

# **Assessing the role of NGOs in alleviating poverty among aborigines habitat in India and Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

The greatest challenge to assuage poverty is revealed through the existing poverty situation amongst the aborigines in Malaysia and India where most of them live below the poverty line.

**Aim:** The purpose of this article is to describe and to analyze the roles of NGOs in alleviating poverty in aborigines habitat in Malaysia and India.

**Methodology:** A descriptive study comprising of results of the need based outreach projects taken up by NGOs in these two countries. Research is based on studies done on the important contributions made by NGOs in increasing the welfare of the poor people and implement various programs to empower the poor people.

### **Results and Discussions:**

Drawn from data gathered in the two countries the authors take a close picture on their work, whereby this research article cites cases of NGO programs in improving the living conditions of the poor. Thereafter the authors have analyzed the successful performance in enhancing the quality of life of the poor.

**Conclusion:** The NGOs activities have made positive changes for the aborigines of these countries. Their work is not philanthropical but more towards arming the aborigines with the lever to means of livelihood and lift themselves up from impoverishment. As the privileged community our support to such entrepreneurial programs is most solicited.

**Keywords:** NGOs, India, Malaysia, aborigines, poverty

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Indigenous People or “Aborigines”**

“Indigenous People” is a collective term referring to the native people who have close ties with the land they inhabit but each person (or tribe) has their uniqueness. They are groups or tribes with different historical and social backgrounds, language families, racial stocks and religious moulds.

Indigenous Peoples constitute about five percent of the world’s population. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) reported that about 300 to 370 million people belong to the world’s indigenous groups. There are around 4,000 languages used by Indigenous Peoples. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) reported that there are more than 5,000 different groups of Indigenous Peoples living in more than 70 countries. Indigenous Peoples inhabit in every region of the world, but about 70 percent of them are concentrated in Asia. Two centuries ago, Indigenous Peoples could be found in most parts of the world. However, nowadays, they have legal rights to use only about six percent of the planet’s land and in many cases their rights are partial or disqualified.

Indigenous People traditionally have a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with the natural environment and their societies tend to be organized on an egalitarian and communitarian basis, with their own systems of knowledge, self-governance and nationhood. They have governed their ancestral territories and natural resources as a participatory community based on democratic processes. They have a collective dependency to the natural resources in their habitats and territories. They also have a historical and unique relationship with their ancestral territories. They have developed particular cultures, life styles, traditions and belief systems according to their territories and natural resources. They have been accumulating vast indigenous knowledge, science and technologies and continuing to practice an egalitarian life style. However, the mainstream society always fails to appreciate the unique cultures of Indigenous Peoples but considers them as socially and economically backward communities. Ironically, Indigenous Peoples suffer from encroachment on and dispossession of their territories by settlers, companies and state agencies. They have been denied the right to self-govern and governed by superimposed and inappropriate structures of governance. Hence, their lifestyle and livelihood are threatened.

### **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as Poverty Reduction Intermediaries**

In Asia, civil society movements are generally equated with nongovernmental organizations, most of which are composed of middle-class social activists. This stems in part from NGOs having consistently been in the front line of democratization in developing societies for the last 30 years or so. They may be classified in terms of their dominant orientations as: service providers, development, and empowerment. Service-provider NGOs initiate livelihood, credit and health projects, and training and education activities, among others. Empowerment NGOs aim to transform the socioeconomic system by addressing the structural causes of poverty thereby enabling people to obtain power through organization. Development NGOs endeavor to do both: meet short- and medium-term poverty reduction goals, while confronting the structural causes of poverty.

In attacking poverty, NGOs have taken on the following roles (San Juan 1996): (i) socioeconomic empowerment of poor communities through holistic sectoral and community organizing and different levels of socioeconomic education and training (e.g., skills training in enterprise development and in business management); (ii) delivery of services needed for enterprise and cooperative development (e.g., technology, credit); (iii) development of models and technologies in enterprise development for poor communities; (iv) advocacy against environmentally destructive and wasteful business/industry practices; (v) advocacy for pro-people economic strategies and approaches (e.g., agrarian reform); and (vi) checking unsustainable and inequitable economic development strategies.

In Asia, the NGO sector has shown steady growth in numbers. Bangladesh and the Philippines are each listed as having more than 40,000 NGOs. In contrast, there are very few local NGOs in Lao PDR and Viet Nam, although their numbers are increasing. At the same time, mass organizations of farmers, women, and youth in these two countries have, under political party leadership, taken on many of the service, organizational, and advocacy functions of NGOs. Despite the energy expended by NGOs in supporting people's development, some kind of workable relationship is needed with the state if the results are to make a difference for poor people. It is noteworthy, for example, that even in Bangladesh, which holds the Asian record for the number of NGOs relative to the population, all the NGOs taken together do not reach more than 20 percent of the rural poor. Accordingly, government-NGO collaboration in addressing poverty on a comprehensive, countrywide basis is necessary.

The heterogeneity of experiences is evident. In Lao PDR and Viet Nam, international NGOs play an important community development role in partnership with the government. They work in remote areas that the government often cannot reach. Besides international NGOs, mass organizations exist in Lao PDR and function to some extent like local NGOs. These include the Lao Women's Union (LWU), Lao Youth Organization (LYO), Lao Patriotic Front for Reconstruction (LPFR), and Lao Trade Union. The Lao PDR government recognizes them as contributing to national development and social mobilization, and hence partly finances their operations.

### **ADVANTAGES of NGOs over GOVERNMENT AGENCIES in uplifting poverty stricken aborigines**

Nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and CBOs have many advantages over government agencies. Being relatively unencumbered by bureaucratic rules and regulations, they possess a flexibility that government agencies often lack. They work in remote areas (which typically have large

concentrations of the poor) that the government often cannot reach. They also stress participatory and integrated approaches, encouraging the poor to contribute their views and involvement at every stage, from planning to implementation and to monitoring and evaluation. Even the oftstated shortcoming of NGOs, viz, that they operate at a relatively small scale and therefore cannot make a difference, is misleading, since an important function of NGOs is to innovate and set up models for emulation.

Advocacy has been another important activity of NGOs. They have used their experiences and clout to influence governmental policies on poverty reduction. NGOs have also sometimes appointed themselves to be "watchdogs" over government actions, devising community-friendly systems for exacting transparency and accountability. At the same time, government officials have reason to be critical of NGOs and their activities. Quick to criticize, some NGOs often do so ignorant of the technical, legal and administrative frameworks that guide

government decisions. Municipal administrators cite NGO demands for immediate financial allocations covering housing schemes for the poor, for example, when the municipal budget had been finalized months before. NGOs are often viewed as “trouble-makers” in inciting community based organizations to protest government delays, which are often due to standard auditing procedures in the process of implementing pro-poor programs. NGO “arrogance” in demanding action and the tendency of some to speak for poor people rather than enable the latter to speak for themselves are also criticized.

Government officials complain further that NGOs sometimes develop parallel programs in health or family planning, for example, which unnecessarily duplicate government services and cause confusion when the NGOs ask government to take over these services due to funding problems. Moreover, some self-serving individuals (sometimes retired or retrenched government bureaucrats) have created pseudo-NGOs as mechanisms for tapping into government or donor funds, with no real intention of helping needy people. NGOs have generally taken these criticisms to heart and begun collaborating more closely with those government officials who seem to be genuinely interested in pursuing common concerns

## **ABORIGINES OF MALAYSIA**

**Orang Asli** (*lit.* "original people", "natural people" or "aboriginal people" in Malay), is a generic Malaysian term used for people indigenous to Peninsular Malaysia. Officially, there are 18 orang asli tribes, categorised under three main groups according to their different languages and customs:

- Semang (or Negrito), generally confined to the northern portion of the peninsula
- Senoi, residing in the central region
- Proto-Malay (or Aboriginal Malay), in the southern region.

The indigenous peoples of Malaysia, or *Orang Asal*, are not a homogenous group. There are at least 95 subgroups, each with their own distinct language and culture. However, they are all marginalised socioeconomically and culturally in Malaysia. Politically, the natives of Sabah and Sarawak are in a relatively better position compared to the Orang Asli (the Malay term for the indigenous peoples in Peninsular Malaysia) as they are part of the ruling government. Notwithstanding this political dominance, the socio-economic status of the majority of indigenous peoples in East Malaysia still lags behind, as it does with their counterparts in Peninsular Malaysia. There is a dramatic contrast between the proportion of indigenous peoples found within the population of Peninsular Malaysia and the East Malaysian States.

The lifestyle and means of subsistence of the indigenous peoples varies. In Peninsular Malaysia, fishing is the chief occupation of coastal communities, such as the Orang Laut, Orang Seletar and Mahmeri. Others, including some Temuan, Jakun and Semai communities, practise permanent agriculture and manage their own rubber, oil palm or cocoa farms. Another, approximately 40% of indigenous peoples live close to or within forested areas. These comprise the Semai, Temiar, Che Wong, Jahut, Semelai and Semoq Beri communities which engage in swiddening (hill rice cultivation) as well as hunting and gathering. They trade in petai, durian, rattan and resins to earn cash incomes. A very small number, especially among the Negrito groups, are still semi-nomadic and depend on the seasonal bounties of the forest. A fair number of them are to be found in urban areas surviving on their waged or salaried jobs.

## History and Demography

Before the Second World War, there was no specific administration for the Orang Asli. The general attitude of the British colonial officials towards the Orang Asli then was “one of patronizing benevolence” and the task of the government was to “protect and preserve them from the ravages of modern life” (Carey, 1976). At the end of World War II, in the face of communist insurgency in Malaya, the British Military Administration (BMA) established in 1951 a Department of Aborigines under an Adviser on Aborigines Affairs, whose primary task was to win over the Orang Asli from providing support to the insurgents. This was partly achieved through the provision of concrete forms of help including medical treatment to the Orang Asli. The Department of Aborigines in 1955 became the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli or JHEOA) housed in the Ministry of Home Affairs. Obviously, the concern for the welfare of the Orang Asli then still stemmed from the country security considerations. The end of the communist threat saw the move of JHEOA out of the Home Affairs in 1964 to the Ministry of Lands and Minerals.

Orang Asli (translated as “original peoples”) are the indigenous inhabitants of Peninsular Malaysia. They constitute a minority group making up approximately 0.6% of the total population of Malaysia (22.2 million in 2000). The figure for the total Orang Asli population differs somewhat depending upon the source. The 1991 national census recorded 98,494 Orang Asli (Department of Statistics, 1997) while the more recent 2000 census recorded 132,486 Orang Asli (Department of Statistics, 2006). The Department of Orang Asli Affairs or JHEOA reported the total population of Orang Asli to be 91,317 in 1992

(JHEOA, 1992), 106,131 in 1997 (JHEOA, 1997) and 149,723 in 2004 (JHEOA, 2004). Orang Asli are not a homogeneous people but they are officially classified into three main ethno-linguistic groups namely, the Senoi, ProtoMalays or Aboriginal Malays and the Negritos, each consisting of several dialectic sub-groups (Table 1). The Senoi, located mainly in the central states of Perak and Pahang, is the largest group with a population of about 55% of the total Orang Asli. The second largest group of Orang Asli is the Proto Malays forming 42% of the Orang Asli population. They are found largely in the central and southern states particularly Pahang, Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor. The Negritos are predominantly found in the northern region of the peninsula in the states of Kelantan, Perak and Pahang. They constitute the smallest group comprising approximately 3% of the Orang Asli population. The proportion for each of these major ethnic groups has somehow remained constant throughout the decades.

**Table 1: Major and sub-groups of Orang Asli and population distribution**

Major Groups	Sub Groups	Population (N%)	
		1992	2004
Senoi	Semai, Temiar, Che Wong, Jah Hut, Semoq Beri, Mah Meri	49,562	80,972
		54.3%	54.1%
Proto Malay	Jakun, TemuanSemelai, Orang Kanaq, Orang	39,054	,63,900
		42.8%	42.7%

	Seletar, Orang, Kuala		
Negrito	Bateq, Kensiu, Kintaq, Jahai, Lanoh, Mendriq	2, 7 0 1 3.0%	4, 8 4 5 3.2%
Total		9 1, 3 1 7 100%	1 4 9, 7 2 3 100%

*Source: JHEOA – 2006*

There are gradual shifts in the rural-urban distribution of Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia since 1970. The 1991 census showed that the majority of Orang Asli lived in rural areas (88.7%) and small towns (2.4%) with a small percentage (9%) in urban areas (Department of Statistics, 1997). By 2000, 11.3% of Orang Asli had settled in urban areas.

In Sabah, the coastal and riverine communities mainly engage in fishing, together with cultivation of food for their own consumption. Surplus food, cash crops and jungle produce provide them with a cash income. The majority of the indigenous population live in the rural areas as subsistence farmers practising diversified agriculture - often a form of rotational (shifting) agriculture, combined with wet padi, tapioca, fruits and vegetables. An increasing number of them cultivate cash crops.

In Sarawak, the rural indigenous population also practise rotational cultivation with an emphasis on hill rice. These communities supplement their diet by hunting game and gathering forest produce. A small number of the Penan community still lead a nomadic life; hunting and gathering while the rest of the community either lead a settled or partially settled life. The rural indigenous communities depend on the river for their drinking water, food, washing and transportation. The indigenous population in Sarawak has also been integrated into plantation projects involving the cultivation of cash crops such as oil palm, pepper, cocoa and rubber trees. Others work in the timber industry and there are those who have migrated to urban areas.

#### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS - Issues and Challenges Confronting Indigenous Peoples and Administration of JHEO (now JAKOA)**

The socio-economic status of the Orang Asli is addressed here with respect to poverty, education attainment, employment status, housing, and basic amenities (lighting, toilet facility, water supply). Such information serves as a benchmark to gauge the progress of development on the livelihood and living conditions of the Orang Asli.

#### **Poverty**

The various five-year Malaysia development plans have identified the Orang Asli as one of the most impoverished groups in the country. The incidence of poverty and hardcore poverty is higher among the Orang Asli than that of the Malaysian population. In 1999, while the national figures for poverty and hardcore poverty were 7.5% and 1.4% respectively, 50.9% and 15.4% of the Orang Asli were identified as poor and hardcore poor respectively (Malaysia 2001). In the 9th Malaysian Plan (Malaysia, 2006), various strategies and programs have been planned to increase the income and improve the quality of life of the Orang Asli. Economic projects that will benefit the Orang Asli as well as resettlement and development of human capital will be implemented to address the high incidence of poverty and hardcore poverty among the Orang Asli.

## Education

Until the past decade or so, the majority of Orang Asli children did not attend school. For those living in the forest interior, there were schools in sporadic locations that provided primary 1-3 levels, but the condition of the resources was often deplorable. Orang Asli children living outside the forest were expected to attend national schools, with some providing boarding facility. However, only a small percentage of Orang Asli children attended or completed primary schooling. The reasons are varied principally grounded in economic and cultural context, including “too poor”, “children are needed to help parents”, “parents unwilling to leave young children in outside schools”, “children do not like the school”, and “high failure rates” (Khor, 1985).

Gradually, the education attainment of the Orang Asli has improved with a reduction of the percent with no schooling from 66% in 1980 to 39% in 2000 for both sexes.

At the same time, the high drop-out rate is most likely linked to the high failure rates of the Orang Asli in the public examinations. Only 13% out of about 2000 candidates in 1998 passed the Primary 6 examination, while 28% of the 580 students passed the Secondary 3 examination in the same year (Department of Orang Asli Affairs, 1999).

## Employment

The majority of male and female Orang Asli workers are engaged in agriculture, forestry, fishing and related occupations as shown by the 1991 census. Approximately 75-96% of the total employed is involved in this category, varying with age and gender. A high proportion of them are employed as workers in rubber and oil palm plantations. Some 7-15% of Orang Asli aged 10-44 years of both sexes are employed in production (e.g. factory assemblers), as transport equipment operators and labourers. The percentage of Orang Asli workers employed in the professional and technical category is very small with female workers aged 25-44 years showing the highest level (2.7%). It is patent that most of the Orang Asli workers are engaged mainly in jobs that require physical labour and manual skills. Frequently, engagement in agricultural-based economic activities is manifested as own worker or family worker without wage. There was a significant increase in the percentage of own worker from 56.7% in 1980 to 65.7% in 1990, followed by a decrease to 56.9% in 2000.

**Table 2: Percentage distribution of Orang Asli aged 10 years and above by employment status, 1991 and 2000.**

Employment	Total		Men		Women	
	1991	2000	1991	2000	1991	2000
Employer	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.6
Employee	27.1	36.8	27.6	33.4	26.0	47.3
Self-Employed	65.7	56.8	68.7	62.5	57.5	39.8
Unpaid Family Worker	6.6	5.8	3.2	3.6	15.8	12.3

## Dispossession of Land

The main challenge confronting indigenous peoples today is that of being dispossessed of their native customary land. Land is their source of livelihood and its dispossession has invariably trapped indigenous peoples into a cycle of poverty. Equally importantly, is the fact that land embodies their cultural identity and thus its loss strikes at the very core of their identity. Traditional indigenous belief holds that land is not a commodity and consequently cannot be bought or sold. Rather, land is on loan to the people from God and it is their responsibility to take care of it. Therefore, land has spiritual and cultural values attached to it. For example, the practice of shifting cultivation is a skill developed and adopted to allow the environment to regenerate itself between each cycle of agricultural use. Shifting cultivation is also efficient and "effectively suited to the rather poor physical environment and specific ecological situations" (Spencer 1966) and has proven to be sustainable over the millennia (Hong 1987). In the main, indigenous peoples do not take from the forest and rivers any more than they need.

These traditional beliefs and practices function to nurture the natural environment and thus preserve the bio-diversity of the forest. In contrast, large scale rapid deforestation for extractive and "development" purposes destroys, often forever, this rich heritage of flora and fauna. Internationally, the preservation of the environment has become a major concern, not least because of the risk involved in losing a rich genetic resource. In addition, it is recognised that preservation would ensure a supply of clean, fresh air as well as making a contribution to preventing or halting the process of climatic change.

Paradoxically, the reluctance of indigenous peoples to part with their land for logging, plantations, dams, industrial zones, mining, roads and townships purposes is often labelled as "*anti-development*". This also implies that their way of life is considered "*backward*". The irony is that it is the "*modern*" development strategies that have resulted in the present environmental crisis. There is international level agreement that development has to be sustainable, i.e. consideration has to be given to the environment in planning. Research has found that the traditional lifestyles of indigenous peoples are environmentally sound. This implies that we may in fact have a great deal to learn from them.

In spite of the impoverished state that indigenous peoples have been plunged into economically, culturally and spiritually by mainstream development policies, efforts to integrate them into that very mainstream economy are still ongoing. For example, under the Seventh Malaysia Plan, the government development approach to eradicate poverty in Sarawak is to develop Native Customary Land into productive assets so that the indigenous peoples will realise its potential value through joint-ventures with the private sector for plantation development and other types of development (Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak Debates 21 November 1996).

## Religion

Religion is another aspect of their cultural identity which is under threat. Indigenous religious beliefs which revolve around the existence of spirits in objects - animism, are being looked down upon. For example, in Sabah such attitudes complement the zealous efforts of early Christian and Muslim missionaries to convert indigenous peoples from their "pagan" beliefs (Lasimbang 1996:180). While many accepted conversion without any pressure, there were also



cases of coercion or of being deliberately misled (ibid). As observed by Lasimbang, an indigenous person herself, of the situation today,

"... a majority of the indigenous population have embraced Christianity, Islam and other religions. This has brought about a complete change in world view for most, while other converts attempt to combine elements of their indigenous religion. Christianity and Islam universally censure the use of spirit mediums. Some religious teachers condemn every activity which hints of the indigenous religion of the past, even their folk medicine, but others condone the use of their traditional plant remedies" (Lasimbang 1996:180).

In Peninsular Malaysia, a policy of integration started in the 1960s through the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA) with the ultimate aim of integrating indigenous peoples into the Malay section of the community. This has, in more recent times, taken on the new dimension of attempting to convert the Orang Asli to Islam. (Nicholas 1996: 166). The JHEOA has a special section for the "spiritual" development of the Orang Asli and other government and non-government bodies too, each has its own programme with similar objectives. Nicholas noted that,

"The assimilationist tendencies, best epitomised by the publicly expressed intention of converting all Orang asli within the next ten years, undermine whatever genuine intentions the government may have for the well-being of the Orang Asli. At the very least, it brings the justification for attention towards Orang Asli one full circle - back to the early days of the British colonial government when the Orang Asli were merely regarded as ripe objects for the zeal of religious missionaries" (Nicholas 1996: 166-8).

In relation to this, it has been recommended that the definition of Malay in the Malay Reserve Enactment be amended to include Orang Asli who embrace Islam, speak Malay and follow the Malay culture and tradition (Chief Secretary of Land and Co-operative Development Ministry, Dr Nik Mohd. Zain bin Hj. Nik Yusof, 1996) can be questioned. The Orang Asli rights to land should be recognised irrespective of their religion. (As it stands, only indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak and Malays are accorded special privileges and rights to land in the Constitution. The Orang Asli position to special rights and privileges is not clearly specified in the Constitution).

Although distinctly different, indigenous peoples rights need to be respected, accorded the same status and not to be discriminated against. For example, in the legal statutes on Malay Reserve Land, any change in status of any portion of reserve land, requires in law that another piece of land of similar size and features be declared as replacement. However, for indigenous peoples in Peninsular Malaysia there is no such guarantee in the law. The same can be said of the situation in Sarawak, as the Minister has the power to abolish Native Customary Rights (NCR) land. In Sabah, titled native land acquired compulsorily by the government may be replaced with another piece under section 16 of the Sabah Land Ordinance but in reality, most people are compensated with cash. Even then, compensation is rare and in these cases the land is often valued at a rate much lower than that for other land titles.

Another issue of concern is the subsuming of indigenous peoples under the category Malay or Bumiputra in population censuses. It is confusing and misleading when indigenous groups are not able to classify themselves according to their distinctive indigenous identities. According to the president of the Orang Asli Association-Peninsular Malaysia, Majid Suhut, this often results

in indigenous people categorising themselves on official forms, as "others" in preference to the alternatives offered, namely, Malay, Chinese or Indian ethnic status. (*Sun* 20 October 1996)

It is possible to arrest and even reverse the erosion of cultural identity experienced by the indigenous peoples. First, their land rights need to be recognised and protected. Second, their knowledge of the forest and their spiritual and cultural traditions need to be actively respected and appreciated. One worrying consequence of the negative labelling of indigenous peoples as "backward" is that some groups are no longer proud of their traditional identity. Active recognition and respect for their way of life would put life into the purported multi-racial nature of the National Cultural Policy. It is of concern that only the physical aspects of indigenous peoples' culture are promoted, e.g. for tourism purposes, without understanding and appreciating the spiritual and cultural values attached to it.

As women are invariably responsible for the necessary tasks associated with social reproduction, this has meant longer hours of work and heavier workloads, a decline in their nutritional status and income, an increase of environmentally-related illnesses and other health problems and the breakdown of social support networks and traditional resource management system. The communities are also differently affected. The Penans who live upstream in the heart of the forest are worse off than the Ibans and Lun Bawang, living nearer to Limbang town, who have been able to switch from being swidden cultivators to wage-earners.

## **HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

### **Health**

In terms of health, the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia record a lower health status than the general population. Since the colonial era, many surveys and studies have been conducted on the medical and health aspects of the Orang Asli. Evidences of poor health and nutritional status of Orang Asli population have been documented over the decades (Baer, 1999). Health statistics succinctly showed that the Orang Asli is worse off than the general population. For example, in the 1980s, the median crude mortality rate and the infant mortality rate of the Orang Asli were respectively doubled and tripled that of the national population (Department of Statistics, 1997). Satisfactory health and nutrition in women is a resource for adequate provision of care to their children. Women with poor health status may not be able to adequately perform child care-giving behaviors

### **Poor Maternal Health**

A high proportion in the Orang Asli community subsists on a level that is below the government's poverty line income. For example, various studies have found that more than one third of Orang Asli surveyed were living in poverty or experiencing household food insecurity (Lim and Chee, 1998; Cheah, 1999; Zalilah and Tham, 2002). Lim and Chee (1998) reported that the intake of energy and most nutrients of nonpregnant, pregnant and lactating Orang Asli women were not satisfactory. Since these recommended levels were formulated for people living a sedentary lifestyle, and considering that Orang Asli women generally are involved in moderate to high levels of physical activity, therefore their low daily energy intake is seriously far below the level required for healthful maintenance of their active lifestyles.

Because of the geographical isolation of the indigenous peoples of Sarawak, health provision is made through a flying doctor service. However, its effectiveness is questionable. For example, the indigenous people of Baram, Sarawak complained in 1995, of the quality of health services provided. In particular, they say that flying doctors have failed to arrive as scheduled or promised. The long distances from their settlement to the nearest clinic prevent indigenous peoples from benefiting from the health facilities provided.

### **Malnutrition in Children**

Childhood malnutrition in Orang Asli has persisted over the decades at levels that are more serious than those reported for the other rural communities in Malaysia. The prevalence of underweight and stunting in Orang Asli young children are often found in one-third to three quarters of the population Shashikala et al. (2005) reported even higher percentages (86% underweight, 79% stunting and 53% wasting) of 1-3 year old Temuan and Mahmeri children with growth retardation. In general, the poor nutritional status of Orang Asli children can be attributed to various factors such as poverty, poor diet quality, inappropriate cultural beliefs, lack nutrition knowledge, poor hygiene practices, and high helminthic infestations. Intestinal parasitic infections, especially soiltransmitted helminthes can compromise the growth and development of children (Simeon et al., 1995; Watkins and Pollit, 1996).

### **Housing and Basic Amenities**

As many of the Orang Asli settlements are located in remote and rural areas, it is a challenging task to provide basic amenities such as piped water supply, electricity, toilet facility and garbage disposal service to these settlements. While electricity is provided to about 53% of the 28127 Orang Asli housing units surveyed in 2000, almost half of the housing units (47%), especially those located in the remote or interior areas of Peninsular Malaysia used oil lamps and other types of lamps. In several rural areas, the Orang Asli housing units had their own generators or the generators were provided by JHEOA. Although there is an overall improvement in toilet facility in the last decade, 36% of the housing units still did not have proper toilet facility. Pour and flush toilets are available in about 58% of the housing units, an increment of about 13 percentage points since 1991. As for water supply, treated piped water is available to less than half (44.5%) of the Orang Asli housing units in 2000.

### **Poverty reduction programme**

The Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA, now JAKOA) has drawn up an elaborate framework of objectives and strategies towards achieving its vision of raising the socio-economic status of the Orang Asli to be at par with that of the general population. For example, the JHEOA aims to reduce poverty among Orang Asli in rural and the interior through resettling them, expediting land ownership and increasing income through cash-cropping and commercial activities. The issue of land tenure is of paramount importance in any decisions on the development and economic advancement of the Orang Asli. Past experiences have rightfully instilled a sense of insecurity among the Orang Asli with regards to their lands and other resources. There have been several cases of their ancestral lands being alienated for projects that usually do not bring about direct benefits to them. On the contrary, these activities have led to detrimental consequences including depletion of food resources and environmental destruction, all of which, in turn results in poorer health status of the Orang Asli. In line with Malaysia's projected poverty reduction programme of 5.5% by the year 2000, RM 2.4 billion has been set aside to help needy rural students and to implement health programmes for 1997.

It is reported that there will be special emphasis on the needs of the Orang Asli. (*Sun* 26 October 1996). This shows that the government is concerned about the welfare of indigenous peoples. However, to go to the root cause of the problems, a more integrated approach that considers indigenous peoples' world-views, lifestyles, cultural and spiritual traditions is needed. More importantly, given the fact that the indigenous peoples are trapped in a cycle of poverty due to their dispossession from their native customary land, there is an urgent need to recognise and protect their rights to land.

### **Role of NGOs in Poverty Reduction among the Orang Asli**

The NGO Approach to Poverty Eradication: Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) The Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) modelled on the on the highly successful Grameen Bank of Bangladesh began as a as a pilot project in 1986 to provide credit to the hardcore poor in the Northwest Selangor region of Peninsular Malaysia. The success of the pilot project in reaching out to the hardcore poor and commendable credit recovery rate propelled the government to establish a private trust called the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) launched with support from the Malaysian Economic Development Foundation (YPEIM) which gave it an initial grant of RM120,000, the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC) and the government of the state of Selangor.

The objectives of AIM are to eradicate hardcore poverty in its areas of its operation through the provision of benevolent loans designed to finance income-generating activities and to attain financial viability through income generated from administrative charges.

The AIM has been lauded as one of the most successful replications of the Grameen bank .and the scheme had provided loans worth RM287 million to about 298,864 borrowers by 2007 . AIM outreach to the poor had increased from 17.3% in 1999 to 79.0 % in 2007 thus making it one of the most successful credit and anti poverty programme sin the country. The success of AIM in reaching out to the poor and impressive loan recovery rates of almost 100% has resulted in an increase in development fund allocation from various sources including the government.

The advocacy and rights of Orang Asli initiated the establishment of various voluntary organizations to protect and improve the life of this people in the community. There are many organizations and institutions have been established by voluntary organizations known by the names such as Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) and the Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association (POASM) are working diligently for Orang Asli welfare and rights. They function primarily as a center to facilitate Orang Asli initiatives at self-development and in defence of their rights, and to support those who want to promote such initiatives. In addition, many members of the legal profession have volunteered their time to help Orang Asli in court cases. The Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPO) is another active Orang Asli organization and all this while the organization has been voicing concerns that range from conversion to agricultural crops with regard to large areas of natural forests that have been severely degraded by industrial logging during the past 20 years. The interest also came from voluntary religious groups such as Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM), Interfaith Religious Commission (IRC), Tabligh and Malaysian Christian Association for Relief, Malaysian CARE. Recently, UNICEF and KEMAS are working together o train some 130 preschool teachers and supervisors whereby they have run workshops for Orang Asli communities, stressing the importance of boosting early childhood development and offering tips on learning activities,

nutrition and child psychology (Azizah, 2008). However such realization is still in infancy and a long way to be translated into effective strategies due to such newness of such concept.

Hence, private sector and NGOs need to be given more roles in the development of Orang Asli community. They should be actively involved in giving their expertise and assistance in various fields such as education, business, rural industries and human development. Cooperation with other governmental agencies such Ministry of Health, MOE, National Population and Family Development Board, Department of Social Welfare etc is very important because educating the Orang Asli is related to health, job opportunities and community.

## **THE ABORIGINES OF INDIA**

### **Adivasi communities (Indigenous People)**

“ADIVASI” (meaning original settlers or indigenous peoples or the very first dwellers) is the term given to India’s native/indigenous people, who possess distinct identities and cultures often linked to certain territories. Scheduled Tribes (STs) is the legal category used by the Government of India, which roughly coincides with those who are adivasis. Traditionally adivasis often had a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with the natural world around them and their societies tended to be internally organised on egalitarian and communitarian basis, with their own systems of knowledge, self-governance and nationhood. In today’s world, a big question mark remains as to the sustainability and continuation of these ways of life. Due to a number of reasons, many adivasi people find themselves as migrants, either as a result of being displaced from their traditional lands or as economic migrants in search of work opportunities elsewhere. As a group, they are one of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in India, characterized by high poverty levels, illiteracy, unemployment, displacement and landlessness. As among the poorest of the poor, adivasis are over-represented as victims of unfair labour practices and as unorganized labourers across the country.

The criteria followed for specification of the scheduled tribes in India are indications of distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, living in unreachable areas, following traditional beliefs & practices, worshipping nature, backwardness, depending on forests resources, indigenous arts of dance and music, unique way of life.

### **History and Demography of Adivasis in India**

Adivasis are the earliest settlers on the Indian sub-continent, and who have contributed much to its culture, history, heritage and environment, have become refugees in their own land and victims of dominant cultural hegemony, human rights violations and development displacement. India has the largest concentration of tribal people anywhere in the world except perhaps in Africa. According to recent census report 88.4 millions are tribals in India which is 8.2% of total population. The areas inhabited by the tribals constitute a significant part of the under developed areas of the country. Tribals are the most marginalised and living in remote and inaccessible areas. As per 2001 census report, total ST Population in India is 8,43,26,240 among this Male 4,26,40,829 and Female 4,16,85,411 and the percentage of the ST population

is 8.20%. Sex-ratio is 972 (Female per 1000 Males). As compared to general population, the sex ratio of scheduled tribes is relatively better. This indicates that females in the tribal society are not neglected. The social and cultural values protected their interest. There are over 570 adivasi communities are living in India such as Abors, Baiga, Bhotias, Birhor, Chenchus, Gonds, Jarawas, Kolam, Mina, Mundas, Oarons, Santhals, Sounti, Soligaru, Saora, Irulas, Paliyars, Panika, Potiya, Kattunaikan, Todas, Uralis, Warlis, Kurichas, Paniyas, Kurumbas, Nagas, Onges etc...However the data's on the indigenous communities differ from various departments.

Adivasis as discussed earlier, are not a homogenous group, but over 200 tribes speaking over 100 languages, which vary greatly in ethnicity, culture and language; however, there are similarities in their way of life and they are generally rendered inferior position within the Indian society. There is over 50 million Adivasis population constituting 7.5 percent of that of the whole country, thus making it the largest tribal population in the world.

- Anthropological Survey of India under the Ministry of Culture reports 461 adivasi /indigenous communities
- Government of India Census reports 2001 says 577 adivasi groups
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs reports that 622 scheduled tribe (ST) communities

Adivasis are the earliest inhabitants of the sub-continent and they once inhabited in a much greater area than at present. However, little is known of their history. Although it appears that many of them were forced into hill areas after the invasions of the Indo-Aryan tribes 3,000 years ago. As a group, they are one of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in India, characterized by high levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, displacement and landlessness. Adivasis consider the earth as mother from whom they can respectfully take whatever they need. As the poorest among the poor, Adivasis often represent victims of unfair labour practices and unorganized labourers across the country.

The word "Adivasi" is used in the same sense in Nepal as is another word **janajati**, although the political context differed historically under the Shah and Rana dynasties. Adivasi societies are particularly present in the Indian states of Kerala, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Mizoram and other northeastern states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Many smaller tribal groups are quite sensitive to ecological degradation caused by modernization. Both commercial forestry and intensive agriculture have proved destructive to the forests that had endured poor agriculture for many centuries. Officially recognized by the Indian government as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, they are often grouped together with scheduled castes in the category "Scheduled Castes and Tribes", which is eligible for certain affirmative action measures.

#### **Issues and Problems faced by Adivasi Communities:**

"Majority of Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) continues to live below the poverty line, have poor literacy rates, suffers from malnutrition and disease and are vulnerable to displacement. These Scheduled Tribes (STs) in general are repositories of indigenous knowledge and wisdom in

certain aspects” - Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India

Adivasis in India are facing several issues and problems in their life endlessly. Among them Extreme Poverty, Illiteracy, Human Rights violation, Poor Health Condition, Unemployment issue, Identity crisis are the major problems which are needs to be addressed with united effort through rights-based approach.

### **1. Land and livelihoods aspect**

Land has been a major issue of Adivasis since 1950s. Few tribal families were allotted a portion of land by their erstwhile landlords. Government provided small holdings, but most of these holding are not viable and without proper title deeds. For the traditionally agricultural communities, land alienation has brought serious impacts on their livelihood, as a major portion of their land was alienated to settler farmers.

- Displacement in the name of development and mainstreaming
- Intervention of multi-national and national companies/factories
- Environmental Degradation (Land, Forest & Water)
- Flood and Drought, Unemployment, Landlessness,
- Migration and lose of ownership on natural resources
- Discrimination in development programmes and in any rehabilitation activities

### **2. Poverty and Social Development aspect**

The lifestyle and livelihood of most Adivasis are dependent on forest and agriculture which is the major source of their income. Adivasis became landless due to the large scale migration of people from the other districts. This leads to low family income and reduced employment opportunities in the agricultural sector. The poor marketing infrastructure, changes in cropping pattern, supply of poor quality of seeds, pesticides, low-levels of agricultural yields due to non-adoption of improved agricultural methods, entry of large number of non-tribal in labour market and the decline of price for cash crops resulted in low-income levels of tribal groups. In addition, diminishing traditional skills, non availability of alternative skills, regulations on non-timber forest produce have also caused low income of Adivasi families.

- As per the Government Report over 40.1% of the adivasis are displaced.
- Above 55.2% of the adivasis are under the below poverty line in India.
- Around 64% of the adivasis are the poorest of the poor in India.
- Over 63.5% of the adivasi households are not having access to electricity.
- About 53.1% of the adivasi households are not having drinking water source.
- Almost 83% of the adivasi population does not access to toilet facility.
  
- Extreme poverty- poor schemes, market based investment against traditional livelihoods of adivasis, Imperialist globalization, privatization, ineffective poverty alleviation schemes that do not reach the adivasi communities, lack of rightful space for people’s participation neither in planning nor in implementation or in benefit

sharing.

### **3. Identity, Atrocities & Human Rights aspect**

In terms of human development index, Adivasis are at the bottom of the rank in every state, every district and every village. No one can question the basic fact and truth that the Adivasis are the poorest of the poor in India. About 65 percent of the ST population in India (except north east region) is living below the poverty line. Low literacy rate, high drop-out rate in school, nutritional deficiencies, endemic diseases and poor living conditions, low bargaining power, indebtedness, forcible eviction, migration, mortgage, atrocities, violence, exploitation of traditional knowledge, and degradation of forest resources, negligence are the long-term problems faced by Adivasi people.

The Adivasis in India live under extreme poverty and hunger because the majority of them do not have land for cultivation. The Adivasis do not have the habit of saving money. Most of the displaced Adivasis are denied of their right to live in forest which used to be their source of livelihood. Now they depend only on daily manual work to meet their expenses.

- Atrocities - caste, community, communalism, conflicts, violence & exploitation
- Identity & tradition- degradation of cultural values, erosion of traditional governance
- Corrupt Bureaucracy, corrupt NGOs, corrupt companies, corrupt politicians,
- Media representation of Adivasis is inconsistent and often unsupportive
- Migration in search of job especially to the urban areas
- Non implementation of Forest Rights Act (FRA), Provisions of Panchayat Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA), Prevention of Atrocities Act (PA) in all adivasi areas
- Inaccurate below-poverty line list depriving many impoverished adivasis families
- Political parties exploitation against adivasi development and their leadership

#### **Illiteracy among Adivasis:**

The lack of motivation of parents and teachers to educate the young generations, high level of drop outs from schools and unsatisfactory performance of staff in schools cause low results in higher secondary levels and, thus, low educational attainment. Lack of infrastructure in schools, lack of transport facilities and low income of parents are some reasons for failure of retaining young people's interests in education.

- About 53% of the adivasi populations are illiterate at the national level.
- Illiteracy- Lack of access to education, lack of availability of schools, continues drop-outs, child labour, continues discrimination and no quality & technical education to adivasi children, no opportunity for better and higher education, lack of poor ST hostels.

#### **Employment and Housing Issues**

- Exactly 76% of the scheduled tribes/adivasis are not having permanent houses.



- Nearly 93% of the adivasis do not possess any land for the agricultural activity.
- Degeneration in status to that of bonded labourers and low wages.

### **Health and Medical facility Issues**

Most Adivasis live in poor hygienic condition resulting in various problems such as low life expectancy, low nutritional intake, high morbidity and high infant mortality rate. The inadequacy of public health care delivery system, poor preventive measures, insufficient income and high consumption of tobacco and alcohol have led Adivasis to an unhealthy life. Comparing to the earnings of Adivasis, the expenditure on health is a heavy burden which keeps Adivasis living in a poor health conditions.

- Health issues, Malnutrition, Malaria, TBs, Anemia, HIV/AIDS, no access to health care centers, hospitals and health centers without doctors/staff in tribal locations and etc.
- Over 56% of the adivasi children in India are undernourished.

### **Situation of Adivasis in India**

- 40.1 percent of the Adivasis are displaced
- 55.2 percent of the Adivasis are under the below poverty line
- 64 percent of the Adivasis are the poorest of the poor
- 63.5 percent of the Adivasi households do not have electricity
- 53.1 percent of the Adivasi households do not have drinking water source
- 83 percent of the Adivasi households do not have access to toilet facility
- 56 percent of the Adivasi children are undernourished
- 53 percent of the Adivasis are illiterate
- 76 percent of the Adivasis do not have permanent houses

### **Needs of Adivasis**

- Eradication of extreme poverty & hunger
- Promotion of alternative livelihoods & employment opportunities
- Education to increase school attendance & reduction of school drop-outs
- Protection & promotion of forest rights of the indigenous communities
- Revival of indigenous knowledge & traditional identity & wisdom
- Regeneration of forest resources & conservation practices
- Preservation of gender equality & promotion of women's empowerment
- Creation of political education & awareness on reservation policy
- Development of civil society action for the sustainable development

### **The Indian Government: Laws Relating to Indigenous People i.e. aborigines**

Many tribal places are in hilly and forest areas and the tribal activities mainly depended on the resources from forests. Forests and tribal have a symbiotic relationship. In spite of being threatened by modernization of the country, some of the tribal continue to live in forest areas. Some of them survive only on the collection of minor forest produce. The tribal have been using forest from generation to generation as their source of livelihood. However, with the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act 1980, their rights to collect minor forest produce and other forest produce has been restricted considerably. In the view of this, the National Forest

Policy 1988 stipulates that all agencies responsible for forest management should ensure that the tribal peoples are closely associated with the regeneration, plantation, development and harvest of forests so as to provide them with favorable employment. Moreover, there are several laws and amendments, enacted in the tribal areas, which are working at cross purposes or have no linkage to the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. But whatever rules or legislations made in these areas have to strictly fall within the ambit of the Fifth Schedule and not allowed to dilute it. For example, the Panchayatraj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act of 1996 (PESA) clearly supports the Fifth Schedule and the rights of the Gram Sabhas (Village assembly) in the SAs. Also, the Land Acquisition Act, the Mines and Minerals Development Act, the Forest Management Act, the Environment Protection Act and others are to be superseded by the Land Transfer Regulation Act or the Fifth Schedule. As per the PESA Act 1996, the Gram Sabha has the supreme authority to make decision over the natural resources, including non-timber forest produces (NTFP). Those monopoly restrictions over NTFP should be immediately removed while ensuring social protection through providing support price to tribal. Tribals are allowed to collect, process, transportation and market NTFP freely.

Although the government has passed many Laws and constitutional provisions to respect the constitutional rights of Adivasis, constitutional rights, like the Fifth Schedule, have been denied to tribal of South India, except those living in certain areas of Andhra Pradesh. For example, in spite of the Government passing the Forest Rights Act, the Forest Department is not willing to hand over forest land to the Adivasis. Although there are agricultural lands available with the Government in many places, the Kerala government is not ready to respect the Agreement signed in 2001 with the Adivasi leaders promising to give one to five acres of land to every Adivasi family in the state. Despite the Government Order to permit the Adivasis to construct their own houses after receiving grant from state governments, the Integrated Tribal Department and Panchayats do not allow them to construct their own houses. The tribal groups in Southern States, despite their demand of entitlement of SAs, have been deprived the ST status for a long time. Contrary to Government's claim that tribal populations are diffused in certain states, Adivasis live together in certain locations of every state. The notification of these areas as SA has not been done due to lack of concern for tribal on the part of rulers and Tribal Departments. Although 6.3 percent of tribal populace of Andhra Pradesh was entitled with SA, Tribal Welfare programmes have not been implemented properly.

Although there are constitutional rights provided, the excessive political influence and pressure on the Panchayats and the Department Officials, deny basic rights to the Adivasis. The political parties are concerned only about the mainstream communities, while Adivasis are not a vote bank in most of the states in India. Most Non-Government Agencies also do not take up a Rights-Based Approach to tackle the issues faced by Adivasis as they fear of losing Government funds. The Government must take Adivasis into priority and implement all the schemes with their active participation of tribal peoples.

### **Constitutional Status of Aborigines in India**

The Constitution of India has devoted more than 20 articles on the redress and uplift of the underprivileged following the policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action, particularly with reference to the STs (Scheduled Tribes), in order to protect these communities from all the possible exploitation and thus ensure social justice. The Adivasis, along with Dalits, other so-called untouchables, became subjected to special protective provisions under the Constitution

1950. The vast majority of Indigenous Peoples were classified as STs. Article 341 authorizes the President of India to specify 'castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this constitution be deemed to be scheduled tribes'.

The Fifth Schedule to the Constitution lays down certain prescriptions about the Scheduled Areas (SAs) as well as the STs in states other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram by ensuring submission of Annual Reports by the Governors to the President of India regarding the Administration of the SAs and setting up of Tribal Advisory Councils to advise on matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the STs (Article 244(1), the Constitution of India). Meanwhile, referring to the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution prescribes certain tribal areas in these states as Autonomous Regions with special district councils (Article 244(2), the Constitution of India).

The Panchayat Raj (Extension to the SAs) Act 1996 was introduced to ensure effective participation of the tribal inhabitants in public affairs, including policy making, since 1996, as the original statements of the Constitution do not precisely clarify what “planning and decision making” means. The Act was designated to be a legislative means of promoting self-governance in rural areas through the creation of local village bodies. This legislation has helped Adivasis to formulate responses to various local issues and to organize themselves at the local level by building local political institutions. There are reserved seats for STs in the Parliament and the State Legislatures. In the two houses of Parliament, the Lok Sabha and the Rajiya Sabha, 7 percent of the seats were reserved for members of STs and similar representation occurs in the states’ assemblies in proportion.

### **Indian NGOs**

NGOs or voluntary agencies in India have a history of involvement in a wide range of social welfare and development work. They have existed and played various roles since the colonial period. Given diversity in types, scale of activities, approaches, and so forth, it is very difficult to count the number of Indian NGOs. Riddell & Robinson (1995) estimate that up to early 1990s, the number of NGOs active in rural development would be in the 15-20,000 range, including local and regional branches of national organizations which operate as NGOs in their own rights. By the end of 1990s, as quoted from an NGO directory published by DAINET (Development Alternative Information Network), the number of Indian NGOs was 21,828 (Sato, 2002: 61). In regard to the type of activities, almost all NGOs are engaged in education and campaign activities, with one-third involved in advocacy activities.

Most NGOs are also active in economic activities aimed at low-income groups, such as income generation, appropriate technology, agriculture, and micro-credit besides activities in social sectors especially in the issues of health, education and environment (Sato, 2002: 60). Given the development of Indian NGOs, and the apparent limitations of government poverty reduction programs, there is a widespread agreement among development scholars that NGOs play an important role in helping to alleviate poverty, complementary to that of government, both in terms of providing additional resources and in making government programs more effective (Riddell & Robinson, 1995: 138). To have a closer picture on how Indian NGOs attempt to alleviate poverty, it will be described in a case study of Gram Vikas.

Gram Vikas - Gram Vikas is a non-partisan, secular, voluntary organisation working in partnership with adivasi (indigenous people), dalit and other poor and marginalised communities predominantly in the South and Southwest of Orissa, India.

The vision of Gram Vikas is: An equitable and sustainable society where people live in peace with dignity

Gram Vikas’ mission is: To promote a process, which is sustainable, socially inclusive, and gender equitable, to enable critical masses of poor and marginalised rural people or communities to achieve a dignified quality of life characterised by:

- Assured access to basic education and adequate health services
- Food security and access to secured livelihood opportunities

- Sustainable use and management of natural resources
- Options for appropriate family and community infrastructure and sources of energy
- Strong self-governing people's institutions with equal participation of men and women
- Conscientisation, self reliance and self-esteem

### **Significant achievements of Gram Vikas Project in India**

Support to People's Movements towards enabling adivasis and other poor communities to assert their rights. Significant among these have been a movement in the Kerandimal region of Ganjam in 1981, wherein adivasis spearheaded by the Kerandimal Gana Sangathan, a people's movement, ousted moneylenders and liquor merchants from over 60 villages to regain lands, trees, forests and other bonded property.

In 1986, adivasis in Thuamul Rampur region of Kalahandi resisted and effectively blocked the efforts of the government to hand over forests for tea plantations.

Biogas programme (1983-1993) in collaboration with the National Programme for Biogas Development in which over 54,000 plants were set up all across Orissa, with mechanisms for sustainable use, by creation of a large pool of capacities at the local level including 'barefoot' technicians and masons.

The programme was spun off in 1994, with over a 100 small organisations being formed in the process. Social Forestry programme (since 1985) in collaboration with the National Programme for Wasteland Development, during which more than 10,000 acres of private and community owned wastelands have been regenerated by growing fuel, timber, fodder and fruit species. In a significant move, Gram Vikas supported communities to obtain legal titles over the revenue wastelands regenerated and protected by them. Gram Vikas continues to support communities for afforestation of about 1,000 acres each year, including generation of new forests and maintenance of the old.

Habitat programme (since 1985) wherein disaster proof housing and community infrastructure are developed with a view to improving living conditions in villages.

Over 3500 families across 170 villages have been supported with loan funds and technical support in cost effective construction technologies for building disaster proof houses (~45 sq.m.). The programme is linked with livelihood promotion activities to improve the income and food security of the families.

Rural Health and Environment programme (since 1992) involving 100% families of each village, wherein creation of a corpus fund, construction of toilets and bathing rooms and supply of protected piped drinking water to all families in the village are key components of the programme. In the 105 villages (over 8,089 families) covered so far, the communities take care of effective use and maintenance of the infrastructure. Water and sanitation is the core rallying element bringing communities together and a springboard for collective action in other spheres as well.

Residential Schools for adivasi children (since 1982) Gram Vikas operates four residential schools for adivasi children. The Kerandimal M.E School (1982) and Gram Vikas High School (1988) in Konkia, Ganjam district, provides education up to Class X. The Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School (1992), Koinpur, Gajapati district, Gram Vikas Shiksha Niketan (1998) at Kumudabahal in Kalahandi district and Gram Vikas Vidya Vihar (2001) cater for education upto Class VII. Over 700 adivasi children are enrolled in these schools.

### **NGO Contributions and Challenges in India**

This paper is not trying to assess the overall NGO activities in rural poverty reduction. Assessing NGO performance in poverty reduction is a difficult task. However, it is worth learning from other observations conducted on NGO performance in alleviating poverty. It has been noted that, NGO contributions in poverty reduction are limited. Edwards & Hulme (1995:6) stated that it is difficult to find general evidence that NGOs are close to the poor. There is a growing evidence that in terms of poverty reduction, NGOs do not perform as effectively as had been usually assumed by many agencies.

More specific evidence is provided by Riddell and Robinson (1995) who conducted a case study on sixteen NGOs undertaken in four countries in Asia and Africa. They found that while NGO projects reach the poor people, they tend not to reach down to the very poorest. NGO projects also tend to be small scale. The total numbers assisted are also small. Furthermore, it is also rare for NGO projects to be financially self sufficient. Finally, although NGOs execute a number of very imaginative projects, many of them appear to be unwilling to innovate in certain areas or activities. Therefore, because of these limitations, the roles of NGOs in alleviating poverty cannot be exaggerated. The aim of this paper is not to provide counter evidence to these assessments. Yet, drawing on the evidence from the two cases, it is clear that the two NGOs have significantly contributed in reducing poverty in rural areas where the majority of populations live below the poverty line. Some lessons learned can also be generated from their best practices.

Local institution is placed as the main vehicle to generate various collective activities and become the main entry point to long term sustainable poverty reduction programs. Therefore, through training programs and other technical assistance, the two NGOs seek to enhance the organizational capacity of the local institution, and in turn make it a self-reliant organization.

The importance of local institution is clearly indicated by the Samiapalli case in India. Through the village committee, the villagers are not only building social capital on their own, but they also successfully accumulated local financial resources. As a result, apart from sanitation infrastructures, they are able to construct various community infrastructures. The case of Arta Mekar Mulya group is also evidence. The saving activities provide the group with straightforward access to credit from Bina Swadaya rural bank, and in turn the members of the group are able to initiate small business activities. If this scheme continuously works, the poor can meaningfully decide their own way to get a first foothold on the ladder of development (Sach, 2001). This supports Siebel's findings (2001) that rural finance is closely linked with poverty reduction. The growth of outreach to the poor is contingent upon the dynamic growth of self-reliant institutions. The essence of self-reliance of the poor is rested on the capacity of their institutions in managing local financial and non financial resources. These resources come from saving activities. Savings deposited and accumulated by the poor in local financial institutions are the basis of self-financing and household risk management. Saving mobilized by local institutions is the main source of growth of funds and it makes them independent from external subsidies and interference. In short, institutional self-reliance of the poor is a key to sustainable poverty reduction.

A comparative analysis of community involvement in the delivery of primary education in two Indian and Chinese villages—the village of Palanpur in Uttar Pradesh and the village of She Tan in Zhejiang province—is provided by Dreze and Saran (1995). Palanpur has no effective village council or village government that could perform a supervisory function for the local school, and act as an intermediary between the district administration and the village

community. The caste-based fragmentary politics at the village level also prevents collective action or the development of responsive institutions. As a result, education in Palanpur has been neglected over several generations, and the female literacy rate has increased from 6 percent in 1981 to only 8 percent in 1991.

In She Tan, in contrast, there is a village government and a party organization that respond to the community's concerns and needs. In fact, they have been effective in improving the school's functioning and disciplining of wayward teachers. In contrast to Palanpur, She Tan has achieved impressive literacy rates in 1978, with little bias against female education. Despite a resource crunch following the introduction of the household responsibility system, school enrollment rates in 1993, as in 1978, were maintained at close to 100 percent.

Community participation in basic education can explain a large portion of the difference in educational outcomes across the two villages.

### **Non-Government Organizations: Programmes with Different Approaches**

The Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have been spending a great amount of time and money to uplift the Adivasi communities in the past 25 years. The NGOs conducted various training programmes and awareness sessions on human rights to Adivasis. However, these programmes have focused more on increasing welfare provision than raising the human rights consciousness and developing people's movement. The Adivasi communities become overdependent on NGOs for providing their necessities. Recently, initiatives have been taken by some networks with rights-based approach to instill right consciousness in Adivasis and to form a national movement to fight for their rights. Only this approach will enable efforts of Adivasis to demand their rights in both public and private sectors. In India we have enough laws and regulations, policies and welfare schemes to uplift the life situation of Adivasis. But the root problem is that the Government and its officials do not show commitment and determination to implement them properly. It is important that the international community pressurize the Indian Central Governments, State Governments and the Adivasi welfare-related Departments to protect the rights of Adivasis.

### **Role of International Development Organizations**

What can multilateral agencies, such as the ADB and the World Bank, do to address the institutional limitations to poverty reduction? Many of the policy options discussed in this paper apply not only to governments but also to international organizations. Some of these options are already being pursued, but more could be done. For instance, there needs to be much greater involvement of beneficiaries and the community in the selection, design, implementation, and monitoring of projects. Likewise, partnerships with civil society groups, such as NGOs and CBOs, could be further strengthened. International organizations can also increasingly work with decentralized local government agencies instead of working solely with central government agencies. Further, it may be useful to move away from narrowly defined project approaches and reorient larger shares of financial and technical assistance to supporting programs of decentralized and participatory governance, programs that seek to build coalitions of the poor, and programs that combat social exclusion (e.g., affirmative-action programs).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

**In Malaysia**, there has been a significant improvements made in the education attained for the Orang Asli. However, their education progress at all levels is still lag far behind. Many reasons have been proffered as to why Orang Asli children dropout of school. There is also a need to recognize that the single most reason why Orang Asli children dropout of school is

poverty. The Poverty Eradication Program needs to be continuously and aggressively implemented to reduce the incidence of poverty. The program should cover efforts to increase income, to improve the quality of life (housing, physical infrastructure and facilities), human development (skills training), health and education. The JHEOA (now JAKOA) has to ensure that the school uniforms, text books and other supplies arrive on time, and in the right quantity and sizes. Besides, politicians and decision-makers should also be more discerning of the issues and problems of this community because actions can sometimes be detrimental to the Orang Asli wellbeing. Efforts are needed from all parties to educate and create awareness on the importance of education among indigenous people. There is a need to reviewing the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 to enable the Orang Asli community to be more competitive and participative in the mainstream of national development. Therefore, the implementation of various development programs such as: establishment of settlement schemes, provision of houses, rural roads, electricity, water supply and social amenities should be properly planned. Simultaneously, educational programmes for community such as heads of families and women folk should also be enhanced. Perhaps, having considered all those issues, it can give some insight toward certain measures which can be taken by the government of Malaysia to improve the education development and the life of Orang Asli.

**In India** the country can learn much from the beauty of Adivasi social practices, their culture of sharing and respect for all - their deep humility and love of nature - and most of all - their deep devotion to social equality and civic harmony. However, in the increasingly industrialized and modernized world, the indigenous peoples always become marginalized with their distinct relationship with the nature. The government and civil society movements should ensure that means of livelihood for indigenous peoples are available to them. The culture and traditions of indigenous people should be protected at all cost. The society at large should be ready to learn from the value system of indigenous people to keep the world with greater sense of equality and fraternity.

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