

# The Influence of Social Support of Adivasi Mothers on Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices: Building Capacity for Sustainable Development

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## **Abstract**

In India, Adivasi (indigenous) children suffer disproportionately from undernutrition, resulting in elevated levels of stunting (NFHS 4). Not only is child nutrition an important issue in itself, it must be addressed in order to successfully meet the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which include good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, and sustainable communities (UNDP 2018). To combat the problem of child undernutrition in India, the government of India initiated the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme in 1975. Our study took place in the unique setting of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, established in 1986 in recognition of the exceptional diversity and interdependence of sociocultural and ecological diversity. We conducted our research in three Irula villages within forty-kilometers of Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu in March and April of 2017. Conservation of people and communities are essential elements of the integrated conception of conservation. Indigenous knowledge, feeding practices, and nutrition outcomes are inextricably linked to environmental conservation as they are essential to sustaining human interactions with dynamic landscapes. In our study villages, familial support networks and traditional knowledge prevail over government interventions in nutrition. By gaining a better understanding of the social support systems available for Adivasi mothers and the sources of support they seek, researchers, community development practitioners, and policy makers could better assist tribal communities in creating nutrition programs that are relevant to local needs and sensitive to cultural preferences.