Two months after the West Bengal government denied any food scarcity as a possible cause of death of seven persons from a tribal community, a survey report has identified “food scarcity in varying degrees” in about 31% of tribal households in West Bengal.

The study titled ‘An Inquiry into the world of the Adivasis of West Bengal’, conducted by Professor Amartya Sen’s Pratichi Institute and Asiatic Society, will be released in Kolkata on Monday.

The survey was conducted in 1,000 tribal households to ascertain living conditions, health and education.

West Bengal is home to 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. One area, which has been a matter of contention in recent months after the death of seven tribals in a span of 15 days in November, is scarcity of food. 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. “...while 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 [of households] reportedly ate only once a day,” the report noted.

In addition “poverty-born deaths” and only four were due to old age.

The work participation rate [WPR] is higher among the Adivasis in Bengal “forcing the children of schoolgoing age to discontinue their studies in order to fend [for] themselves and support the families,” the report noted. According to the Census of 2011, while WPR is 39% and 49% in Bengal and India, respectively, “the corresponding figures for Adivasis were 49% and 47%,” indicating the participation of more children.

“Both the children and elderly were also involved in earning, and that the rate of transition in education was low...” the report said.

Tribals of West Bengal battling food scarcity: study

Communities are ‘far behind’ in terms of human development, says survey of 1,000 households by Professor Amartya Sen’s institute

SUVIJIT BAGCHI
KOLKATA

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SURVEY RESULTS

- 66.6% Adivasi households that do not have proper drainage systems
- 61% Adivasi patients seeking treatment from private practitioners
- 8% Children of respondents who walk more than 1km to attend primary school
- 14% Population aware of their rights under the 'Recognition of Forests Rights Act, 2006'
- 12% Surveyed households found to be unable to afford food more than twice a day
- 50% Students pursuing elementary education reportedly taking private tuitions
- 53% Population involved in income generating work, including children

Premature deaths

The report indicated that the number of deaths reported to have occurred in the surveyed households, in the year preceding the survey, “was 52, among which 48 [92%] were premature deaths” and only four were due to old age.

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