



# **Beyond the Margins: Adivasis Voices, Policy Pathways in India's Sustainable Journey**



## **Voluntary National Review Report of Adivasis Development with CSOs**

**18 February 2025**

Coordinated by: PHIA Foundation and Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)

Supported by: United Nations Tribal Task Team

Images of consultations: PHIA Foundation

Disclaimer: The information, challenges, and recommendations articulated in this document have been curated from consultations with civil society organisations. The views presented here are attributed to these consultations. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of United Nations or its agencies in India.

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## Executive Summary

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2025 - Adivasi Consultation Report assesses the socio-economic, cultural, and governance challenges faced by Adivasis in India. This report is based on extensive consultations with Adivasi leaders, civil society organizations, and policy experts to ensure their perspectives are included in India's sustainable development agenda. These consultations were organized by Partnering Hope Into Action Foundation (PHIA) and Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) with the support of the United Nations Tribal Task Team-India.

A comprehensive survey and desk review of CSOs, subject experts, and development practitioners' input were conducted to evaluate the challenges faced by Adivasis and provide recommendations for policy improvement by the Government and CSOs.

India has one of the largest indigenous populations globally, with over 104 million people belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs), including 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Despite constitutional safeguards and various legal frameworks such as the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996, Adivasis continue to experience systemic exclusion, land dispossession, and limited access to essential services.

This report highlights key thematic areas that influence Adivasi development, including poverty, malnutrition, education, health, natural resource governance, gender equality, and economic empowerment. Key findings include:

- **High Levels of Poverty and Socio-Economic Marginalization:** More than half of the Adivasi population experiences multidimensional poverty, with limited access to education, healthcare, and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Poor Health and Nutrition Indicators:** Adivasi children face higher rates of malnutrition, stunting, and anaemia compared to national averages. Maternal health outcomes remain weak due to inadequate access to healthcare facilities.
- **Limited Access to Education and Infrastructure:** Literacy rates among Adivasi youth are significantly lower than the national average, and dropout rates remain high, particularly among girls.
- **Land and Resource Rights Violations:** The ineffective implementation of FRA and PESA continues to deny Adivasis their rightful claims to land and forest resources, leading to displacement and economic vulnerability.
- **Gender-Based Disparities:** Adivasi women face structural inequalities in land ownership, employment, and political participation, exacerbating their socio-economic vulnerability.
- **Environmental and Climate Challenges:** Climate change disproportionately affects Adivasis due to their dependence on natural resources for sustenance. Deforestation, industrial encroachment, and displacement threaten their way of life.

## Policy Recommendations to Address Challenges

To address these challenges, the report outlines the following priority actions:

- ***Develop Comprehensive National Policy for Adivasi Development and Empowerment:*** Develop a comprehensive national policy focusing on education, healthcare, economic opportunities, safeguarding land and forest rights, and promoting political participation for Adivasis. The policy aims to bridge development gaps, enhance skill development, protect cultural heritage, and ensure Adivasi participation in national life.
- ***Enhancing SDG Monitoring for Adivasis:*** Robust SDG monitoring is crucial to address data gaps and reporting issues, particularly for Adivasis. For instance, while data for 51 Scheduled Tribes (ST) indicators exists, it is not included in the National Indicator Framework (NIF). Establishing a framework for collecting and monitoring Adivasi data will ensure their progress is reflected in national SDG reports.
- ***Strengthen Governance and Legal Frameworks:*** Ensure the full implementation of FRA and PESA, empowering Gram Sabhas to take a leading role in local governance and resource management.
- ***Improve Basic Services and Infrastructure:*** Expand healthcare, education, and housing facilities in Adivasi areas through targeted investments and inclusive planning.
- ***Enhance Livelihood Opportunities:*** Promote sustainable agroforestry, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and entrepreneurship programs to support economic self-reliance.
- ***Support Gender Equality Initiatives:*** Implement gender-sensitive land reforms, increase financial inclusion for Adivasi women, and strengthen social protection measures.
- ***Integrate Traditional Knowledge Systems:*** Recognize and integrate indigenous knowledge in climate adaptation strategies, natural resource conservation, and educational curricula.
- ***Foster Inclusive Development Partnerships:*** Strengthen collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and Adivasi leadership to co-create policies that reflect their needs and aspirations.

The VNR 2025 process provides a unique opportunity to ensure that Adivasi voices are heard and their rights upheld in India's sustainable development journey. By adopting a rights-based, participatory, and community-led approach, India can move closer to fulfilling its commitment to 'Leaving No One Behind' (LNOB).

## Introduction

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a country-led process that evaluates and reports on national progress in implementing the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda encourages member states to conduct voluntary and participatory reviews at the national and sub-national levels. These reviews are presented at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), held annually in July in New York. India has previously submitted VNRs in 2017 and 2020, led by NITI Aayog. In 2025, India will submit its third VNR, reflecting on the country's progress, challenges, and recalibrated strategies for achieving the SDGs in the final years leading up to 2030. To support this process, Civil Society Organization (CSO) consultations are being organized to ensure that the concerns of 13 identified vulnerable population groups, including Adivasis, are adequately represented in the review.

The Government of India, led by NITI Aayog in collaboration with United Nations Tribal Task Team-India and civil society organizations, has undertaken the VNR 2025 process for Adivasi groups to assess India's progress in achieving the SDGs. This report consolidates insights obtained from a comprehensive survey, desk review, and regional and national consultations involving Adivasi community leaders, experts, and development practitioners. The findings aim to ensure that Adivasi voices are reflected in India's sustainable development agenda, reinforcing the principle of "Leaving No One Behind" (LNOB).

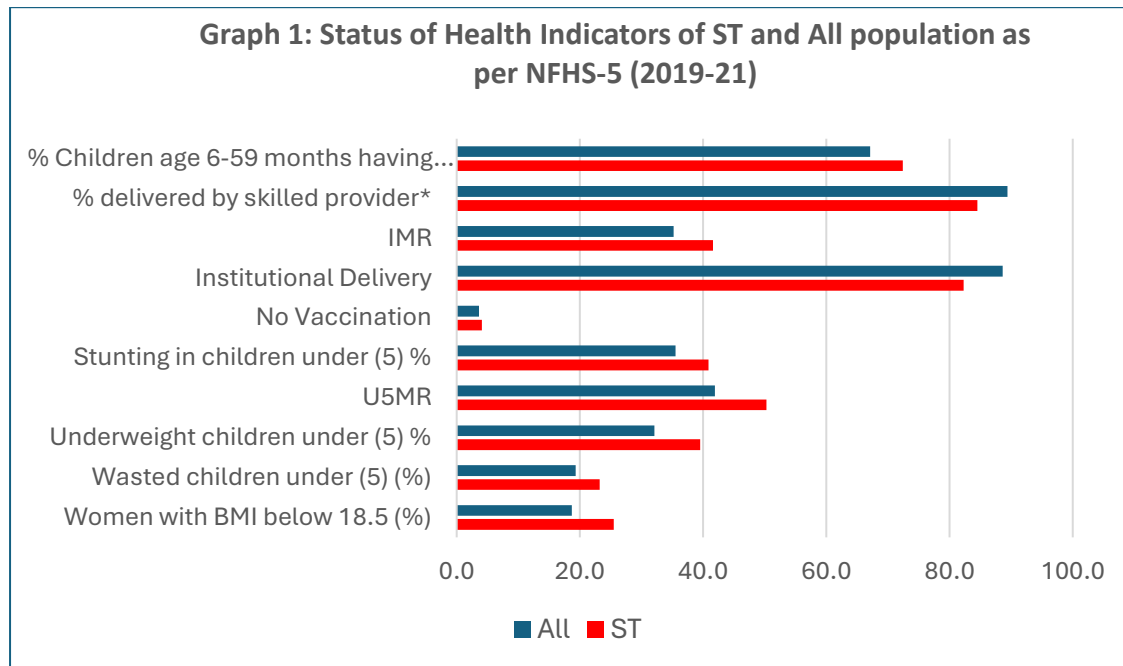
The Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2025 - Adivasi Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic conditions, rights, and contributions of Adivasis in India in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report aims to highlight the key challenges faced by Adivasis in poverty, education, health, nutrition, governance, and access to basic services, and provides policy recommendations.

## Adivasis in India

India has one of the largest Adivasi populations in the world, with over 104 million people (8.6% of the total population, as per Census of India 2011). Adivasis are India's indigenous tribes, officially called 'Scheduled Tribes (STs)' under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. There are 705 recognized Adivasi groups, including 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), residing mainly in forested and rural regions throughout the country. These groups are predominantly located in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka, and the Northeast.

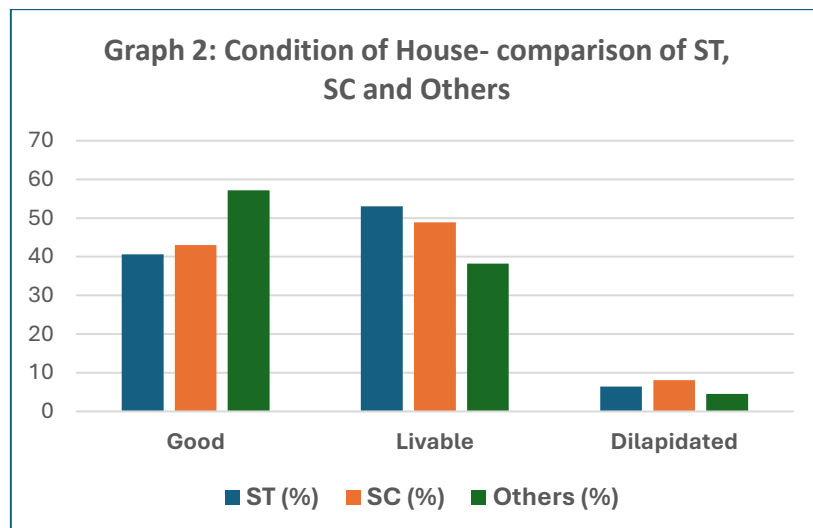
Adivasis have historically been custodians of forests, biodiversity, and indigenous knowledge, playing a crucial role in environmental conservation. Despite protections under various acts like PESA 1996 and FRA 2006, they remain one of India's most marginalized communities, facing issues like poverty, land dispossession, displacement, poor healthcare, and limited access to education and infrastructure. A comparison of various indicators between Adivasis and other social groups is provided below, with more detailed comparisons found in [Annexure 1](#).

Graph 1 shows health disparities, with 40.9% of Adivasi children stunted compared to 35.5% overall, and 72.4% of Adivasi children aged 6-59 months anaemic versus 67.1% overall. Additionally, 25.5% of ST women have a BMI below 18.5 compared to 18.7% overall, indicating poorer health outcomes for the ST group.



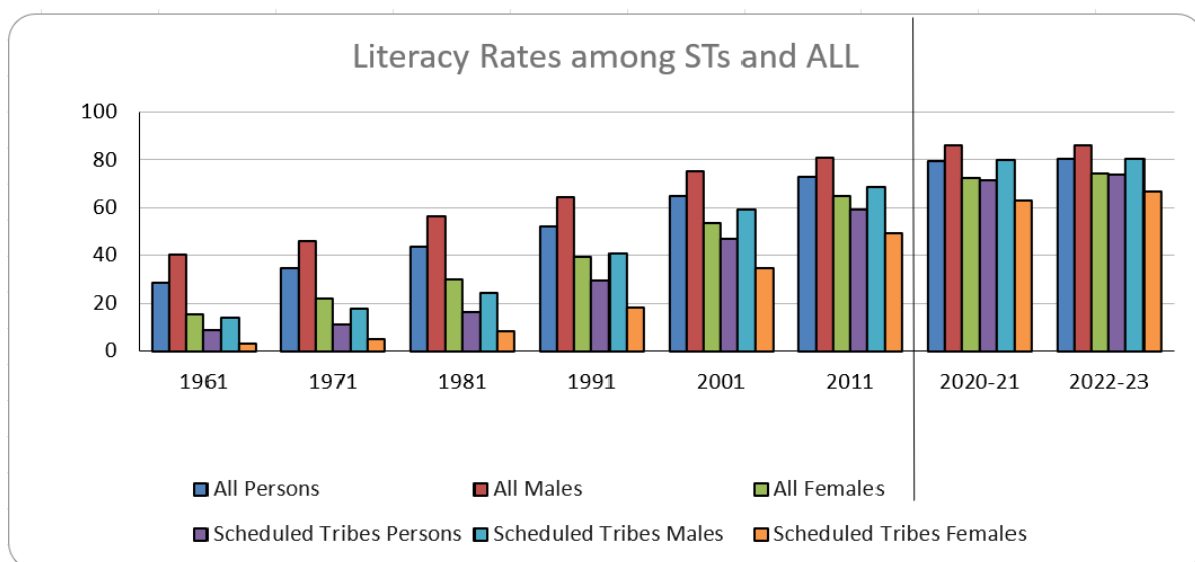
Source: NFHS-5

Graph 2 shows that only 40.6% of ST houses are in good condition, compared to SC's 43% and Others' 57.2%. Additionally, 6.4% of ST houses are dilapidated, versus 4.5% for Others, highlighting poorer housing conditions for Adivasis.



Source: Presentation "SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA, Census 2011" by Registrar General of India, May 2013

Graph 3 reveals that while Adivasi literacy rates have improved significantly over the decades, they still lag behind the national average. The gender gap has reduced but remains a concern, especially for Adivasi women. Continued focus on education initiatives, particularly for Adivasi women, is essential to achieving parity.



Source: Census 1961 to 2011, Office of the Registrar General, India and for 2020-21 & 2022-23, Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2020-21 and 2022-23 Annual reports, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation. <sup>1</sup>

The 2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (GMPI) reveals that 50.6% of Adivasi households live in multidimensional poverty, showing the highest deprivation rates in health, education, and living standards compared to national figures.

As India prepares its 2025 SDG Voluntary National Review, evaluating Adivasi policies and programs is crucial. Addressing systemic barriers and promoting inclusive, rights-based, and community-led development will ensure Adivasis actively participate in the nation's progress, aligning with the commitment to 'Leave No One Behind'.

<sup>1</sup> Though the two data sets are not comparable, the data on literacy rate is only available through PLFS for the latest years

## Adivasis and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

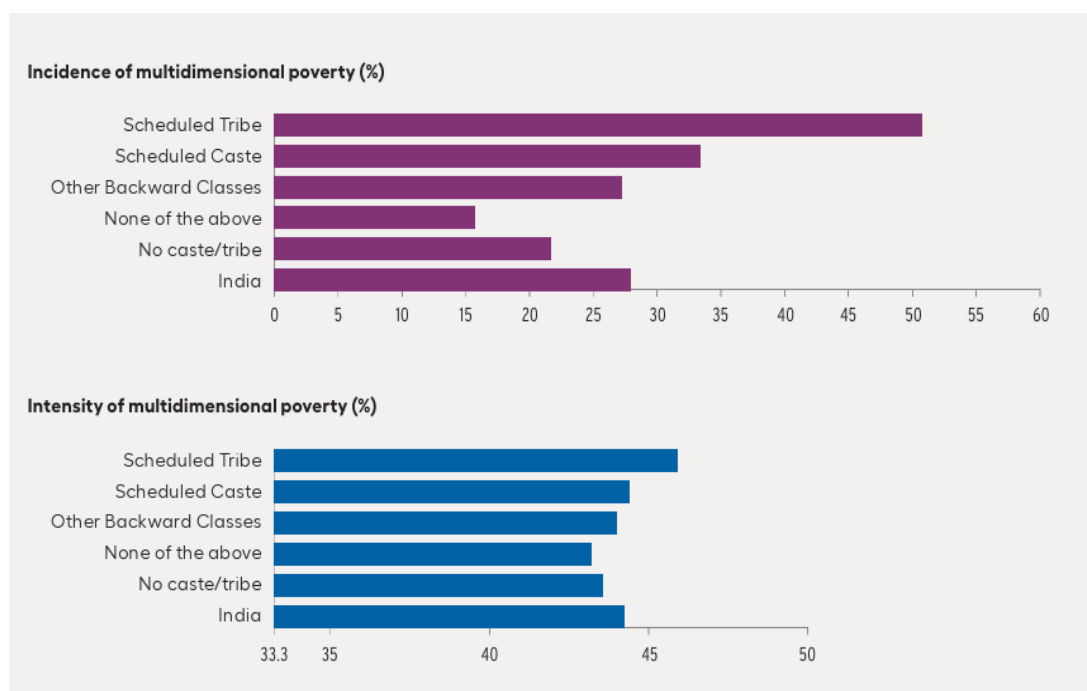
Adivasis constitute one of India's most marginalized communities, facing significant socio-economic disparities. As India works towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is crucial to examine the specific challenges faced by Adivasis across various indicators, including poverty, malnutrition, education, infrastructure, gender equality, and access to resources. Despite efforts to bridge the development gap, Adivasis continue to experience higher levels of poverty, poor health outcomes, lower literacy rates, and inadequate access to basic services compared to other social groups.

This section delves into the critical issues impacting the Adivasis, supported by data-driven insights and graphical representations, to highlight the urgent need for targeted measures and inclusive strategies that align with India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ensuing analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic barriers faced by Adivasis, and to propose policy priorities for fostering their active participation in the nation's progress.

### Theme: Poverty

In India, the Adivasi is the poorest social group, more than half live in multidimensional poverty. They account for about one-sixth of all people living in multidimensional poverty in India. Graph 4 reveals that Adivasis face the highest levels of multidimensional poverty both in terms of incidence (how many are poor) and intensity (how poor they are).

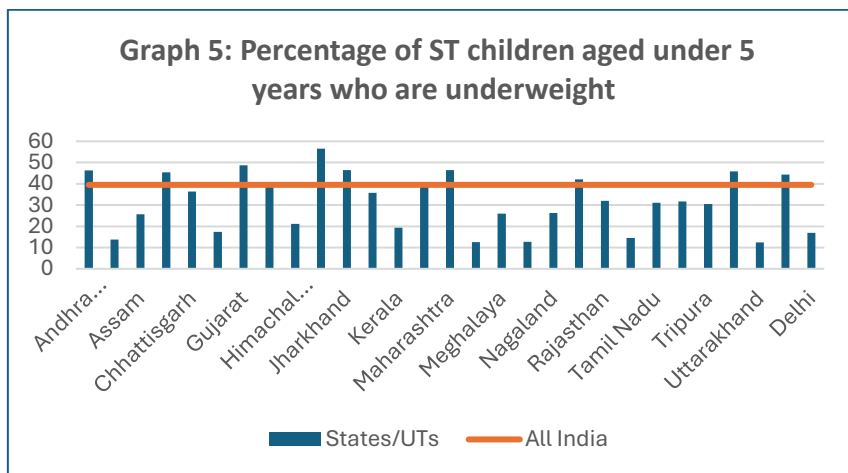
Graph 4: Multidimensional Poverty



Source: Global MPI, 2021 ([https://ophi.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/GMPI\\_2021\\_Unmasking.pdf](https://ophi.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/GMPI_2021_Unmasking.pdf))

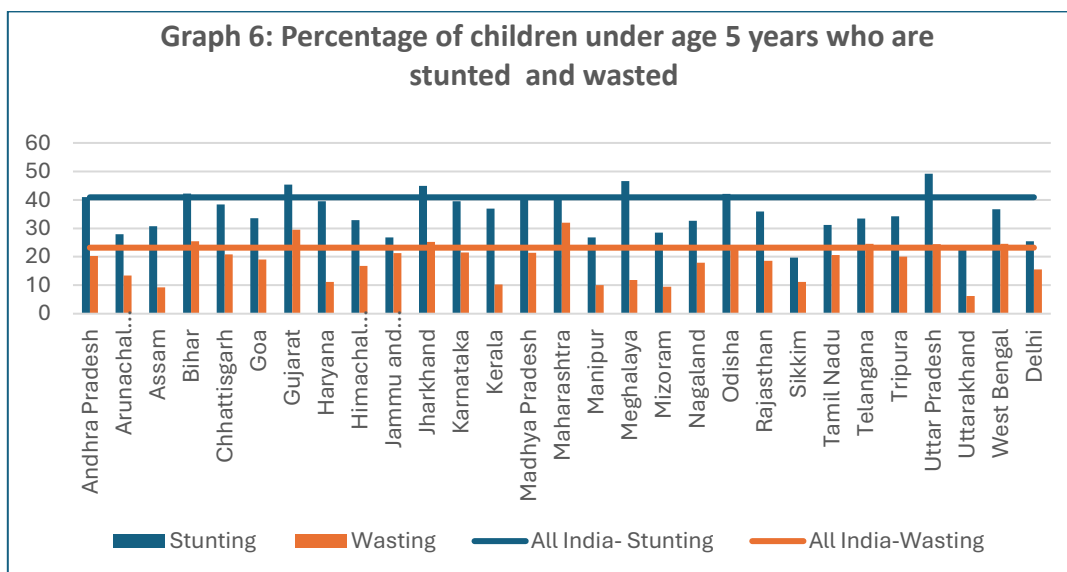
**Theme: Malnutrition**

Graph 5 shows that over 40% of Adivasi children under 5 are underweight in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, J&K, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, exceeding the national average of 39.5%.<sup>2</sup>



Source: NFHS 5

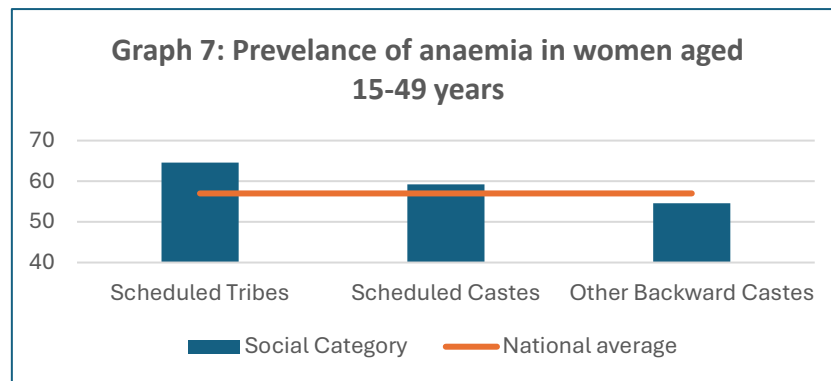
Graph 6 shows that 40.9% of Adivasi children under 5 are stunted and 23.2% are wasted. Uttar Pradesh has the highest stunting rate at 49.2%, and Maharashtra has the highest wasting rate at 32%.



Source: NFHS 5

<sup>2</sup> NFHS 5

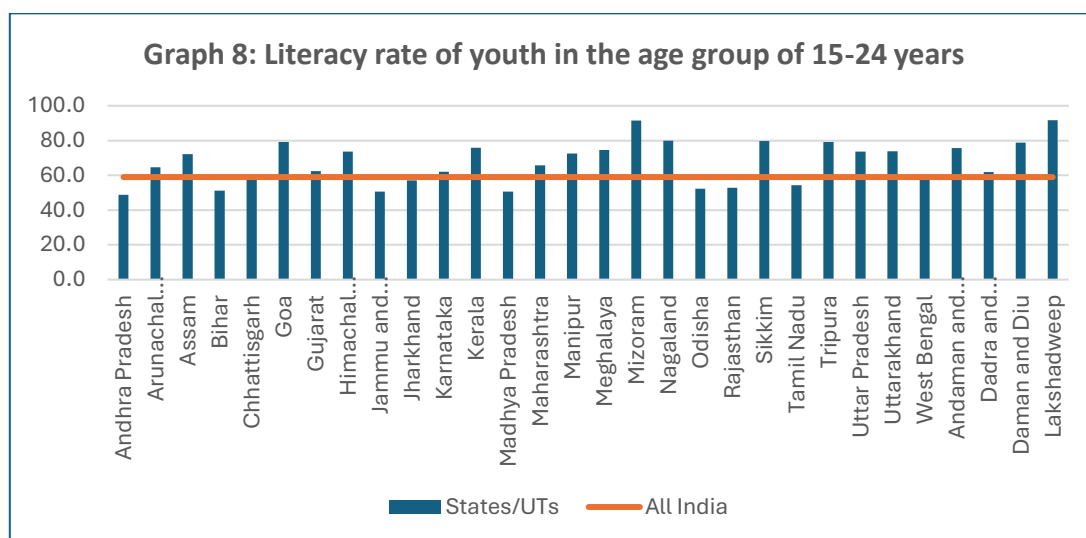
Graph 7 shows anaemia prevalence in women aged 15-49 years. ST women have the highest rate at 64.6%. Nationally, the rate is 57.0%, with Scheduled Caste at 59.2% and Other Backward Class at 54.6%.



Source: NFHS-5

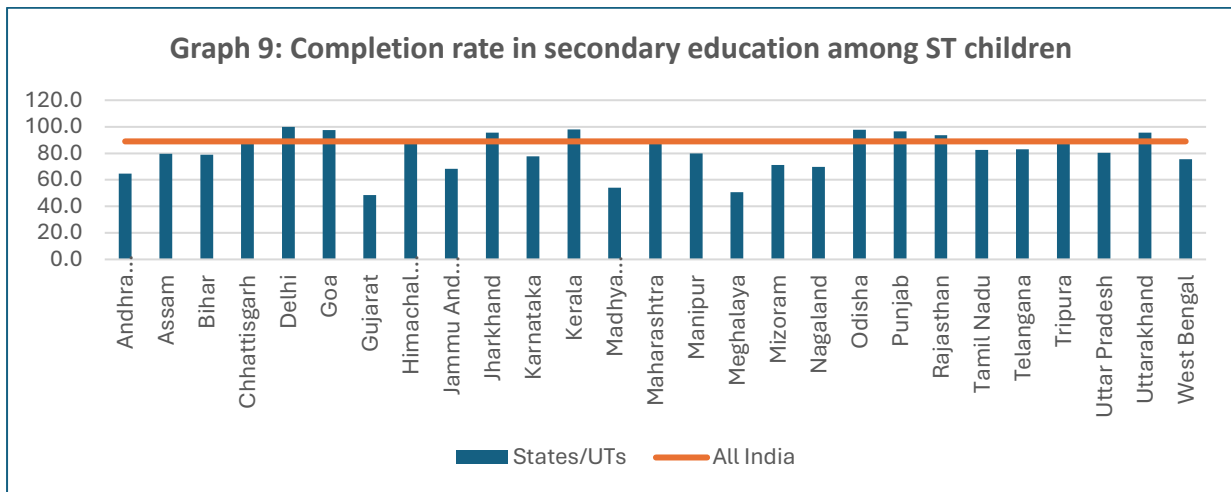
**Theme: Education**

Graph 8 indicates that the literacy rate among Adivasi youth aged 15-24 years in India stands at 59% according to the last census 2011. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal have literacy rates among Adivasi youth that are below the national average.



Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Ministry of Home Affairs / Periodicity: 10 Years

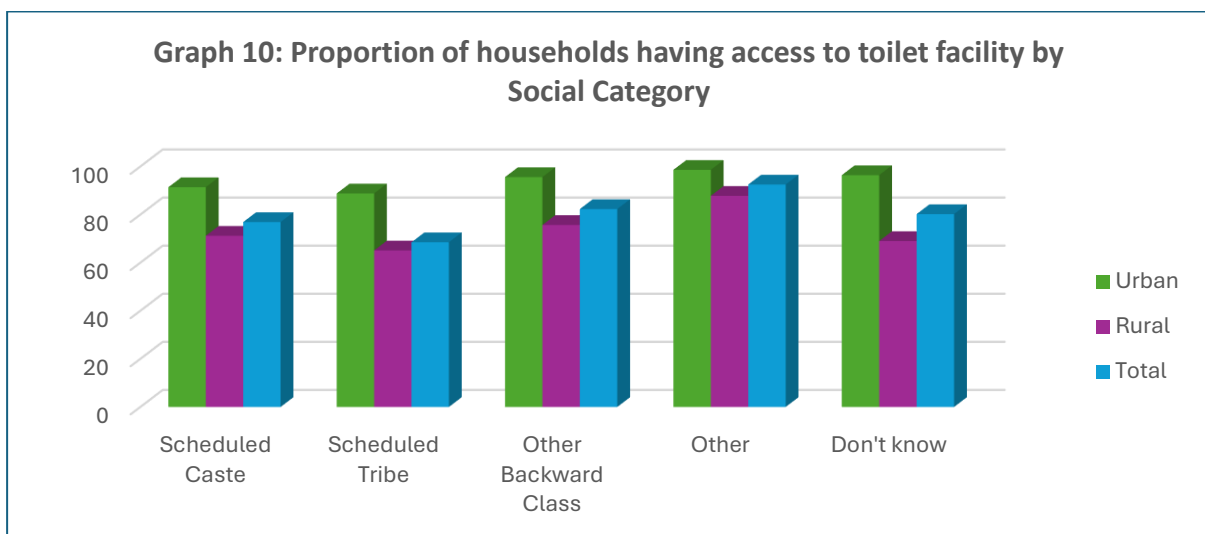
Graph 9 indicates that the completion rate of secondary education among ST children is 89%. However, in Gujarat, less than 50% of enrolled ST children successfully complete secondary education.



Source: Results of Secondary & Higher Secondary Examinations, 2023, Ministry of Education

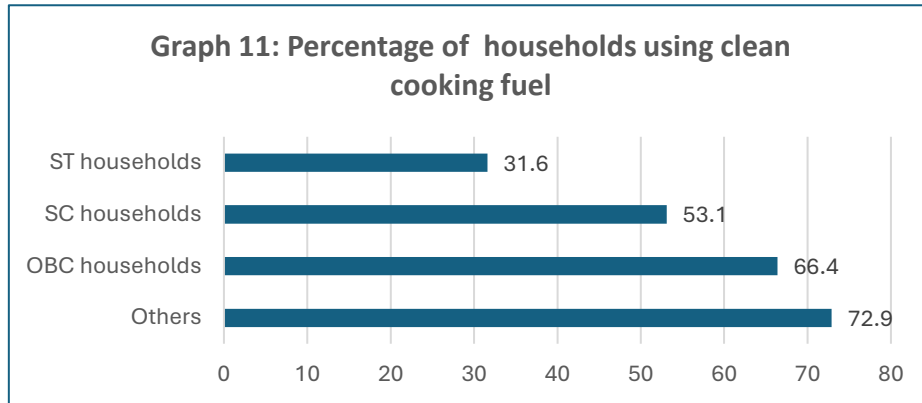
**Theme: Household Infrastructure**

According to NFHS-5, 68.5% of Adivasi households have access to toilet facilities, compared to 76.5% for Scheduled Castes and 82.3% for Other Backward Classes, as shown in graph 10.



Source: NFHS-5

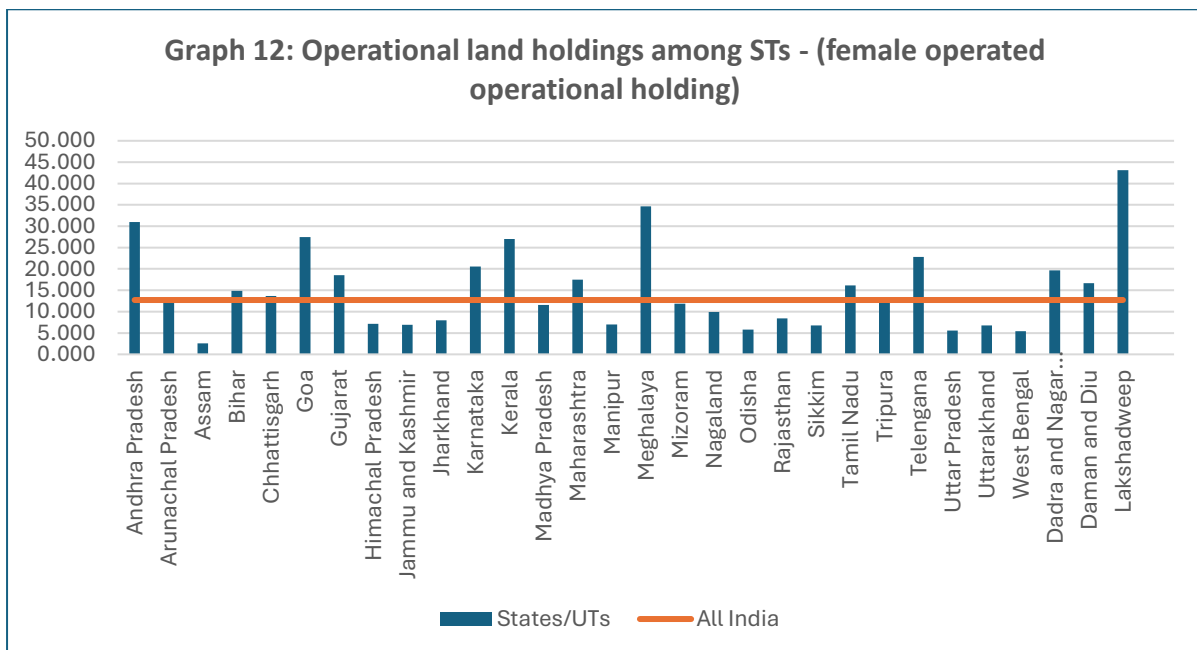
In 2020-21, 62% of Indian households used LPG as their main cooking fuel, according to the National Sample Survey Office's Multiple Indicator Survey. Among Adivasi households, only 31.6% used LPG, with two-thirds relying on firewood as shown in graph 11.



Source: Dhruvika Dhamija (2023), “How many Indian households use clean fuel for cooking?” Centre for Economic Data and Analysis (CEDA), Ashoka University.

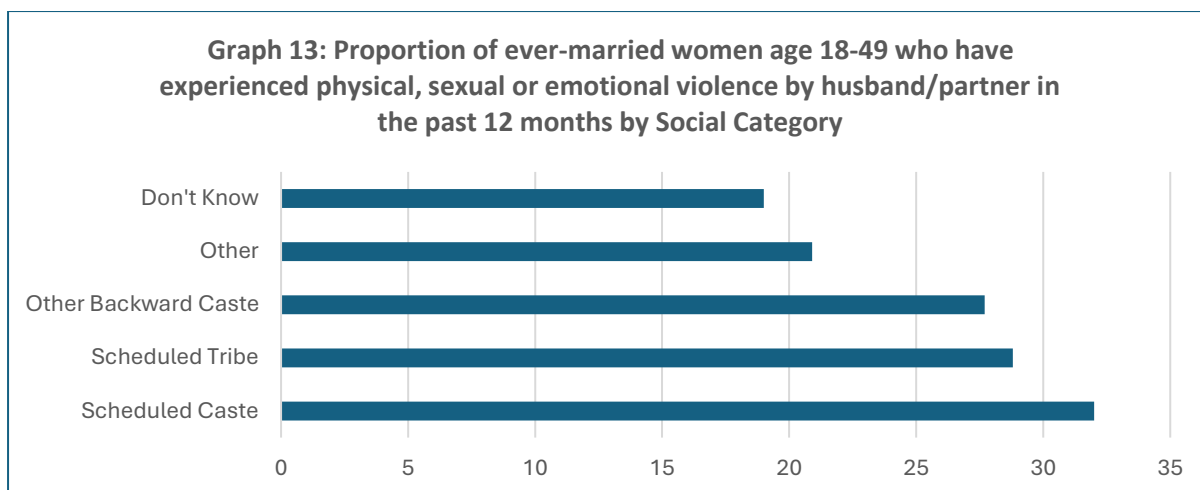
**Theme: Women Empowerment**

Graph 12 shows that only 12.7% of land holdings are operated by females among STs. However, in Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Lakshadweep, the percentage exceeds 30%.



Source: Agriculture Census, 2021-22, DAC&FW, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare/ Periodicity: 5 years

NFHS-5 data shows that around 28.8% of Adivasi women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by husband/partner in the past 12 months. This number is higher than women belonging to OBC community as shown in graph 13.



Source: NFHS-5

Apart from the thematic data highlighted above, UNDP undertook a comprehensive exercise to assess availability of data for Scheduled Tribes in India. Data availability is crucial for the effective development and empowerment of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India. The National Indicator Framework, which is the robust monitoring and evaluation framework for SDG Monitoring in India, was taken as the base for this exercise and availability of data was accessed through published government sources. The detailed analysis on availability of data for Adivasis is available in [Annexure 8.](#)<sup>3</sup>

The Government of India, led by NITI Aayog, will present India's third Voluntary National Review (VNR) report at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York in July 2025. UN in India is supporting NITI Aayog in this endeavour. Organizing consultations with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working with various LNOB groups to facilitate their voices getting reflected in the VNR report is key element of UN in India's support to the VNR process.

## Methodology and Process of the VNR Report Preparation

To prepare for India's third Voluntary National Review (VNR) report at the UN High-Level Political Forum in July 2025, NITI Aayog, in collaboration with Partnering Hope Into Action Foundation (PHIA) and Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), and the UN Tribal Task Team-India, organized regional and national consultations. These events gathered Adivasi Community Leaders, Experts, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to address challenges and policy recommendations for Adivasis.

Before the consultations, a survey gathered input from CSOs, experts, and development practitioners on Adivasi challenges and policy recommendations. A desk review provided updates on progress and gaps regarding Adivasis. The process focused on five thematic areas, addressing issues like women's empowerment, youth aspirations, and climate change.

1. **Basic Amenities/Services** (Education, Health, Housing, Infrastructure)
2. **Natural Resources (Jal, Jungle, Jameen) Rights & Stewardship**

<sup>3</sup> This is preliminary analysis, will be finalised in consultation with MoSPI

3. **Livelihoods** (Dignity, Sustainability, Migration, Displacement)
4. **Culture and Traditional Knowledge** (Recognition and Integration)
5. **Policy & Governance** (Voice & Agency, Schedule V & VI Implementation)

### **Survey to gather views on the challenges faced by the Adivasis and recommendations.**

A bilingual questionnaire was created for this online survey to gather insights from CSOs, experts, and development practitioners on the challenges faced by Adivasis and policy recommendations. Fifty-five respondents from various states participated. The responses were compiled and incorporated into the final VNR 2025-Adivasi report.

### **Regional Consultations**

Five regional consultations across different zones were organized by FES, PHIA, and the UN Tribal Task Team-India from February 3rd to 15th, 2025, focused on Adivasi development as part of the VNR 2025 process. The southern consultation was held with the support of EFFICOR. These consultations saw the participation of 419 individuals from 20 states. The sessions included an introduction to the VNR process by NITI Aayog, a summary of the 2020 VNR report by the UN Tribal Task Team-India, group discussions on key thematic areas, and an open house for additional recommendations. The issues flagged were further discussed in the national consultation. Detailed information on states and participants is available in [annexure 5](#) and the report in [annexure 7](#).

### **The National Consultation of CSOs**

The National Consultation was held on February 18, 2025, in Ranchi facilitated by PHIA Foundation, FES with the UN Tribal Task Team-India under the guidance of NITI Aayog as part of India's Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2025 process on, in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The consultation had 101 participants, including community leaders, social workers, CSO representatives, academia and representatives from NITI Aayog and UN organizations.

### **Sessions and Discussions**

#### ***Inaugural session***

The event started with a traditional welcome ceremony, followed by key addresses from NITI Aayog, UNDP, UNICEF, and PHIA Foundation representatives.

Johnson Topno, Executive Director of the PHIA Foundation, in his welcome address and context-setting remarks, emphasized that the outcomes of the national consultation have the potential to be transformative in shaping the narrative of Adivasi development.

Rajib Kumar Sen, Senior Advisor at NITI Aayog, described the VNR as a crucial process for assessing SDG indicators and determining actionable strategies for Adivasis.

UNDP's Isabelle Tschan, Deputy Resident Representative, highlighted the importance of monitoring SDG progress and the criticality of SDG progress, especially for the "Leave no one Behind Group" and more importantly for the Adivasi groups who constitute about 9% of India's population. She also emphasized the role of civil society and government collaboration in ensuring the successful

implementation of the social security schemes. She reiterated UNDP's commitment to supporting such efforts.

UNICEF's Dennis Christian Larsen, Chief, Social and Behaviour Change Section, linked indigenous development with child welfare, emphasizing the need to preserve Adivasi culture. He stressed that community-led efforts are crucial in ensuring children's rights to health, education, and protection.

***Reflections from Regional Consultations:***

Key challenges and recommendations for Adivasi development from the five regional consultations were presented. Moderated by Ms. Radhika Kaul Batra, Chief of Staff at UNRCO, the session featured a panel discussion with four Adivasi Leaders on their status in relation to the SDGs.

***Thematic Sessions***

Participants were divided into five groups for parallel discussions, each moderated by subject experts: Ms. Akay Minz, Dr. Bipin Jojo, Dr. Joseph Marianus Kujur, Mr. Gunjal Ikir Munda, and Dr. Anangadev Singh.

The National Consultation confirmed regional insights and made actionable recommendations for India's VNR 2025. The Adivasi Development Report will be submitted to NITI Aayog, integrating Adivasi perspectives into India's SDG review. The consultation emphasized inclusive development and multi-stakeholder collaboration for policy reforms, community empowerment, and sustainable Adivasi progress. Key challenges and recommendations from surveys and consultations are summarized under five thematic areas below.

## Theme wise Challenges and Recommendations

### THEME 1: Basic Amenities/Services (Education, Health, Housing, Infrastructure)

Basic amenities like education, health, housing, and infrastructure are vital for Adivasi communities. However, they often face significant challenges in accessing these due to geographical isolation and socio-economic barriers. For example, 39.5% of Adivasi children are underweight compared to the national average of 32.1%, and 40.9% of Adivasi children under 5 are stunted, higher than the national average of 35.5%. Literacy among Adivasi youth is 59% versus the national average of 86.14%, and their Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is just 21.2%.

Programs like Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) aim to improve education, but dropout rates remain high. The Ayushman Bharat Scheme seeks to improve healthcare, yet Adivasi districts lack adequate facilities. Housing initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and infrastructure projects under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) aim to bridge service gaps, but disparities persist. Recently, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) launched Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Abhiyan for National Mission (PM-JANMAN<sup>4</sup>) and Development Action for Janjatiya Gaurav (DA-JAGUA<sup>5</sup>) to address infrastructural gaps in Adivasi areas systematically.

Addressing these issues requires inclusive, context-specific policies that recognize the unique needs of Adivasi populations and empower local governance structures to bridge these service gaps effectively. The key challenges and recommendations are as follows:

#### Key Challenges

##### 1. Limited Access to Education:

- Adivasi children in India face significant barriers to quality education due to inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained teachers, and a lack of culturally relevant curricula. The medium of instruction is a major challenge, as most schools do not incorporate Adivasi languages, leading to learning difficulties and early dropouts.
- Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) serve a limited number of Adivasi children in grades 6-12, excluding younger ones. Overcrowded hostels and school consolidation may restrict access for Adivasi children, especially girls, in remote areas.
- Lack of monitoring mechanisms and unavailability of disaggregated data of teacher student ratio at village level especially in PESA Areas pose a challenge to appropriate planning and availability of teachers in these regions.

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<sup>4</sup> PM-JANMAN aims to improve the socio-economic conditions of 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in 18 states and one UT

<sup>5</sup> DA-JAGUA will improve socio-economic conditions for Adivasis by providing basic facilities to around 63,843 villages across 26 States and 4 UTs, benefiting over 5 crore Adivasi people from 2024-25 to 2028-29.

- Limited access to education also stems from safety and menstrual hygiene issues for girls, leading to high dropout rates. Financial constraints, lack of STEM-focused learning, and absence of Adivasi role models further hinder higher education accessibility.

## 2. Barriers in Healthcare:

- Adivasis in India continue to face significant health disparities, despite overall national progress.
- The Expert Committee on Tribal Health has highlighted critical gaps in healthcare access and socio-economic determinants affecting Adivasi populations. The Maternal Mortality Ratio, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), and Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) in Adivasi regions are significantly higher than national averages. Table 1 reveals that the IMR for Adivasi stands at 41.6 per 1000 live births, compared to 35.2 nationally. Similarly, the U5MR for Adivasis is 50.3 per 1000 live births, whereas the national average is 41.9.

**Table 1: Status of IMR and U5MR for Adivasis**

Indicator	Adivasi	National Average
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)- per 1000 live births	41.6	35.2
Under Five Mortality Rate- per 1000 live births	50.3	41.9

- Adivasi areas often lack adequate healthcare infrastructure, with many regions experiencing shortages of Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Community Health Centres (CHCs), and sub-centres. Even where infrastructural facilities are available, there is a shortage of doctors and paramedical staff and technicians. This infrastructural deficit, coupled with remote locations and poor road and electricity connectivity, hampers timely medical intervention.
- Although initiatives like Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres<sup>6</sup> (AB-HWCs) aim to enhance primary healthcare, their reach in Adivasi regions remains limited. Adivasi populations bear a disproportionate burden of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and sickle cell anaemia, exacerbated by limited healthcare access and awareness. For instance, the prevalence of sickle cell anaemia is notably higher in Adivasis, necessitating targeted health interventions.
- Many Adivasi households lack safe drinking water and sanitation, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. The Ministry of Jal Shakti reports that only 48.67% of Adivasi rural households have tap water, and NFHS-5 indicates that just 65.1% have toilets.
- Maternal and child health face challenges, including high rates of teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and home deliveries due to limited access to healthcare. The elderly struggle with digital-based health services, further increasing their vulnerability.

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<sup>6</sup> The Union Government has renamed the existing Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) as 'Ayushman Arogya Mandir' with the tagline 'Arogyam Parmam Dhanam'.

### **3. Housing and Infrastructure Deficits:**

- Adivasi housing reflects cultural identity with communities like the *Gonds*, *Bhils*, *Nagas*, and *Santals* maintaining distinct architectural styles. However, modernization, deforestation, and land encroachment threaten these traditions. Government housing programs lack provisions to preserve these cultural styles.
- Housing insecurity is increasing as many Adivasi families are relocated due to development projects and land acquisitions, resulting in the loss of traditional construction knowledge.
- Many Adivasi households lack essential infrastructure, with only 57% having access to tap water and inconsistent rural electrification. Despite existing infrastructure, the supply of safe drinking water and regular electricity remains unreliable.
- Infrastructure like roads, electricity, and water supply is lacking, especially in remote Adivasi areas, delaying access to essential services. The absence of digital connectivity further isolates Adivasis, preventing them from utilizing government schemes, financial services, and online education. This deficiency also hampers healthcare and educational institutions in effectively operating within these regions.
- The PM-JANMAN initiative aims to improve housing and infrastructure for 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) across 18 states and 1 Union Territory. However, issues with Aadhaar verification and geo-tagging in remote areas cause delays. As of March 31, 2024, only 39% (188,696 of 490,000) houses under PMAY have been completed. (Annual Report 2023-24, MoTA)

### **4. Digital Exclusion and Service Gaps:**

- Adivasis in India continue to face significant digital exclusion, limiting their access to essential government services and welfare schemes.
- Low digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and limited internet connectivity hinder the benefits of Aadhaar-linked services, digital banking, and online application processes for entitlements. This digital gap increases bureaucratic hurdles, preventing Adivasis from obtaining ration cards, pensions, and MGNREGA benefits. Aadhaar-based exclusions due to mismatched data or lack of documentation further restrict access to government welfare schemes.

### **5. Distress Migration:**

- Adivasis in India face economic challenges due to limited livelihood opportunities and frequent migration caused by land displacement and infrastructure projects. Migration disrupts access to essential services, and women migrants are at higher risk of harassment and trafficking.
- The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, is poorly enforced, exacerbating social exclusion.
- Skill development programs often do not align with local economies, prompting Adivasi youth to migrate.
- Traditional agricultural practices and sustainable farming opportunities are underutilized, and the lack of migration certificates leads to the loss of entitlements for displaced families.

### **6. Gender-Based Challenges:**

- Adivasi women face domestic violence, trafficking, and economic marginalization, taking on unpaid household and agricultural labor while their husbands migrate for work.
- Gender norms limit their participation in governance, affecting their role in decision-making.
- Early marriage and adolescent pregnancies continue to be common, impacting education and economic opportunities. Limited access to childcare facilities increases their responsibilities, making it difficult to engage in livelihood activities.
- Financial exclusion and restricted banking access lead many Adivasi women to rely on private microfinance schemes.

#### **7. Emerging Social Issues:**

- According to NFHS-5 data, 23.3% of Adivasi girls marry before the legal age of 18. Early marriage is associated with higher rates of adolescent pregnancies, maternal mortality, malnutrition, and school dropouts, contributing to ongoing poverty and gender inequality in these communities.
- Substance abuse among Adivasi youth is increasing, with limited access to rehabilitation services. Digital access has led to more cybercrimes, financial fraud, and online exploitation. Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and trafficking, is rising due to weak legal protections. Superstition-related crimes, such as witch-hunting, remain prevalent, particularly affecting Adivasi women. Additionally, youth disengagement from poor education quality and lack of jobs leads to frustration, depression, and criminal activities.
- Most Adivasi lack social security as they are frequently engaged in the unorganized sector or high-risk jobs, particularly when migrating to urban areas.

#### **8. Lack of Disaggregated Data and Representation**

- The lack of real-time, disaggregated data on Adivasi populations hinders effective monitoring of government schemes. Inadequate representation in policymaking results in policies that do not address Adivasis' concerns. Differently abled Adivasis face obstacles such as limited infrastructure accessibility, employment opportunities, and exclusion from welfare programs.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Education**

1. Integrate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, implement mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), and recruit local Adivasi teachers under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and introduce technology-driven solutions, such as digital classrooms, mobile learning units, and community radio for, bridging accessibility gaps.
2. Expand Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS): Ensure the completion of all 740 planned schools to provide more students with access to quality residential education. It may also be considered that EMRS caters to the tribal children from the early stages like 1st standard.
3. Improve School Infrastructure: Enhance the learning environment by constructing more classrooms, libraries, hostels, and sanitation facilities under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Provide facilities like laboratories and promote sports facilities at the school level. Introduce Skill initiatives at the school level and provide additional support for students especially girls who wish to pursue higher studies.

4. **Strengthen Teacher Training:** Incorporate cultural sensitivity modules to enable educators to integrate Adivasi traditions, folklore, and knowledge systems into their teaching.
5. **Adopt Technology-Driven Solutions:** Bridge accessibility gaps with digital classrooms, mobile learning units, and community radio for remote education.
6. **Encourage Community-Led Education Initiatives:** Involve Adivasi leaders, self-help groups (SHGs), and local NGOs in school governance to increase enrolment, reduce dropouts, and create culturally relevant learning experiences.

### **Health**

7. **Expand Healthcare Infrastructure:** Set up additional Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Community Health Centres (CHCs), and Sub-Centres in remote areas, ensuring at least one functional PHC per 10,000 people as per Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS).
8. **Enhance Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centers (AB-HWCs<sup>7</sup>):** Focus on last-mile delivery through mobile health units and telemedicine services.
9. **Scale Up National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan):** Improve the coverage of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) with supplementary nutrition programs tailored to Adivasi dietary patterns.
10. **Increase Healthcare Workforce:** Recruit more Adivasi birth attendants, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), and midwives to enhance institutional deliveries and antenatal care.
11. **Implement Targeted Disease Prevention Programs:** Focus on sickle cell anaemia, malaria, and tuberculosis with mass screening, genetic counselling, and provision of sickle cell management kits.
12. **Improve Vaccination Coverage:** Utilize digital vaccination records and targeted vaccination campaigns to address hesitancy and outreach among Adivasis.
13. **Enhance Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation:** Prioritize infrastructure improvements through Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to reduce waterborne diseases.
14. **Increase Awareness of Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):** Conduct community mobilization to ensure universal insurance coverage for eligible Adivasi families.

### **Housing and Infrastructure**

15. **Expand DA-JAGUA and PM-JANMAN Schemes:** Streamline Aadhaar-linked registrations and provide alternative verification mechanisms for those without formal documents.
16. **Customize Housing Models:** Integrate modern amenities while preserving traditional architectural elements for cultural relevance and acceptability.
17. **Accelerate Infrastructure Projects:** Improve road connectivity through Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), safe drinking water through Jal Jeevan Mission, and energy access under Saubhagya Yojana.
18. **Adopt Community-Driven Approaches:** Engage Adivasi leaders and self-help groups (SHGs) in participatory planning and equitable distribution of housing benefits.

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<sup>7</sup> The Union Government has renamed the existing Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) as 'Ayushman Arogya Mandir' with the tagline 'Arogyam Paramam Dhanam'. Renamed as Ayushman Arogya Mandir.

19. Establish Livelihood-Linked Housing Projects: Provide sustainable employment opportunities in housing and infrastructure development.

#### **Digital and Social Services**

20. Expand Broadband and Mobile Network Connectivity: Improve internet access in Adivasi areas under the BharatNet Project and establish community digital hubs in Panchayat offices, schools, and Anganwadi centres.
21. Launch Adivasi-Specific Digital Literacy Programs: Empower Adivasis to navigate online services and digital banking securely with programs in local languages under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA).
22. Introduce Assisted Digital Service Centers: Set up centers at Gram Panchayats and Post Offices with trained personnel to help Adivasis apply for ration cards, pensions, and MGNREGA benefits.
23. Implement Flexible Identification Mechanisms: Allow alternative documentation for availing government benefits to address Aadhaar-related exclusions.
24. Ensure Multilingual and User-Friendly Government Websites: Enhance usability for Adivasis with simplified, mobile-friendly digital services.
25. Retain Offline Service Alternatives: Prevent exclusion of those without internet access by maintaining offline service options.

#### **Employment and Economic Empowerment**

26. Expand MGNREGA with Skill-Based Employment: Promote community-managed forests and agroforestry and facilitate market linkages for Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs).
27. Strengthen Social Security Portability: Ensure seamless access to ration cards, health services, and pensions through the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme and e-Shram registration.
28. Establish Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs): Provide legal aid, financial literacy, and access to social welfare programs at key migration hubs.
29. Integrate Skill Development Programs: Empower Adivasi youth with alternative employment opportunities through local industries and entrepreneurship training.

#### **Social and Cultural Initiatives**

30. Address Child Marriage: Integrate education, legal enforcement, economic empowerment, and social change in a community-led approach to combat child marriage among Adivasis.
31. Establish Community-Based De-Addiction Programs: Collaborate with Primary Health Centers (PHCs), NGOs, and Adivasi leaders to provide counselling, awareness campaigns, and peer support.
32. Promote Gender Equality: Expand education scholarships, hostel facilities, and leadership training for Adivasi girls to enhance their participation in education and governance.

## **THEME 2: Natural Resources (Jal, Jungle, Jameen) Rights & Stewardship**

Adivasis have a deep-rooted cultural, economic, and spiritual connection with natural resources—water (Jal), forests (Jungle) and land (Jameen). However, despite constitutional safeguards and legal

provisions such as the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996, Adivasis continue to face systemic barriers in securing their rights over natural resources. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act aims to undo the historical injustices of colonial-era forest policies, but bureaucratic delays and resistance from forest departments hinder its full realization.

## Key Challenges

### 1. Weak Implementation of Legal Frameworks

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 and PESA 1996 face challenges in implementation. Reluctance from the Forest Department to recognize Community Forest Rights (CFRs) and administrative obstacles hinder Adivasis from reclaiming their ancestral lands. Total titles distributed under FRA against the claims is 48.95%<sup>8</sup> till January 2025. This, when compared with potential of CFR recognition, comes at a meagre 23.4%.<sup>9</sup> Government of Odisha gives the potential area for the state under FRA Atlas (2020), the titles distributed according to Monthly Progress Report (MoTA) against the potential comes at 13.08%.

The complex documentation requirements under FRA exclude many Adivasis, especially Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), as they often lack proof of residence and land records. Challenges also include lack of access to Forest and Revenue records within the Communities, lack of awareness about rights and claim-making processes, unwillingness of the Forest Department functionaries, and delays by the SDLC in processing claims. Additionally, a lack of trained human resources at the village level and lack of coordination among Revenue, Forest, and Tribal Welfare Departments at the SDLC level further exacerbate these challenges.

### 2. Deforestation and Land Alienation Due to Development Projects

Large-scale mining<sup>10</sup>, industrial projects, and monoculture plantations<sup>11</sup> threaten Adivasi livelihoods and the ecological balance of their regions. Over 80% of land alienation cases are ruled against Adivasi claimants, leaving them vulnerable to land diversion for development projects by private sector and state agencies. Agriculture land degradation and displacement in the North-East due to infrastructure projects exacerbate these issues. The loss of forests has severe impact on life and livelihood, including access to Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), affecting Adivasi economies and traditional knowledge systems.

### 3. Lack of Control Over Natural Resources

Adivasis face difficulties in accessing and managing their traditional water bodies, forests, and land due to overlapping jurisdiction of multiple government departments. Resistance from the forest department in ceding control to Gram Sabhas restricts their autonomy in managing forests and livelihood activities. Government policies acknowledge community roles in conservation but fail to grant decision-making power to Adivasis.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://tribal.nic.in/FRA.aspx> (MPR, Jan 2025)

<sup>9</sup> Potential given by Promise & Performance Report, 2016, actual from Monthly Progress Report, Jan 2025

<sup>10</sup> Hasdeo Arand Coal Mining (Chhattisgarh), POSCO Steel Project (Odisha)

<sup>11</sup> Oil Palm Plantation Expansion (Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh)

#### **4. Authority of Gram Sabhas**

As mandated under the FRA and PESA Acts, Gram Sabhas are to function as an authority and as units of self-governance to govern their affairs, including the governance of common property resources such as forests, water bodies, and pastures. This requires the devolution of funds, functions, and functionaries to the Gram Sabha. However, the lack of such devolution, despite decades of existing Acts, has led to their poor implementation on the ground.

#### **5. Non-Recognition of Adivasis as Stewards of Their Natural Resources**

Adivasis have contributed to the protection and preservation of forests, biodiversity, water, and land through their traditional knowledge and practices. However, this contribution is often overlooked, and they face continued separation from these resources. Although the FRA 2006 preamble acknowledges the need to address the historical issues of forest control taken from the Adivasis, formal recognition of their role as stewards remains limited.

#### **6. Agricultural Challenges**

Declining groundwater levels and drying streams impact agriculture and daily life. Monsoon flooding and seasonal water shortages disrupt farming. Overextraction and unsustainable practices reduce long-term viability. Climate change further disrupts traditional farming, increasing reliance on non-traditional food sources.

#### **7. Human-Wildlife Conflicts**

Increasing attacks on Adivasis, weak forest management, and large industries exploiting resources threaten traditional livelihoods. Poor environmental assessments cause displacement and ecosystem damage. Reduced eco-sensitive zones worsen deforestation and human-wildlife conflicts.

#### **8. Gender Inequality in Land Ownership**

Adivasi women are vital to forest-based livelihoods but are largely excluded from land ownership. Customary laws favour male landownership, limiting women to maintenance rights without inheritance. There is no legal provision for equal land rights for women in current policies. Agriculture Census 2021-22 shows only 12.7% of Adivasi land holdings are female operated.

#### **9. Lack of Recognition of Traditional Governance Systems**

Traditional Adivasi governance like the Manjhi Pargana system (Santals), Manki- Munda System (Mundas), Parha System (Oraons), Dorbar System (Khasi Tribe), Panch System (Bhil Tribe) are ignored, and Gram Sabhas are bypassed in decisions. This lack of integration with modern laws weakens community-led resource management. The Forest Department retains control over forests, contrary to FRA mandates for transferring authority to Gram Sabhas.

#### **10. Poor Coordination Between Government Departments and CSOs**

Conflicts between Adivasis and rural development agencies hinder effective resource management. Mismanagement of NTFPs and common property resources weakens local

economies. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) supporting Adivasi rights awareness and conservation lack coordination with government agencies.

## **Recommendations**

### **Streamline Legal Processes and Strengthen Implementation**

1. Ensure strict enforcement of legal provisions to prevent delays and denial of Adivasi rights. Simplify the process of claiming land and forest rights with community-based verification mechanisms. Accelerate the area mapping exercise to identify villages under FRA, ensuring targets are set and planned execution is completed.
2. Provide and devolve funds, functions, and functionaries to Gram Sabhas, empowering them as authorities and units of self-governance to effectively implement the FRA and PESA.
3. Empower local Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) to facilitate smooth implementation of FRA provisions.
4. Launch a special initiative to expedite CFRR, hindered by insufficient support and often resistance from the Forest department. The transformative potential of enhancing forest-based livelihoods for tribal communities is evident in the economic empowerment seen in Gadchiroli (Maharashtra) and Kalahandi (Odisha) after receiving CFRR.
5. Consider expanding DA JGUA coverage to support Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR) for Gram Sabhas from 1,000 to 10,000 villages, to speed up implementation, help prepare claims and enhance forest conservation and livelihoods.
6. Rights holders must be consulted/consent taken for forestry projects. Where feasible, these projects should be carried out through Gram Sabhas or CFRMCs.
7. It is necessary to establish an appropriate policy framework for the conversion of CFR lands. The Free Prior Informed Consent of the Gram Sabhas must be obtained, and a compensation framework that duly acknowledges PESA should be developed in case of any conversion of CFR lands.
8. Provide special emphasis on implementation of Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR) which provides rights to manage the Forest resources. Till January 2025 only 14.28% of CFR rights have been recognised
9. Transfer the funds allocated to the Forest Department to Gram Sabhas for forest restoration and management.
10. Exempt Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTGs) from extensive documentation requirements. Provide legal support for filing claims and ensure community participation in land governance.

### **Recognize Adivasi Stewardship and Ensure Their Inclusion**

11. Recognize Adivasis as stewards of natural resources. Strengthen community-based forest management and involve Adivasis in environmental policies. Support through stewardship funds (attention by State Finance Commissions). Ensure Governor consults and gets consent from Adivasis.
12. Document and recognize the knowledge and efforts of Adivasis in preserving biodiversity, forests, water, and land resources. Implement stewardship funds to support these communities, with attention from Central and State Finance Commissions.

13. The Governor's office should ensure consultation and consent from Adivasis on development projects.

#### **Strengthen Environmental and Social Impact Assessments**

14. Implement stringent Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) before approving industrial or infrastructure projects in Adivasi regions.
15. Mandate Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Gram Sabhas before any land acquisition.

#### **Enhance Compensation and Rehabilitation Policies**

16. Strengthen the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement (LARR) Act to ensure adequate compensation and alternative livelihoods for displaced communities.
17. Address displacement due to industrial and conservation projects through a robust rehabilitation framework that ensures land-for-land compensation instead of inadequate monetary settlements.

#### **Promote Gender Equality in Land Ownership**

18. Adopt a gender-sensitive approach in land allocation policies to grant legal land ownership to Adivasi women. Amend FRA and other policies to recognize women's land ownership rights, ensuring joint or direct titles for women. Promote gender-sensitive reforms and awareness to shift societal views on women's inheritance.
19. Facilitate women-led forest management groups to strengthen their role in resource governance.

#### **Empower Traditional and Local Governance Structures**

20. Empower Gram Sabhas with decision-making authority over forests, water, and land management.

To enable Gram Sabhas with effective decision-making authority over forests, water, and land management, it is essential to operationalize their legal powers under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This involves strengthening the institutional role of Gram Sabhas through regular meetings, integrating traditional leaders into decision-making, and building community capacity on legal rights and governance. Gram Sabha resolutions should be aligned with Panchayat Standing Committees, ensuring community priorities are reflected in development plans. Supporting Community Forest Rights (CFR) claims and enabling Gram Sabhas to prepare and implement forest and water management plans will enhance community-led resource governance. Cross-departmental convergence and use of schemes like MGNREGA can further reinforce these plans, while village-level monitoring committees ensure accountability and sustainability.

21. The traditional Adivasi institutions may be consulted to ensure culturally appropriate decision-making in resource management.
22. Implement government schemes directly through Gram Sabhas to enhance transparency and efficiency.

23. Finalise and enforce PESA rules in Jharkhand and Odisha to operationalize the Act effectively, ensuring decentralized governance and autonomy for Adivasis in Scheduled Areas.

### **THEME 3: Livelihoods: Dignity, Sustainability, Migration, Displacement**

Adivasis face marginalization, land loss, poor market access, and climate-driven livelihood instability. Despite contributing significantly to India's mineral wealth and forest conservation, they suffer from displacement and economic insecurity. Climate change has worsened conditions in Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh by reducing agricultural yields. Programs like PMKVY and NRLM aim to integrate Adivasi youth into the formal economy, but gaps in awareness and accessibility remain.

Despite initiatives like Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, MGNREGA, and Skill India, only 37% of eligible Adivasi households access formal financial services (RBI Report, 2021). The National Consultation on "Adivasi Development for the VNR 2025 Process" highlights the need for sustainable livelihoods for Adivasis.

#### **Key Challenges**

##### **1. Limited Economic Opportunities and Forced Migration**

- Over 60% of Adivasi youth in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha migrate seasonally for low-paying jobs due to lack of local employment opportunities.
- Programs like PMKVY and NRLM aim to skill Adivasi youth, but the mismatch with traditional knowledge systems and lack of targeted outreach restricts their participation.
- There are 90 districts or 809 blocks with more than 50% Adivasi population and they account for nearly 45% of the Adivasi population in the country<sup>12</sup>. In other words, almost 55% of the Adivasi population lives outside these 809 Adivasi majority blocks.
- Low representation of Adivasis in government and private-sector jobs exacerbates unemployment.
- Lack of financial support for entrepreneurship prevents the establishment of sustainable businesses.

##### **2. Loss of Traditional Land and Resources**

- Encroachment, deforestation, and industrial projects threaten Adivasi land and resources.
- Lack of land documentation weakens land rights and sustainable livelihood planning.
- The poor implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and PESA Act leaves many without secure land tenure.

##### **3. Decline in Traditional Livelihoods**

- Dependence on Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and indigenous agriculture faces challenges due to poor market access and exploitation by intermediaries.
- Climate change has reduced agricultural productivity by 15-20%, increasing food insecurity (Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 2022).

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<sup>12</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1556176>

- Limited awareness and complex procedures hinder the effectiveness of Government schemes like MSP for MFP.

#### **4. Limited Market Access for NTFPs and Agricultural Products**

- Poor market linkages and value-addition opportunities limit income generation.
- Adivasi Farmers lack awareness about MSP, reducing their bargaining power.
- Traditional knowledge related to NTFP processing and sustainable harvesting is disappearing.

#### **5. Gendered Economic Exclusion**

- Male migration increases women's workload in agriculture and resource management.
- Women face unsafe working conditions and limited mobility due to poor transportation infrastructure.

#### **6. Barriers to Entrepreneurship**

- Financial illiteracy, lack of credit access, and weak market linkages force Adivasi entrepreneurs to sell products at low prices to middlemen.
- Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) remain underutilized due to inadequate awareness and poor execution.
- Many Adivasis are uninformed about livelihood schemes and financial support programs, leading to underutilization of resources.

#### **7. Challenges in MGNREGA Implementation**

- Delayed payments, lack of banking facilities in remote areas, and cyber fraud prevent families from benefiting from the scheme.
- The rate of participation of Adivasis in total participation for MREGA in 2023-24 is 17.62%.<sup>13</sup>

#### **8. Youth Employment Challenges and Skill Mismatch**

- Policies focus on mainstreaming Adivasis rather than preserving their skills and traditions, leading to limited employment opportunities.
- Skill development programs do not align with Adivasi culture or local economies, creating a mismatch between training and available jobs.

#### **9. Energy, Infrastructure, and Institutional Barriers**

- Many Adivasi households still rely on firewood due to limited access to clean energy alternatives.
- Electricity access for agriculture and domestic use remains inadequate.
- Absence of cement roads and basic infrastructure restricts employment and market access.
- Percentage of Adivasi households using clean cooking fuel is low at 31.6%<sup>14</sup>.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Empowering Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**

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<sup>13</sup> MGNREGA Dashboard

<sup>14</sup> <https://ceda.ashoka.edu.in/how-many-indian-households-use-clean-fuel-for-cooking/>

1. Strengthen VDKs and SHGs to reduce dependency on middlemen and increase profits from forest and agricultural produce.

#### **Local Agro-Processing Units**

2. Establish local agro-processing units for MFP and agroforestry products to ensure better income security and value addition.

#### **Community-Led Afforestation and Agroforestry Programs**

3. Encourage community-led afforestation and agroforestry programs to provide sustainable livelihoods while protecting ecological resources.

#### **Community Entrepreneurship**

4. Support community entrepreneurship on common resources such as NTFP, alongside individual entrepreneurship.

#### **Awareness Campaigns**

5. Conduct widespread campaigns to inform the community of the provisions in FRA and PESA.
6. Engage traditional Gram Pradhans to raise awareness and take provisions to Gram Sabhas.

#### **Financial Support and Literacy**

7. Expand access to Jan-Dhan Yojana, MUDRA loans, and microfinance programs with Adivasi-focused financial literacy initiatives to boost entrepreneurship and self-reliance.
8. Establish an Adivasi Entrepreneur Development Fund to provide startup capital for small businesses and cooperatives.

#### **Integrating Traditional Knowledge in Training Programs**

9. Integrate traditional Adivasi knowledge into government vocational and entrepreneurship training to boost eco-tourism, herbal medicine, agroforestry, and craft-based industries.

#### **Digital Literacy Programs**

10. Contextualize digital literacy programs to enable Adivasi youth to access e-commerce platforms, modern financial services, and remote work opportunities.

#### **Improving Infrastructure**

11. Improve road networks and electrification in Adivasi areas to increase market reach and enhance access to consumers and buyers.
12. Develop subsidized transport cooperatives to improve mobility for women and youth, ensuring better participation in economic activities.

## **THEME 4: Culture and Traditional Knowledge - Recognition and Integration**

Adivasis in India hold a wealth of traditional knowledge crucial for sustainable living. Their expertise in agriculture, biodiversity, herbal medicine, governance, and crafts is essential for achieving SDGs.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has implemented policies like the FRA 2006, Aadi Mahotsav, and Van Dhan Vikas Kendras to support traditional livelihoods. The New Education Policy 2020 and the People's Linguistic Survey of India emphasize preserving indigenous languages and integrating tribal knowledge into education. Despite these efforts, challenges persist.

## **Key Challenges**

### **1. Exploitation and Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge and Resources**

Indigenous knowledge in India is often exploited, with traditional products being commercialized without benefiting Adivasis. Intermediaries limit market access and worsen economic disparities. Cultural expressions are commodified without consent, leading to a loss of authenticity and weak intellectual property protections. Despite efforts like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), challenges remain in ensuring equitable benefits and control over cultural heritage.

### **2. Exclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Formal Education**

The marginalization of indigenous knowledge in formal education significantly impacts Adivasi students. Despite the NEP 2020's emphasis on mother tongue-based education, effective integration of indigenous knowledge into curricula remains limited. Teachers often lack training in local traditions, making it hard to incorporate indigenous perspectives. This underrepresentation continues to diminish cultural identity.

### **3. Threat to Indigenous Languages Due to Assimilation and Neglect**

Nearly 197 languages in India, especially Adivasi languages, face endangerment due to assimilation and neglect. Dominance of mainstream languages in education, governance, and media erodes indigenous linguistic traditions. Without policies for preservation, schools often exclude indigenous languages, causing children to abandon their native tongues. This results in a decline in traditional wisdom, oral literature, and cultural heritage.

### **4. Decline of Indigenous Governance and Biodiversity Protection**

Traditional Adivasi governance structures have eroded, diminishing community control over natural resources. Over 275 million people rely on forests for their livelihoods, with Adivasis being a significant portion. This erosion not only weakens Adivasi self-rule but also threatens the biodiversity they have protected for generations.

## **Recommendations**

### **Strengthen Documentation and Intellectual Property Protections**

1. Enforce the Biological Diversity Act (2002) and expand the scope of People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) to document indigenous knowledge
2. Expand the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) to include region-specific Adivasi knowledge and make it accessible in local languages.
3. Develop community-led intellectual property rights (IPR) frameworks to grant Adivasi groups legal ownership over their knowledge and biodiversity that they are conserving and protecting.

4. Promote Fair Trade and direct-market linkages to eliminate exploitative intermediaries, enabling indigenous artisans, farmers, and herbal medicine practitioners to receive better economic returns.

#### **Integrate Indigenous Knowledge in Education**

5. Fully implement the NEP 2020's mother tongue-based education mandate, expanding the availability of Adivasi language textbooks and teacher training programs.
6. Involve Adivasi educators and community elders in curriculum development to ensure subjects like traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous medicinal practices are included.
7. Train teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy to incorporate oral storytelling traditions, experiential learning, and indigenous history.
8. Strengthen partnerships among state Tribal Welfare Departments and NGOs to develop bilingual learning materials and train local youth as community educators.

#### **Preserve and Promote Indigenous Languages**

9. Extend official recognition to more Adivasi languages, incorporating them into the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
10. Expand mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) nationwide, ensuring that Adivasi language instruction is available from early childhood education to higher education.
11. Leverage digital documentation and technological innovations to preserve endangered languages.
12. Promote community-driven language revitalization programs involving Adivasi elders, writers, and artists.
13. Ensure media and governance embrace indigenous languages, with Adivasi-language newspapers, television programs, and government services at the state level.

#### **Revitalize Indigenous Governance and Biodiversity Protection**

14. Develop a Community Stewardship Charter to formally recognize and protect traditional resource management systems from external interference.
15. Prioritize full implementation of PESA and FRA, giving Gram Sabhas real decision-making authority over forest and land resources.
16. Mandate and fund People's Biodiversity Registers, with training programs for Adivasi youth and elders to document traditional ecological knowledge.
17. Establish joint management committees between Adivasi councils, forest departments, and conservation agencies to integrate indigenous conservation wisdom into policies.
18. Introduce livelihood-based conservation initiatives, such as sustainable agroforestry, eco-tourism, and value-added forest produce enterprises.
19. Reinforce legal mechanisms to protect sacred groves, traditional water sources, and community forests from deforestation, mining, and industrial encroachments.

## **THEME 5: Policy & Governance: Voice & Agency, Schedule V & VI Implementation**

The socio-economic and governance challenges faced by India's Adivasis are numerous and deeply entrenched, despite the existence of constitutional protections and various policy measures aimed at their upliftment. This section delves into the critical issues hindering Adivasi development, including weak implementation of Fifth and Sixth Schedule provisions, limited outreach of Tribal Welfare Departments, inadequate self-governance under PESA, widespread land alienation, insufficient political representation, economic hardships, gender exclusion, and the impact of transboundary issues. By addressing these challenges through targeted recommendations, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future for Adivasis, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights upheld.

### **Key Challenges**

#### **1. Weak Implementation of Fifth and Sixth Schedule Provisions**

The Fifth Schedule grants special governance provisions for Adivasis, but in most states, Governors do not effectively use these powers, leading to land dispossession and weak enforcement of rights. The Sixth Schedule provides autonomous governance structures for Adivasi regions in Northeast India but are often not democratic in their functioning.

When Tribal Advisory Council was constituted, a dedicated Ministry and State Tribal departments did not exist. With the coming in of MoTA and State Tribal departments, most of the executive functions are performed by them. TAC should act as the think tank and monitoring unit for safeguarding and protection of Adivasi rights and interests. The TAC can provide vital policy directions regarding governance of scheduled areas.

State rules of TAC (of most states) have Chief Minister as the chairperson of TAC. Due to other priorities of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, TAC meetings are very rare.

#### **2. Limited Outreach of Tribal Welfare Department**

The absence of Tribal Welfare Department functionaries at the village level exacerbates challenges in remote Adivasi areas, hindering the incorporation of their plans and aspirations into planning and review processes.

#### **3. Undermining of Tribal Self-Governance Under PESA**

The PESA 1996, aims to empower Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas with control over land, forests, and governance. However, many states dilute PESA's provisions, granting higher-level panchayats control over funds and projects. In Jharkhand, the Panchayat Raj Act, 2001, contradicts PESA by limiting Gram Sabha powers. Additionally, states often bypass Gram Sabha approvals in land acquisitions and mining leases, undermining self-governance.

#### **4. Land Alienation and Displacement Due to Development Projects**

Since India's independence, it is estimated that more than 60 million people (between 1947-2004) have been displaced by development projects<sup>15</sup> of which 40% is the tribal population. Prior to the land diversion or relocation, the FRA process needs to be completed, and communities need to be consulted, and consent taken which is not followed in most of the cases of forest land diversion

#### **5. Limited Political Representation and Voice**

Adivasis are underrepresented in governance, limiting their influence in policy decisions. The exclusion of traditional Adivasi governance structures from Panchayati Raj institutions exacerbates this issue. Large-scale out-migration and the influx of non-Adivasi populations are altering demographics, risking the status of scheduled areas.

#### **6. Economic and Livelihood Challenges**

Though over 50% of Adivasis rely on forests, bureaucratic control over Minor Forest Produce (MFP) forces them to sell at unfair prices. Without direct market access, Adivasi products cannot achieve economic independence, perpetuating poverty cycles.

#### **7. Gender Exclusion in Tribal Governance**

Despite playing vital roles in forest-based livelihoods, women are underrepresented in Gram Sabhas and decision-making bodies. Land titles under FRA often go to male members, leaving women economically vulnerable. Gender-based violence and limited political participation further restrict their empowerment. For example, only 7 out of 47 Adivasi-reserved Lok Sabha seats are held by women in the 2024 elections.

#### **8. Transboundary Issues**

Transboundary trade and environmental mismanagement critically impact Adivasi livelihoods, especially in Northeastern India. Porous borders enable illegal trade that exploits natural resources, harming local communities. Unsustainable practices like deforestation and unregulated mining further disrupt traditional Adivasi life.

Weak enforcement of environmental regulations and insufficient cross-border cooperation exacerbate these issues. Adivasis struggle to maintain cultural and economic stability, necessitating national and regional efforts for sustainable resource management and equitable development.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Strengthening Governance Structures**

1. Establish a Tribes Advisory Council (TAC) Secretariat at both state and national levels to ensure the Governor's accountability in Scheduled Areas. The TAC secretariat should have funds to conduct independent research and evaluate good governance in scheduled areas.

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<sup>15</sup> Source:

<https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/OtherReport/DevelopmentChallengesinExtremistAffectedAreas.pdf>

2. The TAC members should be able to ask the secretariat to take up particular matters for close watch or detailed review. Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure regular meetings of the TAC are conducted and the issues taken up by the TAC are also resolved within a fixed period.
3. Grant greater financial and decision-making control to Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils.
4. Enable Participatory Planning by empowering Gram Sabhas to lead the design, planning, and implementation of development programs with flexible, untied funding for local-level development, such as diversification of TSP in Maharashtra and Kerala.
5. Recognize the role of traditional Adivasi leaders within Panchayati Raj structures and at the Gram Sabha level within the democratic set up, and ensure that such decisions are not gender biased
6. Establish a committee to understand the loss of Adivasi representation due to the change in demographics in PESA areas and recommend measures to address the political representation of Adivasi communities. Mechanisms and safeguards are to be developed to ensure that Tribal communities can participate in governance systems in urban areas.
7. Implement the FRA and the PESA efficiently by simplifying land claims processes, introducing community-led verification mechanisms, and ensuring timely approvals for Individual and Community Forest Rights (IFR/CFR). Enhance support following rights recognition by improving access to government schemes and livelihood opportunities. Additionally, review and align conflicting laws and policies to ensure effective and consistent implementation of FRA.
8. Conduct a national-level study to understand the status of PESA implementation across the country and provide concrete recommendations for its full implementation.
9. Mandate Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) protocols before land acquisitions, and rigorously implement state-specific land laws, such as the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (SPTA), to prevent illegal land transfers.
10. Provide legal recognition to Community Conservation Reserves (CCRs), clearly defining the role of the Forest Department, strengthening Autonomous Councils, and ensuring active community participation in village councils for effective forest governance in the Northeast.

#### **Enhancing Political Representation and Voice**

11. Integrate customary governance structures into Panchayati Raj institutions and strengthen Tribal Advisory Councils (TACs) by including direct Adivasi representation and decision-making power.
12. Study the demographic changes to recommend measures for retaining the scheduled areas' status and address the challenges faced by Adivasis in urban centres, providing safety, basic amenities, and access to dignified livelihoods.

#### **Economic Empowerment**

13. Provide direct market access for forest-based products to eliminate middleman exploitation.
14. Integrate MGNREGS with PESA and FRA to create sustainable employment in Adivasi areas.
15. Expand the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and promote Adivasi-run cooperative societies.

### **Ensuring Gender Equity**

16. Mandate 50% representation of women in Gram Sabhas and Forest Rights Committees (FRCs).
17. Women Gram Sabha needs to be mandatory in PESA areas, and the recommendations of those Women Gram Sabha need to be placed before the Panchayat Gram Sabha for inclusion in the resolution.
18. Ensure women elected leaders and Adivasi elected leaders have access to training programmes, understanding of schemes and programmes and institutional mechanisms to put forth the issues and recommendations to TAC and other bodies
19. Strengthen the implementation of land ownership rights for women, especially single women, under the FRA and ensure gender-disaggregated data collection for securing women's economic rights.

### **Addressing Transboundary Issues**

20. Formulate bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries to address cross-border conservation and trade issues impacting Adivasi livelihoods.

### **A Comprehensive National Policy for Adivasi Development and Empowerment**

21. Develop a National Tribal Policy for Adivasi development focusing on healthcare access, skill development, economic opportunities, and land rights protection. It aims to preserve traditional knowledge and cultural heritage, ensure political participation, and bridge development gaps, empowering Adivasis through equitable access to resources and meaningful inclusion in governance.

### **Enhancing SDG Monitoring for Adivasis**

22. Enhance SDG monitoring to address data gaps for Adivasi communities. Collect and track disaggregated data to ensure national reports accurately reflect their progress. Establish a single-window database at the centre and state levels for regularly monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies and programs on tribal participation in governance systems.

## **Conclusion and Way Forward**

The findings of the VNR 2025 - Adivasi Consultation Report underscore the persistent socio-economic inequalities and governance challenges that hinder Adivasi development. Despite significant policy measures introduced to safeguard Adivasi rights and promote inclusive growth, gaps in implementation, resource allocation, and institutional accountability continue to impede progress.

Moving forward, a multi-pronged approach is essential to ensure sustainable and equitable development for Adivasis. Adivasis must be positioned as active stakeholders in India's development process. Collaborative efforts between government bodies, civil society organizations, and Adivasis will be crucial in achieving SDG targets while upholding the dignity, rights, and agency of indigenous peoples. By adopting a rights-based, participatory, and community-led approach, India can move closer to fulfilling its commitment to 'Leaving No One Behind' (LNOB) and ensuring that Adivasi voices are heard and their rights upheld in the country's sustainable development journey.

## Annexures

- [Annexure 1 Comparison of Adivasi and All in different development indicators.xlsx](#)
- [Annexure 2 National Consultation Agenda.docx](#)
- [Annexure 3 National Consultation Participants List \(1\).xlsx](#)
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- [Annexure 8 Draft Discussion Note Measuring Tribal Progress towards SDGs.pdf](#)
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