

Submission of Policy Recommendations Emerging from the Study: “Redefining Sustainable Development: Co-creation of Knowledge with the Bharia”

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Background

The rationale for choosing the Bharia tribal community in Central India for the study is that the Bharia lands have not been encroached upon by large-scale development projects. Hence unlike huge dispossessions faced by most other tribal groups in Madhya Pradesh, the state with the largest number of tribal people in the country¹, the Bharia is placed in a context where the practices of the tribal worldview are relatively more prevalent. The study sought to examine the socio-ecological space of the Bharia along with its multidimensional links with the state and the non-tribal society.

Aims

- Co-create knowledge on sustenance with the Bharia through:
 - a. Lived experiences of ecology and livelihoods
 - b. Lived experiences of schooling
- Based on the above, redefine sustainable development as a concept and praxis
- Take learnings back to the Bharia and to education at large

Scope

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly defined SD as an organising principle for meeting human development goals while also sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend. 17 SD goals are intended to be achieved by the year 2030.

The study throws light on the processes and perspectives of ecological sustenance and collective social relationship that can help to conceptualise a rethinking of development and on education for all on grounds of ecological understandings and social justice. The study was done mainly in two settlements, Rated and Gaidubba. Even as there were planned queries, we had opted not to have a questionnaire, but pose some questions and listen more so that new questions would emerge leading to more conversations, all of which were audio-visually recorded with prior permission. We also met and conversed with some persons from the Bharia community in Tamia town. A few teachers as well as persons involved in livelihood engagements with the Bharia people were also consulted.

¹ 1,53,16,784 in 2011 census comprising 21.1% of the total population of the state.

Co-creation of knowledge implies the coming together of the research team and the Bharia people to create knowledge through the mutual sharing of information and reflections. The lived experiences of people that include everyday life, livelihoods and ecological relations, and reflections on happenings across time and space, memories as well as oral histories, form an important base of co-creation. These also include experiences with state policies and institutions.

At the end of the study, a one-day meeting was held at Tamia with Bharia community members who were contributing to and supporting the study for the past one year. The meeting was also attended by persons from the non-tribal society including scholars on socio-economic issues, and persons involved with the Bharia tribe in Patalkot on issues of livelihoods. The research findings were discussed and suggestions sought from them. Community members suggested that it will be very helpful if recommendations emerging from the study be submitted to the government. The recommendation has three parts- one is particular for the Bharia community, another for tribal communities in general, and the third one is for society at large.

Policy Recommendations Specific for Bharia Community

1. Language is the identity of any community and its culture. India is a multilingual country. However, India has lost many languages in the past, especially those belonging to the indigenous tribal communities. When a language dies, it is completely lost to human history and culture. Therefore, we recommend that the government enhance Bharia language learning.
2. [The Right to Education 2009](#) section 29 (f) says that children should receive education in their [mother tongue](#) as far as possible. Further [National Education Policy 2020](#) also directs that wherever possible the medium of instruction in schools until Grade V preferably until Grade VIII should be in the mother tongue or regional languages. Hence, we recommend that proactive actions be taken in the implementation of the policy mentioned above in the Bharia tribe of Patalkot, Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh.
3. We recommend that the government reinstate the Bharia language teaching in schools in Patalkot as existed prior to 2011, and also enhance the content and pedagogic processes of learning the language to be formulated by the Bharia people with collaborations as they desire.
4. The modern school alienates the tribal community through hegemonic and non-inclusive practices of both pedagogy and content. The content of education needs

to make space for diverse knowledge evolving from ecologically restorative and socially egalitarian lived experiences. We recommend the government to take suitable steps in this direction.

5. The government needs to enable the Bharia people to claim the provisions set for them, including that of their PVTG status, and the claims of the Forest Rights Act 2006. The government needs to come forward to make collective deliberations on PESA, which has provisions for autonomous decision-making by tribal communities.
6. As the Bharia community of Pataalkot has received [habitat rights](#) under the Forest Rights Act of 2006, the actual practice of safeguarding and upholding habitat rights would mean a lot of struggles on the ground. The smuggling of timber and the assertions by the non-tribal society would be the major threats to them. Hence, the government needs to take proactive steps to enable the Bharia community and ensure their habitat rights under [The Forest Rights Act](#).
7. Practices of ecological sustenance and knowledge of flora and medicinal values are very rich and enhancing among the Bharia people of Pataalkot. The nutritional and literacy status of the Bharia people is in relatively good status. Both these aspects can be contextualised in a large part of their life requirements like food, medicine, environment (unpolluted), leisure, spirituality and aesthetics being vibrant because of the presence of the forests. Hence it is important to preserve their enriching ecological knowledge and skill.

Policy Recommendations for Tribal Communities in General

1. As per Section 3 (1) of the [Forest Rights Act](#), (FRA)2006, forest-dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers have rights on all forest lands. Further, rights including community tenures of habitat and their habitation for primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities, have been ensured, under Section 3 (1) (e) of the Act. But, the implementation of FRA is yet to be completed. The communities are struggling to claim their rights in the tribal area. There have been conflicts between communities as well as between the community and forest department since its inception. Therefore, the government needs to proactively enable the scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers communities to claim the provisions set for individual and common claims under the [Forest Rights Act](#) (FRA) 2006.
2. We recommend that government speed up the implementation of habitat rights recognised for 75 PVTGs in the country as provisions under the [forest right acts 2006](#)

section 2 (h) of the law, as any customary habitat of primitive tribal groups, pre-agricultural communities or other forest-dwelling scheduled tribes in reserved or protected forests.

3. [The PESA Act 1996](#) aim was to empower the Gram Sabha, particularly in the fifth schedule areas, enabling the communities to safeguard and preserve tradition and their cultural identity along with natural resources. However, the PESA act 1996 is still only on paper after 25 years. Hence, the government needs to come forward to make collective deliberations on PESA, which has provisions for autonomous decision-making by tribal communities.
4. The tribal communities have a very strong relationship with the forest and nature. They have been living in the forest for generations. Hence their knowledge and skills in looking at forests, medicinal plants and other natural resources are different from other people. Forest conservation is their way of life and livelihood. Therefore, we recommend that the government should direct the forest department to use tribal community experiences and skills to continue forest conservation in tribal areas.
5. Tribal communities are dependent on forest produce and their traditional agriculture produce which are the major livelihood and income sources for them. However, they are forced to sell their products at a lower price to local traders and lenders (*sahukar*). Hence, we recommend that the government empower the communities to take their independent decision to establish local mandi across the tribal areas where they can sell their products at appropriate rates and end the middleman system.
6. Language alienation is one of the major reasons for dropping out of school for tribal children in India. 623 tribal communities live in India and speak 218 various languages, they represent India's 8.6 per cent population across 28 states. Despite this, government schools are unable to teach tribal children in their mother tongue. However, the Odisha government started a [multi-lingual education programme](#) in 2006 to address the issue of language barriers faced by tribal children. Hence the government needs to proactively take action to appoint teachers from specific tribes in tribal area schools in different parts of the country.

Policy Recommendations for Education at large

1. The content of education needs to make space for diverse knowledge evolving from ecologically restorative and socially egalitarian lived experiences. but the current education system is urban-centric. We recommend that the government should create

an institution which will develop content in tribal languages, and also develop content based on lived experiences of communities, their culture, and enriching ecological and socially egalitarian systems. Such content should enrich the education of not only students of tribal communities, but they should enrich the education of all students in the country.

2. During the study, it was found that in one particular school where all students and all permanent teachers are from tribal communities, the egalitarian cultural practices of tribal society have reshaped the relationships between teachers and students. There are clear indications that this has improved their learning processes. Therefore, the government should inculcate these learnings from tribal communities for education at large for tribal and non- tribal students, and implement such processes for education for all- across all schools in the country.