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Experts Explain: How the PM JANMAN scheme can help Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

Who are PVTGs? What challenges have govt schemes for their development faced so far? How does the PM JANMAN aim to be different? Two senior officials explain

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 **NewsGuard**




The Baiga tribe of Chhattisgarh. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

Written by Ravi Mittal and Rajat Bansal

On November 29, the **Union Cabinet approved the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan** (PM JANMAN), aimed at providing PVTG households and habitations with basic facilities such as safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition, road and telecom connectivity, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

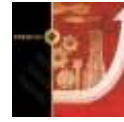
In addition, saturation will also be ensured for schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), Sickle Cell Disease Elimination, TB Elimination, 100% immunisation, PM Poshan, PM Jan Dhan Yojana, etc. This initiative is part of the Pradhan Mantri-PVTG Development Mission announced in India's 2022-23 Union Budget, allocating Rs 15,000 crore over three years to develop them.

Who are PVTGs?

In 1960-61, the Dhebar Commission identified disparities among Scheduled Tribes, leading to the creation of the "Primitive Tribal Groups" (PTG) category. In 2006, this category was renamed Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

Initially identifying 52 groups, the category was expanded to include 75 groups in 22,544 villages across 18 states and one Union Territory of India, totalling about 28 lakh individuals. These groups, living mainly in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, are characterised by pre-agricultural lifestyles, low literacy, small or stagnant populations, and subsistence economies. Population sizes vary significantly, from under 1,000 in some groups, such as the Great Andamanese (around 50) and the Onge (around 100), to over 1 lakh in others, such as Maria Gond of Maharashtra and Saura in Odisha. Some tribes in central India, like Birhor, face stagnation, while the Onge and Andamanese are experiencing a decline.

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What are the challenges in their development?

PVTGs are severely marginalised due to their isolation, low population, and distinct socio-economic and cultural traits. They struggle with limited access to basic services, social discrimination, and vulnerability to displacement from development and natural disasters. They have little political representation, hindering their participation in decision-making.

Mainstream society often overlooks their traditional knowledge and practices, and stereotypes about their backwardness are prevalent.

They are also battling loss of traditional livelihoods and resource rights, lack of market knowledge for Non-Timber Forest Produce, and exploitation by middlemen, threatening their traditional occupations.

What schemes have been floated for them?

The Centre and state governments have introduced several initiatives to support PVTGs. The PVTG Development Plan provides education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities while preserving traditional knowledge. The Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM) focuses on market linkages and Minor Forest Produce (MFP) procurement at Minimum Support Prices.

Other significant schemes include the Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana, Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), which collectively aim for the holistic development of tribal areas. Additional measures

like Eklavya Model Residential Schools, land titles under the Forest Rights Act 2006, Support to Tribal Research Institute (STRI) scheme, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996, and direct recruitment through reservations further in education, self-governance, and protection against discrimination.

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However, challenges in implementation, such as resource limitations, lack of awareness, and unequal treatment among different PVTG groups have affected the effectiveness of these schemes.

What does PM-JANMAN do differently?

Proper identification and recognition: The criteria for identifying PVTGs have been criticised for being outdated. Some PVTGs are not recognised as Scheduled Tribes in certain states, and the list containing repetitive names has led to confusion and exclusion.

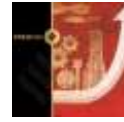
A 2014 report by Dr. Hrusikesh Panda, Secretary of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and a 2015 report by Virginius Xaxa highlighted these concerns. The actual number of PVTGs is around 63, accounting for overlaps and repetitions, as per the publication 'The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of India — Privileges and Predicaments' by the Anthropological Survey of India.

Baseline surveys have only been conducted for about 40 PVTG groups, emphasising the need for targeted development planning. The government's initiative to create a Human Development Index for PVTGs is a significant step towards addressing these vulnerabilities.

Participatory bottom-up approach: To help PVTGs effectively, the scheme abandons the 'one-size-fits-all' approach in favour of customised strategies that respect their unique needs and priorities. It actively involves PVTGs in decision-making, addressing land rights, social inclusion, and cultural preservation. This community-based strategy embraces their cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions, ensuring their participation in planning, implementing, and monitoring development projects.

Livelihood promotion: Providing skills training and resources, like land and credit, will help in sustainable livelihoods. Implementing the Forest Rights Act by granting land titles secures access to forest resources. Section 3(1)(e) of the FRA specifically supports the rights of primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities. Additionally, encouraging traditional technologies and skill enhancement through industry partnerships will help maintain cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development.

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Health, nutrition and education: Outreach strategies like Mobile Medical Health Units will be crucial for providing healthcare in remote areas. These strategies need to be tailored for specific health issues like teenage pregnancies and oral health, and overcoming language and cultural barriers through sensitised healthcare workers or hiring those from within the community. Collaboration with trusted traditional healers can also aid in addressing complex health issues.

Incorporating their culture and language into the curriculum, providing transportation, and training teachers about PVTG cultural contexts can enhance education accessibility. Additionally, incentives for personnel working in PVTG areas and special educational institutes focused on PVTG needs can further improve opportunities for these communities.

Infrastructure development: The habitations of PVTGs often don't meet the criteria for schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Jal Jeevan Mission due to factors like population requirements or lack of surveys.

Guidelines for infrastructure schemes, thus, have been relaxed to improve access to housing, water, sanitation, electricity, and connectivity. Adopting a tola-based (habitation) approach rather than a Gram Panchayat-based approach for development planning will better address these communities' specific needs.

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