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ORISSA

Kandhamal ranks lowest in UN food security report on state

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Bhubaneswar: Persisting ethnic and communal tensions apart, Kandhamal district has earned yet another unenviable distinction. It has been ranked as the 'most insecure' district in terms of food availability in a report prepared by the UN World Food Programme and New Delhi-based Institute for Human Development.

The report titled 'Food Security Atlas of Rural Orissa' was released by Planning Commission member Prof Abhijit Sen here on Saturday. It has placed tribal-dominated Kandhamal district at the bottom of the 30 districts in the state when it came to 'food availability' for the people.

The district, which has shot into prominence in recent times because of widespread violence, has been placed last in all indicators, except one, determining food availability. While it has been ranked as district number 30 as regards per capita agricultural output, share of forest area (limiting agriculture) and rural connectivity, it has finished just ahead of Nabarangpur on the extent of irrigation.

"Kandhamal has high forest cover resulting in low net sown area, which in turn has a negligible irrigation of 13.5 per cent, resulting in low per capita agricultural production," the report stated. Alongside Malkangiri, Koraput, Gajapati, Rayagada and Boudh, Kandhamal has 'very poor' rural connectivity with more than two-thirds of their villages not having access to paved roads.

Comparing the improvement in situation in the KBK districts to parts of southern Orissa, Sen pointed out lack of effective interventions in Kandhamal and Gajapati. Throwing light on the report, WFP country director Mihoko Tamamura said the



Planning Commission member Abhijit Sen releases the Food Security Atlas of Rural Orissa at a function in Bhubaneswar on Saturday



FOOD FACTS

- More than 15 million people in rural Orissa are BPL
- Over 5 million people in Orissa suffer from calorie under nourishment
- The average body mass index of both men (19.8) and women (19.7) in Orissa is among the lowest in India

Source: WFP and IHD report Food Security Atlas of Rural Orissa

rich spend around 20 per cent of their income on food, compared to the poor who spend 70 per cent of their earnings.

The report used 12 indicators under food availability, food access and food absorption categories to develop a Food Security Index (FSI), which in turn helps in explaining Food Security Outcome Index (FSOI). FSI is aimed at explaining how the chosen indicators influence food security, while FSOI helps to cross-check the validity of FSI.

Under the FSI, in addition to Kandhamal, Gajapati, Rayagada and Nabarangpur districts have been bracketed as 'extremely insecure'. Similarly, using indicators like child mortality and prevalence of underweight among kids below five years of age, Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Gajapati, Rayagada and Nuapada have been classified as 'extremely insecure'.

According to the report, mortality below the age of five is 'alarm-

ingly high' in Orissa and except Mayurbhanj and Jharsuguda all districts have under-five mortality higher than 100 per 1,000 births.

Kandhamal, Gajapati, Rayagada and Malkangiri have under-five mortality higher than 160 with more than half of their children underweight, it says.

On food access, the report has found that people in Koraput, Nabarangpur, Rayagada and Malkangiri (all in the KBK region) have the lowest access to food.

"They spend less than Rs 250 for a person every month on consumption, which is below the national expenditure level. Poor literacy among the rural females (less than 20 per cent) adds to food insecurity," the report stated.

Regarding food absorption (utilization), the report points out that less than half of the state's population has access to primary health facilities.

"The situation is worse in most of the northern districts and in the southern districts of Rayagada, Malkangiri, Kandhamal and Gajapati where less than 20 per cent of the population has access to primary health care," the report stated.

"Every third household in the state doesn't have access to safe drinking water exposing them to water-borne diseases. Cholera and diarrhoea are rampant in such districts," it added.

According to the report, enhancing agricultural productivity, development of livelihoods of hill-forest based population, improvement of rural connectivity, regularization of casual and agricultural wages, land redistribution, better access to safe drinking water and promoting value-added processing of non-timber forest produce can help improve the scenario.

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