

## **Empowerment of Tribals Through Education and sustainable Livelihood: A Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) model**

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### **SUMMARY**

Sustainable livelihood through education is important for tribal people. The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) offers professional skills and Gandhian principles to help empower tribal people. Discrimination, deprivation and exclusion threaten these people and ruthless exploitation of their habitat puts their survival at risk.

KISS provides a model for tribal people, gives them a platform to mainstream development.

Orissa, where KISS is located, has the largest number of tribals of any state in India. About 24% of the population is tribal.

The tribal communities belong to the remote ethnic minority. Education is a key challenge. There are few primary schools with a limited number of trained teachers. Yet these schools are not accessible to poor children, therefore the community members are deprived of education.

Many of these communities live in remote areas several hours walk away from schools, hospitals and other services. Most of the tribal communities are unorganized and have difficulty with maintaining their livelihoods and obtaining income from the sale of minor forest produce and other natural resources. Their lack of organisation reduces their bargaining power and they tend to be neglected by the government.

Complicating the situation is the violence of the Naxalite or Communist groups linked to socio-economic factors. Illegal mining has been a factor behind the alienation of tribals, who have become a major source of manpower for the Communist insurgents.

Language is a crucial factor in their alienation and a barrier to full involvement in mainstream Indian society. They are often unable to take advantage of education and programs offered by the government, and with their loss of confidence are easily lured into the influence of vested interest groups.

KISS was begun by Achyutananda Samanta in 1993 under the slogan, "Poverty creates illiteracy and literacy drives away poverty". He created a small school for 125 tribal slum children in Bhubaneswar as tribal families were seeking work in the city. This school eventually became KISS and now is the largest residential school for tribal children in Asia with 12,000 pupils from kindergarten to college level.

The mission of KISS is to empower the tribal population through education and training to bring a qualitative change in their life to ensure their livelihood. KISS provides schooling for the poorest of the poor both in terms of formal and non-formal education and all round development. We provide vocational training in computers, agriculture, animal husbandry, food processing, tailoring, driving, security work and so forth.

Language is a crucial component in providing or restricting access to education and work opportunities. Within the state of Orissa, many languages and dialects are spoken and this complicates communication.

KISS recognizes the role language plays in sustainable development and in the reduction of poverty, hunger and the mitigation of environmental degradation. The organization provides education in the pupils' mother tongue but also a bridge to mainstream languages of government, education and employment.

KISS is recognized as a success story and the school has gained international press coverage when pupils performed well in international sporting events, such as under-14 rugby.

In order to address the challenges of exclusion and educational opportunity, the KISS model of tribal empowerment through education and sustainable development is proving an inspiration. The initiative has pushed the drop-out rate down to virtually zero, nurtured the confidence of students, helped them excel in education and vocational training. It has provided the seeds of future empowerment, encouraged the self employment of students and their community. This has led to the overall development of the tribal community.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Question: One of the projects KISS is involved in is toy making. Do these toys reflect social culture?

Answer: They used to make toys. This is part of tribal culture. The type of toy reflects tribal tradition. This is joyful education for me.

Question: How do you monitor the sustainability of the student programs?

Answer: The students have access to the tribal areas. We have good teachers and parents. We go back to the respective areas. We see the local needs. We see how vocational skills are useful, for example tailoring, and that they are earning a livelihood. We work with the community.