

Chenchu Tribes and Government Schemes: A Study on Contribution and Access

Dr. G.A. Swamy¹ & Prof. K. Visweswara Rao²

¹Regional Coordinator and Lead Faculty at Institute of Livelihood Research and Training,
promoted by Basix Social Enterprise Group, Hyderabad
Professor, Department of Social Work, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

Abstract: Being a welfare state, in order to achieve equality, India has been implementing several schemes and programmes especially to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable sections of society. While these schemes have a significant impact on some sections, the most vulnerable sections such as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) are still deprived of basic needs. Chenchus are one among these groups who are deprived of basic needs, even after 69 years of independence. The current study explores the role of government schemes in the lives of Chenchus and issues related to access of these schemes. Institute of Livelihood Research and Training (ILRT) commissioned this study as part of its Action Research with Chenchus.

1. Introduction

The directive principles of state policy of the Constitution of India emphasise on the role of the state in protection of weaker sections from the deprivation of enjoyment of basic necessities and to provide basic requirements to live a life with dignity. To put this idea in to action, the government has been implementing numerous schemes and programmes to realise the larger goal of social equality, especially to safeguard the interests of backward and vulnerable sections in the country. As per 2011 census 8.6 per cent of the Indian population belongs to Scheduled Tribes. Studies conducted on tribes revealed that, tribes are the most vulnerable section in Indian society than any other sections; Tribal poverty is highest in India at 45.3 per cent¹. Chenchus are one among the tribal groups, considered as PVTGs by government of India considering their pre-agricultural level of technology, very low literacy level; and declining /stagnant population. Chenchus have fragile livelihood base, as their access to various livelihood resources is limited. As a response to the poverty conditions among Chenchus the government have been implementing several development and welfare schemes to improve their living conditions. The current research paper details out contribution of

government schemes to Chenchu tribes and issues related to access in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

2. Review of literature

Andhra Pradesh, one of the South Indian states, is the abode for 34² kinds of tribes, which include 12 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. Chenchu is one of aboriginal tribes in the state and they are predominantly found in the Nallamala forest region. The Chenchu population is 47,315. Physically Chenchus are of short and slender stature with very dark skin, wavy or curly hair, broad faces and flat noses (Haimendorf & Christoph, 1982). Chenchus live in deep forests and non-agrarian community. They are primarily dependent on forest for their food requirements and also for livelihoods. However, the government of India's notification on Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve in 1978 caused for several changes in the lives of Chenchus. As their access to forest, which happens to be their traditional livelihood choice, is curtailed, they remain helpless. Particularly vulnerable tribal groups face serious problems of survival. As their habitats shrink their life styles of hunting and food gathering are seriously eroded, their survival has been threatened (UNDP, 2012). The lifespan of Chenchus is shorter and the mortality below 1 year is 11.66 and below 15 years is 26.13.³ In these critical circumstances various schemes and programmes of Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), various departments of state government and the local panchayat raj institutions became important players to provide various services to Chenchus. These schemes and programmes have been playing a considerable role in ensuring basic needs and livelihood support to Chenchus. They have also been contributing for reducing poverty. Planning Commission estimated that the poverty in India is declining; along with the growth of the economy the government schemes have played an important role

²Source:

<http://www.tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201507300952199123287LatestListofScheduledtribes.pdf> accessed on 16 Sept, 2016

³ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, www.researchgate.net/publication/262012652

¹ Tendulkar Committee Report, Government of India

in reduction of poverty in the country (Prasad, Sinha, & Khan, 2013). However the government schemes need to cater to the resource poor in an effective way to see social equality in the society.

3. Research methodology

The study is commissioned with two main objectives, (i) to explore the access of various government schemes to Chenchu tribes and (ii) to analyse the contribution of such schemes for meeting the basic needs, livelihood and welfare requirements of the same. The study is conducted through use of the exploratory research design. Atmakur mandal of Kurnool district is one of the high Chenchu populated locations in the state. There are eight exclusive Chenchu habitations in the mandal and total number of households is 533. The study carried out in all the Chenchu habitations. Using a proportionate random sampling method, which is 20 per cent of the households in each habitation, has drawn a sample of 107 households. While the government have been implementing several schemes, the study focused on few schemes and programmes, which are of high relevance to the Chenchus. The study covered schemes related to three important categories including (i) Basic needs (ii) livelihood related and (iii) Social welfare and protection related and studied their accessibility and use by the sample households. Household survey method was used for collection of data from the sample households. The data was uploaded into "Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the data was analysed in alignment with the research objectives.

4. Results of the study

61 per cent of the respondents to the study are female and 38 per cent are male. The minimum age of the respondents is 20 years while the maximum age is 67 years. The mean age of the respondents is 35.7 years with a standard deviation of 11.97. The study results have been discussed in three important heads as detailed below

4.1. Schemes related to basic needs:

Schemes concerned with food, drinking water, housing and health care are largely part of basic needs and access to such services is discussed here under.

4.1.1. Food security:

The state government adopted a system called 'Public Distribution System' (PDS) through which the government supplies food grains such as rice, sugar and kerosene for the households who live below the poverty line on subsidised prices. To access the PDS services it is mandatory to the household to have a "Ration Card" which is issued

by the government. The study found that 84 per cent of the households have the ration cards and 16 per cent of the households do not have a card.

4.1.2. Drinking water:

The study found that 89.7 per cent of the households are accessing drinking water with the sources created by the government. The government has created four different kinds of drinking water sources in the villages i.e. common bore wells, common taps, common protected water tanks and 60.7 per cent, 25.2 per cent and 2.8 per cent of the households accessing drinking water respectively. 11.3 per cent of the households are dependent on common well, which happens to be the traditional potable water sources for Chenchus.

4.1.3. Housing:

Housing is one of the basic needs of human beings. Chenchus, the forest dwellers live in huts made out of bamboo and locally available grass. As part of rehabilitation of Chenchus to nearby plain areas, government has provided a piece of land for building their houses. The study noticed that 72 per cent of the households have place for housing, all of which has been provided by the government. The study noticed that all the sample households in six villages have land allotments for house construction. Chenchu families have erected huts on the government land and have been living there. As Pedacheruvu village is still in the tiger reserve forested area it is technically not possible for the government to allot sites for construction of houses.

While a piece of land is one important requirement for housing, building a house is most critical work for Chenchus. The study revealed that only four per cent of the sample households were extended support by the government with a slab house. Rest of the 96 per cent of the households have erected huts with the locally available bamboo and grass. However apart from the efforts of the government, some of the not-for-profit organisations are also playing an important role in building houses for Chenchus. Rural Development Trust (RDT), a non-governmental organisation constructed 96 slab houses in three study villages - Bairlutu, Indireswaram gudem and Amalapuram gudem by end of August 2016. The cost incurred for construction of a house has been ₹.235,000/- and the . This activity has been initiated by the RDT in other villages too.

4.1.4. Health care

Health care support is one of the essential service has been ensured by the government. Community health care centre at Bairlutu, health sub-centres at panchayat level are the major health care service institutions established by the government. However

the study found that majority i.e. 74.8 per cent prefer to visit private health care centres in spite of the fact that they are expensive. Patients are not treated with proper care and attention in government run hospitals. However the government health centres are playing a significant role in providing pre and postnatal services.

4.2. Schemes related to livelihoods:

This section discusses on the schemes related to access to credit, wage work and other livelihood support services.

4.2.1. Credit through SHGs:

Capital is one of the important and essential requirement for any livelihood activity. Many a times Chenchus are really deprived of capital when they wanted to take up some livelihood activities like cultivation, petty shops, purchase of goat or chicken. Considering the poor asset base and skills Chenchus are found as non-credit worthy people both by the banks and the local moneylenders. However the local traders and moneylenders seriously exploit and charge high interest rates. While the access to credit from the formal banking system Chenchus had to depend on the farmers and moneylenders in the main villages. In these circumstances the women Self-help Group became an important platform for the Chenchu households to access credit. The study found that 85 per cent of the women in study respondent's households have membership in SHGs. Majority i.e. more than 60 per cent of the SHG membership has been continuing for more than five years.

4.2.2. Agriculture and support services

Over a period of time after moving away from the forest the importance to land became crucial for Chenchus, as their forest based livelihood options can't make sufficient contribution for the household needs. Though Chenchus are non-agrarian communities, they started getting into agriculture to ensure food security and cash flow. The study noticed that 43 per cent of the sample households have agriculture lands and the rest i.e. 57 per cent are landless. Chenchus got these lands from the government part of rehabilitation against the displacement due to tiger reserve. The study also found that with in the land holding households on 30 per cent are cultivating and rest of them are leasing out their lands to the non-tribal communities.

In deprived conditions, though Chenchus do not have skills in agriculture, with the acquired skills and knowledge by working as agriculture labour in the farms of non-tribal communities, tribes started getting into cultivation. There have received support from Department of Agriculture (DoA). The study noticed that 26.1 per cent of the landholding

households (46 hhs) are assisted with the bore wells to ensure irrigation support to their lands. But to fetch water from the bore well, the essential requirement is electricity connection and this service has only been extended to 17.4 per cent of the farmers. This indicates that 8.7 per cent (26.1 - 17.4) of the farmers are unable to provide protective irrigation to their farms and continue to depend on seasonal rainfall in spite of the availability of bore-well due to lack of electricity.

Seed is one of the necessary inputs for the agriculture activity, for the year 2015 – 16, only 13 per cent of the Chenchu farmers were extended seed support by the DoA. The major crops that Chenchus cultivate are Red gram, black gram and paddy and the DoA's seed support limited to only red gram and black gram.

4.2.3. Wage employment

The displacement from deep forests to periphery had a serious impact on the livelihood opportunities of Chenchus. When they lived in deep forests collection of non-timber forest products such as roots, herbs, honey from the forest and sell in the local markets and for all these activities forest was the key resource. Once they moved out of the forest, Chenchus had to depend on agriculture wage work, offered by the non-tribal farmers in the rural villages. But this was seasonal in nature with employment available during the rainy season and not in other seasons. As a result, Chenchus remained jobless for more than 8 months in a year. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREA) 2005, is a flagship programme of Government of India. The programme is mandated to ensure 100 days of wage employment for unskilled rural populations. However to access the wage employment under the scheme every member should have a 'job card' issued by the concern department. The study found that 86.9 per cent of the study respondents have a job card and only 13.1 per cent of the respondents do not have the job cards.

Wage work under the scheme became one of the important source for household income for Chenchus.

Table 1: Village, year wise, number of MGNREGS wage workdays

S. No	Village name	Number of households	No of wage work days per member		
			2013	2014	2015
1	Amalapuram	45	76	70	33

	gudem				
2	Bairluty	141	49	62	52
3	Indreswaram gudem	24	67	61	128
4	Kottala cheruvu	105	10	12	42
5	Nagaluty	83	13	63	58
6	Nalla kalva	41	22	47	61
7	Pedda cheruvu	81	58	56	42
8	Vengalreddy colony	13	0	0	0
	Total	533	295	371	416

(Source: Field office Atmakur, ITDA Srisailam)

Though there are ups and downs in accessing wage work in different study villages, as a whole the number of working days per individual is steadily increasing year by year. In the current year (2016) the wage rate is ₹.194 per day and which was ₹.137 in the year 2012. The average person days of employment created in the year 2014 -15 to Schedule Tribe households in the state as a whole is 46.99 (Padma, 2015).

4.3. Government Schemes related to welfare needs

4.3.1. Old age pension:

The state government considers a person who has crossed 65 years eligible for old age pension. The life span of Chenchus is around 40 years as against 65 years of general population⁴. Appreciating the ground realities the state government has been considering the people who crossed 50 years to provide old-age pension⁵. The study found that one member from 24 per cent of the study households have been receiving old age pension of ₹.1000/- per month. Majority of the respondents explained that the money is primarily used for two main purposes one is for purchase of food grains and the second is health. The study noticed that the pension services are not reaching all the old aged people across the study villages. Despite presence of eligible people nobody is receiving the pension in two study villages namely Indireswaram gudem and Amalapuram gudem.

4.3.2. Widow pension:

Part of social assistance services Chenchu widows have been receiving ₹.1000/- pension amount per month. The study found that 8 per cent of the study households have been accessing the

widow pension. The respondents informed that the pension amount is helping them to meet some of the household needs especially purchase of clothes for children and food grains for the family. The study observed that this pension service is only extended to 50 per cent of the study villages and not found in four villages' i.e. Vengalreddy colony, Indireswaram gudem, Amalapuram gudem and kottala cheruvu.

4.3.3. Disabled pensions:

The study noticed that 2 per cent of the households studied are receiving disabled pensions. The amount of the pension is decided in accordance with the percentage of the disability. Persons with high disability (< 80%) receive ₹. 1500 per month and persons with low disability (40 to 79%) receive ₹.1000 per month. The pension holders expressed that the amount is useful for them to purchase of good grains and also for health services. The study found that the disabled pension services reached out to only 25 per cent of the study villages i.e. Amalapuram gudem and Bairluty and these services have not been extended to the rest of the study villages.

5. Discussions

Both the state and central governments have been implementing a range of development and welfare schemes and programmes for the tribal communities as a whole and it could also be seen for Chenchus. However due to limitations in psychosocial, economic and skill aspects, Chenchus demand for very limited number of government schemes even in spite of the availability of a range of schemes. For instance, schemes related to career guidance for youth, small scale industries, food processing etc. are hardly demanded by Chenchus because of their psychosocial priorities. Limited attention has been paid to the peculiarities of tribal lifestyle, their needs and threats to survival they face on day-to-day basis (UNDP, 2012).

Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Revenue Office, Development Office, Agriculture Department and the local panchayat raj institutions (PRIs)) are the institutions for Chenchus, because, majority of their needs are catered by these institutions. Chenchus seek housing, credit, livelihood support, village roads and infrastructure related schemes from ITDA. Similarly, the revenue department is an important institution to issue housing land, agriculture land. Ration cards, welfare schemes, MGNREG scheme are being assured by Mandal Development Office, Seeds and irrigation related support services are provided by the agriculture department. The local Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are extending support for drinking water, sanitation needs. It is an important aspect to discuss that, though many government

⁴ Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/chenchus-for-35-years-limit-for-oldage-pensions/article1024320.ece> accessed on 18 Sept, 2016

⁵ Source: G.O.Ms.No.157 dated 16.12.2014, Government of Andhra Pradesh.

departments exclusively work for Chenchus, it is evident from the study that all the eligible and deserved individuals and households are not being covered under the schemes. Government intervention against unemployment and joblessness among adivasi communities in rural areas has been weak and highly inadequate (Karat & Rawal, 2014). This scenario highlights the need for improvement of effective service delivery system from the government to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable sections in the society.

6. Policy recommendations

- Despite having a well-established mechanism, the schemes have not reached all the deserved individuals and households. The state has to seriously ponder upon it and reach out to the all the deserving people. Moreover, constitutionally it is the prime responsibility to serve these most vulnerable sections on first and priority basis.
- Due to psychosocial, economic and skill limitations Chenchus just remained as 'beneficiaries' and their participation is hardly found in designing the schemes. The state should proactively make efforts to understand these factors and address such limitations, so that the community can take a role of 'partner' instead of beneficiary role.
- The state should not only design and implement variety of schemes and should also take up a proactive role in exposing to various livelihood options which can not only increase the household income and reduce the drudgery.

7. Conclusions

The ITDA established as a nodal agency in 1976 and several government schemes have been designed and implemented for the development of Chenchus. However these efforts would be able to impact the lives of tribes to some extent, but still they are not able to earn their basic needs without the assistance of government. This scenario highlights the need for a revised approach, which enhances the psychological confidence and capabilities simultaneously to make Chenchus self-reliant.

8. References

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