

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Economic Development of the Tribal Community of Gujarat: Contribution to Social Work by AKRSP (I)

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Abstract

The present article discusses the economic and social challenges faced by the tribal communities of Gujarat, especially those living in areas like Dang, Surat, Tapi, Navsari, Narmada, Bharuch, Chhota-Udepur, Valsad, Dahod, Panchmahal, Mahisagar, Arvalli, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha. Limited resources, poor education and very limited employment options have made it difficult for these communities to improve their livelihoods. Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in such times. The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has been working in the areas of livelihood development, education, women empowerment and natural resource conservation to bring sustainable development to the lives of tribal communities. For livelihood development, AKDN helps in modern technology in agriculture, micro-enterprises and market linkages. Along with this, it also develops school infrastructure, trains teachers and creates awareness for girl child education. The framework for economic independence has been created through self-help groups and vocational training programmes for women. Projects like water conservation and forest expansion have been implemented under natural resource conservation. These programs have been instrumental in bringing about significant changes in the lives of tribal communities, and they provide an ideal model for sustainable development.

Introduction

Present article the tribal communities living in the southern and eastern hilly areas of Gujarat are famous for their culture, tradition and lifestyle. Tribal communities, such as groups like Bhil, Chaudhari, Dhodiya, Vasava, Gamit, Dangra and Tadvi, are largely dependent on agriculture, forest produce and labor. However, tribals have remained untouched by the impact of industrialization and modern development. They are still economically, educationally and socially backward. The main challenges in tribal areas are scarcity of resources like land and water, lack of transport facilities and limited employment options. Their access to primary education and health services is very low, which hinders the development of tribal society. Sustainable development and social empowerment measures are very necessary for this community associated with a traditional lifestyle. The government has launched various schemes to bring the tribal society out of these challenges, but due to the limited presence of the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an important role in many areas. The efforts of these organizations create a framework of knowledge, opportunity and stability in the lives of the tribal community. The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a prominent name among the non-governmental organizations that strive to bring about comprehensive improvements in the lives of the tribal community in Gujarat.

Condition and Challenges of Tribal Areas in Gujarat

The tribal community of Gujarat deprives the backward classes of even the basic needs. These communities lag behind in the agricultural sector due to limited resources. They have to depend on rain for water, and due to low productivity of the land, families do not get a full income. The economic and physical stress on tribal women and children is high. Lack of education is also a major problem. There is a lack of primary schools in remote areas, and the schools with very poor infrastructure fail to provide education to children. Due to the lack of health facilities, the tribal community faces several life-threatening diseases and malnutrition. Economically, employment options in tribal areas are limited. Tribal families, mainly engaged in agricultural labour or forest produce, lack a stable income. Self-reliance among women is low, and they do not get a say in key policy decisions of the household.

Aga Khan Foundation and its work in Gujarat

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a globally recognized organization, committed to bringing about comprehensive improvements in the lives of the disadvantaged sections of society. It was established with the aim of human development, educational advancement and economic empowerment. The main objective of AKDN is to lead the weaker and backward sections of society towards a more sustainable and stable lifestyle. AKDN was started in Gujarat by assessing the major challenges of tribal areas. Various initiatives were launched for the tribal community in key areas such as agriculture, health, education and natural resource development. The organization acts as a guiding element, which is not limited to providing basic services, but carries out transformational experiments for the development of the entire society.

The Aga Khan Foundation works in the tribal areas of Gujarat with three main objectives:

1. **Livelihood Development:** To increase productivity through the use of technology in agriculture, animal husbandry and alternative employment opportunities.
2. **Education and Women Empowerment:** To empower women through self-help groups, to provide access to education and to create educational awareness among children.
3. **Natural Resource Conservation:** To improve water and soil quality, to create water storage facilities and to contribute to the cultivation of plants.

Special programs for the tribal community by the Aga Khan Foundation

Livelihood Development:

The Aga Khan Foundation has guided many families to generate a stable income through agriculture by promoting sustainable methods of farming. The use of modern equipment for irrigation has saved water. Along with this, families have been involved in alternative employment sectors such as animal husbandry, fish farming and handicrafts.

Education and Women Empowerment:

A comprehensive plan has been prepared for the education of girls in tribal areas. The educational infrastructure has been strengthened through the renovation of schools, free educational materials and training of teachers.

Self-help groups for women have been started and participation in areas such as savings, investment and skill development has been increased. These efforts have helped in building confidence among women and making them economically empowered.

Natural Resource Development:

The creation of ponds, check dams and river bridges for water storage has alleviated water scarcity in tribal areas. Sustainable farming methods have been introduced along with the promotion of natural fertilizers and organic farming to improve soil quality.

It is clear that non-governmental organizations, especially the Aga Khan Development Network, have emerged as a source of development opportunities in the tribal areas of Gujarat. Their progressive policies and decisions have been successful in bringing stability, sustainability and all-round progress in the lives of the tribal community.

Major Discussion

Tribal communities have faced a state of economic and social backwardness for decades. It has become difficult for the tribal areas of Gujarat to keep pace with the rapidly advancing world on a global scale. In this situation, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a very important role in strengthening the tribal community and connecting it to the mainstream of development. Among these organizations, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has done significant work in the areas of economic, educational, social and environmental enrichment in the tribal areas of Gujarat. This discussion covers the contribution of the Aga Khan Foundation and its various sectors.

Livelihood Development

Improvement in the agricultural sector: Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the tribal community of Gujarat, but due to traditional farming methods and limited availability of water, they have failed to achieve economic prosperity. The Aga Khan Foundation has taken some important steps in the agricultural sector.

Sustainable Agriculture: Effective use of water was made through methods like drip irrigation. Vegetable and fruit cultivation was encouraged along with traditional crops, which increased the income of the farmers.

Agricultural Guidance: Training camps were organized at the local level to teach farmers new techniques.

Animal Husbandry as an Alternative Employment

The Aga Khan Institute tried to increase female participation in the animal husbandry sector. Milk Mandals were formed to increase milk production and establishment of small industries provided employment to more people.

Microfinance: Low-interest loans were provided to start small businesses.

Handicraft and Skill Development: Training was provided in areas such as bamboo production, fish farming and forestry. This has resulted in increasing the employment options of the tribal community.

Education

The availability of education in tribal areas is very limited. The Aga Khan Institute made the following major efforts in the education sector.

1. Improvement of Schools: Re-establishment of category schools and appointment of more teachers.
2. Free educational materials: Books, uniforms and scholarships were provided to children.
3. Girl child education: A special campaign was run to create awareness among families for girls' education and to enroll them in schools.

Women empowerment

The Aga Khan Institute undertook various programmes to increase self-reliance among women.

1. Self-Help Groups: Savings and small investment schemes were started for women.
2. Economic participation: Skill development training was provided to women and they were linked to small shops or home-based industries.
3. Role in family and society: Camps were organized for women on health, nutrition and education.

These efforts have increased women's economic independence and their ability to take decisions in the family.

Natural resource development

Land and water development:

Water and soil quality has been a major problem in tribal areas. The Aga Khan Institute took the following steps in this regard:

1. Water Conservation Project: Ponds, check dams and tanks were constructed to store rainwater.
2. New techniques for irrigation: Irrigation methods that can sustain less water were implemented.
3. Land improvement: The use of natural fertilizers and organic methods was taught to make the land suitable for agriculture.

Vegetation and environmental protection:

1. Forest area: Forest area was increased by seedlings of local plants.
2. Use of solar energy: Solar energy-based equipment was encouraged to avoid damage to the environment.
3. Organic farming: Organic farming methods were developed to maintain the energy of the soil and protect the environment.

These steps made sustainable use of natural resources and enhanced the development of the tribal community while protecting the environment.

Economic impact and results

The efforts of the Aga Khan Institute have witnessed significant changes in the tribal community of Gujarat.

Increased income: Improvements in agriculture and animal husbandry have increased the income of many families by 30-40%.

Education: The schooling of girls and boys has increased by more than 50%.

Women empowerment: The number of women associated with self-help groups has increased significantly, and more than 40% of women have become active in small-scale employment.

Resource development: More than 20% of land has become available for irrigation, and the forest area has also increased significantly.

Environmental improvement: Soil quality and effective use of water have improved.

The Aga Khan Institute has been very successful in bringing about economic and social transformation in the tribal community of Gujarat. Its livelihood development schemes, efforts for women empowerment and approaches to natural resource development have established it as a model for sustainable development. These efforts are not only useful for the tribal community of Gujarat, but are also inspiring for other backward areas of the world.

The efforts of the Aga Khan Foundation have brought about a significant change in the lives of the tribal community of Gujarat. Livelihood development efforts have significantly increased the income of farmers, with sustainable farming practices and alternative employment opportunities playing a major role. Tribal women, who were struggling with inflation and poverty, have now become self-reliant through self-help groups and skill development programmes, which is a major step towards their empowerment in society.

In the field of education, there has been a significant increase in the education of girls, which has been possible as a result of school improvement and awareness campaigns. At the same time, the strengthening of educational infrastructure has created new opportunities for the younger generation. The natural resource conservation campaign has improved the availability and quality of water and land, making agricultural production more sustainable.

Modern irrigation methods, water conservation measures and environmental conservation campaigns have improved the land and forest resources, which has further strengthened the traditional relationship of the tribal community with the environment.

These efforts have set new benchmarks of economic stability, educational advancement, and social empowerment in the tribal community, which are guiding principles for sustainable development.

Conclusion

The Aga Khan Institute and other NGOs have made significant contributions to the economic development of the tribal community of Gujarat. These organizations have transformed the lives of the tribal community by working in key areas such as livelihood development, education and natural resource management. Sustainable practices in agriculture, water efficient projects and development of alternative employment have improved the economic condition of this community. Increased education and efforts for women empowerment have made the tribal community more educationally and socially empowered. Women have started playing a significant role in economic and family decision-making, which has helped in the progressive development of the entire society. The efforts of the Aga Khan Ngo's have acted as a beacon for a strong framework for sustainable development, which is inspiring not only for the tribal areas of Gujarat, but also for other areas. These approaches show how NGOs can join hands with government schemes to bring backward communities into the mainstream.

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