



Bridging the Gap in Tribal Welfare

*This editorial is based on “[Budget and Adivasis: Is it about development or politics?](#)” which was published in *The Indian Express* on 07/05/2024. The article brings into focus the Union Budget 2025-26’s unprecedented 46% funding increase for tribal welfare, emphasizing PM JANMAN, DA-JGUA, and Eklavya Schools. However, challenges like unspent funds, resource diversion, and displacement remain critical concerns.*

For Prelims: [Union Budget 2025-26](#), [PM JANMAN](#), [Eklavya Model Residential Schools](#), [Illegal mining](#), [GI Tag Registry](#), [Tribal welfare](#), [Van Dhan Yojana](#), [TRIFED](#), [Ayurveda](#), [Swadesh Darshan scheme](#), [National Education Policy](#), [National Health Mission \(NHM\)](#), [Poshan Abhiyan](#), [PM Vishwakarma Yojana](#), [One District One Product \(ODOP\) initiative](#).

For Mains: Significance of Tribal Communities for India, Key Issues Faced by Tribal Communities in India.

The [Union Budget 2025-26](#) has demonstrated unprecedented commitment to [tribal welfare](#) with a **46% increase in allocation to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs**. The budget prioritizes three key initiatives - [PM JANMAN](#) for vulnerable tribal groups, [DA-JGUA](#) for comprehensive development, and [Eklavya Model Residential Schools](#) for quality education. The increased budget could represent a turning point for India's tribal communities, but significant challenges persist - **from unspent funds and resource diversion to displacement-driven development projects** - that need immediate attention to ensure these allocations translate into real change on the ground for effective tribal welfare.

What is the Significance of Tribal Communities for India?

- **Custodians of India’s Biodiversity and Forest Conservation:** Tribals play a crucial role in **preserving forests, wildlife, and biodiversity** through their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices.
 - They act as the first line of defense against **deforestation, [illegal mining](#), and poaching**, ensuring ecological balance.
 - The ISFR 2019 indicates that close to **60%** of the country's forest cover is in tribal districts like **Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha**.
- **Rich Cultural and Linguistic Heritage:** India’s tribal communities **preserve diverse languages, art forms, folklore, and indigenous knowledge systems**, enriching national identity.
 - Their traditions, festivals, and handicrafts contribute significantly to tourism and the creative economy.
 - The [GI Tag Registry](#) shows that **many tribal art forms** like **Gond painting (Madhya Pradesh) and Pattachitra (Odisha)** have received Geographical Indication (GI) status, boosting economic potential.
- **Vital for India’s Economic and Agricultural Diversity:** Tribals contribute significantly

to **agriculture, minor forest produce (MFP) collection, and traditional crafts**, strengthening India's rural economy.

- They are key producers of **lac, tendu leaves, bamboo, and medicinal herbs**, yet face exploitation in pricing and market access.
- According to [TRIFED](#), tribal people derive **20-40%** of their annual income from Minor Forest Produce.
 - [Van Dhan Yojana](#) has a target of **establishing 50,000 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras** across the country, which will benefit around **10 lakh tribal entrepreneurs**
- **Significant Political Influence in Indian Democracy:** With a population of **over 104 million (Census 2011)**, tribals form a crucial voting bloc, impacting state and national elections.
 - Their role in electoral politics is evident in **tribal-dominated states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha**.
 - Increased tribal representation in governance ensures their socio-economic concerns are addressed effectively.
 - The appointment of **Droupadi Murmu** as India's **first tribal President** reflects growing tribal representation in national leadership.
 - Also, in a historic move, the [Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar](#) voted for the first time in a **General Election 2024**.
- **Essential for Climate Change Adaptation and Sustainable Development:** Tribals possess deep traditional knowledge of **climate adaptation, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture**, which is crucial in combating climate change.
 - Their **indigenous water-harvesting methods, biodiversity conservation practices, and disaster resilience techniques** offer lessons for modern sustainability strategies.
 - UNESCO has recognised that **Indigenous knowledge systems contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 13** on climate action by observing changing climates.
 - For instance, it has been found that **tribal water conservation techniques like Zabo farming (Nagaland)** improve groundwater recharge and promote sustainable agriculture.
- **Backbone of India's Traditional Medicine and Ayurveda:** Tribal communities hold **vast knowledge of herbal medicine, Ayurveda, and ethno-botanical practices**, contributing to India's healthcare system.
 - Their use of **medicinal plants and natural remedies** supports alternative medicine, but over-commercialization threatens these resources.
 - Government initiatives like [AYUSH](#) and **Tribal Health Mission** must ensure **tribal knowledge protection and fair benefit-sharing**.
 - It has been estimated that more than **8,000 species of plants are used by the tribal and ethnic communities** in India as part of their health care.
- **Critical for Sustainable Tourism and Eco-Tourism:** Tribal regions are home to **some of India's most biodiverse landscapes**, making them key players in **sustainable and eco-tourism**.
 - Their **cultural festivals, handicrafts, and traditional cuisines** attract tourists, boosting local economies.
 - Under the [Swadesh Darshan scheme](#), **1,000 tribal homestays** are being promoted to enhance local tourism and support livelihoods in tribal regions.

What are the Key Issues Faced by Tribal Communities in India?

- **Land Alienation and Displacement:** Tribal communities face large-scale displacement due to industrial projects, mining, and conservation efforts, leading to loss of traditional livelihoods.
 - The lack of proper implementation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**, results in denial of land titles, further marginalizing them.
 - According to the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, only **50% of FRA claims** have been approved, leaving lakhs of tribals landless.
 - Also, sometimes resettlement policies remain inadequate, pushing them into extreme poverty.
 - A 2022 report stated that **hundreds of tribals displaced from Satpura Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh** were not provided rehabilitation and compensation as of June 2022.

- **Poor Health and Malnutrition:** Tribal populations suffer from **higher mortality rates, malnutrition, and lack of healthcare access**, worsened by poor infrastructure in remote areas.
 - The prevalence of **sickle cell anemia, tuberculosis, and malnutrition** is alarmingly high, yet public health interventions remain weak.
 - Sickle Cell Disease is widespread among the tribal population in India where about **1 in 86 births among STs have SCD**.
 - Also, a recent report stated that **30.8% of tribal children** under five suffer from undernutrition, leading to stunting and wasting.
- **Lack of Quality Education and EMRS Implementation Gaps:** Tribal students face **language barriers, poor infrastructure, and high dropout rates**, especially in higher education.
 - The **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)**, meant to provide quality education, face **delays in construction and lack of teachers**.
 - Also, **recent centralization of the recruitment process for Eklavya Model Residential Schools**, along with the mandatory Hindi proficiency requirement, has raised concerns.
- **Livelihood Crisis and Economic Marginalization:** Traditional tribal occupations such as **shifting cultivation, forest produce collection, and handicrafts** are declining due to **deforestation, legal restrictions, and market exploitation**.
 - MGNREGA and other employment schemes provide some relief, but wages remain low, and corruption reduces actual benefits.
 - Access to credit remains difficult, pushing many into debt traps under informal moneylenders.
 - Recent reports stated that **only 12.3% of people from the scheduled tribes group** had wage employment in 2022-23, highlighting the gravity of the issue.
- **Impact of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:** Tribal communities, dependent on forests and natural resources, are **disproportionately affected by climate change** and environmental degradation.
 - **Erratic rainfall** has reduced agricultural yields and forest produce availability.
 - Government policies **promoting afforestation and conservation often displace tribals** without ensuring their participation.
- **Loss of Indigenous Culture and Linguistic Marginalization:** Tribal languages and cultural heritage are fast disappearing due to **urbanization, lack of institutional support, and mainstreaming policies**.
 - The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** emphasizes mother-tongue education, but tribal languages lack **textbooks, teachers, and policy-level recognition**.
 - Digital and mass media penetration is further accelerating this cultural dilution.
 - **UNESCO has declared 197 Indian languages as 'endangered'**. Various unscripted languages are particularly in danger of becoming extinct
- **Human Rights Violations and Security Issues:** Tribals often become victims of **state-led displacement, police excesses, and Maoist insurgency**, caught between the government and extremist groups.
 - Incidents of land grabbing, forced evictions, and violence against tribals remain high, despite constitutional protections. The misuse of laws like UAPA against tribal activists and inadequate legal aid make justice inaccessible. The rise of **private militia and corporate land acquisitions** has further worsened tribal vulnerability.
 - According to 2021 NCRB data, crimes against Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities rose by **9.3%**.

What are the Indian Government Initiatives for Tribal Welfare and Development?

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Grants **individual and community forest rights** to tribals, empowering them to manage land and resources.
- **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996:** Strengthens **self-governance** in tribal areas by giving **Gram Sabhas decision-making powers** over land and resources.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):** Provides **quality education** for tribal children in remote areas, with **740 schools sanctioned**.

- **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN):** Focuses on **health, education, and livelihoods** for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- **Van Dhan Vikas Yojana (VDVY):** Promotes **value addition and marketing** of Minor Forest Produce (MFP).
- **Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Minor Forest Produce (MFP)** – Ensures **fair prices** for tribals collecting forest produce.
- **Tribal Health and Nutrition Portal - ‘Swasthya’** – A digital platform tracking **tribal health indicators**.

What Measures can India Adopt to Enhance Tribal Welfare and Development?

- **Effective Implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Ensuring timely recognition of **Individual and Community Forest Rights (IFR & CFR)** will empower tribals to manage their land and natural resources.
 - **Digitizing land records (as envisioned in [Budget 2025-25](#))**, setting up **fast-track FRA tribunals**, and involving local Gram Sabhas in claim verification can speed up the process.
 - Strengthening the link between **FRA and MGNREGA** can provide sustainable employment in afforestation and conservation.
- **Expanding and Strengthening Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):** While the **₹7,088 crore budget allocation for EMRS (2025-26)** is a welcome move, ensuring infrastructure, quality teachers, and modern pedagogy is crucial.
 - Introducing **tribal-language textbooks, digital learning platforms, and vocational training** can improve educational outcomes.
 - Linking **EMRS with PM Daksh Yojana** will ensure skill-based training alongside academic education.
- **Revamping Tribal Healthcare through Mobile Health Units and AYUSH Integration:** Tribal regions suffer from **high malnutrition, maternal mortality, and endemic diseases**, requiring **decentralized healthcare solutions**.
 - Deploying **mobile health clinics with telemedicine** in remote areas can bridge healthcare gaps.
 - Strengthening the **National Health Mission (NHM)** and **Poshan Abhiyan** in tribal belts can improve child and maternal health indicators.
- **Ensuring Sustainable Livelihoods through Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Minor Forest Produce (MFP):** Tribal livelihoods depend on **minor forest produce (MFP) like tendu leaves, mahua, and honey**, yet market exploitation leads to distress sales.
 - Expanding MSP coverage for more MFPs and strengthening **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs)** can enhance tribal incomes.
 - Encouraging **community-led forest produce cooperatives** will ensure fair pricing and reduce dependence on middlemen.
 - Integrating **PM Vishwakarma Yojana** with VDVKs can further promote value addition and tribal entrepreneurship.
- **Empowering Tribal Women through SHGs and Microfinance:** Tribal women face **economic marginalization and social exclusion**, requiring targeted financial inclusion policies.
 - Strengthening **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** under the **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)** will improve their access to credit and entrepreneurship opportunities.
 - Providing **interest-free loans, financial literacy programs, and digital banking access** will empower tribal women economically.
 - Linking SHGs with **One District One Product (ODOP) initiative** can ensure market access for tribal handicrafts.
- **Boosting Political Representation and Tribal Governance:** Despite reserved seats, tribal voices are **underrepresented in higher decision-making bodies**, impacting policy execution.
 - Strengthening **PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**, will **empower Gram Sabhas in decision-making**.
 - Decentralizing development planning by ensuring **direct tribal participation in budget allocations** will improve governance efficiency.

- Implementing **capacity-building programs** for tribal leaders can enhance their political agency
- **Addressing Land Displacement and Rehabilitation Challenges:** Tribal displacement due to **mining, dam projects, and conservation** leads to landlessness and socio-economic instability.
 - Strict implementation of the [Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Act, 2013](#), is needed to prevent forced evictions.
 - Setting up **land banks for displaced tribals**, offering alternative livelihoods, and ensuring proper rehabilitation can mitigate displacement effects.
- **Developing Tribal Tourism for Economic Growth:** Eco-tourism and cultural tourism in tribal areas can generate **sustainable employment** and **preserve tribal heritage**.
 - Developing **community-owned tribal tourism enterprises** will ensure direct benefits to tribals rather than private operators.
 - Promoting **homestays, handicraft hubs, and guided eco-tours** can boost income while ensuring cultural sustainability. Integrating **Swadesh Darshan Scheme with Tribal Tourism Circuits** will promote responsible tourism.
- **Decentralized Renewable Energy Microgrids for Tribal Villages:** Many tribal regions remain **off-grid or experience unreliable electricity**, affecting education, healthcare, and livelihoods.
 - Setting up **community-owned solar, wind, or biomass microgrids** can provide clean energy while reducing dependence on external suppliers.
 - Training tribals in **solar panel maintenance, biogas generation, and battery storage** will create local employment. These microgrids can also power **cold storage for perishable farm produce**, improving food security.
- **Developing Tribal Superfoods for Global and Domestic Markets:** Tribal regions are home to **nutrient-rich superfoods** like **millets, wild honey, bamboo rice, and moringa**, which have high global demand.
 - Creating [geographical indication \(GI\) certification](#) for tribal superfoods can ensure premium pricing and market access.
 - Establishing **farm-to-table tribal collectives** will eliminate middlemen and increase direct profits.
 - Linking these products with **e-commerce platforms like ONDC and organic food brands** can boost the tribal economy while promoting **nutritional security**.

Conclusion:

India's **enhanced budgetary** focus on tribal welfare marks a pivotal step toward inclusive development. However, challenges like **land displacement, poor healthcare, and educational deficits persist**. Bridging these gaps through effective implementation and community-driven initiatives is crucial. Only then can true **empowerment and equitable growth for tribal communities be realized**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Despite various government initiatives, India's tribal communities continue to face socio-economic marginalization. Analyze the key challenges in tribal development and suggest a holistic strategy to ensure their sustainable and inclusive growth.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q.1 Consider the following pairs: (2013)

Tribe	State
1. Limboo (Limbu)	Sikkim
2. Karbi	Himachal Pradesh

3. Dongaria Kondh Odisha
4. Bonda Tamil Nadu

Which of the above pairs are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (a)

Q.2 Consider the following statements about Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India: (2019)

1. PVTGs reside in 18 States and one Union Territory.
2. A stagnant or declining population is one of the criteria for determining PVTG status.
3. There are 95 PVTGs officially notified in the country so far.
4. Irular and Konda Reddi tribes are included in the list of PVTGs.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 2, 3 and 4
- (c) 1, 2 and 4
- (d) 1, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

Q3. Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, who shall be the authority to initiate the process for determining the nature and extent of individual or community forest rights or both? (2013)

- (a) State Forest Department
- (b) District Collector/Deputy Commissioner
- (c) Tahsildar/Block Development Officer/Mandal Revenue Officer
- (d) Gram Sabha

Ans: (d)