

Forest-dependent Food Systems



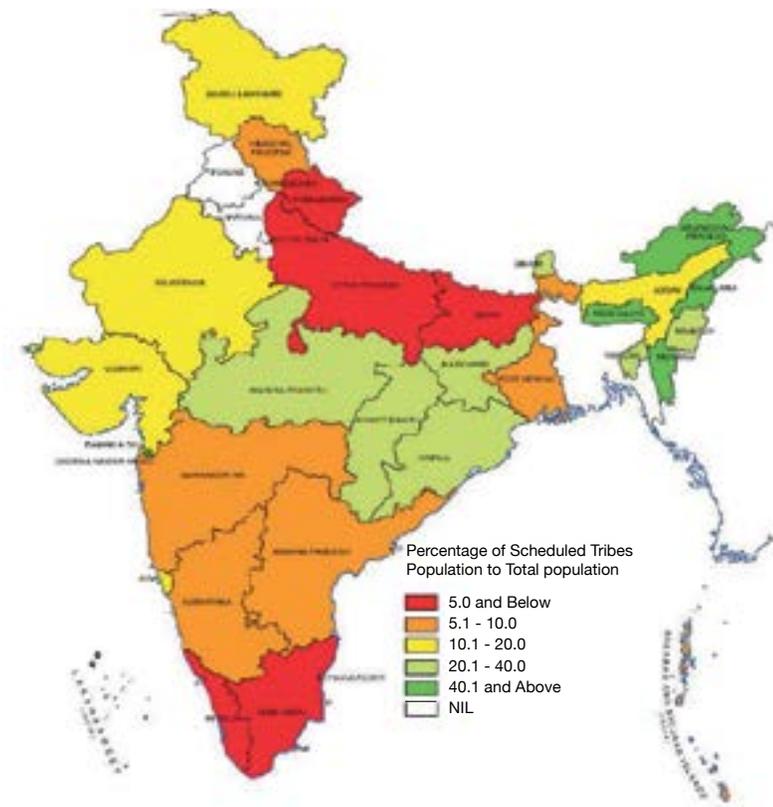
Actionable Area

Redesigning the food systems to deliver a nutritious and affordable diet for all, particularly tribals. Policymakers, researchers, and the agriculture sector should work jointly to systematically solve the nutrition divide for a sustainable food system for tribal people.

Issue

- India's 105 million tribal population from about 705 distinct Scheduled Tribes (STs), representing 8.6% of the total population, are hardest hit by the menace of hunger and malnutrition. They are living with multiple forms of marginalisation, co-morbidities, and struggling to survive and thrive.
- About 40% of under-five tribal children are stunted, and 16% of them are severely stunted. Most of the tribal population used to be self-dependent on their daily food intake. However, changes in food habits have made them dependent on external supplies from the urban locations during recent years.

Census of India 2011- percentage of scheduled tribe population



Status

- The tribal food system depends on forest, land-common property, water resources, and biodiversity (so-called catch and collect). The Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, which was meant to expand local self-governance and tribal self-rule, has not been fully implemented. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, that recognises the rights of the forest-dwelling tribal communities embroiled with unnecessary bureaucratic and many other implementation hurdles.
- The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, which controls three food and nutrition entitlements like Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and Mid-Day Meal (MDM), has numerous governance and program delivery issues.
- India was host to multi-variety millets, a popular staple of the tribal community. But, over the past decades, this miracle crop got lost by relegating its status to a 'coarse grain' for the poor. Recently there has been a growing interest in nutri-cereals, specifically millets. The Government of India declared 2018 as the Year of Millets and launched a campaign to promote nutri-cereals. In 2020, the Prime Minister dedicated 17 biofortified varieties of eight crops, including nutri-cereals, and also endorsed the year 2023 to be observed as the International Year of Millets.
- There are several government initiatives and regulations to enable food safety and nutritional security. Still, there are serious issues of the tribal diets due to problems related to availability, accessibility, affordability, or nutrition governance. Hence, the government initiatives are not in a position to achieve the desire outcomes.

Vision 2030

- **Priorities programmes to nourish the undernourished tribal people, achieve zero hunger, and develop a sustainable food system. Align the vision and strategic directions with the vision of Poshan Abhiyaan 2.0 and UN Sustainable Development Goal (UNSDG) II emphasising agriculture, food security, and nutrition together.**
- **Enable a community-led caring, resilient, just, equitable & accountable, and transformative local food systems for forest-dependent communities based on responsive, efficient, and sustainable natural ecosystems.**



The U.N. General Assembly recently adopted a resolution, sponsored by India and supported by more than 70 countries, declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets.

Pathways

POLICY



Develop and promote the new food systems for tribal that will address all forms of hunger and malnutrition with prioritised actions in the first 1000 days of life- “Windows of Opportunity.”

Develop a comprehensive framework for bringing awareness and behavior change towards social safety schemes- access and utilisation among landowners and forest-based communities.

Minimise the need for displacement, as it has a direct impact on tribal food and nutrition security.

Promote the agro-forestry and nutrition gardens through MGNREGA.

Promote smallholder women farmer-led climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.

Introduce a major policy shift with dry-land agriculture incentivising nutri-cereals (millet varieties) and doubling the minimum support price of millet that of rice.

Introduce reforms on women's land leasing and gender mainstreaming women's role in the food value chain.

Pathways

IMPLEMENTATION



Invest in tribal nutrition that promotes a life cycle approach and revitalise local food systems.

Make each district self-sufficient at least in six food groups to bring food and nutritional self-sufficiency at the district level.

Link MGNREGS for physical capital strengthening, nutri-garden, diversifying production through collective/community farming system.

Encourage local and household level non-farm enterprise promotions.

Conduct capacity-building training of producers around food safety and market standards to avoid exploitation and fetch better prices.

Recommend timely policy measures after reassessing the cost-effectiveness of the government's current food baskets offering, accounting for the nutrient adequacy recommended by the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN).

Have a policy shift from food to nutrition security. The tribal population, specifically women and children, must be able to afford foods and consume fruits, vegetables, legumes, dairy products, meat, fish, and eggs, which are significantly lower today.

Prioritise nutritional needs of aboriginal extinctive primitive tribal for their sustainable development. Local government bodies, through micro-level planning, social audits, community-based monitoring mechanism/community nutrition report cards, and IT-enabled technologies, can contribute towards this agenda.

Enhance convergence and coordination among key sectors and stakeholders, required for optimum results from the community level to the district and state level.

Promote the herbal plants and medicines for mission malnutrition-free India.

Start fruit plantation and set up bio-diversity parks in all villages for biodiversity conservation.

Pathways



Provide the tribal cultivators the basic technology and research know-how on the local foods they can grow and consume.

Develop an understanding of food habits, promote local nutritious recipes, and promote new nutrient-rich foods by organizing community recipe demonstrations.

Conduct nutrition education sessions with all the family members to improve the knowledge, attitude, and behavior of the tribal community.

Reach to zero mortality missions by addressing the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition.

Improve child feeding behavior by addressing myths/misconceptions, hygiene practices, and food safety through social behavior change and communication strategies based on tribal culture and tradition.

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