Strengthening National Capacities in Tribal Areas

Background

According to the 2011 India Census, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute 8.6 percent (104.3 million) of India’s population and traditionally concentrated in about 15 percent of the country’s geographical area. The Tribal population represents an enormous diversity of groups, linguistically, geographically, in terms of physical attributes, livelihoods, and level of development and social stratification. It estimated that 47 percent live below the poverty line in rural areas and 30 percent in urban areas. Given the often remote locations where these tribal populations live, delivering essential services and ensuring they able to benefit from economic growth, remains a key challenge for the country.

A World Bank report notes that scheduled tribes are almost 20 years behind the average Indian population due to their isolation, and lack of access and rights over resources. Further, tribal communities are increasingly isolated from traditional livelihood sources such as land and forests because of involuntary displacement resulting from various development projects.

Recognizing the special needs of Scheduled Tribes, India’s Constitutions provides for safeguards and the Government of India has enacted a number of pro-rights legislations and schemes to encourage the socio economic empowerment of Scheduled Tribes including the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA); Provision of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996; and Tribal Sub-Plan Strategy. However, uneven implementation of these Acts and Programmes have not reduced the development deficit between Scheduled Tribes and other social groups.
About the project

The Ministry of Tribal Areas and UNDP project titled ‘Strengthening National Capacities in Tribal Areas’, aims to ensure that excluded groups benefit from the inclusive agenda of the Government of India through strengthening capacities of communities to demand and access entitlements and ensuring decentralized institutions deliver timely and stigma-free services.

The project focuses on developing capacities of the Ministry and the State Tribal Departments to effectively implement the Forest Rights Act, effectively plan and monitor Tribal sub-plans and Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana to ensure better access to development infrastructure, and facilitate inter-ministerial coordination to integrate the tribal agenda within different government departments.

Developments so far

- Issued guidelines on conversion of forest villages into revenue villages for states
- Provided technical assistance at the national level for monitoring effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act leading to increased recognition of individual and community rights
- Supported legal counsel and advice to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs aimed at upholding the principles of the Forest Rights Act and preventing wrongful dispossession
- Organized regional consultations to create awareness on the amended Forest Rights Rules (2012) and build capacity of state officials on critical issues impeding the Act’s implementation
- Provided technical assistance to establish the National Resource Centre on Forest Rights Act at Tribal Research Institute in Odisha for capacity building, research and innovation on tribal issues
- Prepared training manuals for gram sabhas, elected representatives, revenue and forest officials and committees under the Forest Rights Act to implement and monitor the Act. Also compiled landmark judgements on Forest Rights Act by various courts and directives/directions issued by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs which serves as a ready reckoner
- Undertook studies on the Forest Rights Act, findings of which resulted in directives and guidelines to states to expedite Act implementation
- Supported to roll out of Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojana in 10 Schedule V states with low human development indicators
- Facilitated inter-ministerial dialogue and coordination for integration of the tribal agenda, particularly on the issues of health and livelihood
- Developed umbrella schemes for education of tribal children and scholarships
- Promoted knowledge sharing on international good practices in enabling tribal rights and entitlements through supporting the visit of high-level delegation of policymakers from India to Vietnam and Canada
- Demonstrated community-led governance model on forest resource management for protection, conservation, regeneration and management of natural resources for sustainable forest-based livelihood

Looking to the future

- Preparation of National Tribal Human Development Report on inclusive Growth
- Preparation of policy briefs on the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, tribal health and livelihoods
- Web-based monitoring system, an e-governance and accountability tool designed and operationalized for reporting by states on the Forest Rights Act (FRA) implementation
- Institutional mechanism and operational tools to help states plan and monitor tribal sub-plans and Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana to make them more coherent and relevant to tribal needs through convergence of resources
- Establishment of National Resource Centre on Tribal Livelihood to promote entrepreneurship in tribal areas
- Development of models for convergent and improved service delivery in four left-wing extremism affected districts to move tribal households out of deprivations
- Capacity of civil society organizations/community-based organizations led by tribals built on leadership skills to undertake advocacy and social monitoring on rights and entitlements on behalf of tribal groups

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