

# Rajasthan tribals' struggle for indigenous practices highlighted at U.N. event

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The tribal communities in southern Rajasthan have utilised their indigenous agricultural practices to survive during the pandemic and embraced an intelligent food management after this year's rabi crop harvesting. The pandemic has immensely affected their livelihood and economy.

The struggle of the tribal population to preserve their indigenous practices and the challenges of survival amid malnourishment, weather variability and resource losses were highlighted at a side event at the U.N. High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held earlier this week. Its emphasis was on "tribal voices" which could deliver the best solutions.

The event, organised with an online participation of experts, was dedicated to the theme, "Indigenous solutions to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) with accelerated actions." Experts gave several suggestions for ensuring a better association of indigenous communities with natural resources, including seed, water and soil.

Increased commercialisation

Jayesh Joshi, secretary of the Banswara-based Vaagdhara, which works on tribal livelihood issues, said at the event the tribals were pioneers of Gandhian Swaraj and had all the solutions to achieve the SDGs. "Increased commercialisation is responsible for disturbing indigenous practices, leading to inequalities and new challenges," he said.

Mr. Joshi said the development of the tribal-dominated region was adversely affected by the factors such as low productivity caused by soil erosion, malnourishment, climate change, poorly managed rainfed farming, loss of resources and fast reducing biodiversity.

The tribal communities in Banswara, Dungarpur and Udaipur districts earlier had a forest resource-based livelihood, but the large-scale deforestation forced them to shift to farming activities on a sloping land and caused degradation of land.

Poverty, hunger eradication

Gandhian scholar Sudarshan Iyengar said the first two SDGs — poverty eradication and hunger eradication — could be achieved through the concepts of Swadeshi and Gram Swaraj. Gagan Sethi of Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (RRAN) laid emphasis on empowerment of tribal communities to decide and allocate resources according to their indigenous needs.

The event, attended by over 100 participants, recommended strengthening of livelihood scenario for tribal communities by connecting missing links of resource management in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, pasture and medicinal products. The experts also suggested promoting climate-resilient integrated farming systems in the tribal areas.

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