

Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Tribal Communities of India

Why in news?

Food insecurity and undernutrition are ongoing issues in tribal communities in India, even with government welfare programs in place.

What are the Recent Findings in Malnutrition regarding Tribal Communities?

- **National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) report** - It reveals the alarming poverty rates and malnutrition among *Odisha's tribal population*.
- **Severe impacted districts** - Kandhamal, Rayagada and Koraput.
- **Kandhamal district** - Due to mango kernel (a waste product of mango fruit canning industry) consumption the dire state of food insecurity among Odisha's tribal communities.
- It reminds the earlier incidents of illnesses and multiple deaths in Kashipur, Rayagada in 1987, 1995 and 2001 due to the consumption of mango kernels.

What are the Challenges of Food Insecurity and Undernutrition in Tribal Areas?

- **Limited Dietary Diversity** - Tribal diets mostly consist of staple crops such as rice and maize, with little access to vegetables, fruits, and protein-rich foods.
- This causes deficiencies in essential micronutrients, leading to malnutrition-related diseases.
- Traditional eating habits neglect various nutritious foods
- **High Malnutrition Rates** - NFHS-5 (2019-21) data shows
 - 43% of children under five in Koraput are stunted.
 - 33% are underweight.
 - 50% are anemic.
 - Malnutrition impacts children's physical and cognitive development and increases mortality rates.
- **Lack of Awareness and Nutrition Education** - Limited understanding of balanced diets and nutrient-rich foods among tribal communities.
- Low awareness about nutrition programs like the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).
- Poor infant feeding practices lead to early childhood malnutrition.
- **Marginal and Small Land Holdings** - Most tribal families focus on subsistence farming, limiting their access to diverse, nutrient-rich crops.
- Many lack access to modern farming techniques and face seasonal food shortages.
- **Gender Inequality in Nutrition** - Women and girls often eat last and receive less nutritious food than men.
- Pregnant and lactating women face inadequate nutrition, resulting in high maternal

and child malnutrition.

- Women's limited decision-making power in food choices impacts family nutrition.

What are the Features of the Koraput Model?

- **The Koraput Model** - It is a community-based Approach to Food Security.
- To address these issues, the MSSRF implemented a community-driven intervention from 2013 to 2022 in Koraput, focusing on nutrition literacy, sustainable farming, and collective decision-making.
- **Community Nutrition Literacy** - Training programs educated villagers on dietary diversity and balanced diets.
- Women and children received priority in access to better nutrition.
- Local champions were trained to promote healthy eating.
- **Diversified Agriculture** - Villagers were encouraged to grow a variety of crops which enhanced food security.
- Successful initiatives included home gardens, mushroom production, vermicomposting, and crop diversification.
- **Collective Decision-Making & Social Engagement** - Group discussions on food choices and farming were conducted.
- Women-led groups promoted nutrition awareness.
- Nutrition messages were shared through community engagement activities.
- **Integration with Government Programs** - The initiative connected villagers to key nutrition schemes.
- Nutrition champions helped ensure awareness and utilization of available resources.

What are the Impact of the Koraput Model?

- **Intervention** - Significantly improved food security and nutrition in Koraput. Increased dietary diversity by cultivating various crops.
- Higher consumption of vegetables, fruits, and dairy, especially among women and children.
- Empowered women in nutrition-related decision-making.
- Strengthened local food security, reducing dependence on external sources.

What are the Government Initiatives related to Tribal Communities Food Insecurity and Malnutrition?

- **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) Development Program** - Targets the most vulnerable tribal communities on improving access to healthcare, education, clean water, and electricity.
- **Nikshay Mitra Initiative** - Aims to tackle *tuberculosis (TB) patients* effectively and additional diagnostic, nutritional, and vocational support to many of whom belong to tribal communities.
- **Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission** - Aims to provide affordable, accessible care and quality of care to all Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) patients through awareness creation, in affected districts of tribal areas.
- **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan** - Aims to address critical gaps in social infrastructure, health, education, and livelihood development across

approximately 63,000 tribal villages in Hazaribag, Jharkhand.

What lies ahead?

- The Koraput model illustrates that a community-driven approach, combined with sustainable farming and nutrition education, can effectively address food insecurity and malnutrition.
- This model can serve as a valuable blueprint for improving food security and health outcomes in other tribal areas across India.

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Reference

[The Hindu | Malnutrition and Food Insecurity in Tribals](#)

