

[News](#) » [National](#)

Published: March 26, 2010 23:05 IST | Updated: March 28, 2010 01:01 IST

Tribals, Dalits still at the bottom in most indicators

Aarti Dhar

Indigenous groups and Dalits continue to be at the bottom in most indicators of well-being, the Muslims and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) occupy the middle rung, while forward caste Hindus and other minority religions are at the top. The "Human Development in India: Challenges for a Society in Transition" survey has found this.

These patterns are seen in a variety of indicators, including household incomes, poverty rates, landownership and agricultural incomes, health, and education. The group positions are not immutable, and on some dimensions, there is a difference in rankings.

The Adivasis generally have slightly better health outcomes (reported short term morbidity and child mortality), particularly in the northeast where healthcare appears to be of a higher quality.

Similarly, when it comes to education, the Muslims are as disadvantaged as the Dalits and Adivasis, although their economic well-being is more at par with that of the OBCs, the survey suggests.

Two major aspects of these group disparities have been highlighted in the survey report. Firstly, much of this inequality seems to emerge from differential access to livelihoods. Salaried jobs pay far more than casual labour or farming, and these jobs elude the disadvantaged groups for many reasons, including living in rural areas and lower education. But regardless of the reason, more than three out of 10 forward caste and minority religion men have salaried jobs, compared with about two out of 10 Muslim, OBC and Dalit men, and even fewer Adivasi men.

Dalits and Adivasis are further disadvantaged as they either do not own land, or mainly low-productivity land. Not surprisingly, these income differences translate into differences in other indicators of human development.

Secondly, the report points out, future generations seem doomed to replicate these inequalities because of the continuing differences in education — both in quality and quantity. In spite of the long history of positive discrimination policies — reservation in college admission — social inequalities begin early in primary schools. Thus, affirmative action remedies are too little and too late by the time students reach the higher secondary level.

It further says that differences in well-being among social groups are long established, but a variety of contemporary forces have conspired to sustain and sometimes exacerbate these inequalities. Dalits have long laboured at the margins of a society that depends on that labour, but that has often excluded them. Although some Adivasis in the northeast fared better, other Adivasis living in extremely remote locations have been left out of the recent economic progress or forced to migrate, only to work as low paid labourers. In some cases, such as for the OBCs and the Muslims, historical disadvantages have been exacerbated by structural shifts. A decline in artisan incomes has affected the Muslims disproportionately, while agricultural stagnation has affected the OBCs.

Keywords: [OBCs](#), [Dalits](#), [Muslims](#)