# 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, vermi-composting, 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

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