

## Prevention of Migration among Tribal Group through Special Project

*Karan Girdhar and Richa Singh*

*“It is obvious that tribal areas have to progress. Nobody wants to keep them as museum specimens. It is equally obvious that they have to progress their own way.”*

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, 1952

### Earning livelihood without migration: a success story

*Mandli Jayamma*, a Chenchu tribal woman from Kollapur mandal of Mahabubnagar district in AP, was given two acres of land under the Recognition of Forest Rights Act 2006 (RoFR). The acres were fallow and did not yield enough for her family to meet even its basic survival needs. Though she tried to augment her income through collection and sale of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), earnings were meagre and largely seasonal. Where baseline survival was at stake, ensuring proper education and healthcare for her three young children while putting aside some savings for the rainy day was a luxury she could not even dream of.

Her experience with government schemes led her to comment, *‘We do get work intermittently under some government scheme or the other but the earnings are not enough and sometimes we have to wait for years for the money to be released to us.’*

Struggling with days of starvation, malnutrition, poor health and deprivation, Jayamma with her husband and children were forced to migrate to the city in search of livelihood.

The story has been similar for nearly all families of the Chenchu tribe which had to withstand the adverse impact of the Nagarjuna Sagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve Notification of 1978 and Declaration in 1983 – two bits of legislation that pushed the tribe into a hell hole of extreme poverty and deprivation.

It was in the year 2009 that the NREGS Chenchu Special project was introduced in the area. The challenge facing the project team was to gain confidence of people in government schemes.



*Picture 1: A Chenchu Household*

Jayamma had little choice but to try her luck with the project given her dire situation and reluctance to migrate.

The project was much like other earlier projects which aimed to provide livelihood options to the tribe, but the significant difference was that it was structured to avoid the pitfalls of earlier projects. Says Jayamma,

*'We are working under the NREGS Chenchu Special project since 2009 and are assured 15 days of wage employment in a month throughout the year for Rs. 2055 per month per member. There have been no delays in payments so far'*

There has been a sea change in Jayamma and her family's life. The family now earns an amount of Rs. 6165 per month and is able to afford sufficient food, clothing and healthcare. The household has seen no migration since the project implementation. Steady and timely cash releases to the beneficiaries have also helped them revive their fallow land through cultivation, thus providing sustenance during off-season. Children are going to school and the family has been successful in setting aside some savings every month for their future needs.

*"All we have to say is that NREGS Chenchu Special project has made us realise how bread tastes with butter which we never did earlier neither through migration nor any other interventions" – Ramudu, Jayamma's husband.*

## Introduction

The Constitution of India makes special provisions for the welfare, development and protection of tribal communities. Schedules V and VI under Constitution of India consist of many constitutional safeguards for tribal groups. There are currently 654 Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in India, out of which 75 are termed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) earlier known as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs). Government of India (GoI) has enacted important policies, programmes and laws for the welfare and protection of the tribal communities. But PVTGs have benefited less than other communities due to isolated settlements, poor community participation, and inaccessible habitations.

### *Chenchu tribe*

Chenchu is a primitive tribe of Andhra Pradesh (AP) recognized as PTG/ PVTG in 1975. The tribe is referred to as primitive as their livelihood is based on forest produce; they use pre-agricultural techniques for food gathering and production and their way of life has not modernised. They inhabit the Nallamalai hills of AP and are spread over the six major districts namely Kurnool, Mahabubnagar, Prakasam, Ranga Reddy, Nalgonda and Guntur. Living across 338 villages or hamlets in the state, their total population adds up to around 42, 000.

Table 1: District wise population of Chenchu community spread across the districts of AP<sup>1</sup>

District	Mandals	Habitations	Households	Population
Kurnool	14	42	2133	8160
Guntur	6	48	1643	6376
Nalgonda	3	15	291	1069
Ranga Reddy	7	31	799	2700
Mahabubnagar	10	123	2766	10406
Prakasam	7	81	3136	13321
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>10768</b>	<b>42032</b>



Picture 2: Map of AP showing Chenchu districts

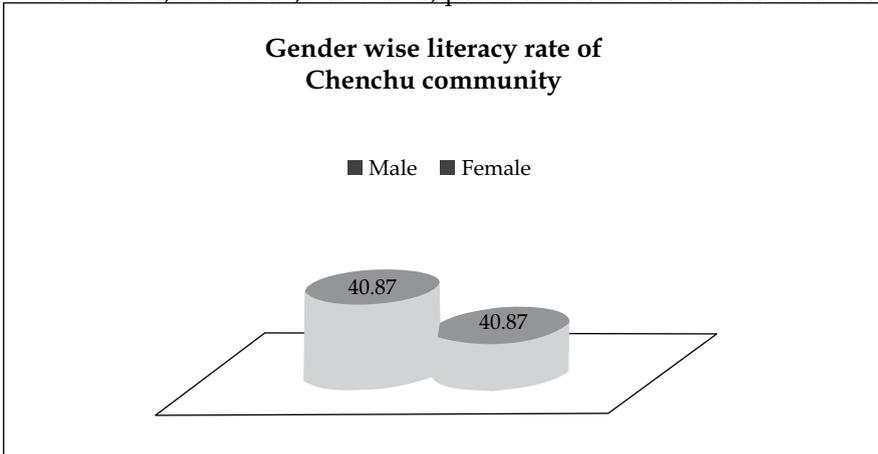
Members of the Chenchu tribe are undaunted by the challenges of their natural surroundings and gather food or hunt animals from the forests. They hunt with bow and arrows as well as small knives. They generally gather NTFPs and trade them for pulses and food grains at Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) set up by the Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP). Other NTFP collected include gum, tamarind, myrobalans, nuxvomica, honey wax, mohwa flowers, chironji, etc. They rear goats, sheep, buffaloes and cows. Activities that the Chenchu community is generally involved in are:

<sup>1</sup>Source: Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Srisailam

- Tiger tracking for forest department of the state
- Acting as guides for tourists
- Labour work under NREGS
- Agriculture (recently started)

The larger indigenous tribe is divided into distinct clans with a common culture. It follows a patriarchal and patrilineal social structure where monogamy is usually followed (though cases of polygamy are also seen). Marriages between cousins are common. The overall literacy rate is 32.3% where male literacy higher than literacy among the women folk.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Chenchu tribe has lived in isolated hilly settlements and remote and inaccessible forests for centuries, it has suffered a degree of exclusion from government development programmes. Initiatives in reaching infrastructure, education, healthcare, potable water and sanitation facilities



to the community have neither been sufficient nor very successful. Thus the Chenchu community has, for many years, remained outside the realm of the Government’s constitutional safeguards.

### ***Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Srisailam***

Keeping in mind the challenges involved in both implementation and administration of constitutional policies, programmes and laws, GoAP set up the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Srisailam. The agency was established with the objective of improving the socio-economic condition, infrastructure, accessibility and awareness about the various government schemes and entitlements leading to elimination of poverty, unemployment, migration, displacement, indebtedness and lack of livelihood opportunities.

<sup>2</sup>Source: Census 2001

The ITDA Srisailam was established in 1975-76 with its headquarters at Hyderabad. The headquarters was later shifted from Hyderabad to Srisailam during 1988 as Srisailam is more centrally located for the Chenchu communities in Nallamalai hills. The ITDA acts as a nodal agency for the development of the Chenchu community. So far, ITDA Srisailam has taken up many development schemes covering:

- Provision of basic amenities like drinking water, housing, electrification etc.
- Education
- Agriculture
- Recognition of Forest Rights (RoFR)
- Livelihood

The ITDA is chaired by a Project Officer and has a team of sector experts with strong network of implementing agents at district, mandal, village and habitation levels.

## **The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**

Article 21 of The Constitution of India - "Protection of Life and Personal Liberty" - assures a citizen the right to live with human dignity, and to be free from exploitation. And to live with dignity, a citizen must have access to a means of livelihood that provides the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education. Government of India has been implementing various programs to provide opportunities for growth to rural communities. Initiatives such as National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Scheme, Jawahar Rojgar Yojna, Employment Assurance Scheme, Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojna were launched at various points in time for the purpose of improving the quality of life of the rural citizenry but met with limited success.

The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** (MGNREGA) was enacted in 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage of 120 per day at 2009 prices. It provides assured employment and guaranteed wage benefits to the rural community and marks a paradigm shift from earlier employment generation schemes with its provision of rights-based framework for wage employment and demand-driven objectives. The MGNREGS is the largest employment programme in Indian history.

## **The three basic objectives of MGNREGS are:**

- Provision of employment
- Development of natural resources
- Capacity building enhancement through inclusive growth

Not only does the scheme provide employment opportunities to landless labourers, it also helps in creation of resources in situ through construction of roads, ponds, wells, irrigation canals and other water conservation activities along with afforestation. The scheme is being implemented through the gram panchayats to avoid middlemen.

The scheme has been implemented in a phased manner covering 200 most backward districts in first phase, 130 additional districts in second phase and remaining 285 rural districts of India in the third phase, thereby covering 615 districts in all. Proper planning and a focussed approach has helped this programme in successfully reaching the grassroots.

## **The intervention**

The Chenchu tribe has been suffering from many societal ills including low life expectancy, low literacy rate, extreme poverty and increased rate of migration for livelihoods.

The objective of any successful Intervention is to incorporate a working culture. It must enhance livelihood and income-generating activities among the tribe and thereby reduce migration. The earlier Interventions had seen limited success and so migration was widely prevalent in the tribal community. Though there are many reasons, the primary one identified was the lack of livelihood options being provided.

### ***Regular programs by ITDA***

So far, 5013 houses have been sanctioned to the Chenchu community excluding 1158 houses sanctioned under the Conservation Cum Development Project (CCDP) program. Initiatives to provide drinking water have been taken up on a large scale and also electrification of 293 Chenchu habitations out of a total of 340 habitations.

Currently, there are 122 Government Primary School (GPS) schools in the agency area wherein 1493 students have been enrolled. ITDA has provided a total of 122 Chenchu teachers, one each for a school. Apart from GPS, 34 Tribal Welfare Ashram School (TWAS) with strength of 4848 students, 6 mini-gurukulam schools with strength of 893 students and 5 residential schools with strength of 2379 students exist in the area. In total, more than

10,000 students have been enrolled in different educational institutions set up by the ITDA.

ITDA has established 41 Public Health Centres (PHC), 7 Community Health and Nutrition Clusters (CHNC) and 2 area hospitals. Also, as of now, 300 ASHA (Chenchu women) have been trained and posted in all 340 habitations, and 29,500 bed nets have been supplied.

For the promotion of agriculture in the area, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) has distributed 1678 acres of land to 1006 households. Under RoFR, 7380 acres and 1008 acres have been distributed to 2360 individuals and 212 individuals in first and second phase respectively.

Apart from this, a special agency G.C.C. was set up by GoAP in 1956 with the aim of improving the socio economic conditions of this tribe to improve their livelihood options. It was established with following objectives:

- To ensure procurement of NTFP collected by Chenchu tribe and giving a fair price for same.
- To ensure the supply of essential commodities under the PDS and other daily requirements (DR) at reasonable prices to tribal consumers through a network of DR sales depots.
- To provide short-term credit to the tribal farmers for their seasonal agricultural operations.

### ***NREGS Chenchu Special project***

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme - Chenchu Special project was launched in ITDA Srisailam during May 2009. The project was introduced to address the alarming rates of migration of Chenchu members to cities in search of livelihoods. The projects that were successful in other parts of the country were not as successful in Chenchu areas because the issues facing them were unique.

NREGS Chenchu Special Project was designed in such a way as to focus on the root cause of the issue i.e. ensuring livelihood opportunities in the local area to improve their income and prevent migration.

The usual procedures of NREGS were especially customized such that the Chenchu tribe benefitted the most. The major modifications that were done include:

- Fixed wage employment throughout the year whereas NREGS ensured only 100 days of wage employment.
- No advance wage payments are usually made to beneficiaries in NREGS while here 50% of the wage component is released to Chenchu beneficiaries as an advance to meet their expenses and keep them engaged within the project.
- NREGS provides for only monetary payments for work carried out. In this project, food baskets were given in exchange of wage amount to tackle starvation.
- With NREGS, most wage payments are generally transferred to bank accounts of the beneficiaries and the payments are often delayed. In this project, wages was paid in cash on time through local Village Organizations (VOs).
- Land allotted to Chenchu farmers was hardly being put into use due to inhospitable terrain and unavailability of water. Through this project, land development programmes have been taken up which have made the land suitable for agriculture. The agriculture operations are now an added source of revenue for the beneficiaries.
- All work allotted under NREGS has been carried out in the local area, thereby preventing migration.

### ***Customized NREGS project***

NREGS Chenchu Special Project did not follow the NREGS guidelines that have been implemented across the country. The procedures and guidelines were customized to address the issues faced here. The features, which made the project a remedy for the pains of the Chenchu tribe, have been summarised below:

- An assured amount of Rs. 2200 per month given to each Chenchu wage seeker working for 15 days in a month, throughout the year.
- Employment given to the wage seeker throughout the year
- The wage payments released with no delay and the work usually started immediately after issue of orders.
- 50% advance payment of wages to encourage participation.
- A dedicated project management team with a strong network of field team that reached the remotest of the villages and habitations, including deep interior areas of forests and hills.

### ***Monitoring system***

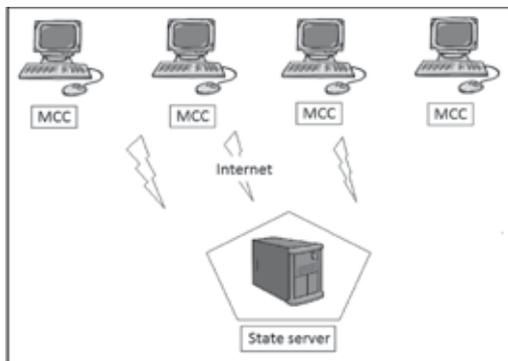
#### ***Information and Communication Technology Level 4***

The process delivery of NREGS is completely technology driven. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has been appointed for managing the web portal ([nrega.ap.gov.in](http://nrega.ap.gov.in)) where progress reports are reflected on a daily basis. The NREGS process - job card delivery, estimate generation, issue of work orders, release of funds for the project - is processed through the

fully integrated software application called Rastra Grameena Abhivridhi Samacharam (RAGAS).

Mandal Computer Centres (MCC) have been established in mandals which have computer systems with internet facility. Each centres act as a facilitation centre and hub for the process at mandal-level. The progress is recorded and reviewed through the state-level-server, which captures the progress in web reports.

The layout of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) system of NREGS may be as follows:



Picture 3: Layout of ICT system of NREGS

The server gathers the information uploaded at each MCC and the data thus collected is used for analysis. The analysis produces useable information in the form of web reports which are updated on a daily basis.

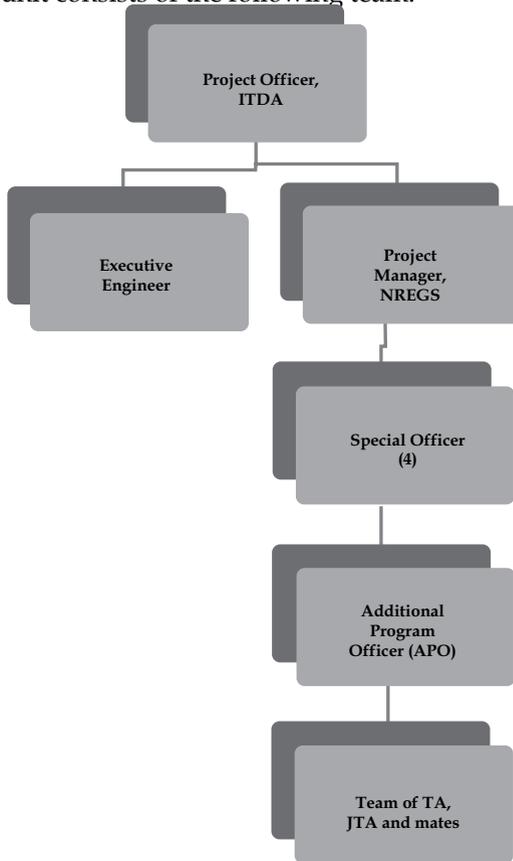


Picture 4: A snapshot of the web portal showing NREGS Chenchu Special Project progress reports

The web reports describe the progress of the project on a day-to-day basis in the form of wage seekers enrolled, wage payment status (estimated cost, payment made), man days created, coverage of habitations, job card registered, work status (number sanctioned, number in progress, number completed) etc. The information available is at state level, which can be drilled down upto habitation-level for micro-analysis and close monitoring.

## Project monitoring unit

A Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) has been established at ITDA for the close monitoring of the project's implementation and to review its progress. The unit consists of the following team:



Picture 5: PMU, NREGS at ITDA Srisailam

## *Challenges faced*

There were several challenges to the successful implementation of the project. Some of the major ones were:

- Most of the habitations were located deep within forest areas making it difficult for the group to mobilize them
- Alcoholism was very high among Chenchu which hampered work
- Low availability of the local educated youth for the implementation. involvement of local youth was important to mobilize the community
- Most of the Chenchu habitations are located in forest area where permission from the local forest department is required for any Intervention.
- General rates as per the NREGS Act did not work out in this project area as hilly terrains offer low opportunities for work. Furthermore, the long distances involved increases the transportation costs. This resulted in private suppliers/service providers not showing much interest at current allowable rates.
- The project needed close co-ordination between ITDA, Srisailam and local forest department. But the level of dedication shown towards the project was not equal on all the sides and thus, the project was delayed or suffered in certain cases.
- Low interest among Chenchu community for work other than land development due to lack of working culture.
- Cell phone network is not available in interior habitations, which prevented implementation of IT based monitoring systems such as e-muster.

## *Strength of the project*

Despite various challenges that were faced by the implementing and monitoring teams, the project succeeded to a large extent. This was mainly due to certain strengths:

- The major strength of the project was in creating livelihood options locally.
- Advance payments attracted higher number of beneficiaries.
- As only land development tasks were initiated, nature of work was not very complicated and involved low manual labour, which ultimately suited the tribal culture.
- The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) were homogeneous i.e. all members belonged to the same community and thus proved to be an added benefit for the project.
- Extension programmes were conducted for creating awareness about the NREGS projects.
- Conversion of existing SHGs into fixed labour groups through provision of wage and employment throughout the year helped functioning
- Live demonstrations were given by the subject experts for the

development of the land as an additional source of income to enhance their livelihood.

- Regular and robust monitoring system, which included IT based Interventions and MIS reports updated on a daily basis.
- Project strategy developed ensured the ownership and control of Chenchu community over the project.
- Supplementing schemes like supply of food baskets to communities, where the food items were generally not available in the vicinity, provided physical well-being to carry out labour-oriented activities under the project.

### ***Impact***

- The project resulted in significant upliftment of the living standards of Chenchu tribe.
- The physical strength and health of the community members has improved to a large extent as a result of regular labour and increased food intake facilitated by higher income and better nutritional intake through the food basket scheme.
- With the community's adults largely involved in NREGS work, their alcohol consumption has reduced to a large extent.
- Prior to NREGS Chenchu Special Project, adults of the community would take their children for NTFP collection or other income generating activities. NREGS staff now regularly visit the Chenchu habitations and motivate them to send their children to school. Education level is thus rising among the youth as a result of increased school attendance.
- Assured paid employment has reduced migration to a great extent.
- Increase in purchasing power.
- Increased exposure to technology such as Television, mobile phones and resultant awareness of the outer world through such media.
- Better access to health facilities and use of NREGS team vehicles in case of emergency.
- Community members have started visiting cities and other areas for leisure and shopping;
- Chenchu tribe have been traditionally inhibited in their interactions with the government officials. Frequent visit by NREGS team and addressing the issues raised in a timely manner has developed a comfortable rapport for community members to approach and discuss their issues freely.

### ***Food basket scheme***

It was observed during the initial periods of the project that the wage amount received by the Chenchu beneficiaries was mostly spent on liquor and other social vices. Many male Chenchu members were affected with diseases like TB. Considering the gravity of the situation, a Food Basket Scheme has been introduced. This basket contains nutritious food items

like red gram, wheat flour, turmeric powder, chilli powder, ground nut oil or coconut oil. The scheme has been so far successful in tackling liquor consumption and diseases like tuberculosis.'

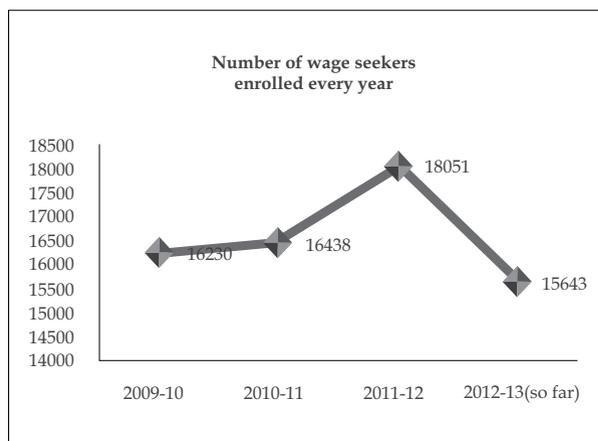
Picture 6: Distribution of food baskets to chenchu community members



### *Progress so far*

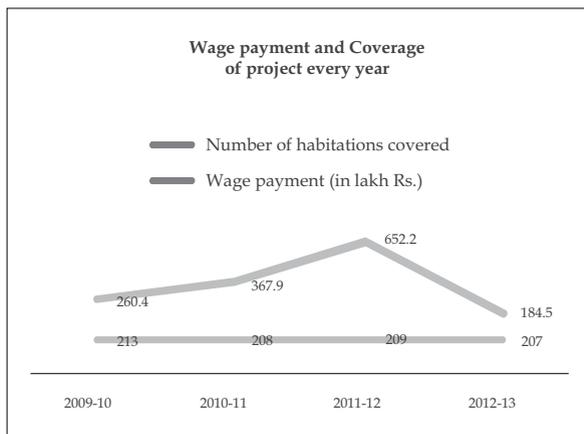
Till now, through the NREGS Chenchu Special Project, approximately 6000 households have been provided with at least 100 days of wage employment through the program.

Picture 7: Number of wage seekers enrolled every year



Payment progress for the wage disbursement and the habitations covered by the project so far are as follows:

Picture 8: Payment progress and coverage of project every year



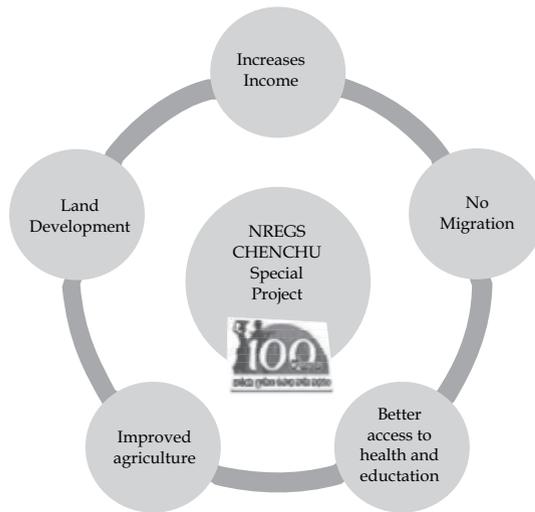
Following table gives the district wise details of the yearly habitation coverage by the project.

Table 2: District wise yearly coverage of habitations

S. No.	Year	Habitations covered				
		Mahabubnagar	Kurnool	Guntur	Prakasham	Total
1	2009-10	88	28	37	60	213
2	2010-11	88	28	37	55	208
3	2011-12	90	31	36	52	209
4	2012-13 (so far)	90	31	36	50	207

### ***Sustainability***

The project gives assurance of wage employment throughout the year to willing wage seekers. Land development activities followed by farming on the land create livelihood assets for the community. This ensures sustainable income generation for the community. It also gives enough time to Chenchu to practice their traditional way of life. The project has become well-known not only within the Chenchu tribe but also other government departments for its effective implementation.



Picture 9: NREGS Chenchu Special Project: Sustainability component

## Conclusion

Despite the Chenchu community members not being open towards government Interventions and officials, NREGS Chenchu Special Project has attained remarkable success in upliftment of their living standards. The success of the project cannot be attributed to a single factor or a single stakeholder. The deviation of the project guidelines from the normal NREGS guidelines, dedication of the implementation team, IT Intervention, strong monitoring system, cooperation of Chenchu community members and many other factors have contributed to project success. Though the project targeted improving the livelihood of the beneficiaries, it has also made significant contribution to the improvement of social status, health standards and education level of the community. Children go to school, nutrition level of the people has improved, alcohol consumption has been reduced to a large extent and they now have mobile phones, TV other assets that are increasing their awareness of outside world.

As it is said, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The project has been a single step by the GoAP towards the upliftment of one of the most vulnerable groups of the country i.e. the tribal community. However, it's still a long journey to achieve the successful upliftment of various other groups that are on the verge of extinction. Tribals are the most vulnerable of our communities and the preservation of their culture while providing opportunities for livelihood through the Interventions is what the tribal community needs. There are hundreds of development schemes and programmes initiated in every region of the country, but

to what extent their strategies are customized to suit the needs of the vulnerable groups, still remains a question.

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