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Human Development of the Tribal communities in Kodagu and its institutional linkages

Sham N Kashyap

Chandrika Shetty

Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement,

Ca-2, Kiadb Industrial Housing Area, Hebbal Ring Road Mysore, Karnataka, India

Abstract

The human development status of the tribal population of Kodagu in dire contrast to its impressive overall district figures displays the unique disposition of these communities. Isolated by inaccessible physical terrains, low penetration of infrastructure and health services in rural areas, lack of land ownership and political voice and unique mainstreaming challenges, sizeable portion of Kodagu's tribal communities continue to delve at the bottom of the human development ladder. This paper argues that local institutions matter and are to be understood not just on the basis of conformity of their structure against prescribed norms, but against the backdrop of their expected role in boosting the status of human development of local tribal communities.

This paper analyses the status of human development of scheduled tribes in Kodagu using a comparative approach. It provides an overview of the government efforts for the development of tribal communities and highlights issues related to local governance, which hinder the overall human development of the district's tribal population. While empirically analysing the specific areas for improvement in the areas of education, health, livelihood and governance that hasten tribal human development, the paper contributes to the conceptual understanding of how local de-jure inclusive institutions like PRIs¹ and bureaucracy contribute to the human development of tribal communities in the district. The secondary data for the paper is based on the district human development report of Kodagu, whereas primary data is derived from personal interviews with tribal communities and leaders, government officials and local plantation owners.

Keywords: *Human Development, Tribal Development, Institutionalism, participatory development, Panchayat Raj Institutions.*

Introduction: The human development paradigm views development as the expansion of choices, capacities and freedoms of people to lead the life they value to its fullest. It goes

¹ Panchayat Raj Institutions

beyond just the few indicators of economic development and expands the scope of development to include other necessary elements of holistic human development like education, health and livelihoods (Haq 1996). Measuring the status of human development in a particular area includes assessing the levels of education, health and livelihoods of its people, in a way that can be used to compare with other regions and other communities (Fukuda-Parr 2003). The human development paradigm can also address gaps and help in calibrating policy and implementation to address the specific issues in the diverse areas of development, that were often considered to be taken care of, if economic progress was ensured (Anand and Ravallion 1993; Spence and Deneulin 2009).

It can be seen that institutions which “are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” substantially impact the way human development is realized and sustained in any society (North 1990, 3). For example, the institution of bureaucracy substantially influences outcomes related to service delivery in developing countries like student enrolment or provision of ration cards (Deva 1986). Similarly, institutions like Self Help Groups, Banks, local governments, markets, regulatory regimes, caste and clans influence the possibilities and choices individuals make in attaining their desired goals in life. It is agreed that institutions are important and that effective institutions (like secure property rights) provide suitable signals and opportunities for individuals to thrive (Bardhan 2005). However, developing economies have diverse institutions (like caste, the state, markets, Panchayat Raj Institutions, bureaucracy etc) which are often overtaken by conflicting agency problems and have differential influence on individual actions, based on the nature of state-society relationships in the area (Migdal 1988).

Interventions for the development of marginalized communities (like the forest dependent tribes) that do not explicitly recognize the role of social, economic and political institutions in the processes of planning and implementation may fail in achieving their objectives. Further, ignoring them may also lead to the capture of the de-jure inclusive institutions as well and perpetuate the hegemony of the powerful as often noted in literature, with respect to grassroots institutions like Panchayat Raj Institutions (Manor 1999; Platteau 2004; Rajashekhar, Babu, and Manjula 2011). Thus it is necessary to understand the roles, effectiveness and mechanisms of how these diverse institutions affect human development outcomes in an area. This understanding would help to achieve and sustain inclusive human development of our communities. This paper aims to explore these issues in the district of Kodagu in Karnataka which offers unique contrasts with respect to the different components of human development.

Kodagu, (also known as Coorg) is a picturesque hilly district, located in the south-western region of Karnataka. Being the smallest district of the state, the land of Kodagu blessed with exceptionally beautiful natural landscapes. The region is well suited for the cultivation of many high valued plantation crops like Coffee, oranges, black pepper and cardamom. The district is driven by a thriving rural, commercial plantation based economy, supplemented by incomes from tourism. The district’s human development status is better than most other districts in the state in terms of indicators of performance in education,

health and livelihoods. However, the development status of the tribal population of Kodagu in dire contrast to its impressive overall figures. Kodagu's tribal communities continue to delve at the bottom of the human development ladder. Their human development status is often worse off than other low performing districts in the state. Further, Kodagu also demonstrates a unique mix of features: a largely rural population dependent on commercial plantations and forests, skewed resource distribution and an economy which is influenced by global markets but with limited commonalities with the economy of the rest of the state (Kodagu ZP and GOK 2014).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section provides the summary of the human development status of the tribal population of Kodagu, contrasting it with other marginalized communities and the overall district. It further provides a snapshot of other supplementary factors that influence the human development status of its tribal population. The next section focusses on the linkages between human development status of the tribal communities and two important institutions that operate within the district. The paper concludes with a section that discusses the repercussions of the analysis on reforms within institutions can be strengthened. Unless otherwise stated, the secondary data for the paper is sourced from the Kodagu District Human Development Report 2014, published by Kodagu Zilla Panchayat and Government of Karnataka. Primary data for the paper is derived from personal interviews with tribal communities and leaders, government officials and local plantation owners.

A snapshot of human development in Kodagu: In terms of Human Development Index, Kodagu was ranked at the 3rd position in 1991 and 4th in 2001 (GOK 2005). Kodagu's niche in the tourism map of India is a unique blend of its landscape interspersed with forests and coffee plantations and the culture of the Kodavas. Kodagu's economy is driven by agriculture, specifically its Coffee plantations together with its other valuable commercial crops. Kodagu produces 1/3rds of the nation's Coffee. More than 25% of the land under Coffee in India is found in Kodagu. Kodagu is also known for its honey, spices and timber from its forests. A new option for supplementing livelihoods in Kodagu is tourism.

Roughly one third (1,34,597 hectares) of the total geographical area in the district is covered with forests. Total land under agriculture forms about 37% of the total available land in the district. There are four major forest areas located within Kodagu: Rajiv Gandhi National Park (Nagarahole), Pushpagiri, Talakaveri and Brahmagiri Hills Wildlife Sanctuary. The forest belt of Kodagu is part of the Nilgiri Biodiversity Reserve and forms a crucial link in carbon fixation, regulating rainfall and weather patterns in the entire South Karnataka region.

Average literacy rate of Kodagu in 2011 was 82.61%. The average literacy level of the district is better than the State-level literacy rate in all the categories like male-female, urban-rural, etc. However, literacy rate of the district in 2011, is 2.39% less than the state target of 85%, as specified in the 11th Five Year Plan. The Net Enrolment Rate of the

district, in Government Primary schools during the year 2011-12 was about 90% and no noticeable gender difference was found in enrolment rates.

The last decade (2001- 2011) witnessed negligible decadal growth rate of population (1.09%) in the district, whereas the state's decadal growth rate was 15.67%. In 2011, Kodagu's share in the total population of the state was just 0.91%. Kodagu is also the district with the least population density (135 people per sq Km) in the state (319 people per sq. Km). It has the highest proportion of rural population (85.39%) in the state and is considerably higher than that of the state figures of 61.33%.

Kodagu has a healthy sex-ratio in terms of both its population (1019) as well as 0-6 sex ratio (978). Based on decadal comparisons, Kodagu's sex ratio is improving (both population and 0 – 6 sex ratios), in contrast to the national figures of decreasing 0-6 sex ratio. In absolute terms, the 0 – 6 population of Kodagu is witnessing a decline between successive census years. Between 2001 and 2011, there was a reduction in 0 – 6 population of the district by 21.33%. Hence, the population pyramid of the district is quite different from that of the state. While 62.86% of the population of Karnataka is below 35 years, this ratio is 57.39% for Kodagu. It has a higher proportion of working age population in comparison to Karnataka (69% in contrast to 67.6%) and hence, the dependency ratio (number of dependents per 100 working age population) is also lower in Kodagu (45) compared to that of Karnataka (48).

Kodagu's Gross District Domestic Product, per-capita was Rs 68,965 in 2008-09. It was higher comparison to the state average of Rs 53,101. The primary sector's share in the district economy was 47% in comparison to the state-wide figure of 17%. The important components of the primary sector in Kodagu are Coffee plantations and forestry. The contribution of the secondary sector was 11% (in contrast to the state average of 30%). The GDDP grew at the cumulative annual compound growth rate of 6.81% with the primary sector registering the highest rate of 9.63%.

Coffee is the major commercial crop in the district, spread over an area of about 1 lakh hectares. Paddy is the principle food crop and traditional crop of the region, cultivated on an average of 37,000 hectares every year in the district. Other major crops from Kodagu are: Oranges, Cardamom, Black Pepper, Ginger, Areca, Rubber, Coco and Cashew. Jackfruit and honey are other major agro-forestry products from Kodagu. Tourism forms another major economic activity in the region. Together with tourists visiting the birthplace of Kaveri and other temples, Kodagu is famous for its scenic spots and waterfalls, which is supplemented by homestays within coffee plantations. The low possibility of mechanization in Coffee plantations, the demand for labour and high wages invite substantial wage labour in Kodagu, which results in seasonal and permanent migration of labourers across the district. Labourers from neighbouring districts, Tamil Nadu and North India are common in the coffee plantations of Kodagu. Local businesses and service sector witness migrants from Kerala as well. The influx of such 'outsiders' has resulted in various debates related to cultural identities, security issues and vote-bank politics.

The average land holding size in Kodagu is about 2.39 hectares. Marginal and small land holders make up 65.4% of the total cultivators in the district and own 22.49% of the land whereas large farmers form 3.14% of the total cultivators and also own 22.5% of the total agricultural land. It can be concluded that although the per-capita domestic product of the district is higher in comparison to the state average, the district offers limited livelihood choices within its primary sector for its citizens for gainful employment and livelihood opportunities. Further, the skew in land distribution and major dependence of the economy on plantations indicate large income disparity in the district. Hence, migration of out of Kodagu has also been frequently noted.

Human Development status of Scheduled Tribes in Kodagu: Scheduled Tribes (STs) form 10.47% of Kodagu's population. Their proportion of population is higher in Kodagu in comparison to the state (6.97%). Kodagu is home to forest dependent tribes such as Yerava, Kudiya, Jenu Kuruba, Kadu Kuruba, and Soliga. Much of the tribal population live within forests or in resettled colonies in interior rural areas. The dependence on forests for Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) is substantial among these communities. Kodagu also has dispersed settlements of three specific nomadic communities: Golla, Haavaadiga and Hakkipikki (Kodagu ZP and GOK 2014).

Together with traditional barriers against such marginalized communities elsewhere in the state and the nation, the district also faces unique challenges of its own, in guaranteeing good human development status for STs. Almost 97% of the district's ST population is concentrated in rural areas. The hilly and thickly forested terrain, lack of penetration of private infrastructure and the isolated regions of their habitation make the provision of health and sanitation, basic infrastructure and diverse choice of livelihoods difficult for these communities.

There is a lack of disaggregated, social category-wise data related to all the indicators of human development at the district level and below (Kodagu ZP and GOK 2014). Hence, the paper makes use of available local and census data and contextualizes it within the district to understand the status quo of tribal human development in the district.

The highest proportion of ST population in the district is found in Virajpet taluk (19.61% of the total population). The taluk-wise educational profiles (at the primary and secondary education levels) show that Virajpet, consistently underperforms in comparison to other taluks of the district. It has the lowest literacy rate in the district (79.62%). Female literacy rate is also lowest in Virajpet. These statistics indicate the lower levels of literacy among the STs in the district in comparison to other social categories. The out of school children's proportion in Lower Primary school level in the district during 2011-12 was 2.73%. The percentage was the highest in Virajpet taluk with 12.52%. The out of school children's rate at Higher Primary School level is highest in Virajpet taluk (16.2%) and more among girls (18.2%) than boys (13.6%). At the high school level, the proportion of out of school children in Virajpet reaches to 22.2%. School drop-out rates among ST girls was 11.6% during the year 2010-11 in Virajpet. Further, the low proportion of enrolment of ST students

in 9th and 10th (6%) in the district indicates that a major portion of ST students miss out the opportunities for secondary school education in the district. It is clear from this analysis that there is a need to focus more on the primary and secondary education of scheduled tribes. The district human development report also documents that the availability of infrastructure as well as per-capita expenditure on education in the taluk are also the lowest in the district. The health profile of STs shows similar trends. Decadal growth rates among these categories show that ST population grew by 25.89% (the highest growth rate of 31.62% in Virajpet) in the years 2001 – 2011 whereas the SC population grew by 9.14%. There was a 2.79% reduction in the population of Others (the highest reduction of 7.06% in Virajpet) during the same period. The line listing of maternal deaths in Kodagu in the years 2010-11 to 2012-13 (3 years) shows that in absolute and proportional terms, the maternal mortality among STs was highest among the different social categories. The analysis of line listing of infant deaths also showed that STs had disproportionately high infant deaths in comparison to their population proportions.

Table 1: Social Patterns in the line listing of maternal and infant deaths in Kodagu

<i>Social Category</i>	<i>Maternal Deaths (2010-2012)</i>	<i>Proportion</i>	<i>Infant Deaths (2010-11)</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
<i>SC</i>	2	6%	20	15%
<i>ST</i>	13	42%	40	29%
<i>Muslims</i>	7	23%	18	13%
<i>Others</i>	9	29%	58	43%
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>		<i>136</i>	

Source: Kodagu District Human Development Report - 2014

Analysis of the causes of maternal deaths among the 31 cases showed more than 2/3rds of the maternal deaths reported may have happened due to preventable reasons. 53% of the ST deaths occurred either at home or during transit to locations outside the district (Mysore/Mangalore). The lack of emergency obstetric care in the district may have aggravated the vulnerability of mothers especially those belonging to the ST category, who have to travel a considerable distance, even to get to the modest health infrastructure available in the urban centres of the district.

The analysis of line listing of infant deaths yields similar results. Among infant death cases in the ST category, almost half the infant deaths cases in 2010 occurred due to complications related to low birth weight or premature birth and about 1/3rds of the deaths were due to Sepsis and respiratory complications. Among infant deaths in STs, 43% of infant deaths have occurred at homes, and after one month of child birth, without institutional medical intervention. The coverage of infants and mothers through the nutrition programmes of the Dept. of Women and Child Development is roughly about 53% and 47% of the population of infants and mothers respectively, showing that voluntary health seeking behaviour among tribal communities has limited success. Increasing the coverage of these

services, especially in the tribal areas, specifically of pregnant and lactating women is vital for ST communities, considering the number of maternal and infant deaths that can be related to under-nutrition.

The disproportionately high incidences of infant and maternal deaths among the ST communities and the lack of health seeking behaviour among them are clearly causes of concern in Kodagu. An integrated approach, covering aspects of sanitation, nutrition, safe lifestyles, efficient ante-natal and post-natal care health seeking behaviour and provision of emergency medical services locally is needed that targets the ST community specifically. It emerges that special attention has to be provided to improving health infrastructure and coverage in Virajpet taluk of the district.

While sanitation coverage in Kodagu is impressive in comparison to other districts in the state, with an overall coverage of 81.43% of households (Census 2011). Similarly, 61% of Gram Panchayats in Kodagu have won the Nirmala Grama Puraskar awards by eliminating open defecation. However, field visits to tribal colonies and hamlets confirmed that close to 80% of the visited tribal households did not have access to individual household latrines. Together with these health concerns, private medical doctors and government medical officers in the district opine that life style related diseases like Cirrhosis and Liver failure (caused due to Alcohol abuse) are becoming more and more alarming among ST communities leading to distress for the entire household.

Disparities in living conditions across the district continues in patterns of housing conditions as well. The percentage of SC and ST households who live in good houses are well short of the overall district figures. 41.1 % of the SCs have access to good households while only 33.92 ST households have access to good houses compared to the district average of 56.58%, a shortfall of approximately 15% and 23% respectively. Field visits and interaction with tribal groups indicated that there are a significant number of tribal households who are yet to get the ‘hakku pathra’ (title-deeds) for their land and the data shows that more than 10% of the tribes in rural areas are living in dilapidated houses.

Kodagu displays a highly skewed distribution of land ownership. The table below provides classification of landholdings based on social classes of the land holders. It shows the inequality of land distribution among the different social classes, with the scheduled tribes owning the least amount of resource base in the district (both in terms of number of landholders and the area of land held). SC and ST communities in the district amount to 13.27% and 10.47% of the total population of the district respectively. However, in terms of land ownership, they together form about 5.75% of the total landholders in the district, totally owning about 1.75% of the total agricultural land in the district.

Table 2: Social Patterns of Land Ownership in Kodagu

Taluk	Scheduled caste		Scheduled tribes		Others		Total landholders	
	Count	Area	Count	Area	Count	Area	Count	Area
Madikeri	339 (1.68%)	240.10 (0.50%)	497 (2.47%)	577.74 (1.20%)	19325 (95.85%)	47370.43 (98.30%)	20161	48188.27
Somwarpet	2012 (7.76%)	1488.61 (2.97%)	363 (1.40%)	250.89 (0.50%)	23560 (90.84%)	48379 (96.53%)	25935	50118.50
Virajpet	472 (2.07%)	289.10 (0.42%)	281 (1.23%)	152.34 (0.22%)	22032 (96.70%)	69113.53 (99.37%)	22785	69554.97
District	2823 (4.10%)	2017.81 (1.20%)	1141 (1.66%)	980.97 (0.58%)	64917 (94.25%)	164863 (98.21%)	68881	167861.74

Source: Kodagu District Human Development Report - 2014

Poverty is closely related to ownership of assets, employment status and caste and it can be seen that, in the case of STs, 97% of whom are based in rural areas, land is the main income generating asset. The lack of own land proves a considerable handicap for the landless since only labour and its price (wage rate) determine their income status. Most STs are thus dependent on such wages available in Coffee plantations and other agricultural activities for income generation.

With the perceived shortage of labour in Coffee plantations, plantation labour is in high demand during the peak seasons. There is temporary migration of agricultural labour from neighbouring districts during such times. Further, migration into Kodagu from various locations across India affects the wage prospects of tribal labourers. Based on such fluctuating demands, agricultural wages for non-permanent plantation workers in Kodagu goes through varied phases depending on the coffee cultivation cycle and the type of work. During the picking season, agricultural wages raise to more than Rs 500 per day, while skilled labour wages may reach up to Rs 1000 per day, depending on the urgency of the work and the supply of workers. Thus, it is true that during the peak seasons, Kodagu provides some of the highest wages for the agricultural labourers in the state. However, considerable amount of agricultural land is also involved in cultivation of paddy and other non-plantation crops in the district which provide lesser wages. Therefore, the average agricultural wages in the district is considerably lesser than the peak wage rates.

Although tribal labourers are much more efficient and skilled than any other labourers and are highly preferred, their lifestyle and existing practices do not allow them to move up the social ladder. Discussions with planters reveal that a tribal family cannot be expected to work for more than 3 days in a week irrespective of the wages given to them, since they would be inebriated during the rest of the days. While planters condone the vice of alcoholism among tribal labour, they encourage it in some cases to attract labourers. Due to their lifestyle choices and lack of effective public health infrastructure, tribal labour families are frequently ill which takes a significant toll on their income levels leading them into perpetual indebtedness.

However, labourers express that plantation labour is a dead end job in itself because, although the wages are pretty good, the labourers do not see any growth and possibility of moving up in the social ladder. For example, although working as permanent labourers provides job security, at the end of 20 years of work, the family can hardly save enough to own a piece of land for themselves. The complex land rights regime in Kodagu, the booming real estate prices and the challenges faced by small farmers in Kodagu provide significant obstacles for labourers to 'move out of their class'.

The data from this section shows that the tribal communities of Kodagu are faced with the unique challenges. On one hand, they are landless, lack diverse employment opportunities, but have higher wage rates. However, the land and labour market regime in Kodagu does not allow them to invest their surplus income from plantation wages to tangible income generating assets. Together with grossly trailing indicators of education and health, such limited livelihoods prospects of tribal communities indicate that human development of tribal communities in Kodagu will take place only with active government interventions across different social.

Government initiatives for development of vulnerable groups: Recognizing the vulnerability of the tribal communities in the district, special focus has been given to the issue of tribal development in the district. The Integrated Tribal Development Project is the nodal agency the development of tribal populations in the district and works for the cause of bringing tribal communities to the mainstream, by targeted social, economic and educational interventions. Major intervention sectors of the ITDP in Kodagu include education (provision of hostels and scholarships), Housing and water supply for tribal hamlets and colonies, agriculture and allied activities (including soil conservation, animal husbandry and horticulture), provision of food and nutrition security and forest based activities. There are three LAMPS (Large sized Adivasi Multi-Purpose Co-operative Societies) in the district that aim towards the improvement of economic and financial conditions of the tribal communities. Anthyodaya cards are issued for forest dependent tribal communities and special nutritious food is provided to prevent under-nutrition among these communities (Jenu Kuruba, Yerava, Kadu Kuruba, Soliga and Kudiya tribes) during the rainy season. Special tribal development schemes for backward tribes are implemented to provide infrastructure like roads and drainages to tribal hamlets and colonies. While tribal communities have been subject to numerous socio-economic difficulties of resettlement, the provision for ownership of land for tribal communities through the Forest Rights Act (FRA) has been an important legislation towards recognizing tribal rights and guaranteeing sustainable livelihoods and ownership of resources for them. In Kodagu, a total of 3524 applications claiming ownership of forest land have been received out of which 1189 individuals have been provided land deeds (Kodagu ZP and GOK 2014).

Infrastructure for tribal hamlets through Tribal Special Programs (TSP) are implemented through the Zilla Panchayat. Further, Gram Panchayats also are responsible for planning and implementing works that ensure the provision of basic services for tribal communities.

While multiple government agencies and democratic institutions exist for guaranteeing tribal development in the district, the effectiveness of their activities is debatable in the context of the human development status of tribal communities in the district.

Institutional Linkages: The analysis from the previous sections show that the issues of tribal development in Kodagu are deep rooted and require a long term, sustained and stable strategy. For this to be realized, the effective functioning of important local institutions, geared towards equitable development is of utmost importance (Johnson 2001). In this section, analysis of 2 local institutions that could play a vital role in changing the status quo of tribal human development. These institutions are: district bureaucracy and Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Local bureaucrats form the final link of the state's hierarchy and are directly responsible for translating the objectives of the government into reality (Lipsky 1980). Hence, local bureaucracy plays an important role in delivering the schemes and programs of the government. In the case of Kodagu, it is important that this crucial element understands the unique local issues that affect the human development status of STs. It takes time for any bureaucrat serving in other districts to get accustomed to the political environment of the district and understand important development issues in the district. Thus, the possibility of using the existing government schemes innovatively for meeting local development needs is less. Thus, the stability of the bureaucratic leadership in the district is an indicator of how the bureaucracy at the local level could respond to the unique challenges at the local level, through the same tribal development schemes that exist throughout the state. The table below shows the number of people serving in each of the top bureaucratic positions in Kodagu Zilla Panchayat. It shows that there is high volatility in the tenure of officers leading the Zilla Panchayat, which coordinates most of the tribal development programs in the district.

Table 3: Tenure patterns of top bureaucrats in Kodagu

<i>Year</i>	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>	<i>Deputy Secretary</i>	<i>Chief Planning Officer</i>
2008-09	5	4	4
2009-10	2	1	3
2010-11	4	1	1
2011-12	1	1	3
2012-13	2	2	1

Source: Kodagu District Human Development Report - 2014

With frequent changes at the top bureaucratic positions at the district level, it is difficult to expect local need based modifications in the implementation of schemes and works at the local level. More often than not, the tendency then is to follow the rule book, without looking for the ramifications of such actions of the possibility for modifications and

innovations. Thus, bureaucratic stability at the leadership level affects the nature of action at the local level, contributing to a tendency to maintain status quo.

Such inclinations were visible in the discussions with bureaucrats & Gram Panchayat officials implementing these interventions revealed that they followed two main approach towards tribal development. The first was based on reaching targets set by scheme guidelines from above, rather than understanding local needs and demands². The second was to completely rely and follow on the advice of the local elected representatives³. These suggestions, although valid on the principles of democracy, affected the autonomy of the institution of bureaucracy in the district, leading to the possibility of arbitrary outcomes of bureaucratic action frequently seen in rural India (Gupta 2012). The lack of experienced personnel at leadership positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy and the vacancies in district bureaucracy mean that, even in the presence of well-intentioned officials, bureaucracy expected function with ‘embedded, autonomy’ (Evans 2012) failed to substantially change the status quo of tribal communities. In this context, the role of local political institutions was high in influencing the path of development taken in the district. Although the district has vibrant political institutions, their prioritization of tribal development is debatable, as shown in the following analysis.

Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) form the major decentralized governance structures in India, responsible for deepening democracy and delivering various development works at the district level (Aziz 2000). Their role in human development of STs is vital since these institutions are responsible for planning, implementation and monitoring of majority of development works implemented at the district level (GOK 2005). In this context, the political representation of seats from tribal communities is seen as a much needed step for the influencing the state machinery to meet their socio-economic needs (Blair 2000). Reservation roster of seats within the district for marginalized classes proportionate to their population is fixed at the time of election for PRIs and is provided in the table below. The table shows that reservation of seats for STs within the three tiers of the PRI institutions roughly match their population proportions (Kodagu ZP and GOK 2014). Similarly, the reservation for women across the social categories for the three PRI tiers is also shown. From the table, it could be concluded that SC and ST communities as well as women are amply represented in the PRIs, conforming to the legal requirements of PRIs. However, the information from this table has to be interpreted in the context of the existing socio-economic-political relationships between the social classes in the district.

² Based on field notes from visit to Valnur-Tyagathur Gram Panchayat in Somwarpet Taluk in September 2013

³ Based on discussions with Primary School teachers and bureaucrats in Maragodu Gram Panchayat.

Table 4: SC/ST and Women representatives in PRIs in Kodagu

	<i>Representation of different social categories</i>			<i>Women's representation across social categories</i>		
	ZP	TP	GP	ZP	TP	GP
<i>General Seats</i>	52%	51%	40%	53%	48%	41%
<i>Scheduled Castes</i>	14%	12%	14%	50%	67%	61%
<i>Scheduled Tribes</i>	10%	10%	11%	67%	80%	69%
<i>Backward Classes</i>	24%	27%	35%	57%	62%	40%

Source: Kodagu District Human Development Report - 2014

Although controversial, another interpretation from this table could be that the reservations for women is abnormally high in the SC and ST categories in comparison to the general category reservations. It is known that most SCs and STs are landless and are dependent on local plantation owners for their day-to-day livelihood activities. Thus, the possibility of SC and ST women representatives to assert their legitimate influence on the decisions and recommendations of their PRIs, across the entire district seems to be remote. In any case, since the overall representation of STs and SCs in the PRIs amounts to not more than 25%, their chances of influencing popular decisions in the PRIs for the benefit of marginalized remains less, specifically when their interests and that of the powerful are at logger heads.

These tendencies of other voices representing tribal communities were visible in the attitudes of elected representatives of PRIs. If bureaucratic imagination seemed to be limited by the scheme guidelines provided to them, elected representatives and members of PRIs had a strong paternalistic attitude towards tribal development. They viewed the provision of free food supplies, housing and toilets as the most important needs for tribal communities. Even self-help groups of tribal women were viewed only as vehicles to promote alcohol de-addiction messages and provision of loans for emergency family expenditures rather than visualizing tribal empowerment as feasible outcomes. For these elected representatives, the more serious development issues of the district were those directly affecting the landholders: de-listing protected tree varieties that can be cut without permission, stringent enforcement of home-stay permissions, special grants for all time tarred roads, security issues due to immigrant labourers, encroachment of Devara Kadus, problems of planters due to labour issues, cultural identity of Kodagu, lack of locals in public service, higher education infrastructure etc. These elected representatives did not raise issues of tribal landlessness, the lack of their political voice and their difficulty in moving up in the socio-economic ladder⁴.

⁴ Based on discussions during ZP meetings attended by the author (01-10-2013)

It was clear from these interactions that the local state officials and political leaders seemed to exactly know what tribal needs were. Their powerful assertions of Kodagu's development needs seemed to silence the voice of tribal elected representatives. Discussions with Gram Panchayat members also suggested similar paternalistic attitudes. One influential GP member commented that SC and ST communities are cared and looked after very well in Kodagu unlike other region since these labourers are highly in demand⁵. Thus, tribal communities' immediate local needs like access to forests for collection of NTFPs, effective implementation of FRA and provision of agricultural land and protection of their rights were barely audible.

Discussions and way forward: The findings and analysis of the different dimensions of human development in Kodagu with an emphasis on tribal human development was presented in the previous sections. Tribal communities in the district, especially in the Virajpet taluk lag in the indicators of human development substantially in comparison to other communities in the district.

The educational status of tribal children, specifically proportion of out of school children, drop-out rates and retention rates are causes on concern. Targeted programs in maternal and child health and nutrition, provision of emergency health care, campaigns against substance abuse are some of the important health related initiatives required immediately in the district for improving the status of health among tribal communities. Strengthening the allied agricultural activities like value-addition enterprises of agro-forestry products, intensive coverage of tribal communities under LAMPS, creation of employment opportunities for tribal communities in secondary and tertiary sectors are some of the interventions suggested for improving livelihoods of STs in Kodagu (Kodagu ZP and GOK 2014). The need for these interventions is well understood among the local communities as well as state officials. However, as the previous section analysed, the effective implementation of these activities locally is hindered due to the misalignment of priorities of important local institutions like the bureaucracy and PRIs.

Trying to implement these interventions without serious stakes for these institutions would increase the possibility of such efforts becoming insignificant in the long run. Thus, more radical reforms on increasing true tribal political presence in the PRIs of the district, dedicated tribal action plans at the district level, where tribal elected representatives decide on the plan of action, tribal action plan coordination committees at all levels of PRIs, higher focus on land reforms and redistribution targeted towards STs and improving the effectiveness and stability of bureaucracy in the district are a few long term institutional reforms that have to be considered if tribal human development status has to increase in the district.

⁵ Based on group discussion with GP members of Valnur-Tyagathur Gram Panchayat in Somwarpet Taluk in September 2013.

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