, the perceived goals of oorusamithi and panchayath samithi would be discussed. Resource mapping and livelihoods like agriculture, cattle-rearing and non-timber forest produce would be drawn and presented. At the end of the discussions, the members would select the Executive Committee from the Presidents and Secretaries and a nominated member of each NHG.

At present 106 Oorusamithies have been formed out of which 40 are in Agali, 36 in Pudur and 30 in Sholayur. They are being registered and have bank accounts. Start-up costs and Vulnerability Reduction Funds have been disbursed. Panchayath Samithies were formed in all the three panchayaths, Agali, Pudur and Sholayur within a span of one year where all Oorusamithi executive members participated. It was a mass mobilization of around 500 to 600 women. The relevance of the institutions was discussed followed Pudur Panchayat Samithy Election by group discussions and presentations and finally election of the Executive Committees of the Panchayath Samithies from the Secretaries and Presidents of the Oorusamithies.

The Block Samithi is the consolidation of Panchayath Samithi at the Block level. The Executive Committee of the Block Samithi is selected from the Executive Committees of the Panchayath samithies.

Funds to the community

Corpus fund of Rs 10,000 has been given to the 507 groups. Start-up- Costs of Rs 63 lakhs has been given to 63 Oorusamithies and 63 lakhs Vulnerability Reduction Fund to 63 Oorusamithies. This is based on the micro-plan and vulnerability index developed by the Oorusamithies. The Oorusamithies disburse the funds to the NHGs which are most vulnerable. VRF in Attappady is considered as a revolving fund and repaid to the Oorusamithi by the NHGs. Community Investment Fund of Rs. 75,60,000 has been given to the 3 Panchayath samithies. The fund has been transferred to the NHGs and will be returned to the Panchayath samithi. An amount of Rs 60,000 is being given to the NHGs and they are using it for the purpose of livelihood by developing business plan looking into available resources, skills and marketing facilities.

Community Cadres – the Backbone of the Process

The most important strategy and strength with respect to the entire project has been the selection of Animators from the Tribal community and the capacity building programmes for the community cadres. The mobilization, institution building was successfully accomplished as the animators belonged to the Tribal community, spoke the same language and were well versed in the social and cultural background and needs of the community. The mobilization and institution building was accelerated as the animators understood the pulse of the community and the strategies to be adopted. Capacity building for the cadres has been a continuous process with constant reflection and review meetings where conceptual clarity about the project was achieved apart from the thematic training on agriculture, natural resource, education, health, gender, etc.

There are around 120 Animators. Through the capacity building process, the Animators have been strengthened to access their rights and entitlements and strengthen the institutions to raise their voices and

assert their agency and access their rights. They support the capacity building programme in the field. All the community cadres belong to the respective Tribal communities and speak the Tribal dialect.

Capacity Building

Capacity building programs have been facilitated for NHGs, Oorusamithis and Panchayat office-bearers and members. Trainings have been held to explain the non-negotiable principles and various activities like Community kitchen and health interventions. Women were trained in topics related to Oorusamithi and Panchayat Samithi formation, roles and responsibilities of these social organizations, management of corpus funds to the community and book-keeping. Women have been trained in social development and livelihood aspects. Trainings have been held with respect to natural resources and agriculture with focus on organic farming without lethal pesticides and chemical fertilizers and other agro-chemicals.

Exposure visit was undertaken to Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, Kovel Foundation and Jattu Trust in Vishakapatnam to understand the institutions of women from Animators and Co-ordinators. The Tribal communities, the agriculture and Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) operations they have undertaken. Visits were made to Oornatikiri, Malapuram, Thrissur and Ernakulam districts. They learned about the functioning of joint liability groups, saw the exhibition of Kudumbashree products.

It was a revelation to the women to understand the potentials of marketing. Kurumba women were shocked to see that products like ragi could be sold at such high prices. The confidence in organizational structure to be able to manage agriculture and marketing and undertake micro- enterprises was built up.

Farmers Field School

Farmers Field School is a novel concept of initiating agricultural group training activity where a long-term process of restoration and rejuvenation of agro-ecosystems and indigenous and sustainable agricultural foundations are taking place. All the ecologically and economically suitable organic/eco-friendly/ natural/ indigenous farming techniques from soil and water conservation and rejuvenation to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that rely on ecologically suitable principles, and from breeding, land races and commercial varieties to saving crop wild relatives will be experimented, demonstrated, and suitable methods developed in these field schools. The expertise and local knowledge of the whole community will be brought together in these demonstration plots.

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