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 says?

- 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

