

Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

The following recommendations are based on my experience and expertise on People of African Descent (PAD) in South Asia.

PAD live in a landscape of diverse ethnic groups competing for the same bundle of goods, where resources are scarce. Most are not city dwellers. They are doubly marginalised: they are not part of the urban population and they are of African descent. Many have become indigenised after the generations that were born locally. Some have out-married. Identification of PAD, unless they live within communities of PAD, is problematic and self-identification has to be relied upon. A few hundred PAD are elite, reminding us of the days when Africans ruled the Indian States of Janjira and Sachin before India's independence in 1947 and until they were absorbed into the Indian Union in 1948. But the majority of PAD are impoverished. Empowering PAD is compatible with the UN Sustainable Development Goal SDG1 – to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

- UN Sustainable Development Goal SDG4 concerns ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Education is a way of empowerment leading to economic enhancement. But access to education is uneven due to the limitations in resources where most PAD live. Literacy levels vary amongst PAD. Attempts have been made to correct this inequity. PAD who have been recognised as disadvantaged in the south Indian state of Karnataka, living in North Karnataka and in the north Indian state of Gujarat, living in Shaurashtra, have been classified as “Scheduled Tribe” (ST)(The word “tribe” bears no ethnic significance). This status entitles them to reserved quotas in educational establishments, fee concessions in schools and colleges, scholarships for fees in educational courses, relaxation/lowering of marks required in entrance exams, employment opportunity in government jobs and loans given to start businesses and discount/subsidies in the government housing scheme (not gifts of land). But those who have ST status are not able to negotiate their entitlements. They need to be supported to gain the benefits accorded to the ST status. However, all PAD do not have ST status.
- I recommend the Introduction of Inclusive Education that cuts across differences in race, caste, class and gender, for example. Scholarships or grants to support PAD through education, particularly higher education. Important to produce role models. Some PAD who have graduated from universities in India give back to their communities and have shown agency in the methods they have adopted to help their people.
- In Sri Lanka education is free of charge or subsidised by the government, all the way from the Primary, through Secondary and into the Tertiary education at universities. But parents have to pay for lodgings, food, transport and other expenses and support children through university courses.
- Education needs to be extended beyond the requirement for literacy and numeracy. In an Age of Information Technology, PAD need to be IT literate to use mobile phones, laptops, PCs to connect globally. They could form a support network and share their common history of enslavement with other PAD in other parts of the world. Donations of IT equipment (mobile phones, laptops, PCs) and providing IT training are essential in enabling the access to education.
- I recommend that cottage industries be set up in order to enhance the livelihood of PAD who cannot access the employment markets. They are happy to share such enterprises with people of other groups who live with them in their habitats and who are similarly impoverished.
- I recommend that the intangible cultural heritage of PAD be sustained. PAD want to hand over their heritage to future generations. Intangible Cultural Heritage is the only heritage that has been left

behind by their African ancestors. Their appeals for help have brought them some publicity but are inadequate to sustain their heritage elements.

- Artistic talents of PAD are not marketed adequately and monetary rewards for their performances are below the payments made to other artists who provide entertainment for events. Workshops on marketing their talents and products, cultural or otherwise would be beneficial in order that PAD can participate in markets on equitable terms.

Thank you for considering my recommendations.

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