



## **ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) AMONG TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN TAMIL NADU: A STUDY ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION**

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### **Abstract**

*This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic status, education, health, and livelihoods of tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) districts. The findings highlight significant challenges, including limited access to higher education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The study proposes a multi-faceted strategy to address these challenges, focusing on targeted interventions to increase educational opportunities, healthcare, and employment prospects.*

**Keywords:** *Tribal Communities, Socio-Economic Development, Education, Health, Livelihoods, ITDP Districts, Tamil Nadu.*

### **Introduction**

The socio-economic development of tribal communities in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu's Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) districts, is a pressing concern due to their historical marginalization and vulnerability. Despite government initiatives, these communities continue to face significant challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, which has hindered their overall development and integration into mainstream society. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic status, education, health, and livelihoods of tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's ITDP districts, with a focus on identifying the key factors that contribute to their marginalization and vulnerability, and informing policy and programmatic interventions to promote their development and welfare. By examining the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by these communities, this research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on tribal development and inform evidence-based policies to address the unique needs and challenges of these communities.

### **Literature Review**

Numerous studies have highlighted the socio-economic challenges faced by tribal communities in India. According to the World Bank, tribal communities are among the most disadvantaged groups in India, with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (World Bank, 2020). A study by Xaxa (2018) emphasizes the need for inclusive policies to address the development needs of tribal communities. Bijoy (2019) highlights the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of tribal communities to their ancestral lands.

### **National Level**

Numerous studies have highlighted the socio-economic challenges faced by tribal communities in India. Xaxa (2018) emphasizes the need for inclusive policies to address the development needs of tribal communities. Bijoy (2019) highlights the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of



tribal communities to their ancestral lands. Savyasaachi (2019) notes that tribal communities face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services, leading to poor health outcomes.

A study by the Planning Commission of India (2013) highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to tribal development, focusing on education, health, and livelihoods.

Sarin (2018) emphasizes the importance of implementing the Forest Rights Act, 2006, to recognize and protect the rights of tribal communities to their ancestral lands.

Nambissan (2018) notes that tribal children face significant challenges in accessing quality education, leading to high dropout rates and limited opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

**Biswabijayini Mohanty 2024** This review paper provides a multidisciplinary analysis of recent research on marginalized tribal communities in India, focusing on sustainable agricultural practices and alternative livelihood generation approaches. The review explores the cultural identities, traditions, and challenges of specific tribal communities, such as the Bodos and Asurs, and evaluates the impacts of organic farming techniques on crop productivity, soil health, and produce quality. Additionally, the review examines the potential of traditional livelihoods for sustainable income.

**J. Ramadevi, D. J. M. Zeyavudheen 2024** This study examines the socio-economic conditions and constitutional safeguards for the Malayali tribal community in Yercaud Taluk, Tamil Nadu. The analysis reveals that despite some improvements, particularly in housing conditions, the overall socio-economic impact of constitutional safeguards on the scheduled tribes has been limited. The study identifies five key factors influencing the effectiveness of these safeguards and highlights the need for more targeted efforts to improve the welfare of the Malayali tribal community.

**Satrughan Behera, A. Dash, Rathi Kanta Kumbhar 2023** This study examines the enduring health disparities between India's Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the general population, identifying socioeconomic factors as the primary drivers of these gaps. The findings highlight the STs' poor health outcomes, including higher mortality rates, inadequate child health indicators, and maternal health challenges such as high maternal mortality, early marriage, and malnutrition. The study offers policy recommendations aimed at bridging these health disparities and enhancing the overall well-being of ST communities.

**M. Das, Arijit Das, Selim Seikh, R. Pandey 2021** The study evaluates the nexus between indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) and ecosystem services (ESs) for sustainable ecosystem management in a tribal-dominated region of India. A study on tribal communities' reliance on ecosystem services revealed that provisioning services, such as access to water, fuelwood, and medicinal plants, were most valued, followed by cultural and regulating services. However, the perceived importance of these services varied significantly based on socio-demographic factors like gender, education, and age. Moreover, a notable gap existed between the communities' actual access to ecosystem services and their perceived value, highlighting the need for sustainable management and equitable access.

**Rajendra Devidas Baisane 2020** Tribal communities in India have a very poor socioeconomic status due to lack of government support, awareness, and empowerment efforts. India's tribal populations face significant socioeconomic challenges, with a substantial proportion experiencing extreme poverty and deprivation. Tribal communities are typically engaged in agricultural and manual labour jobs, which limits their economic progress. The government has made limited efforts to support tribal communities, and many are unaware of or unable to access government schemes and policies due to administrative barriers.



### International Level

International organizations and researchers have also highlighted the challenges faced by indigenous communities worldwide. United Nations (2020) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of indigenous communities to their lands, territories, and resources. Hall (2019) notes that indigenous communities face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services, leading to poor health outcomes.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The United Nations (2015) emphasizes the importance of achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 4 (Quality Education), to promote sustainable development and improve the well-being of indigenous communities.

**Indigenous Peoples' Rights:** Anaya (2013) highlights the importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands, territories, and resources, as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Climate Change:** Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2019) notes that indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by climate change, highlighting the need for inclusive and sustainable approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

**Asian Pacific Journal of Health Sciences 2022,** this study investigates the factors influencing food security in a tribal community, considering sociodemographic profiles, nutritional status, food availability, and healthcare utilization. The community struggled with high undernutrition rates, particularly among women, and moderate to severe food insecurity, with households experiencing hunger, meal skipping, and compromised food quality. Key drivers of food insecurity included knowledge gaps, unemployment, poverty, limited access to basic amenities, and underutilization of government programs.

### Importance of the Study

This study's importance and significance lie in its potential to inform policy and practice for the development and welfare of tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) districts. By examining the socio-economic status, education, health, and livelihoods of these communities, the study provides valuable insights into the complex challenges they face and identifies key factors contributing to their marginalization. The findings can inform evidence-based policies and interventions, promoting sustainable development, social justice, and human rights. Ultimately, this research contributes to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, and SDG 10, and enriches academic discourse on tribal development and inclusivity.

### Key Themes

1. **Land Rights:** The importance of recognizing and protecting the rights of tribal communities to their ancestral lands is a recurring theme in the literature.
2. **Healthcare:** Tribal communities face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services, leading to poor health outcomes.
3. **Education:** Limited access to quality education is a significant challenge faced by tribal communities, leading to high dropout rates and limited opportunities for socio-economic mobility.



4. Sustainable Development: The importance of promoting sustainable development and improving the well-being of tribal communities is emphasized in the literature.

### Research Gaps

Research gaps in ITDP tribal districts, particularly in relation to SDG goals, include limited understanding of the intersectionality of poverty, education, and health outcomes among tribal communities. There is a need for more nuanced studies on the impact of ITDP initiatives on SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Furthermore, research is required to explore the role of traditional knowledge and practices in achieving sustainable development and climate resilience (SDG 13). Addressing these gaps can inform evidence-based policies and interventions to promote the welfare and development of tribal communities.

### Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the socio-economic status of tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's ITDP districts.
2. To analyze the educational status and challenges faced by tribal communities.
3. To investigate the health status and healthcare challenges faced by tribal communities.
4. To explore the livelihoods and income-generating activities of tribal communities.

### Methodology

The study was conducted in 9 ITDP districts of Tamil Nadu, namely Salem, Namakkal, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Dharmapuri, Tiruchirappalli, Vellore, Nilgiris, and Dindigul-Kodaikanal. A systematic sampling approach was employed to select 690 respondents from 41 villages across these districts. The sampling frame focused on villages with  $\geq 50\%$  Scheduled Tribe population. The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data on socio-economic status, education, health, and livelihoods. The data collection tools included structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and case studies. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic challenges and development needs of tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's ITDP districts.

### Key Finding

- **Demographic Profile- Age Distribution:** The majority (29.0%) of tribals are in the 57-69 age group, followed by 27.5% in the 44-56 age group, highlighting significant implications for policy interventions.
- **Gender Distribution:** 57.8% of respondents are males, and 42.2% are females, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive policies.
- **Tribal Communities:** The study identifies 9 tribal communities, including Kolli Malaiyar, Paliyar, Yerukula, and Soliga, with diverse languages and occupations.
- **Socio-Economic Status- Family Types:** 88.7% of tribal respondents reside in Joint Families, while 11.3% reside in Nuclear Families, highlighting the importance of family structure in tribal societies.
- **Occupational Profile:** Agriculture and allied activities are the primary sources of livelihood for tribals, with significant variations across districts.
- **Land Holdings:** Limited land holdings and lack of access to formal credit sources are significant challenges faced by tribal households.



- **Food Security and Nutrition- Food Sources:** Rice and millets are the primary food sources, with significant variations in consumption patterns across districts.
- **Meal Frequency:** 57.5% of respondents take meals thrice a day, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote healthy eating habits.
- **Health and Well-being- Disease Prevalence:** Tribal communities are prone to both infectious and non-communicable diseases, with inadequate exposure to healthcare facilities and patient care services.
- **Traditional Healing Practices:** The study highlights the importance of traditional healing practices and the need for culturally sensitive healthcare initiatives.
- **Education-Enrollment Rates:** High enrollment rates of tribal children in secondary school, but limited access to higher education and reservation benefits.
- **Awareness of Government Schemes:** Significant awareness of government schemes, but gaps in access to higher education and skill development programs.
- **Livelihoods and Income - Primary Source of Income:** Agriculture and allied activities are the primary sources of income for tribal households.
- **Credit Sources:** Tribal households rely heavily on informal credit sources, highlighting the need for improved access to formal credit sources.

#### The study's key findings can be summarized as follows

- **Demographic Challenges:** Majority of tribals are in the 57-69 age group, requiring targeted policy interventions.
- **Limited Access to Education:** Significant disparities in educational attainment across districts, with limited access to higher education and reservation benefits.
- **Health Concerns:** Tribal communities are prone to both infectious and non-communicable diseases, with inadequate healthcare facilities and services.
- **Livelihood Challenges:** Agriculture is a vital source of livelihood, but tribals face significant reliance on informal credit sources and high levels of indebtedness.
- **Poverty:** 42.2% of tribal respondents fall below the poverty line, with significant disparities in poverty levels across districts.

#### Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic challenges affecting tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's ITDP districts. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to increase educational opportunities, healthcare, and employment prospects, promoting sustainable agriculture and improving access to formal credit sources. A coordinated and evidence-based approach is essential to address the development needs of tribal communities.

#### Recommendations

- Improve access to higher education and reservation benefits for tribal communities.
- Enhance healthcare facilities and patient care services to address the health concerns of tribal communities.
- Promote sustainable agriculture and improve access to formal credit sources to enhance the livelihood security of tribal households.
- Increase awareness and access to government schemes and programs to support tribal development.



### Future Research Directions

- Conduct in-depth studies on the impact of government schemes on tribal communities.
- Explore the role of traditional healing practices in tribal healthcare.
- Investigate the effectiveness of skill development programs for tribal youth.

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