



## NGO Role in Tribal Education and Empowerment

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### INTRODUCTION

The tribal communities in India are simple living, culture specific and geographically isolated. The very name “Tribe” indicates the primitiveness. These people are also called as “Indigenous” communities which mean that they are natives or local inhabitants. Even though the tribals are backward they have a distinct rich culture, tradition, knowledge in conservation of natural resources and are good herbal medicine practitioners. They live in forests and have a great love for nature and believe god in it. The sacred grooves protected by these people for tribal people forests are interwoven with their lives. Their sustainable practices to collect non timber forest produce (NTFP) lead to “in-situ” conservation of the species. The tribal communities are the best managers of biodiversity. They are the ethnic conservators. Though they are underprivileged their lifestyle is highly eco friendly and hence this community can be referred as “Green Community”.

On the other side they are still in abject poverty with high rate of illiteracy. There is a big gap between policy intent at macro-level and actual local level delivery and implementation in tribal development schemes and plans. This is observed in terms of availability, access and utilization of social services, as well as in terms of access and control of natural resources that impact the livelihoods of the tribal people, who are perhaps the most disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society. The context of cultural erosion, industrialization in the mineral belt and transmigrations create additional challenges for the tribal communities.

If the development plans are to be effective, it is necessary that a demand driven and need based plans should evolve from the tribal communities. They should have a say in defining their development needs as schemes might not be neutral and generate

conflicts. At the same time it is very important that in the name of development the tribal identity should not be lost. It is in this context the need for empowerment arises and then development. Without capacity building of the community, development interventions will not reach them. It is in this area the NGOs should play an important and significant role.

The following critical problems necessitated the NGOs to work along with the government for the socio economic development of tribal communities.

- Tribal communities migrate to different places for livelihood.
- There is strong sentiment and attachment to a particular locality and hence the problem of rehabilitation and resettlement.
- Lack of awareness regarding the importance of education and in general about water and sanitation, health.
- Lacking access to information on different development and welfare schemes of government.
- Deprivation of traditional livelihoods due to declaration of some reserve forests as wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.
- Large scale displacement of tribals in the name of development works like construction of big dams and mining operations.
- Decreasing forest and loss of biodiversity.

For the tribals living in a forest it is a source for food, fodder and fuel wood. The main livelihood is collection of Non timber forest produce (NTFP). Due to heavy biotic pressure, over exploitation by other communities, encroachments and other anthropogenic activities the prime forests have degraded and decreased which resulted in loss of biodiversity. When a forest shrinks the incidences of human-Animal conflict will increase. All these consequences lead to distress migration of tribal population.

It is a known fact that all the above problems cannot be tackled or addressed by the NGOs alone but needs government support. But they can be a voice for the poor tribals when some activity disturbs their culture, livelihood or even their identity.

Illiteracy or being unable to read is an important factor in the degrading environment of tribal areas. People who are able to read have access to more knowledge. They can learn from the experiences of people from all over the world and can implement the best practices best suited to their situation. Illiteracy also comes with other evils. Illiterate tribals are seldom well versed with their rights, confusion policies regarding them and their environment. This not only has direct effects on their actions, but also acts as a feedback loop in the vicious circle of social and economic causes. Illiteracy or being unable to read is an important factor in the degrading environment of tribal areas. People who are able to read have access to more knowledge. They can learn from the experiences of people from all over the world and can implement the best practices best suited to their situation. Illiteracy also comes with other evils. Illiterate tribals are seldom well versed with their rights, confusion policies regarding them and their environment. This not only has direct effects on their actions, but also acts as a feedback loop in the vicious circle of social and economic causes.

Hence the most important area that needs to be addressed by the NGOs is to empower the tribal communities through education. Education gives the opportunity to learn and gain knowledge. It exposes the target group to observe and study the outside world. They should be aware of the information technology and the concept of "Global village". For education, innovative methodologies, promoting local languages should be offered as an example for motivating both pupils and teachers.

NGOs should have clear roles and responsibilities in promoting tribal education and empowerment. Empowerment is a long term process and covers different most critical areas. That too empowering tribal community is a challenging task for NGOs. They should put forth sustained efforts to achieve the goal.

Their primary role should be awareness generation and sensitization towards the issue. Lack of awareness is the core problem and a major hindrance in tribal

development. Next to awareness capacity building trainings are necessary. NGOs should act as bridges and not as barriers. Care should be taken to avoid duplication. They should see that any project/program or a scheme should be implemented with transparency and accountability. Here NGO's role can be a 'Watchdog'. They should be aware of all developmental schemes available with the government. Another important role is to facilitate for convergence. This need not be with govt. schemes alone but can with other NGOs implementing programs not available with the government. All types of education like non formal education, adult education and Anganwadis should be promoted with the involvement of government. Since tribal habitations are far away from big villages and towns NGOs can develop Para teachers with in the community. All types of innovative information, communication and education materials can be developed by the NGOs to attract tribal children to schools. Central govt. schemes such as Sarva Sikha Abhayan and Rajiv Vidya Mission under compulsory education program should be utilized to full extent. NGOs with their existing rapport with tribal people can motivate the parents to send their children to schools established under such schemes. Apart from regular govt. schools NGOs can explore the possibilities of developing a net work of mobile education centers for the benefit of migrating families. Their migrating localities should be mapped.

Constraints: Though NGOs work hard and have the interest of the tribal communities at heart funds is the main constraint for sustenance of their activities. Once funding for a particular project is stopped it becomes highly difficult for the NGOs to continue the project. Sustainability of projects/program with tribal community is a tough task.

- To sustain and promote sustainable alternatives for security of livelihood; and
- To ensure self-governance recognizing their cultural identity and value systems
- Our programme thrust areas include:
- Legal Assistance and Advocacy
- Capacity Building of Tribal Youth and People's Institutions
- Empowerment of Tribal Women
- Issues in the Region and Campaign Activities
- Research, Documentation and Dissemination

## The Educational Context in the Tribal Areas of Andhra Pradesh

With a population of more than 10.2 crores, India has the single largest tribal population in the world. This constitutes 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country (Census of India, 2011). Education is one of the primary agents of transformation towards development. Scheduled Tribes are at the lowest strata of the Indian Society. For generations most of these communities were neglected by the rest of the nation. As per the latest Census of India the tribals number 8.08 percent of India's population. These tribals are spread in various parts of the country. More than 75 percent of India's Tribal population resides in the Central Tribal Belt comprising the states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Tribals in Andhra Pradesh is the traditional home of nearly 35 tribal groups and most of these communities are found inhabiting in the border areas of Andhra Pradesh in the North and North-East. Identical tribal groups are found in the border areas of Maharashtra in the North and Madhya Pradesh and Orissa in the North-East. Out of 35 recognized Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh, 30 groups are mostly found living in the sprawling 30,030 Sq. kms. of Scheduled areas and contiguous non-scheduled sub plan area in the districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad and Mahaboobnagar. The Scheduled area in the State which is the chief habitat of tribal groups of Andhra Pradesh constitutes 11 per cent of the total geographical area of the State. The density of population in tribal areas is 125 persons per Sq. Km. as against 194 in the plain areas. In addition to Scheduled villages, non-scheduled villages on the basis of contiguity and predominant tribal population are included in Tribal Sub Plan / I.T.D.As. Visakhapatnam District is having highest number of scheduled villages and Mahaboobnagar is having the least. With regard to area, Khammam District is having largest geographical area under scheduled areas. This reveals the gap between the general population and the tribal communities.

### Defining 'Education' in the Tribal Context

For us 'education' is an integral part of the empowerment process. Empowerment of the tribal community means capacitating tribal communities to secure access and control of their land, forest and water resources as well as sustains and promote viable alternatives for security of their livelihoods.

Empowerment thus is an interactive process whereby tribal communities are enabled to participate actively in local governance (decision making that affects their own life situation).

It is in this context that we need to define the role of adult education. For us, educating tribal communities in a more concrete sense means to facilitate processes, which will enable tribal representatives to:

- develop an analytical capacity for assessing their external and internal environment impacting on their own communities;
- develop confidence and capacity to articulate their interests and perspective thereby participating in decision making processes leading to better governance;
- develop skills to initiate local relevant alternatives to improve livelihoods and challenge external pressures;
- value self and community history with a critical appreciation of traditional knowledge systems.

### TRAINING MODULES

- **Problem Perspective in the Tribal Context of Andhra Pradesh**
- Demographic characteristics of tribals in the Andhra context.
- Local level problems:
  - Types of problems and the impact of these problems on the local community.
  - Causes of the problems.
  - What can be done about these problems at the local level.
- Macro level problems and analysis;
  - Type of problems e.g., deforestation, land alienation, displacement, mining.
  - Structural reasons for these problems.
  - Link between local level action and macro problems.
- Perspective of development in the tribal context:
  - Historical perspective of tribal development in the agency areas
  - Critical appreciation of traditional knowledge systems
  - Poverty and development in the tribal context.
  - Power analysis.
- Analysis of intervention in relation to
  - Political parties

- Non government organizations
- Militant groups
- Local level groups
- Any other movements.

### ➤ **Intervention Methods and Techniques**

#### ➤ Understanding the village:

Methods of observation of land ownership patterns, cropping patterns, flora and fauna, production pattern; areas of co-operation and conflict; interaction between groups; changing realities; government programmes and structures, leadership patterns, traditional leaders and panchayats, role of women, youth, children.

#### ➤ Self awareness/development:

- Through individual and group exercises.
- Confidence building exercises.

#### ➤ How to work on issues and problems with people:

- Problem identification
- Principles of working with individuals and groups in the community
- How to ensure participation of people
- How to form local sanghams (associations): Role and how to sustain sanghams
- Qualities of a good leader and follower

#### ➤ Communication methods: Culture, role-plays, video, photographs, slides, press.

#### ➤ How to work with Government:

- How to present problems to government representatives
- How to write petitions, letters etc

### **III. Law and Administration**

#### **A. Administration:**

#### ➤ Decision making bodies from the local to the state level:

- Panchayat Raj (Local self-governance) structure.
- Role and their functioning: critical analysis.
- Traditional leadership structures

#### ➤ Administrative structure: Revenue.

- Village, mandal (sub-district), district.
- How it functions; critical analysis.

#### ➤ Development administration:

- Village, mandal, district.
- How it functions; critical analysis.

#### ➤ Relevant bodies set up by the government pertaining to tribal areas such as:

- Integrated Development tribal Agency (ITDA) : departments and structures; critical analysis of functioning; participation by people .
- Other institutions such as the Tribal, Cultural and Research Training Institute etc.
- Schemes and programmes

#### **B. Law:**

#### ➤ Legal structures:

- Prevailing legal institutions/Courts from local to state level
- Critical analysis
- People's role

#### ➤ National policies/laws relevant to tribal areas: ex. Forest laws, displacement policy etc.

- State policies/ laws relevant to tribal areas: ex. Land related laws, maintenance regulations etc.

#### • Decision making structures from the grass roots to the state levels: executive, legislative, and judicial systems.

#### • Role of Customary Law in the tribal context

#### • Special focus on role of panchayats and traditional leaders in local areas

#### • Laws pertaining to agency areas

#### • People's rights vis-a-vis the police

#### • National Bills, policies having local relevance: e.g., Forest Bill, Rehabilitation Policy, Land Acquisition Act.

#### **Implications for Policy Advocacy**

The quintessential issues of concern that require policy advocacy in tribal areas today

Decreasing access and control over natural resources on which the survival of the tribal communities depend

#### ➤ Lack of access to basic services: health, education and infrastructure

#### ➤ Violation of their identity rights leading to cultural erosion

#### ➤ Encroachment of their right to self-governance

From our experience it is clear that we need to recognize that major learning in the tribal context takes place through struggles on issues focusing on human rights of tribal communities. The development of general awareness of multiple stakeholders is crucial for perspective building on tribal reality. More specifically, structured, systematic training initiatives

for developing change agents add lasting value on internalizing learning processes. Also, education on alternatives, which challenge the existing processes of development, is crucial from the perspective of sustainable livelihood.

Hence as stated before, it is imperative that indigenous 'education' must be an integral part of the empowerment process. For a lasting impact, youth must be the centre of development activity. Therefore the need to invest in the education of young men and women in tribal areas. Governance functions in the future will be played by today's youth so the direction of development of tribal areas depends on them.

Within this framework, the following are some specific policy implications:

- The thrust of adult education processes must be linked with:
  - human rights education especially in the current context where there is an increasing threat to access and control of natural resources by indigenous communities;
  - development of skills to initiate and sustain relevant micro alternatives that address livelihood issues from a long term perspective and
  - Value based education with critical appreciation of traditional knowledge systems and relevant responses to the changing external environment.
- Need to create special opportunities to respond to the educational needs of women. Consequences of the development processes are not neutral. They militate more against women than men and hence tend to result in greater negative effects on women. Loss of access and control of resources in tribal areas tend to push women out of productive activities. This also affects adversely their status in their family and community as their participation in the economy decreases. Lack of basic services, particularly related to health and education makes women especially vulnerable. Moreover, atrocities on women are on the increase, as tribal areas become accessible to outsiders and commercially oriented activities. The major strategy to address this issue is to educate the 'panchayat' representatives to safeguard the position of women in the areas under their jurisdiction.
- Need to develop an informed cadre of tribal citizens in law related processes is vital. A critical

understanding of the customary laws and the legal provisions in the tribal context is necessary to achieve social justice. The legal machinery in the current circumstances is either insensitive or manipulative in character.

- In order to safeguard human rights and ensure enlightened governance there is a need for a special focus on educating elected leaders on relevant laws, their role and functions. In the light of the specific application of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Indian Constitution to tribal areas, a pertinent law known as the Panchayat (Extension to Schedule Areas Act) was enacted in 1996. This Act facilitates the participation of the 'gram sabha' and the panchayat leaders in playing a role in governance issues at the grassroots level. Several NGOs all over the country have taken this up as a challenge. However, the point remains that respective State governments are slow to act. For example in Andhra Pradesh even the rules and regulations pertaining to the Act are not framed as yet!
- Tribal institutions of secondary education are irrelevant and do not 'educate'. The main reason for this is that the content of education does not take into account their traditional knowledge systems, an understanding of their own environment which is rich in natural resources, relevant skills to provide access and control of their environment and a recognition of their own identity as tribal communities. Also where relevant, a major concern is the need for providing primary education in their mother tongue in order to create an opportunity for them to enhance their learning capacities. Mainstream educational institutions tend to create an alienated group of youngsters with few opportunities to use their capacities. There is a need to review the relevance of curriculum and methodologies of education currently in the tribal context. More specifically we need to campaign for a policy, which takes into consideration the learning needs of tribal youth dropouts at the school and pre university levels.
- Need to strengthen literacy levels by promoting opportunities for reading at the grassroots level. Even daily newspapers hardly reach remote villages. Decentralized libraries run by literate youth could be one initiative. Any educational

process has to be sustained through creating conditions for being updated on current events and how they impact local communities. This means that processes of creative literacy must be accompanied by follow up measures whereby avenues for deliberation and some reading material is made available on a continuous basis.

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