



Review Paper

Rehabilitating Tribes and Recreating Livelihoods: Issues and Challenges the case of Aralalm Tribal Rehabilitation Programme in Kerala, India

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>Tribal people are considered as the original inhabitants or Adivasis. In Kerala, they constitute nearly 1.5 percent of the total population of the state. There are 37 Scheduled tribal communities living in the state with greater concentration in Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Kasaragod and Kannur districts. The livelihood status of the Kerala Tribes in general, are much higher than those of other Indian states. Yet, quite many of them suffer from several socio-economic and health issues in Kerala too. Even though both, the state and central governments have formulated several development programs and policies for the welfare of the tribal communities since Independence, there is still a vast gap between the tribal and the general population, though the extent of this gap is relatively low in Kerala as against the situation in the rest of India in varying degrees. Kerala has been in the forefront in taking progressive initiatives in several domains including the uplift of the tribal people. Aralam Tribal Rehabilitation Program is one of the largest such programmes in India to emerge as a model programme for the landless tribal people. The present paper is one of the outcomes of an ethnographic study, carried out as part of the Doctoral research carried out in Aralam Tribal Rehabilitation area, located in Kannur district, in the state of Kerala, India, with the aim to examine the major issues and challenges in the process of development efforts towards the tribal communities in the context of the Aralam Tribal Rehabilitation Programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 09-05-2024 ▪ Accepted: 10-06-2024 ▪ Published: 14-06-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(3); 2024: 95-100 ▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes <p>How to Cite this Manuscript</p> <p>Manojkumar A, S Gregory. Rehabilitating Tribes and Recreating Livelihoods: Issues and Challenges the case of Aralalm Tribal Rehabilitation Programme in Kerala, India. International Journal of Contemporary Research in Multidisciplinary.2024; 3(3): 95-100.</p>

KEYWORDS: Tribe, Development, Rehabilitation, land alienation

INTRODUCTION

Most tribal people in India have been still facing many developmental challenges, on account of the different socio-economic disabilities, even after more than seventy years since independence. While Kerala has achieved high development in education, health and standards of living, the tribal communities in Kerala is said to remain as outliers in getting their due share in the fruits of Kerala's unique development, though they seem

to be better placed as compared to those in most parts of the rest of India. Land alienation, poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism and malnutrition are still some of the major problems noticed among most of the tribes of Kerala. Particularly, land alienation is considered to be one of the key problems faced by the tribes of Kerala as they have been experiencing the process of exploitation at the hands of the non-tribes since the time of the

British, and in the process, getting alienated from their lands, and becoming landless.

There have been several tribal development programs implemented by the state Government since the formation of the state in 1957. Several development measures had been initiated by the Kerala Government for the landless tribal communities across Kerala. The major tribal rehabilitation programs for the landless tribes in Kerala such as Cheengeri coffee project, Sugandhagiri cardamom project, Priyadarsini tea estate, Pookkod dairy project, etc. which were started with the aim to enhance the livelihoods of the adivasis, however, ended with failures without producing the intended outcome.

During the last two decades of 20th century, Kerala had witnessed several tribal struggles regarding the land issues. As the result of these struggles, the government had decided to allocate lands in Aralam to the landless tribal families by evolving a tribal rehabilitation programme. For the execution of tribal rehabilitation, the state government created a special mission called Tribal Resettlement Development Mission (TRDM). Under the initiative of TRDM, several developmental programs have been introduced in Aralam.

An anthropological field work was conducted in the rehabilitation area in Aralam and in the previous settlement areas of the rehabilitated tribal communities, using anthropological research tools and techniques such as observation, interview, case studies, content analysis and focus group discussions. Efforts were also made to converse with different stakeholders, concerned government functionaries, tribal leaders and development experts. Secondary data were collected from the government records, journals and relevant literature and other publications including print and visual Media to supplement, or strengthen the field findings and to put them in perspective.

The present paper is an attempt to examine the process of implementation of the Aralam tribal rehabilitation program and to identify the major developmental issues and challenges faced by the beneficiaries in the tribal rehabilitation area of Aralam since 2006.

Aralam Tribal Rehabilitation Program (ATRP)

The term 'rehabilitation' is generally used both in a restricted as well as broader sense. Conceptually, it means everything from restoring to former capacity or condition, to making in an improved form., involving services specifically concerned with education, physical functioning, psychological adjustment, social adaptation, vocational capabilities, or recreational activities. On the other hand, rehabilitation, in its practical and broader sense, is not merely the services and techniques of functional restoration, but also the organization of all the efforts of all people involved, as well as the end results or goals of those efforts (Alexander *et al.*, 1991)^[1].

The term 'development' is used in multiple meanings, involving multiple dimensions. In its simplest understanding, it could refer to a process of improving the existing standard of life and living conditions of the people. The Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD) under the Government of Kerala is the

nodal agency that plans and administers the tribal development programmes in Kerala.

The Aralam tribal rehabilitation program is considered as Asia's largest tribal rehabilitation program under the government sector. For the rehabilitation of the landless tribal families and for their development in Aralam, the TRDM was constituted by the state government under the STDD, as a special agency, in November 2001.^[2] It was for the TRDM to plan and implement the programme, using the Multi-level Developmental Approach for tribal development, with the support and co-operation of various government departments, banks, local self-governments and NGOs. The Aim was to improve the life of the tribal people, ensuring them with a sustainable livelihood security and better quality of life.

The Aralam tribal rehabilitation program area is located in the Aralam Farm in the 6th ward of Aralam Grama Panchayath, Iritty Block, under Iritty taluk of Kannur district. The program is mainly focused with the resettlement of the landless tribal communities in Kannur and Wayanad districts of Kerala. The beneficiaries of the programme belong to different tribal communities including Kurichiyar, Paniyan, Mavilan, Karimpalan, Adiyar, Uralikuruman (Bettakuruman) and Kattunaikkan.

Aralam Farm is located at about 60 kilometers from Kannur. The Farm has been under the State Farms Corporation of India, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India. It was started in the year 1970 with the objective of production of seeds, planting materials and commercial production of plantation crops. The farm has a total area of 3060 hectares (7558.2 acre) with a cultivable area of 2623 hectares. It is divided into 13 blocks for administrative convenience. In 2004, Government of Kerala took control of the Aralam Farm and set apart 50 per cent of the area for allotment to the tribal people and decided to retain the rest as farm (The Hindu: June 22,2004)^[14].

The tribal people were rehabilitated in six blocks of Aralam Project area that include block numbers 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13. Of these blocks, there are three blocks, i.e., 9, 10 and 13, which share border with the nearby reserve forest. As on 2015, a total number of 3375 tribal families have been given 'Record of Right' in Aralam farm, spread out in six blocks of the farm. However, as on October 2023, only 1834 tribal families are permanently residing in the farm. Other tribal families who got entitlements in the Farm had gone back to their original settlements as they had encountered several problems of adjustment and developmental alienation.

Development Initiatives under ATRP

Several development initiatives had been carried out under the ATRP. As the earliest initiative, the TRDM had gone ahead with the construction of houses to 361 families through Nirmithi Kendra, a semi-government sector involved in construction works. There were 990 families who have undertaken to construct houses directly, with the assistance from TRDM. Of these, 365 houses had already been completed, and the remaining are under various stages of construction. There are 378 open wells, constructed so far, and assistance had been given to 129

families to construct sanitary latrines. A total of 1400 families have been covered under Jananidhi (community drinking water and sanitation scheme). Electricity connectivity has also been ensured in most of the colonies under Rajiv Gandhi Rural Electrification Scheme and 346 houses have been electrified. There are three main roads which are connecting the settlement to the outside world.^[9]

Of the six blocks involved in the resettlement project, three blocks i.e. 9,10 and 13, are sharing border with the reserve forest, with a stretch of about 14 kilometers. As a measure of protection from animal attack, about five kilo-meters of granite wall and seven kilo-meters of solar fencing have already been completed, and an Iron pillar fencing is said to have been proposed for the remaining area.

Institutions in the settlement include one public health center, one family welfare sub centre, one Homoeo dispensary, two baby crushes, four Multi grade learning centre, nine Anganwadies and one high school. Ambulance service is provided by TRDM. Once in a week, tribal mobile clinic visit is ensured. Free bus service in the morning and in the evening (two trips only) has been arranged by TRDM. One KSRTC bus service is available in the morning from Thalassery, the Taluk headquarters to the Farm. All families are provided with/covered under ration cards. 633 families possess MGNREGS labour card. Morning food by TRDM and lunch by education department is provided to the students in schools and free transportation facility is arranged by TRDM for students.^[11]

Agriculture oriented livelihood system is being followed by the families. Most of the existing crops were planted by the farm authority, well before handing over the land to the families. Major employment sources are own farming and wage labour in agriculture and construction sites.

Partnering in this effort is the NABARD which extends its support for the promotion of tribal development in Aralam Tribal Settlement Area through its Tribal Development Fund (TDF), extending support to several livelihood and infrastructure initiative projects. Similarly, there had been a series of efforts and constructive interventions by the Kannur District Kudumbashree Mission in bringing about many positive changes in the livelihood system of the people.

Issues and Challenges in the Process of Implementation

Notwithstanding the laudable objectives and multi-faceted efforts, the Aralam Rehabilitation programme is facing several issues and challenges in the process of its implementation, and in view of its sustainability. These are related to transport and communication, housing and shelter, livelihood security, financial services, health and health behaviour, education, coordination and scientific approach, skill development, and adaptation, and encounter with wild animals.^[6]

Transport and communication

Transport and communication facilities are inevitable for the development of an area and of the inhabitants. Without proper access to the facilities of transport and communication, people become cut off from the outside world and their life is likely to

become miserable for want of access to better amenities to keep their life going in the modern world.

In Aralam tribal rehabilitation area, public transportation and communication facilities are very poor. The tribal people become constrained to depend on auto rickshaw, spending a hefty amount for travelling from their residential block to nearby towns, hospitals, commercial centers and neighboring blocks. This is highly unaffordable for these people, considering their economic vulnerability. There are very few people who are using motor-bikes for travel purposes.^[8]

As a partial remedy to the problem, though highly inadequate, the TRDM has provided two buses for transportation of the students which is also used for transporting the staff and laborers of the farm. There is one government-owned KSRTC bus service with the name *Gramavandi* (Village carrier) which is operating with the financial support of TRDM.^[10]

The communication facilities are very poor in the rehabilitation blocks. There are no mobile and internet network in the rehabilitation blocks. During the outbreak of Covid-19 and the declared lockdown, the students in the rehabilitated families became handicapped without able to utilize the facility of online learning. It was the panchayat which came to their rescue by providing Wi-Fi services for solving the connectivity problem of the students in temporary mode. In the era of internet, with social media platform playing a leading role in the information-spread, lack of access to such facilities, creates a gap, keeping the rehabilitated people continue to be away from the mainstream population.

House Construction

The TRDM focuses on providing affordable houses for resettled families in ATRP area. More than thousand houses were constructed in the resettled area under the financial support from TRDM. The houses were constructed fully under the norms and criteria fixed by the government, either by the beneficiaries themselves or by sub-contract to the private non-tribal contractors. Involvement of private contractors increased the chances of exploitation.^[7]

In the first phase, the amount sanctioned for each house was Rs. one lakh. Thereafter the amount was increased to Rs. 1. 25 lakhs, which was further increased to Rs. 2. 5 lakhs. Later, it was further increased to 3.5 lakhs and was again hiked to 6 lakhs per house. All house constructions are carried out under the supervision of TRDM officers including an Assistant Engineer. Unfortunately, the supervision is found to be inadequate as the incidence of cheating the beneficiaries by the contractors is not uncommon. In addition, the TRDM provides financial assistance to the construction of toilet and digging of well for each resettled family in ATRP area. Unfortunately, most of the tribal families have failed to fully use these facilities as the house design and structure are not in tune with the traditional tribal culture and cultural ethos. There were hardly any efforts to seek the views of the tribal stakeholders in the designing of houses. Furthermore, the size of the stakeholder families was not at all a consideration in the construction of the houses in the rehabilitated area. Hence, the rehabilitated families are not fully satisfied with their houses.

Livelihood Security

In the case of tribal development and rehabilitation at Aralam, the people struggle to survive, with scarce availability of local resources. Most of the tribal communities in the area depend on wage labour, agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. According to the TRDM and Farm officials there are 361 tribal people most of whom are females, who engage in farm works on daily wages. In the view of the Farm officials, the males are not interested to work in the farm sector as the wage is very low. Hence, they engage themselves in other works that fetch higher wages, outside the ATRP area. Another important employment source is MGNREGA work. Most of the tribal blocks conduct MGNREGA works and provide hundred and fifty wage days each year. Most of the workers are from Kurichiyar and Paniyan women. Agricultural and allied works are given primary importance in MGNREGA in Aralam. ^[12]

The tribal men in the rehabilitation area are engaged in various kinds of occupations. Majority of the tribal men are engaged as wage laborers in construction sector under private contractors in various parts of Kannur district. They earn daily average income of about 700 to 800 rupees. Some tribal men are engaged as taxi and auto drivers and in loading and unloading works outside the farm settlement. There are tribal men from Paniyan, Mavilan and Karimpalan communities who are engaged in the works of coconut plucking and other labour work. Most of the Kurichiyars are engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry inside the ATRP block. Plantain, rubber, coconut and yam are the principal crops cultivated. Members of Karimpalan, Mavilan and Paniyan tribes are also engaged in agricultural sector. But the major problem in agriculture sector of rehabilitated area faced by the tribal people is the lack of required guidance, training and orientation. ^[3]

The attack by wild animals is one of the major problems faced by tribal people in Aralam rehabilitated area. Wild pigs, elephants and monkeys are posing threat to the life and income of the tribal people.

At present, there are various construction projects, that are underway in ATRP area. These projects have provided many unskilled persons with employment opportunities. However, the contractors are not willing to engage the tribal people inside the farm for such works. Instead, they prefer to hire non-tribal workers from outside the farm. It is only after the direction of the TRDM site-officer that the contractor started engaging some of the tribal workers in the construction of Model Residential School in 7th block of the resettlement area.

For the comprehensive development of tribal communities in Aralam, Kudumbasree Mission started some livelihood activities for the development of tribal women in the program area. They organize self-help groups and have started women enterprises. The Aadi Umbrella units, Cocoos coconut Mill are the major interventions. For the livelihood development of tribal inhabitants, the Centre for Research and development (CRD), an NGO, started livelihood program with the financial support of NABARD under the tribal development fund (TDF). Through this TDF project, the CRD is trying to create livelihood opportunities in the tribal families of Aralam. But the above

interventions do not provide stable financial and food security of the rehabilitated tribal families.

In this context, the major issue in Aralam turns out to be the severe unemployment of the rehabilitated tribes. Tribal families demand 'one job for one member in each family'. The Aralam Farm, TRDM and other government agencies are trying to create maximum work opportunities for the rehabilitated tribes in the ATRP area. At the same time, the Farm and the Tribal authorities appoint non-tribal personnel in various vacancies in TRDM and Farm. The Tribesmen opine that appointment of non-tribes was part of a political conspiracy to appoint the associates and sympathisers of the political party in governance. Currently, the rehabilitated tribes from Wayanad, particularly those who are living in part two of the 7th block have been facing a huge unemployment problem. ^[4]

Financial Services

In the rehabilitated blocks, a full-fledged financial institution is not yet functioning. One satellite branch of KGB (Kerala Gramin Bank) provides financial services to the settlers. Only very few farm workers and the farm inhabitants use these services while a majority people depend on the banking services at the nearest town. The KGB branches of Kakkayengad, and Keezhpally, Aralam and Muzhakunnu service co-banks are the major financial service providers available in and around seven to nine km circumference of the resettlement area. This causes lack of interest in saving deposit. Most of the money earned are fully and fast spent, with very little that goes for saving. The inhabitants also lack proper financial literacy and awareness about the latest banking transaction methods such as the use of ATM cards, UPI payments system, etc.

Health and Health Behavior

Aralam rehabilitation area has very poor facilities of healthcare. The inhabitants depend on the nearest Family Health Centre, (FHC) in the 8th block. The FHC is confined to the outpatients-care alone. The In-patient and specialty services are not available and for which they have to travel a distance ranging from three to nine km to reach the particular Centre. The nearest Community Health Centre is situated at Irritty town, which is 10 to 15 km away from the resettlement area. The nearest Taluk Hospital is situated at Peravoor town which is again about 10 to 15 kms away. A mobile dispensary is working through resettlement blocks attached to FHC. After Covid outbreak, the *e-sanjeevani* telemedicine facilities were started. This is very useful for tribes for getting specialty services.

In the rehabilitated area, a variety of health issues such as cancer, malnutrition, infant mortality, abortion, growth stagnancy and other disorders have been reported. Most of the inhabitants are using alcohol and chewing betel leaf with tobacco and areca nut. The regular use of these items causes various health problems to the inhabitants of ATRP area. The Excise Department, TRDM authorities and tribal promoters have not been successful in eliminating these habits of tribal people in the rehabilitated area. The Excise Department has conducted awareness program at ATRP blocks, and waiting for better outcome.

Education

Aralam rehabilitated area has very poor educational facilities. There are no good educational institutions in this area. There is one school located in Block VIII, which is part of the Aralam Farm. There are 621 students enrolled in classes 1 to 10. A couple of years ago, the school had been renovated and upgraded as higher Secondary school. At present, the school having good basic facilities and teaching faculties. When compared with the other schools, most of the students of this tribal school are not satisfactory. Only a few students get A and B grade. This result also indicates the attitude and approach of the teachers towards the poor tribal students. For better education, some students depend on schools outside the farm. Pala Government Higher Secondary School is close to the farm. At present, the students get the travel facilities through the *Vidyava-vahini* project of the Tribal Department.

There are nine Anganwadis located in the resettlement area, three in Block XI, two each in Blocks IX & XIII and one each in block X and VII. All Anganwadis are operating in old premises owned by the Farm. There are two baby crèches, one each in Block XII & XIII. However, they are underutilized. The tribes are only partially utilizing the benefit of Anganwadis in the farm.

For better education of tribal students in the farm, the state government has sanctioned a Modal Residential School in 7th block of the resettlement area. But the school is not yet opened. The major challenges facing the students in the rehabilitation area are that there are no opportunities for higher studies within or nearby areas. The nearest place that they can go is Iritty, which is nearly 15 to 20 kms away from their settlements in Aralam or they have to go to distant places like Kannur, Thalassery, etc. which are located at more than 40 kilometers away from their homes. Hence, the students become less motivated for higher studies.

Approach to Rehabilitation and Development

Aralam rehabilitation program was still in want of a systematic and scientific approach. The project had been designed at the bureaucratic level without considering the ground realities or taking the tribal views into consideration, nor the views of the social scientists had been sought, while policy formulation. It also appears that the previous resettlement experiences in various districts of the State had also not been given in due attention in the process of planning. The tribal social, cultural and economic peculiarities had not been given due consideration at the time of land distribution, shelter development, and income generation activities, etc. These had led to the partial decline of traditional cultures of the tribes in the rehabilitated area. Moreover, there has been greater intrusion of vested interests on political lines, and particularly to score political mileage by doing land allocations as a response to the organized land struggles of the Tribal communities rather than to involve the tribal communities in a genuine development process.

Adaptation Issues and Institutional interventions

The ecological and psychological mal-adjustment to newly resettled area is an issue of tribes in Aralam farm. Some tribal

people easily overcome and adjust to the new eco-cultural system but there are other tribal people who find it difficult to adjust to the present economic-cultural scenario pushing them to get back to their original settlement. The total number of rehabilitated families was 3375 but now only 1794 families are residing in the rehabilitated area, a reduction of almost 47 per cent. The people suffer relationship breakage with their relatives and friends, unemployment, lack of shelter, wild animal attacks etc. At the same time, the rehabilitated tribes were unaware about the topography, land management practices and other developmental activities in this area.

There is no professional support to the rehabilitated tribes for solving the problems of eco-cultural adjustment to the new atmosphere. Government has not yet appointed any qualified professional to take care of these concerns. The site officer is the only person who manages affairs in this regard but is not a qualified professional for dealing with problems of eco-cultural adjustment. Moreover, he is also burdened with official work. At present, the Kudumbasree Mission, Community Police, Social Justice, Women, Health Departments are conducting awareness programmes to the resettled tribes, but its impact is yet to be realized.

Skill Development and Training

The rehabilitated tribes are unaware about the latest technical knowledge in the field of economy. Government has not paid any attention to equip the tribes in latest technology. The tribes are following simple technology for agriculture, and animal husbandry, dairy, poultry and allied sectors. At present there are no skilled training centers in the ATRP area and so, the tribal people have not been oriented towards producing value-added products nor have been trained to improve their existing skills for better use. For the overall development of the tribes of Aralam farm, they need better vocational training and intensive and regular training programs.

Intrusion of Wild Animals

Another big issue faced by the resettled tribes in Aralam is wild animal attacks. Forest and resettlement area share a border of about 13 kilometers. Since 2014, there have been nine deaths, reported inside the resettlement blocks because of the wild elephant attacks.^[13] At present, the tribal families are living here with fear of the animal-attacks. According to the residents of the Aralam resettlement area, the wild animals are the biggest threat to their lives and to their agricultural products. Hence, the people had organized several protests to bring the problem to the notice of the Forest Department and of the State government. Though no permanent solution to the problem is yet to be realized, at present, the construction of elephant wall is under progress along the forest border, with the completion of about one fifth of the shared border with rail fencing, thereby helping to restrict the trespassing of the wild animals from the forest to the habitational area.

CONCLUSION

Every developmental activity should aim for improving the socio-economic growth of the people. The active role and participation of the people in the formulation of the policies and in the implementation of the developmental programs determine the rate of success of those programs. Development, in its holistic and integrated perspective, should also involve searching for the root cause of problems and should involve people at grass root levels. Giving due recognition to every people's dignity and existence, and evolving strategies for a genuine and collective participation of the people at the micro and macro level development planning and implementation is vital for development (Gregory, 2008:2) ^[5].

One of the major shortcomings of the Aralam Tribal Rehabilitation Programme has been the absence of a participatory approach involving the key stakeholders in the formulation, planning and implementation of the development programmes in the area. Because of this, in spite of the programme being one of the largest rehabilitation programmes that was aimed to be accomplished as a model project, it has to face several limitations and challenges in the process of its implementation as outlined in this paper. For the same reason, the project has not been able to accomplish its stated objectives as envisaged in the project. It is a telling story that even today, almost ten years since the project has been initiated, even the work on basic infrastructure facilities, livelihood and income generation have not progressed much. Multi-level developmental activities in Aralam, carried out by different organizations and NGOs are also showing the inherent limitations of delay and systemic execution of the project programmes. All these clearly highlight the urgency for a strategic change in approach so that the programmes are implemented with people's involvement and participation.

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