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## BANJARA DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY, ANDHRA PRADESH

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Reclusive and undernourished, the Chenchu tribals are among the most deprived sections of the country. Reduced to just 30,000 in number, this Australoid Primitive Tribal Group, fights for survival in six forest districts of Andhra Pradesh. Their problems are compounded by the police's combing operations against Naxalites, which make it difficult for them to venture out of their gudems (habitations) and into the forests to gather food and non timber forest resources. Left out of the ambit of the government's health reach, they have succumbed rapidly to diseases like scabies, malaria, tuberculosis and gastroenteritis.

Operating on the principle that health is inextricably linked to development, the Banjara Development Society (BDS), has been conducting a project in the Prakasham district whereby advocacy efforts on health are buttressed by improving the Chenchus' livelihood skills.

Despite the announcement of schemes by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), the tribe's chief source of livelihood still focuses around activities like honey gathering and gum extraction. BDS provides support for this daily sustenance through scientific and environmental-friendly inputs.

Over 70 Chenchus have been trained on rock bee management and persuaded to wear sting-proof clothing. Efforts are underway to train youth and women to rear European bees in boxes. Training in scientific methods for gum extraction is organized and hormones are injected in the gum trees to substantially increase yields. This extract is then used to add nutritional value to their diet.

The Chenchus' meager diet of pounded chillies with rice is now supplemented with vegetables like bottle gourd, bitter gourd and lady fingers that are grown in their kitchen gardens under close monitoring of BDS staff. Access to medical services has improved thanks to the advocacy efforts of BDS and as a result, five mobile dispensaries and three Primary Health Centres have been provided exclusively for the Chenchus. This and the screening of Chenchus for TB is the outcome of intense lobbying with the ITDA and other agencies.

A grant of Rs 6.00 million was sanctioned in 2005-2006, for three years.

*Chenchu children after successfully receiving health care*





*Extraction and collection of gum resin and honey which provide livelihood opportunities and add nutritional value to the diet of the Chenchus*

