

Tribal Food Security

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Tribal Food Security: Issues, Initiatives, and the Way Forward

Introduction

Many tribal communities in India **struggle with food insecurity and malnutrition** despite government welfare programs. **Poor diets, poverty, lack of awareness, and gender inequality** make the problem worse. Children suffer from **stunted growth, anemia, and poor health**. Women and girls often **get less food and nutrition** than men.

In states like **Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh**, tribal people face **severe food shortages and nutritional deficiencies**.

Recent Findings on Malnutrition in Tribals

- **NFSA Report (2013)**: Highlights **poverty and malnutrition** in Odisha's tribal areas.
- **Worst-affected districts**: Kandhamal, Rayagada, and Koraput.
- **Mango kernel consumption in Kandhamal**: A sign of **extreme food insecurity**.
- **Past incidents (1987, 1995, 2001)**: Deaths due to eating mango kernels in **Rayagada, Odisha**.

Challenges of Food Insecurity and Malnutrition

- **Poor Diet Diversity**: Mostly rice and maize, with **little access to vegetables, fruits, and proteins**.
- **High Malnutrition (NFHS-5, 2019-21)**:
 - **43% children stunted, 33% underweight, 50% anemic** in Koraput.
- **Low Awareness**: Many don't understand **balanced diets** or know about **nutrition programs**.
- **Small Land Holdings**: Only **subsistence farming**, leading to **seasonal food shortages**.
- **Gender Inequality**: Women and girls **eat last, get less nutritious food**, affecting **maternal and child health**.

The Koraput Model: A Community-Based Solution

The **M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)** launched the **Koraput Model (2013-2022)** to **improve food security and nutrition**.

Key Features

- **Nutrition Awareness:** Villagers trained on **healthy eating**. Women and children prioritized.
- **Diversified Farming:** Encouraged **home gardens, mushroom farming, vermicomposting**.
- **Community Involvement:** **Group discussions on better food choices**. Women-led groups promoted **nutrition awareness**.
- **Government Integration:** Helped people access **nutrition schemes**.

Impact

- **Improved food security, better diets.**
- **More vegetables, fruits, and dairy in meals.**
- **Women gained decision-making power** in family nutrition.
- **Less dependence on external food sources.**

Government Programs for Tribal Nutrition

- **PVTGs Development Program:** Supports **healthcare, education, clean water** for tribal groups.
- **Nikshay Mitra Initiative:** TB patients get **nutrition, diagnosis, and support**.
- **Sickle Cell Anemia Mission:** Affordable care for tribal patients with sickle cell disease.
- **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan:** Healthcare, education, and livelihood support in tribal villages.

Conclusion

Tribal communities **continue to face hunger and malnutrition** due to **poor diets, poverty, and lack of awareness**. The **Koraput Model** shows that **community-driven efforts, better farming, and nutrition education** can **improve food security**. Expanding such models across India can help **tribal populations lead healthier lives**.

