

## West Bengal: Tribal community & Food Scarcity

### What is the issue?

A survey of 1,000 households by Professor Amartya Sen's institute reports that the tribal communities are 'far behind' in terms of human development.

### What does the survey say?

- The study titled 'An Inquiry into the world of the Adivasis of West Bengal' was conducted by Professor Amartya Sen's Pratichi Institute and Asiatic Society.
- The survey was conducted in 1,000 tribal households to ascertain living conditions, health and education.
- West Bengal is home to a over five million tribals, with 6% of the India's tribal population of 100 million.
- But in many areas, tribals of the State are "far behind" in terms of human development.



- The preliminary survey report claimed that nearly one third [31%] of the surveyed households reportedly faced "food scarcity in varying degrees" in the past year.
- Recently the reason for the death of seven tribals in a span of 15 days in November 2018 was speculated as food scarcity.
- The average age of the tribal persons who died was 58 years, which is much shorter than the life expectancy at birth (70 years in West Bengal).
- In the area of health and education, too, tribal communities are far behind the rest of State's population.
- Moreover, 44% of households do not have access to toilets and nearly two-thirds of the households had no drainage system.

### To what extent the tribal community in the state is affected?

- Some households faced acute hunger only in some months (August-October), in many cases people had half-meals only twice a day.
- Also, in some cases, adult members reportedly ate only once a day.
- Most of the families surveyed could hardly afford animal protein or pulses.
- In addition poverty-born vices like alcoholism and the fragility of the public health system seemed to have resulted in a much lower life chances among the Adivasis than their co-citizens.
- Degradation of forest and environmental degradation are cited as two more reasons for reduced availability of natural nutrients resulting in early deaths.

### **Has the higher work participation rate translated to their well being?**

- The work participation rate [WPR] is higher among the Adivasis in Bengal forcing the children of schoolgoing age to discontinue their studies.
- According to the Census of 2011, while WPR is 39% and 49% in Bengal and India, respectively.
- The corresponding WPR figures for Adivasis were 49% and 47%.
- The survey indicated that a higher rate of work participation has not contributed to a better living standard.

**Source: The Hindu**

