

Food Insecurity Amidst Plenty
Locating Vulnerability in a Resource Rich Region in India
A Study in Undivided Kalahandi District of Orissa

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Executive Summary

1. This present study was undertaken in Kalahandi district of Odisha broadly to understand the paradox of food insecurity vis-a-vis the availability of 'resources'. Resources here refers to human resources, capital resources, natural resources and institutional/community resources.
1. More specifically, the study aimed to comprehend the entitlement to resources and factors responsible for the denial of resource entitlement which could lead to the vulnerability of local people.
2. Methodologically, the study analyses entitlement failure in Kalahandi district using the political economy framework. The study was an exploratory and was conducted in indigeny ways to grapple the 'reality' to be used in theory building.
3. Given such framework, the anthropological tools of data collection were used to gather the information, especially the 'intensive interview' with open-ended questions keeping self as 'insider'. The use of the questionnaire in getting the quantitative information, which was later de-coded into meaning, in accordance to the objective of the study, was one of the important tools.
4. However, the data collected through interview method- conducted with the respondent families and the various government functionaries-largely substantiated the quantitative data.
5. Theoretically, as the study was to understand the paradox of food vulnerability given the abundant 'resources', albeit, the political economy framework as entry point of discussion, CIPP model (Context, Input, Process and Product) developed by Elliot 1989, a qualitative tool, was largely used in collecting information and analyse the occurrence of vulnerability in Kalahandi district. The '*context*' here is resource abundancy, '*input*' is the accessibility/utilisation of resources, '*process*' is the power hegemony, caste/kinship, traditional norms and '*product*' is the food insecurity and vulnerability.
6. A total of 605 households from three blocks were covered to gather the data pertaining to the food related information. In each block two gram panchayat (GP)- one interiorly located and one mainstream- were selected to measure the accessibility of existing resources and consequent vulnerability, if though.
7. Some of the important finding related to the availability and consumption of food are as below:
 - i. The asset holding among the respondent households is low. However 85.29 per cent of the respondent households possess agricultural land, the land holding size is estimated only acres.
 - ii. The non-working adult and non-working children (student) constitute the major proportion of the respondent households (40.74%), who do not contribute to the household economy and are dependent on their parents. Farmers comes next to them (37.59%) and other occupational groups are scanty. Still their engagement with income activities contributes to the household economy. The annual average income of the respondent households is estimated Rs. 21808.11.
 - iii. Migration among the respondent household continue to be an important coping mechanism to household food insecurity. A total of 106 members from the

respondent households were found to have migrated of whom 70.8% are working as manual labour. And others migrant are said due to either studying or salaried job purposes.

- iv. There are poor asset holding patterns among the respondent households. 81.16% of them stay in kachha house and around 45 per cent of the households are devoid of electricity. Around half of the respondent households do possess bank account in their name most of whom said opened due to the received of MGNREGA work. Only 18.51 per cent of households do have SHG link but are said now dysfunction due to un-enthusiasm from both local bodies and the villagers.
- v. The district being poverty stricken and one of the backward districts in India, it receives immense flow of funds to build infrastructure and to develop the socio-economic conditions of the local people. But the access to such schemes is seen very low. Except ICDS and PDS, other programmes are hardly come by to the needy in the district due to various factors.
- vi. The fruits of KBK scheme, which was at function under long-term action plan (RLTP) seldom reach to the poor as evident from only 23.5% households received it last year. The enigma of obtaining Biju Krushak Vikash Yojana, Biju Grameen Jyoti Yojana, MoKudia (Biju Pakka Ghara) Yojana better to untold because most of the respondent households not yet benefitted or if they selected in past years, some of them were removed from the beneficiaries list.
- vii. MGNREGA does exist, but the functioning of the programme runs up and down and is always triggered by the political factor. The district has not achieved the norms both in term of extending employment to the needy and numbers of day to be provided. Exclusion error is clearly noticed from the employment history in which caste play a dominant role in the selection process.
- viii. It was found that less attention is paid to the agriculture development. Despite some of the households are given Kishan Credit card to avail the agricultural subsidised, only few have benefited. It is largely accessed by the powered groups who can influence the authority.
- ix. The social security schemes mostly old-aged pension, widow pension, disability scheme were found well functioning. But the MoKudia scheme is run through the political dogma.
- x. Regarding the consumption of food among the respondent households, it was found that 82.48% of them of course able to eat three square of meal in a day but their food basket many times does not contain green vegetables or pulses and almost 73.06% of the household want the PDS rice to come to the household. After the enactment of Rs.1 rice by the government, almost everybody get their ration more or less, although, found inaccessibility to full-quota by some of the households due to lack of purchasability.
- xi. Around 73% of the households face problem of enough food during monsoon and live on credit either from the relatives, village shops or money lender which they repay immediately after the harvesting by cash or kind.
- xii. The food consumption level among the respondent households shows that they obtain their food through own production, PDS, market and forest. The food consumption from own farm is universally reported-mostly of rice, and pulses (chana or mung).
- xiii. The access to PDS by them shows that the average rice obtained in past month is estimated 21.029kg rice and 2.558 litre kerosene oil. 90.6% of the respondent households could obtain the PDS items fully or partly. 19.5% of household

could not access full quota due to unaffordability (9.3%), non-requirement (6.4%) and mortgaging of PDS card (3.8%).

- xiv. The quantity consumption of food grains among the respondent households shows that a household consume an average food of 39.203kg in a month. The consumption of cereal is estimated 22.09kg. The consumption of fruit among them is very low and SC household face problem of fruit eating due to lack of money to purchase.
 - xv. The food expenditure pattern among the respondent households reveals an average monthly expenditure of Rs. 1679.30 with less among the SC (Rs. 1456.25). Given the expenditure, the per day household expenditure is estimated Rs. 55.97 which is above the national average of Rs. 32 as estimated by the Tendulkar committee. The consumption expenditure is really better but the quantity of food in their food basket does not reflect the 'nutritious diet' of food security definition. It is because most of household's food basket contains largely rice, pulses and some curry. The quantity of consumption being high, as habituated, the increased food expenditure is the only reflection of that quantity consumption.
8. Owing to the availability of 'resources' in Kalahandi district, the frequent allegation of hunger, starvation death, malnutrition and distress migration is always discoursed. The following are some of the major findings the present study observes behind the 'vulnerability' of Kalahandi district.
- i. The colonial legacy is found to be important cause for the historical vulnerability of Kalahandi district which especially invited the merchant from outside to exploit the available resources during that period. It continues till date.
 - ii. The lopsided distribution of agricultural land, ever since the colonial peiod, is another major cause for the low productivity among the ST/SC household who are historically pushed towards the Berna (unfertile) land. Most of the fertile lands are occupied by the land holding class especially Brahmin and few ST. So despite Kalahandi contribute larger amount of paddy in the state, the question of productivity is arise: who really produce? It is only the landholding groups, generally Brahmins and non-adviasi who can get befit of producing more. Or the fertile land is in the hand of few people who are the major producers whereas majority of people are small landowners or landless particularly among SC and ST. However the sample of this present study does not substantiate such argument due to their small concentration in the sampled village, it is usually found in the district. It is also fact that as the district was under provincial regime, few ST became the landlord but ironically their power came down owing to the land reform and subsequent migration of the labour who once used to work for the landlords. This has led to the decline in their production and people switched over to other occupations mainly salaried one which they considered secure and safe.
 - iii. The economic liberalisation in India has affected the local farmers in Kalahandi worsely due to their incompetency nature with the growing monetised economy. The post-green revolution in the state however encouraged farmers to grow market competent crops; the farmers in Kalahandi ironically could not compete not only because of their unexposed to the market economy but also due to their indigeniety as most of those who grow belong to the ST. It affected their

household income and in some case led to the quieting of market orientation rather than self sufficient agriculture.

- iv. The incessant rainfall is also a major factor of Kalahandi story. Despite the district received good rainfall compared to other district, the irregularity in the rainfall ruins their agricultural production and therefore causes food vulnerability largely among the landless (sukhbasi) households.
- v. However the colonial form of exploitation is not found that much as before, but the labour contractor (sardar) has now started exploiting the local poor households in term of provoking them to migrate to brick kiln of mostly Andhra Pradesh. It has doubled their vulnerability where often they are 'bonded' with the brick kiln owners. They often cannot replay the loan advanced taken for this purchase and face multiple harassment.
- vi. Further, to some families, the youth migration, although, help them mitigating hunger and food insecurity at their households level due to their monetary contribution, but once they back to the village, they do not work in the unorganised sector being returned from big city or outsides. This always escalate their food insecurity and because of this the district again re-entering into the mainstream debate of poverty.
- vii. The political trigger is also found one of the major causes for the underdevelopment of Kalahandi district. The local politicians forget the development of region fighting for the political power. It was alleged that those who are vocal in time of election forget to visit the villages and become lukewarm in the development matter. However, they often claimed Kalahandi issue in the parliamentary debate, they are many times suppressed by dominant political leaders.
- viii. At the bureaucratic level, no government official want to serve in Kalahandi district and any transfer of government official to Kalahandi is considered punishment as noticed from the either frequent change of District Collector or vacancy of most of the officers post in the district. It indicates the negligence ideology by the government.
- ix. When the political parties are criticized for not taking any steps for the development Kalahandi by the media they defend through their own-handled newspaper as generally hold by each political group. Rather the political groups busy mobilizing for their vote bank instead of focusing on alternative policies for tackling problems of poverty and underdevelopment including the Congress which are spontaneously supported by the Kalahandi people
- x. The lack of proper utilisation of available 'resources' in the district is also found one of the causes for the denial of entitlement to the local people. There are various interlinking factors behind improper utilisation of the resources. Most of the government-induced resources, which are largely seen in the form of 'development aids or funds' are diverted, trapped or remain un-expensed as reported from the functioning of various schemes. It rather attracts NGO to get benefits out of it. The swelling number of NGO in this district is clear-cut indication of such corruption. And to say about the development of Kalahandi by such NGO, they are busy building conference hall to assemble the target people, vehicle, or other infrastructure to avoid penalty from the audit.
- xi. The functioning of the employment generation program particularly MGNREGA is hilarious as the district authority unable to provide job during need. The average day of work done among the respondent household is

estimated only 13 days. No beneficiary from the respondent households obtained 100 days of work under this scheme.

- xii. The functioning of PDS was also found very comical. The diversion of PDS rations or use in personal work was frequently reported in all the GPs studied. Such corruption led to a starvation death in one of the GP, though not during fieldwork. It however led to the movement from the villagers, the district authority coloured the death differently and claimed the well-functioning of the scheme.
 - xiii. The lack of skilled education among most of the respondent households were also found one of the causes for their vulnerability and they simply like to work in unorganised sector as wage labourer or paid migrant as noticed from the youth migration in some respondent households.
 - xiv. The historical degradation of the natural resources, i.e. forest, has ceased to affect their traditional food consumption and people are forced to depend on the market to purchase, however the lack of money to buy those commodities many times obstruct them from buying and led to the food vulnerability.
9. The overall functioning of the programme is undemocratic. It was found that as the district face frequent draught or famine situation due to irregularities in rainfall, the Orissa Relief Code, which has specially meant to monitor the situation, is not functioning at all in the district.
 10. Lastly, the lack of public action in the district leads to the corruption both at local and district level. However, naxal becoming an alternative methodology against the corruption, it, on the other, threat the functioning of the state whereby many pro-poor service remain unreached to the beneficiary. But it is also fact that the government do not want to eradicate poverty and hunger from kalahandi district. Because the Kalahandi's poverty become the 'trump card' for politician to strengthen their political game. And they love hearing 'poverty', 'hunger', 'starvation death', 'malnutrition' and 'food insecurity' of Kalahandi, as P Sainath says 'everybody loves a good draught'.