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PROJECT TITLE: Indigenous Food System, Food Security and Nutritional Outcome in children: A study among Paraja Community, Koraput district, Odisha

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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Hunger and malnutrition continue to be the greatest challenges facing the global community. According to the UN report (2023), **worldwide**, around **735 million people suffered from hunger in 2022 and over** 2.4 billion people suffered from moderate to severe food insecurity. An estimated 148 million under five children were stunted, 45 million were wasted and 37 million were overweight (WHO, 2023). The scenario is more acute among the marginalized sections of the society, people living in rural areas, the urban poor and among the tribal population.

India is a home to 104 million diversified tribal people (2011 census), and is the second largest tribal population in the world. Tribal people maintain a close proximity with nature, enjoy a rich biodiversity and have a unique food culture. Despite having a rich indigenous food system, food insecurity and child malnutrition has been reported among tribal communities across the country.

About 40 per cent of under five tribal children in India are stunted, and 16 per cent of them are severely stunted (UNICEF, 2020). About 80 per cent of the 5 million chronically undernourished tribal children live in just eight states of India including Odisha. The current scenario points to the immense challenge of achieving the SDG – 2, targeted to eradicate hunger and malnutrition by 2030, particularly among the marginalized sections.

The global food system is unsustainable and key reason for biodiversity depletion, ecological degradation and environmental pollution at all levels (IPCC, 2019; Rockstrom, et al., 2020 and FAO, 2020). Around one-third of all Green House Gas emissions is contributed by the contemporary farming system pooled with food handling, supply chains and consumption pattern (Crippa, et al., 2021).

To realize the SDGs and to deliver healthy and nutritious diets to all, the global food system needs to be reshaped to environmentally sustainable, resilient and inclusive of poor and marginalized population.

Indigenous peoples' food systems, with rich cultural and spiritual identity, are vital for food security, because they sustain high levels of biodiversity, and are often more resilient to climate change.

Considering the role of indigenous food system in achieving SDG 2, this particular research topic has been proposed with an aim to focus on documentation of indigenous food system of Paraja tribes of Koraput District, Odisha with a specific emphasis to the contribution of the indigenous food system to household food security and nutritional status of children.