



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Restoration of dignity and human rights of indigenous tribal community in Karnataka

Region	Asia and the Pacific
Award Scheme	World Habitat Awards
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

Securing land rights helps break the cycle of caste-based oppression in India

The Koraga tribal community suffered centuries of oppression under India's historic caste system. While caste-based discrimination is technically illegal today, many of the practices and prejudices remain. These include 'Ajal', where Koragas are made to eat leftover food from upper caste households mixed with hair, fingernails and other inedible substances.

Background and Objective

For centuries, the caste system dictated every aspect of people's lives in India, creating enormous inequalities between social groups – members of the upper castes enjoyed great privilege, while the lower castes were subjugated and oppressed. Today, India's constitution bans discrimination on the basis of caste but, despite this, much of the prejudice and many of the practices of the system remain in place, contributing to the ongoing marginalisation of certain communities. One such community is the indigenous Koraga tribe, who were classed as 'untouchable' under the caste system. For centuries Koragas have suffered psychological, physical, sexual and economic violence at the hands of higher castes. Despite legislation in place to prohibit it, Koragas are still subjected to the practice of 'Ajal', where they are made to eat leftover food from upper caste households mixed with hair, fingernails and other inedible substances, in the belief that the misfortunes of the upper castes will be transferred to those who eat it. Since 2000, a project has been seeking social justice for the Koraga tribe and other communities like them, supporting them to access their basic human rights and to stand up against practices like Ajal. The initiative – Restoration of Dignity and Human Rights of Indigenous Tribal Community in Karnataka – is run by ActionAid India, part of the global federation of ActionAid International. Initially a short-term project engaging with Koraga communities in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts in the south-west Indian state of Karnataka, the programme was expanded in 2003 to become a long-term initiative involving 10 tribal communities affected by the caste system.

Actions and Implementation

When ActionAid India began working with the Koraga people, they had been classified by the government as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). This classification entitles the community to certain government-sponsored schemes. However, a lack of awareness of their rights and the ingrained inferiority felt by the group meant they were not accessing these entitlements. The community had been subject to land expulsions, had few livelihood opportunities and was suffering from malnutrition, all of which contributed to the continued practice of Ajal, as people were forced to accept the leftover food as their only means of survival. To reverse the systemic injustices and stigma faced by the Koraga people, ActionAid India designed a programme that focused on supporting the community to access their rights to land and housing, education, health and dignity – with gender equality as a central component. The project is community-led and included the formation of the Koraga Federation, which is made up of community members and located in Udupi. Through ActionAid India's multiple partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local community groups, the project opened up a critical dialogue with the government. This took the form of policy advocacy, research publications and campaigns to highlight the challenges facing the Koraga community. As a result of this work, the Koraga people are now accessing two rural housing programmes, one through central government and one through the state of Karnataka. Residents receive a grant and construct their own home with technical assistance from government agencies. The project has also successfully influenced the state to provide land for families in the same villages in which they already live.



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In 2014, ActionAid India worked with the Samagra Grameena Ashram (SGA), a grassroots based civil society organisation, to create an alliance of 10 different tribal Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). This alliance, called Karnataka Aranya Mula Budakattugala Okkoota, helps to create a stronger voice for impactful advocacy. Its current campaign, the Karnataka Adivasigala Nyayakagi Andolana (KAVANA), has successfully advocated for a government-sponsored nutrition programme entitling the 10 tribal communities to free food during the six-month monsoon season. ActionAid India's Restoration of Dignity and Human Rights of Indigenous Tribal Community in Karnataka project has an annual budget of approximately \$38,000 USD. The total cost of the programme to date is approximately \$633,000 USD. More than \$5 million USD of support has been generated for the Koraga people and other tribal communities in the form of housing grants, pension entitlements, nutrition and food security schemes, land, agricultural support and education.

Outcomes and Impacts

The main focus of ActionAid India's project is to enable indigenous tribal people to access government schemes they are entitled to. These schemes had historically low uptake and were often misused by the administration – including the diversion of funds from the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) in the state of Karnataka. Between 2012 and 2014, ActionAid supported a movement to improve the services delivered through the TSP, which resulted in legislation preventing the diversion of funds from the TSP for non-tribal welfare purposes. In relation to land and housing rights, the project has secured the allocation of 117 acres of land in the Udipi district to the Koraga tribe, while 2,527 families have been given 2,850 acres of land under the Forest Rights Act (FRA). Approximately 10,000 Koragas and 9,000 people from forest-dwelling communities have accessed state-sponsored housing (receiving a grant of \$2,529 USD on average to cover self-build construction costs), and 120 families have reclaimed 271 acres of land in a national park. The project has also improved nutrition and food security for the Koraga people. In 2009, a health study by ActionAid India showed high levels of anaemia among women and children, with four in every five (80%) Koraga women suffering from the condition. With the support of SGA, a nutrition plan was drafted in Udipi and Dakshina Kannada districts, which led to a state-sponsored free nutrition programme for all 3,542 Koraga families. Working closely with SGA and the Koraga Federation, ActionAid began advocating for nutritional support for the wider Koraga community in 2011. Since then, 200,000 people have benefited, including 2,668 families who were given access to 3,153 acres of land by the government for food production. The community organised themselves to gain access to these reserved forest areas through the FRA. ActionAid India's work has also increased tribal communities' access to education (including further education) and led to greater participation of Koraga women in decision-making in their community. The project has supported more than 1,000 women to become self-sufficient, earning between 50,000 and 100,000 Indian Rupees per year (\$716 – 1,432 USD) by growing and selling jasmine. ActionAid India recognises the importance of community-led protection of the environment and its work with tribal communities supports this. While government policy allows residents to choose the design of their house, many are built with local materials and are not energy-intensive to construct. The Koraga community practices a subsistence economy, using natural resources to meet only their basic needs through hunting, gathering and growing food. Some members of forest-dwelling tribes have even pursued government jobs in the forest department, where they work to protect both the forest and the rights of their own communities.

Conclusion

While some components of the project have been completed, ActionAid India's advocacy initiatives are ongoing. These campaigns include: state-level quality education for tribal people; complete implementation of the FRA, and an extension of the nutrition programme to include two further communities. Future expansion plans include advocacy initiatives for land and housing entitlements for people freed from forced labour. This has already been initiated in the coffee estates of Kodagu district, where people are supported to reject the bonded labour system they are forced into. Costs for further expansion of the project will be covered by ActionAid India under its long-term commitment to break the cycle of caste-based oppression and marginalisation of tribal communities. Through education and support, the programme gives tribal groups a foundation from which they can begin to address the issues impacting their community, and so transform the lives of generations to come.