



Photo by SARRA

Tribal Communities Fight to Lift the Yoke of Landlessness Amid Climate Change

**A Case Study of the Yanadi and Yrukula Tribal
Communities in Andhra Pradesh State, India**

By Rohini Reddy

South Asia Rural Reconstruction Association (SARRA)

Key Messages

- The Yanadi and Yrukula tribes have not developed adaptation practices to help them cope with the impact of regular cyclones. However, they assert that they need a piece of land to build their home on and to grow food; and timely financial support to purchase seeds, fertilizers, and plant protection farm inputs.
- These communities cannot rely on aid from the government to help them cope with their disaster losses. Such aid could stop at any time, according to changes in government priorities.
- Gaps in research on the links between land tenure and food security must be remedied. Mixed methods are needed to analyze the complex casual linkages. Household-farm panel data collected over longer periods of time, combined with simulations, can also provide valuable insights about the linkages between tenure security and food security.
- CSOs employ a variety tools and approaches to explain the link between land rights and food security, including awareness-raising campaigns, community mobilization and engagement; partnership building and networking; policy dialogues; and, research and documentation, among others. At the same time, they educate the tribes on sustainable agriculture and support them in their adoption of natural farming techniques, especially among women and the youth.

The Yanadi and Yrukala tribal communities living in Andhra Pradesh State are two of India's Scheduled Tribes, or indigenous people who are outside of the caste system of India and are considered as socially disadvantaged.

The Yanadi and Yrukala tribes consist of over 300 families who together occupy about 4,856 hectares of land.

These tribes rely on the forest for their livelihood. They engage in hunting, fishing, small scale farming, and collecting food and other non-timber forest products (NTFPs). In January to June, they migrate to mango-growing areas to work as farm laborers.

Majority of the tribal community members have little to no land that they can call their own. Of the 300 Yanadi and Yrukala families, only 15 to 20 percent, or 40 to 50 families, have a *patta*, which entitles them to work on assigned forest land. The rest of the families have no *patta*.

The *pattas* are not land titles that allow the holder to sell the land; they merely provide user rights to forest land, as provided for in the new Forest Rights Act. They are issued in the name of both husband and wife, and can be handed down to the children.

The *patta* lands are generally small: on average, about 0.2 hectare in size. However, families that are politically connected are able to get larger parcels from local government authorities.

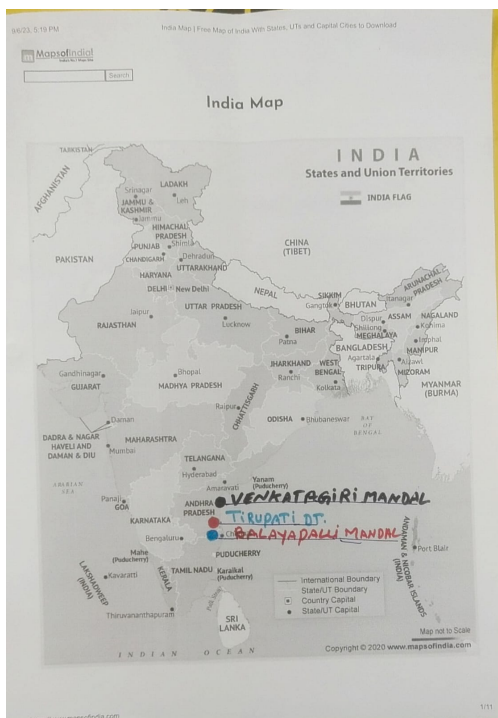


Photo by SARRA

Poverty incidence is high among the tribes. They belong to the poorest strata of society. Most of them suffer from low levels of education and have limited access to health care. Their children do not go to school; 99 percent of them are illiterate.

The Yanadi and Yrukala tribes have turned away from agriculture as a source of livelihood because it brings very little income. Like farmers in the rest of Andhra Pradesh State, these tribes are generally smallholders and landless workers. Land fragmentation continues to reduce the croplands that they can use. Disputes over landownership are common in their community.

The impact of climate change, particularly extreme weather events that result in droughts and floods, including also erratic rainfall and high temperature, has increased the difficulties of these farmers, driving them deeper into debt and poverty.

Climate Change: The Straw that Breaks Farmers' Backs

Andhra Pradesh State has been hit by more than 60 cyclones since 1975. The most recent cyclones that swept over the State were Mandous (11 December 2022) and Mocha (4 May 2023). Cyclone Mocha affected many people, and flooded 973 villages in 105 *mandals* (local government areas).

In Tirupati District, 75,000 acres (over 30,350 hectares) of gardens and vegetable crops were destroyed, along with 1,400 kilometers of roads and 20 small water sources.

In Venkatagiri and Balayapalli mandals, 80 percent of the rice crop planted on 12,000 acres (4,856 hectares) of land was lost.

In addition, 1,400 kilometers of roads were destroyed; and 20 small water sources in Tirupati District were affected.

At least two to three cyclones batter Andhra Pradesh every year. Experts predict one more cyclone by the end of 2023.

Responses by the Community

SARRA, a training resource agency that is focused on promoting natural farming technologies in India, has been supporting the Yanadi and Yrukala tribes since 2018.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, SARRA provided relief assistance to the tribes by collecting donations from all over the sub-district. Affected families receive a ration of rice, pulses and oil.

SARRA has recorded no adaptation practices among the tribes. However, the latter have expressed their specific needs, including among others: (a) a piece of land to build their home and to grow food; (b) timely financial support to purchase seeds, fertilizers, and plant protection farm inputs; (c) transport facilities; (d) safe drinking water; and, (e) a community shed where they can gather and hold discussions.

Responses by Authorities

The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, inaugurated a program in early 2023 to distribute *pattas* covering denotified conditional land to beneficiaries.



Photo by SARRA

Preparatory to this, the State government is undertaking a land resurvey program in Tirupathi District to address all issues relating to land ownership. Reddy said that the land resurvey will be completed by March 2024, following which borders will be marked, and *pattas* will be issued through the Sub-Registrar Offices in the villages. This program will cover hundreds of villages every month, and by the end of 2024, all of the 17,000 villages in Andhra Pradesh will be covered by the concerned government departments.

Current land policies, while good on paper, are poorly and slowly being implemented because of the lack of political will. In contrast, the transparent and accountable research being conducted by the academia, with the help of elected representatives from villages, SHGs, and civil society organizations (CSOs), is putting pressure on the government and building awareness among advocacy groups.

Assessment

Tenure security and resource rights enhance the communities' climate resilience, through the adoption of sustainable land management practices, such as soil and water conservation measures, land use planning, natural farming and soil health management, that can mitigate the effect of climate change.

Tenure security enables landholders to access climate finance, crop insurance and climate grants. Landholders can engage in long-term planning, risk assessment and adaptation strategies. They can invest on reforestation, afforestation, and sustainable farming systems. Tenure security also encourages landholder to undertake biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management.

Tenure security can reduce the impact of climate-induced displacements and reinforce the practice of climate resilient sustainable practices that can improve the lives and livelihoods of small landholders.



Photo by SARRA

Authorities can improve their response to climate disasters by facilitating the distribution of land title documents, which provide legal recognition and protection against land grabs and encroachments of climate induced migrants. Authorities can also link up urban consumers with small producers, benefitting both financially and promoting better health.

Authorities must go beyond the distribution of rations to affected communities, which could stop at any time when the government's priorities change. The communities need land and the knowhow to use such land in a productive manner. Women and youth must be prioritized in such interventions.

Recommendations

The growing land scarcity and landlessness threatens food security in poor countries. Low-cost tenure reforms have the potential to improve tenure and food security. Gaps in research on the links between tenure and food security must be remedied. Mixed methods (i.e., multi-cropping as opposed to monocropping) are needed to analyze the complex casual linkages. The commitment of the government agencies is critical.

Youth landlessness and unemployment is a growing challenge in agrarian societies where population growth is still high. The creation of employment opportunities and the provision of secure property rights for the youth is increasingly important to ensure social stability and food security. More research is needed to investigate the potential of alternative livelihood strategies for the youth and displaced populations, whether in rural or urban settings. Tenure security and food security should be put into the broader perspective of livelihood security to facilitate comprehensive research that takes on board the new challenges of a rapidly changing world.

A mixed methods approach is needed that can utilize natural experiments as well as randomization where feasible in combination with increasing flows of spatial and time-series data from diverse sources. Household-farm panel data collected over longer periods of time, combined with simulations, can also provide valuable insights about the linkages between tenure security and food security. The structural complexity and context specificity limit what can be generalized from randomized social experiments. Still, randomized pilot experiments should be encouraged in relation to the implementation of new land policy reforms.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), through community driven programs, can strengthen the process of facilitating the distribution of land title documents. Land redistribution, if poorly managed and not accompanied by necessary support and resources, may lead to conflicts.

By providing secure land tenure, mobilizing communities, and empowering them (women, men, and youth) on climate-resilient and adaptive capacities, people can better navigate the challenges of climate change and work towards a sustainable future which is climate resilient.

CSOs use the following tools and approaches to explain the link between land rights and food security:

- **Awareness creation and advocacy through campaigns.** CSOs undertake campaigns and awareness raising initiatives to illuminate the link between land rights and food security. This is being done through campaign posters and leaflets; organizing

workshops and public events, developing role plays; and, media coverage.

- **Community mobilization and engagement.** CSOs work with communities to involve them in decision-making processes on land rights, land use, and food security. They empower the local communities to advocate for their land rights and food security.
- **Partnership and networking.** CSOs often associate/collaborate with other likeminded organizations and government departments to enhance the results of their implementation of sustainable agriculture practices.
- **Capacity-building.** CSOs provide training courses to farmers and other community members on the importance of linking land rights and food security.
- **Legal support.** CSOs assist individuals/farmers who are facing land rights violations and help them in the legal proceedings.
- **Policy dialogue.** CSOs facilitate discussions between the governments, communities, and other partners to find solutions on issues pertaining to land rights and food security.
- **Research and documentation.** CSOs conduct research on land rights and food security. They gather information/data to highlight the impact of insecure land tenure on food security in support of policy changes.



Photo by SARRA

- **Adoption of sustainable agriculture.** Communities increase their resilience to climate change impacts through the adoption of climate-resilient crops, indigenous solutions, and sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Natural farming.** Natural farming, which uses traditional knowledge, promotes healthy food production.
- **Climate change mitigation.** The planting of trees in common areas contributes to carbon sequestration and mitigation of climate change effects. ■

References:

- Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). *Integration of Agriculture into Coastal Area Management*. <http://www.fao.org/3/W8440e07.htm>
- Kantamaneni, K., Rice, L., Yenneti, K., and Campos, L. (2020). Assessing the Vulnerability of Agriculture Systems to Climate Change in Coastal Areas: A Novel Index. *Sustainability* 2020, 12(11), 4771; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114771>
- Kunnonen, M. and Pott, L. (2019, September 4). Why the fight against climate change depends on secure land tenure. In *World Bank Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/why-fight-against-climate-change-depends-secure-land-tenure>
- World Bank (WB). (2019). World Bank. Agriculture Is Environment. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/WDI07section3-intro.pdf>

Citation:

Reddy, R. (2023). *Tribal Communities Fight to Lift the Yoke of Landlessness Amid Climate Change: A Case Study of the Yanadi and Yrukula Tribal Communities in Andhra Pradesh State, India*. Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC). [Paper prepared by the South Asia Rural Reconstruction Association (SARRA) for the pilot phase of the Collective Action on Mainstreaming Land Rights of the Rural Poor in the Climate Discourse in Asia Pacific, zooming in on Bangladesh. This collective action is supported by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR/GFAiR) and the European Union (EU)].