

Annual Report

April 2017-March 2018



Dhaatri Trust

A Resource Centre for Women and Children



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About Dhaatri Trust

Dhaatri Trust is a Resource Centre for Women and Children's rights in India. It is a small platform to support the everyday struggles of rural and indigenous women. Registered in 2007 under the Indian Trusts Act, the Centre is an initiative to represent the voices, perspectives and campaigns of rural, adivasi and marginalized women in India and for the protection of the rights of their children.

Dhaatri Trust works primarily with adivasi/indigenous women who live in rural and forest areas where their way of life, livelihoods, socio-cultural relationships, health and well-being are closely linked to their habitat and natural resources. We believe that the sustainable framework of human development can only be achieved when the political theory of development is based on ecological justice and ecologically sustainable economics from a perspective of gender equality. We therefore, work with a vision of achieving gender equality through safeguarding and gaining women's rights of access, ownership, decision-making and knowledge rights to their natural resources. We believe that adivasi and indigenous women's vision, wisdom, economics and collective agencies hold critical knowledge which can guide today's global crisis of human peace and well-being. The experiences of indigenous women around the world and women affected by abuse of natural resources by corporate interests have common concerns of human rights violations and natural resources destruction.

Some of the serious areas of conflict over natural resources between local communities and modern development ideologies in India relate to the diversion of forests, agricultural lands and water resources for commercial or development interests like hydel power projects, mining, thermal power plants, conservation projects like national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, tourism, commercial plantations and infrastructure projects like highways, expansion of towns and urban facilities. Despite the constitutional safeguards of protective legislations for adivasi communities and ecological resources, evictions, deforestation or state and corporate appropriation of natural resources is increasingly leading to human rights violations and environmental destruction. These impact the lives and rights of women with far more serious consequences than that of the men in their communities. Yet their losses and demands, are barely acknowledged either by state, corporate or customary bodies. Their leadership in community movements for assertion of their rights vis-à-vis natural resource conflicts or to dialogue with state bodies does not have sufficient support for engagement at different levels even when these roles could enable strengthening critical perspectives for ecological justice.

There is an increasing understanding that community concerns and especially women's concerns have to be brought to the national and global attention of redress and justice while women's perspectives of locally sustainable development economics and resilience have to be nurtured and strengthened. Yet, even today, the challenges for women to participate in public

discourse and decision making, to find the time and resources to move beyond their domestic responsibilities and engage with the governance and political bodies, to articulate and assert their self-representation, to protect their traditional knowledge and find pathways for new skills, are too many. Access to information and participation in local decision making bodies is itself a long struggle. Formal rights to resources are obstructed both by apathetic and patriarchal governance and customary patriarchies that hold cultures of exclusion with regard to women owning land or property rights. Women among adivasis, even those educated and employed, have limited access to and understanding of laws, entitlements or mechanisms of redressal for grievances. On the other hand, basic infrastructure and development facilities for improving the quality of life of rural and adivasi communities and their children are neglected resulting in poor education and health facilities, lack of skill building opportunities for youth and diversification of traditional livelihoods and incomes.

Using our medium of an institutional platform, Dhaatri was created to provide a space for women's voices from the communities affected by ecological injustice be heard, to dialogue, represent, strategise and build assertive spaces for women's leadership. The organisation works as a resource centre to facilitate this space of exchange and to enable a collective agency for women to advocate for their and their children's rights and to resist patriarchal and corporate economics. We work with women in communities and women's rights defenders to promote gender equality and ecological justice.

As a resource centre, our focus of work is to provide opportunities for women and youth to build on their life skills, to have access to information and agencies of lobbying and advocacy, to support their demands and perspectives through evidence based research, legal assistance, dialogue with governance institutions and cross learnings among women affected. We work at a community level in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh in 30 adivasi villages in the Fifth Schedule area of Paderu mandal. We work as an advocacy and support organisation through collaborative linkages with other NGOs and networks in the country and in the region of Asia as we understand that ecological violations at the local level today are steered by larger global economics and corporate lobbies.

Dhaatri's work and focus in 2017-18

WOMEN's Land and Forest Rights:

We recognize the traditional science and knowledge of farming practices, natural resources management, land and agriculture of the Adivasi women farmers.

- 1. Promoting the land rights, livelihoods and food security rights of adivasi women farmers:** In the 30 adivasi villages of Salugu, Vantlamamidi and Modapalli panchayats in Visakhapatnam district this year the main focus was to work with the network of widows and single women to identify their problems related to registration of lands in their names and to get employment under the MGNREGS. Women who lost their husbands but were not in a position to get their lands transferred into their names applied for pattas (entitlements). We have helped women register their claims with the revenue department. This year the MGNREGS job cards were missing for 24 women for which our team worked

with the women's groups in ensuring their work guarantee. Dhaatri field team helped 15 women in getting old age and widow pensions, housing schemes and toilets.



The year started with a major event with women farmers – the food security and farming mela with adivasi women who came from different states to celebrate the diverse food from their lands and forests. About 300 adivasi women participated in the mela sharing their seeds, recipes, and concerns related to farming in the hills.





Our women leaders and youth also visited other organisations and enterprises to interact with women working on diversified livelihoods based on forest produce, horticulture and food processing. They visited Odisha (M.S.Swaminathan Foundation), Kothapad, Killoguda, Padua (Pragathi organization). They also visited Jattu (Parvathipuram), Sanjeevini (Dumbriguda). One team visited Keystone Foundation to learn about millets processing and making food produces from forest produce.





Training was given by VRDS, Cuddapah to the women farmers on soil fertility, crop rotation and making natural fertilizers to improve soil quality. The field team followed this up with demonstration sessions in each cluster and with the seeds exchange programme for millets. This year we also started the kitchen gardens in 7 villages, mainly with adolescent girls.

Women's Entitlements under the Forest Rights Act:

The Forest Rights Act and entitlements for women and gram sabhas is a key area of our work related to land rights. This year our focus was on completing the documentation and institutional strengthening for making claims in 10 villages with 143 claims made for individual forest rights in 4 villages and 8 claims made for CFR. Alongside, we also started the biodiversity mapping of the forest lands in 2 villages and people's own land records using the GPS to prepare individual land maps of every family. This was completed for Kapparamajji village. The PVTGs took out a rally in Paderu demanding for implementation

of the FRA especially in the context of non-implementation with the purpose of diversion of lands for commercial purposes.

We conducted training workshops for women from the three panchayats on the documentation process and participation of women in the FRA decision-making at the village level. We are working on strengthening the formal role of the Gram Sabhas and with active participation of women.



An important focus within the FRA process of making entitlements is the demand for the Habitat Rights under the Act for the PVTG community. Dhaatri works in the three panchayats where majority population belongs to the Khonds and we have initiated their understanding and claims making not only for rights under CFR but also for Habitat rights to the resources and routes used by the community across the hills. A team of Khond elders and elected representatives were taken to Odisha where Vasundhara has been working with the Mankidia village in settlement of Habitat Rights. This gave a clarity on the process of making the claims and the documentation of the resources. We registered a claim with the SDC for four PVTG Khond villages this year.





Strengthening dialogues among Adivasi Women on Gender and land rights in the context of the Fifth Schedule, PESA and customary laws:

As a resource centre for promoting the customary and constitutional rights of adivasi women and supporting their agencies of self-representation, this year we have initiated dialogue building across states and enabling linkages for women in local campaigns to have solidarity exchanges with adivasi women from national platforms. We organized a national consultation of adivasi women on land rights, social security and feminist perspectives within the customary social order. Women from six states participated to share their local concerns and regional action plans were discussed to take forward the feminist dialogues among adivasi women and adolescent girls.





Site visit was organized to Dallapalli village to understand the concerns of the women there who were disturbed with the unchecked tourism plans in their lands. The dialogues focused on women's formal rights to land and the issues around violence against women within the customary society of the adivasis.



These dialogues were also carried to the national adivasi platforms where Dhaatri is facilitating the participation of young adivasi women from our communities in the national debates around adivasi self-representation and identity. Our girls have participated in the national meetings of Adivasi Ekta Parishad and the Indian Adivasi Women's Network both of which are challenging the alienation of resource rights and fifth schedule rights.



These dialogues were taken to the regional platforms of dialogue for sharing of feminist actions from indigenous women’s perspectives vis-à-vis violence against women. Dhaatri and our partner NGO team participated in the Feminist Dialogues at Chiangmai, Thailand in September 2017, at the Nepal regional dialogue organized by Women’s Fund Asia in July 2017 and in the Resisters’ Dialogue in the Philippines in November 2017. These debates help us build stronger perspectives with our team of WHRDs and develop linkages of solidarity with indigenous women.



2. Governance and women's environmental concerns related to natural resources and women's rights:

The Fifth Schedule areas in India are protected by special legislations but land alienation is. Constant threat to tribal people, especially women. This situation was posed to the women of Dallapalli, a hill-top village in Salugu panchayat which is experiencing irresponsible tourism and vulgar tourists misbehaving with local women. This has resulted in indiscriminate and irresponsible influx of local tourists and lumpen groups of men using the hills for anti-social behavior and revelry, putting the women's security at great risk. This has caused severe damage to the ecology of the hills that are littered with toxic waste of the trespassers and harming both animals and humans. The Gram Sabha which has been trying to dialogue with the state authorities on this disturbance to their environment and social life. The institutional framework of the Gram Sabha under the PESA is a strong constitutional mechanism of upholding the spirit of the constitution. Dhaatri has been coordinating with the Gram Sabha and local authorities to dialogue on the social security for Adivasi women and the conservation of the ecological biodiversity of the hills.





Women's occupational health and security of livelihoods:

Dhaatri works as a collaborative platform of women and natural resource rights. We have been actively promoting the leadership of women in mining areas in order that their voices may be heard at local and policy levels of decision-making and that their demands and perspectives become key to development planning. This year we have been involved at the national through organizing local workshops and trainings for women. An India Skill-share was organized as a sharing and support platform for women, particularly adivasi women in forest areas facing environmental threats from illegal mining, destructive mining practices. A major area of our concern is the health of women in mine sites affected by silicosis and their occupational work safety. We have been having follow up meetings with women labour and making representations to the authorities for the implementation of the Silicosis Rehabilitation Policy in the affected states. At Asia level, we are working for bringing together women to the advocacy lobbies on due diligence compliance mechanisms and strengthening of legal accountability mechanisms to protect the rights of women workers and communities.







3. Sexual Rights and Promoting Gender Equality:

We work with women and adolescent girls in adivasi and mining affected areas to resist violence and protect themselves from physical and sexual abuse. Our work on economic and ecological justice brings the connection between resource rights and rights of women over their bodies, reproductive health and sexual spaces.

An important area of our work is the Adolescent Gender programme where we work with adivasi boys and girls in high schools and colleges to bring the connection between gender, tribal and women's laws and customary practices.

This year we have mainly worked in the Ashram High Schools in Paderu with boys and girls through workshops on gender, menstrual health and hygiene, social issues related to adolescent relationships, sexual problems, unwed mothers and child marriages. Our team is working with the girls in teaching them how to make reusable sanitary napkins and through these interactions, approach the issues of sexual relationships and complaints. We are using this space to develop rapport with the teachers to engage them with non-academic issues of the students, but this is a challenge.



We undertook some preliminary research on the issue of sexuality and women's resource rights by interviewing students, teachers and adivasi women employed in government service. The purpose of the research was to assess the understanding of laws and rights related to women. We found that even employed women and teachers had limited or no understanding of the laws or rights and very few invested their savings on land or property.





At the community level, we are working with Kishori Balikas (adolescent girls) on the above issues of menstrual hygiene, sexual rights and understanding their land entitlements. The girls have been taught to measure their lands and understand the land documents. They were taught the entitlements under the FRA and claims making process. Another area of work with adolescent girls is their livelihood skills where we have given orientation to girls on life skills like adda leaf plate making.





Devadasi women and building their collective voices:

We are collaborating with Sakhi Trust in advocating against social and caste discrimination and sexual violence, particularly in the context of Devadasi women. We worked with the Sakhi team in documenting the self-narratives of Devadasi women and collecting primary data on the status, benefits and demands of Devadasi women. A network of Devadasi women has emerged to articulate their collective demands from the government.

CHILDREN

Dhaatri works for the protection of children's rights and promotion of their quality of education and health, particularly in forest and mining affected regions in India

Right to Education

Universal primary education as a constitutional right of Adivasi children to a quality elementary education is a critical area of Dhaatri's work with children. We work with Adivasi communities in 30 villages in taking leadership in school management and we work with government schools and teachers in improving the social, cultural and pedagogic environment for Adivasi children. This year we have worked with the parents of children who dropped out of school in motivating the children to re-enter their academic cycle. We helped in enrolment of 46 children into ashram schools and have had meetings with the school wardens and teachers on their role of student retention. For the children in the primary schools at the village level, we have worked with the school management committees in motivating them for conducting regular monthly meetings. Although teachers are not responsive in all villages, we have taken conducted training for women in undertaking social audit and monitoring the quality of school attendance, entitlements and mid-day meal quality. In some schools the parents are taking a

keen interest but the lack of positive response to complaints from the authorities concerned dampens the motivation of the SMCs to represent their grievances. For lack of resources, we could not pursue this area of our work with the level of intensity that we desire to take it forward.

Cultural Rights of Adivasi Children:

The Kuvi Cultural Knowledge Centre at Dallapalli has been initiated by the youth and the Gram Sabha and discussions over the concept and activities are ongoing. The primary objective was discussed as to provide an intergenerational space for transfer of Kuvi language, culture and knowledge to the children of the surrounding Khond villages. This concept has received consensus from all members and the youth are working towards creating this space with the help of Dhaatri. We have started an after school cultural education programme for the children of Dallapalli where the field team is working with the volunteers of Dhaatri in conducting culture and environment lessons, compilation of Kuvi language, games, songs and stories. We are working towards a more formal structure to this programme in order to bring an effective connection within the tribe and its children and to gradually develop an interface with the outside.





Acknowledgements:

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