Understanding the Status of Gotthi Koya IDP Children for Promotion of Child Welfare in Telangana

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A study by Bal Raksha Bharat (globally known as Save the Children) executed in collaboration with CESS (Centre for Economic and Social Studies) -July 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

The project "Understanding the Status of Gotthi Koya Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Children for Promotion of Child Welfare in Telangana" is the first comprehensive study of the status of Gotthi Koya IDPs from Chhattisgarh and status post-migration into Telangana and the challenges faced by them on various fronts. The report is based on a study covering 3250 households belonging to 121 settlements spanning 17 mandals from three districts of Telangana viz., Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulugu and Bhadradri Kothagudem.

The IDP groups have founded settlements in the current Telangana districts of Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulugu and Bhadradri Kothagudem and have been staying for periods ranging from less than 10 years to 30 years and above.

Specifically the study has aimed to draw out a profile of the Gotthi Koyas including their identity and recognition; educational profile and prevalence of child labour; access to Ante natal & Post natal Care and Child Health services; livelihood profile (land, labour, livestock and migration); availability of basic infrastructure like roads, electricity supply and their bearing on household amenities & utilities, and; risks and hazards faced by the IDP Community. Survey included desk study, collection of field level data by canvassing household interview schedule, analysis and interpretation.

II. GOTTHI KOYA IDP- A Brief Profile

The number of Gotthi Koya settlements per mandal and size of individual settlements varies widely; from 4 to 68 settlements per mandal and 40 to 791 households respectively. By religion, they are referred to as Hindus with a miniscule percentage being Christians spread over 13 mandals.

97% and more of the surveyed population identified as Koya, spoke Koyi language while the balance, belonging to Muria, Gond, and Dorla community, spoke specific dialect -Gondi, Dorli, Dhurva, etc. Telugu is the dialect common to all of them.

94% of the Gotthi Koyas have migrated from Sukma (61%), Bijapur (16%), and Dantewada (15%) of Chhattisgarh, while a miniscule percentage trace their origin to Malkangiri and other places in Telangana.

The migration of the Gotthi Koyas into Telangana was at its peak 11 to 20 years ago constituting above a third of the respondents during the conflict between Maoist and Salwa Judum to save themselves and their youth. Less than a fourth migrated after the peak period continuing even after the ban on Salwa Judum in 2011.

More than 85% families are Nuclear, with close to 9% constituting joint families. Sex ratio among the Gotthi Koyas is 985 and ranges from 837 to 1145 across the mandals. In six out of the 17 mandals it is above 1000. Average family size among the IDPs is 4.13 and ranges from 3.48 to 4.55 across the mandals.

Half the surveyed population belongs to the 19 to 45 years age group, suggesting the trend of migration of individuals in the productive age in the past 20 years, with 10% population being 46 years and above and 40% population being children.

Nearly 61% of the sample population is married, with 56% living with spouse; 39% of the sample population is unmarried.

Close to 59% of the population is illiterate, followed by 27% with some exposure to education. A little above 25% is constituted by those with education from primary and upper primary levels, upwards, into graduation and technical training. More than 47% of the population is working.

46% of the total population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, working to meet their subsistence needs. This is marginally augmented by 20.4% engaging in Non-Timber Farm Produce (NTFP) for cash incomes. A small percentage is involved in arrack preparation, livestock management and employment in government or private service.

III. IDENTITY AND RECOGNITION OF GOTTHI KOYA IDP

The study attempts to understand the peculiar status of the IDPs belonging to the Gotthi Koya tribe, their identity based on migration into Telangana and status of their rights as individuals and tribe, influenced by length of their stay, their familiarity and relational dynamics with the locals and the institutions in their current place of settlement.

Only 608 children enrolled into Non-Formal Education (NFE) centers and government schools possess Birth Certificates. The mandal-wise percentage ranges from 0.6% to 8%. Interesting to note is that Zero percent of persons beyond 31 years possess Birth Certificates.

As with Birth Certificates, Caste certificates are possessed by a mere 6% of the IDP population utilized mainly to get into government schools, and higher studies. Mandal-wise percentage possession of ST certificate ranges from Zero to little above 15%. The mandal-wise Caste certificate possession is scattered, reflecting both non-availability of educational facilities close to their residence and response of officials of concerned departments issuing certificates. Further, the Caste Certificates mentions ST – 17 Koya under caste, recognized as Koya in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and not Gotthi Koyas or other sub-castes mentioned above.

A high 71% of the eligible population among the Gotthi Koyas have Voter cards, with the mandal-wise percentage of possession being between 39% and 89% largely attributable to political influences in the process. It is also seen that while Gotthi Koyas have voting rights in their current place of stay, they are not eligible to contest elections as tribal representatives.

83.7% of the IDP population encompassing all age and gender cohorts were in possession of Aadhaar Card reflecting the intensity of the UIDAI campaign and the linkage of pensions, PDS services with possession of the card. Mandal variations range from 76% to more than 97% of the population. The concern of not to be excluded from any benefit for want of the card is one driving force behind getting an Aadhaar Card.

36% of the population possesses bank accounts though with minimal transactions. The pattern of possession across mandals is scattered ranging from 14% to 57.4%. 75% of account holders belong to 60 plus years age group. Access to banks is an important factor influencing possession of account.

A high number of the IDP population have access to PDS ration and children's access to schools, but pensions, loans for women, membership in Thrift & Credit groups range from insignificant to negligible.

Ration Cards (White Ration Cards and Antyodaya Cards) were found to be available with 82% of the households to ensure food security and offer them crucial proof of identity and residence.

Less than 1% of the total population was seen to avail Pensions. 16% of eligible categories are availing widow pensions, 20% old age pensions, and 0.5% are availing disability pensions.

The women's Self-Help Group programme has a mere 3% of eligible women as members. These groups are spread across 13 mandals with 4 mandals not having a single SHG woman. The number of Gotthi Koya women in the SHGs ranges from 2 to 38.

The Gotthi Koyas do not have any pattas (land titles) or protection from eviction. Nevertheless, 43.6% of households are paying tax. Households paying house tax are located in 16 out of 17 mandals. The percentage of households paying tax ranges from as low as 6% to 97% across the mandals.

IV. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF CHILDREN & CHILD LABOUR

Status of IDP children has been surveyed against three parameters, namely, education, child labor and child marriages.

More than 60% of the children of school-going age 6-18 years were enrolled into school at the time of the study while a little above 25% of them had never enrolled. Close to 12% of them had dropped out of school. Poor road connectivity to nearby schools and lack of electricity were largely cited as reasons for current school going behavior. Advent of NFE centers have contributed to the rise in school attendance in 11 out of 17 mandals.

Increased inclination toward going to school is evident from the fact that 64% of the school going children are from the primary while a little above 10% are in high school. Nearly 3% of the students studying beyond high school indicate a growing aspiration among them to go into mainstream study. A high close to 34% children from upper primary and high school are studying in hostels while girls are also in KGBVs. Interestingly, while enrolment among girls was found to be high in lower classes, it rapidly declined in the subsequent years.

A little above 35% of students had institution located one kilometer and less. More than 50% of the students had institutions located between one to 30 kilometers away, the farthermost ones being residential institutions.

Engagement of school going aged children in agricultural activities to supplement family income accounts for non-attendance in school.

Children engaged in labor constitute a little more than 9 percent of all children of school-going age. Close to 78% of these are engaged in farm and non-farm labor and little more than 1% engage in livestock rearing while a little above 9% work in their own land. More than 57% of girls are engaged in chilli and cotton picking while the boys are engaged in activities in their own agricultural land.

V. ACCESS TO ANTE-NATAL & POST-NATAL CARE AND CHILD HEALTH

The Study has covered a total of 3705 women of reproductive age of 15 to 49 years, 3186 females who are sexually active (married or with partners) of age range 6 years upwards with above 52% below 18 years of age.

There were 1277 pregnancies occurring in the study area of which more than 95% pregnancies were registered with the health or related health by Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Worker, Auxiliary Nurse & Midwife (ANM) or Anganwadi Worker. Mandal-wise, the registration ranged from a little above 77% to 100%. Above 51% of pregnancies were confirmed by self or family members while a little above 48% of pregnancies were confirmed by government health personnel including doctor.

In terms of Ante-natal health services, 100 IFA tablets, 3 doses of TT and regular check-ups from 5th month onwards were availed by 72.2%, 78.7% and 68.6% of the registered cases respectively, while 2.9%, 2.6% and 4% beneficiaries did not receive any of the three services respectively.

Supplementary nutritional services, offered by AWCs to registered ante-natal cases were availed by all the registered ante-natal cases, of which only close to 23% got it in the form of cooked meal served at the AWC. The balance received it in the form of Rice, Dal and Eggs, supplied once a month. 87% of the latter group received full measure of the said three items.

The study revealed that despite the registration of pregnant women in government health institutions, a little more than 75% deliveries have taken place at home. Of these, only 12% deliveries are assisted by Trained Birth Attendants. Unassisted home deliveries have posed a risk for both mother and child resulting in stillbirths and post-natal complications affecting mothers, neonates or both (52%, 34.5% and 13.1% cases respectively). Further, 95% of eligible women received nutrition post-delivery (83.4% as dry rations and 16.6% as cooked meals)

Of the women who have undergone institutional delivery, a little more than 66% have received the State Government sponsored KCR Kit, with essential delivery and child care items (soaps, towels, etc.), and a cash incentive of Rs.12,000 (Rs.13,000 in case of a baby girl), payable in 4 installments (48% receiving full incentive and a little above 19% receiving only in part).

Similarly, the supply of weaning food and child nutritional supplement for children under the ICDS project consisting of 2.5 kg of health cereal mix every month and eggs twice a week could benefit above 77% of the children fully and nearly 15% partially. A significant close to 8% children did not receive any benefits under the scheme. The Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) has totally missed close to 6% of children; it has covered a little above 66% of children fully while partially covering close to 29% children.

Prevalence of disease among children since three months prior to the study was at a high, affecting close to 27% of them with diseases related to poor quality and management of water and seasonal diseases. Disease-wise the distribution was of fever, followed by Diarrhoea, Malaria and Chickenpox. This can be attributed to poor sanitation and solid waste management coupled with lack of proper access to primary health care.

In 50% of cases of disease, Registered Medical Practitioners (RMP) were consulted followed by 36% consulting government doctors. A high 90 infant (0-1 yrs.) and 31 child (1-5 yrs.) deaths have been reported in the past 5 years.

VI. LIVELIHOODS AND HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES

Livelihood of the Gotthi Koya IDPs is precarious and any shocks or risks make them more vulnerable. Their resource base, like their livelihood activity, agriculture, is undependable and insecure. The Gotthi Koyas engage in the Podu method of agriculture, taken up mainly for the family consumption. In addition, the IDPs also fall back on supplementary income through agricultural labor and collection and value addition of NTFP.

The Gotthi Koyas practice agriculture in the forest encroached rain fed areas in plains loosely referred to as Podu cultivation. They do not hold land titles and face the threat of eviction and loss of livelihoods. A major percentage of the population (more than 87.3%) has land holdings of up to 5 acres followed by a small 27.8% having up to 10 acres and 10% having more than 10 acres).

99.5% of the households cultivate paddy in the traditional way by sprinkling seed rather than by the transplantation method used everywhere else. Some of the larger land owners purchase seed from the market and adopt transplantation method. Commercial crops are also grown especially in mandals with long-standing settlements. Cotton is the common commercial crop; other crops include sesame seeds, lentils, vegetables and cowpea.

Nearly 35% of households have MGNREG cards but coverage is low at 30% in six mandals. 98% of card holders use them for work but work is not available for them. The study found that the payments for work done are often delayed.

Rearing of livestock has for the Gotthi Koyas, both livelihood and cultural significance accounting for their food security and for feasts. Exchange of livestock is done as a cultural practice relating to finalization of land and other transactions. Goats are sold for income in the weekly market for income. Sheep, pigs, duck and poultry are also reared.

Migration is very rare among the Gotthi Koyas as revealed in the survey. Very few instances of migration have taken place for farm, construction and loading activity and helping in rig work for bore-wells. Short term labor in farms etc. fetch Rs.300/- to Rs.800/- depending on the place of migration, while bore and rig work yield a high Rs.1500/- per day.

VII. HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES AND CONSUMER DURABLES

Nearly 79% of the households in the settlements have mud walls with two or three rooms followed by 17.2% having thatched walls. 83% of the structures in the IDP settlements have roofing made up of Bangalore tiles followed by 9% roofs of grass and 5% Asbestos sheet material. 54% of the houses have two rooms, 36% of houses had single rooms and 10% households had three or more rooms.

60% of households cooked in the main house or outside without a separate cooking area, while close to 40% households had separate kitchens. Firewood, available freely and for free was the source of cooking in 94% of households and a small 6% households used LPG.

Collection of water, among the surveyed population, is a shared responsibility among the family members. A little above 38% collect water from the stream after removal of sand. This is

followed by 27% each, collecting it from taps supplying water from Mission Bhagiratha and from borewells while the remaining gathered it from wells and other sources.

Open Defecation is practiced by 95% of households with the balance households spread across 4 mandals having individual toilets

The availability of electricity is very poor, impacting the possession of other amenities in the surveyed area. There is not a single household in 5 mandals with electricity while in other 12 mandals the availability of electricity is confined to just above 1% to 97% of households. This has bearing on the possession of amenities in the IDP settlements; 21.8% households having fans and 6.3% households having access to Television sets. Further, individuals have to pay Rs.10/- for a single recharge of mobile at the nearby village; children have no possibility of study with these deprivations while close to 23% households are powered by solar energy, maintenance of solar operated appliances like lamps, etc. is a serious issue.

Use of vehicles is dependent on availability of motorable roads. Use of bicycles and motorcycles is present among the youth. Where transportation is a problem, use of mobiles is more, notwithstanding all limitations relating to their.

VIII. RISKS AND HAZARDS FACED BY THE IDP COMMUNITY IN THE PAST DECADE

The life of the IDPs is ridden with hazards related to starting life where they face dangers of natural calamities, wild animal attacks, unknown diseases, and also threats of eviction for encroachment. 28% of the households faced risk or hazard in the last ten years. With time the threat gets dissipated.

Old settlements that came into existence in the mid-eighties to nineties have not faced eviction in the past ten years due to their growing familiarity with locals in the neighboring village is high in older settlements. 28% of the IDPs have faced threat to their lives and shelter.

40% of the IDP households reported having experienced hazard or loss in the past 10 years (damage to shelter 18%, cases filed by forest department and police department 12%) and attack by wild animals 8%). Unnatural death of a family member was reported by close to 2 %).

In case of loss of shelter the newly built shelter is stronger than the previous one sometimes after purchasing sites from the local Koyas. Re-locations in few mandals have taken place on the advice of forest officials.

IDPs also reported facing loss of family members due to unnatural deaths (attributed to conflicts, fire accidents, road accidents, and attack by wild animals), snake bites and unknown diseases. 6.5% of households reported death of a family member in the past ten years, and more than one out of every four households suffered from attacks by wild animals.

Cases filed by forest officials or police have affected almost all the IDPs. In such cases, resources are pooled to face litigation costs. These take months to years to resolve, increasing burden of cost and time. Some have also faced jail sentence.

Alleging support to Police or Maoists and their being labeled as 'Police Informers' or sympathizers of Extremists, many adults are expected to report regularly to the nearest police station. Their weekly attendance at the Police station is used to make them work as forced labor.

Dispossession of Podu lands is a serious problem heightened by these lands being brought under afforestation, curtailing IDPs cultivation and arresting their livestock movement leading to their increasing landlessness.

More than 46% suffering risks and hazards in the past 10 years moved into the current locations some 11 to 20 years ago compared to slightly lesser percentage of settlers of 21 and 30 years ago, followed by 5 % and 7% moving into current settlement 31 and 40 years ago and more, respectively. Extent of risks and hazards faced by the IDPs is relatively less with increasing years of stay in the settlement.