

## Integration of Entrepreneurship in Tribal Communities: An Analytical Study of Tribal Economy Propensity, Cultural distinctiveness, and Policy framework in Postmodern Bharat – India

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study investigates the evolving landscape of tribal entrepreneurship in post-liberalization India, with a focus on how indigenous communities mobilize enterprise as a form of economic self-determination, cultural resilience, and ecological stewardship. The purpose is to critically examine the intersection of tribal identity, policy frameworks, and entrepreneurial ecosystems, highlighting both opportunities and systemic constraints.

**Method:** This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach, drawing on secondary data from government reports (NITI Aayog, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, TRIFED), academic literature, and policy evaluations. It utilizes a multidimensional analytical framework encompassing structural, cultural, and policy lenses to assess the effectiveness of central schemes such as Van Dhan Yojana, TRIFED, and Stand-Up India.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that while these initiatives have expanded tribal participation in enterprise, significant gaps persist in fund utilization, skill development, and market integration. Challenges include historical land alienation, institutional exclusion, and deficits in culturally relevant education. Moreover, the lack of decentralized governance and real-time monitoring mechanisms undermines the sustainability of tribal ventures.

**Implication:** The study's implications are twofold: it calls for embedding entrepreneurial education within tribal skilling ecosystems and promoting women-led cooperative models, while also advocating for a Van Dhan Innovation Challenge to incubate tribal startups. These recommendations aim to reorient policy toward participatory, culturally embedded development.

**Originality:** The originality of this research lies in its framing of tribal entrepreneurship not merely as economic activity but as a site of cultural negotiation and systemic transformation—offering a nuanced lens for future policy and practice.

**Keywords:** Indigenous communities, entrepreneurship, cultural identity, inclusive development, tribal economy.

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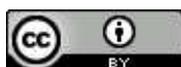
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

India's tribal communities, collectively known as Adivasis, constitute approximately 8.6% of the national population. Their marginalization stems from a legacy of colonial displacement and a persistent sidelining of tribal epistemologies in mainstream development discourse (Bijoy, 2003). Post-liberalization reforms have ushered in a market-driven development paradigm, positioning entrepreneurship as a key engine of economic growth. Yet, indigenous participation in India's entrepreneurial ecosystem remains disproportionately low (Baviskar, 2005; Annual Report, 2022–23).

Recent studies underscore the transformative potential of innovation-driven tribal entrepreneurship, particularly when rooted in cultural preservation and ecological sustainability. For



instance, [Naik and Panda \(2023\)](#) highlight how entrepreneurial models in Odisha's Rayagada district have empowered tribal communities by integrating traditional occupations with modern business practices. These initiatives not only enhance livelihood options beyond subsistence agriculture but also foster intergenerational skill development and cultural continuity. Such models demonstrate that entrepreneurship, when aligned with indigenous values, can serve as a vehicle for both economic resilience and identity affirmation.

However, persistent structural barriers continue to hinder the scalability and sustainability of tribal ventures. [Kumari and Sharma \(2024\)](#) identify critical challenges such as limited access to capital, inadequate entrepreneurial education, and weak market linkages. Their proposed "Tribal Entrepreneurship Model" emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive policy frameworks, digital inclusion, and cooperative structures to bridge these gaps. Without targeted interventions that address these systemic constraints, tribal entrepreneurship risks being reduced to tokenistic participation rather than genuine empowerment.

Despite the proliferation of government-led initiatives aimed at fostering tribal entrepreneurship, a critical gap persists between policy intent and lived realities. This disconnect raises a fundamental research question (RQ):

**RQ:** How are tribal communities in post-liberalization India navigating entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and systemic inclusion?

This research question emerges from the intersection of three core tensions: (1) the structural constraints embedded in India's development apparatus, (2) the cultural distinctiveness of tribal epistemologies, and (3) the evolving policy landscape that seeks to integrate indigenous enterprise into the national economy. By interrogating these dimensions, the study aims to uncover whether entrepreneurship is truly serving as a transformative tool—or merely reproducing existing hierarchies under the guise of inclusion.

To address this question, the paper adopts a multidimensional analytical framework that integrates structural, cultural, and policy lenses. It draws on secondary data from NITI Aayog, TRIFED, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, alongside qualitative insights from recent field studies and academic literature. The goal is not only to assess the effectiveness of schemes like Van Dhan Yojana and Tech for Tribals, but also to explore how tribal entrepreneurs themselves interpret, adapt, or resist these interventions in pursuit of self-determined futures.

This article critically examines how Adivasi communities are engaging with entrepreneurship not merely as an economic activity, but as a form of cultural assertion and self-determination. It explores the tensions between traditional knowledge systems and modern market structures, and interrogates the efficacy of policy interventions such as the Van Dhan Yojana and Start-Up India in fostering inclusive tribal enterprise.

By situating tribal entrepreneurship within a broader socio-political and ecological context, the study aims to illuminate both the transformative potential and the structural limitations of current development models. It argues for a paradigm shift that centers indigenous worldviews, ecological wisdom, and culturally responsive governance as foundational to sustainable and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems.

## 2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Analytical Framework

This study adopts a multidimensional analytical framework to explore the evolving landscape of tribal entrepreneurship in post-liberalization India. At its core, the framework integrates structural, cultural, policy, and ecological-economic perspectives to capture the complexity of indigenous entrepreneurial mobilization. The structural dimension focuses on legal, institutional, and infrastructural constraints that continue to shape tribal access to markets, credit, and technology. Simultaneously, the cultural lens foregrounds indigenous identity, traditional knowledge systems, and socio-religious values that inform entrepreneurial behavior and community resilience ([Rajendra, 2024](#)). These cultural foundations often stand in tension with mainstream development paradigms, yet they also offer unique pathways for sustainable and socially embedded enterprise.

The policy dimension critically examines central and state-level interventions such as TRIFED, Van Dhan Yojana, Tech for Tribals, and Stand-Up India. These programs are assessed not only for their design and implementation but also for their responsiveness to tribal epistemologies and lived realities. The ecological-economic interface further enriches the analysis by situating entrepreneurship

within forest-based livelihoods, sustainability practices, and ecological stewardship. This holistic approach allows the study to move beyond economic metrics and engage with entrepreneurship as a socio-political and cultural process.

## 2.2. Methodology

Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative-descriptive design, drawing primarily on secondary data from NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, TRIFED annual reports, and recent academic literature. Thematic coding of policy documents and budgetary reports enables a grounded critique of the gap between policy intent and grassroots outcomes. To deepen contextual understanding, the study incorporates comparative insights from regional case studies in Odisha, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand—regions with significant tribal populations and active entrepreneurship schemes (Shah, 2010). These cases illuminate how tribal entrepreneurs navigate structural barriers, reinterpret cultural assets, and engage with state-led initiatives in pursuit of self-determined futures. The triangulation of policy data, regional narratives, and scholarly critique provides a nuanced lens through which tribal entrepreneurship can be understood not merely as economic participation, but as a form of cultural assertion and systemic negotiation.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Understand the current aspects (Areeparampil, M., 1996) (Government of India, 2020)

#### *Historical Dispossession and Land Alienation*

Where land alienation, lack of formal land titles, or displacement arising out of some development projects are involved, cases of tribal entrepreneurship come into view. The historical trajectory of tribal marginalization in India is deeply entwined with patterns of land dispossession and forced displacement. Colonial land policies, followed by post-independence development projects, have systematically alienated tribal communities from their ancestral territories. Despite constitutional protections under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, the implementation of land rights remains inconsistent and often undermined by bureaucratic opacity and extractive economic agendas (Chandra, 2016). The loss of land is not merely a material deprivation—it represents a rupture in cultural continuity, ecological stewardship, and spiritual identity.

Recent research highlights how development-induced displacement continues to exacerbate tribal poverty and ecological vulnerability. Tripathy (2024) argues that cost-benefit analyses of infrastructure and industrial projects routinely ignore the socio-economic and environmental costs borne by tribal populations. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, though amended, still requires formal land titles for compensation—an impossible demand for many tribal communities whose land tenure is customary and undocumented. As a result, thousands remain uncompensated, uprooted, and excluded from rehabilitation schemes.

Moreover, the political economy of land acquisition has created a new class of beneficiaries while deepening the dispossession of indigenous groups. Mallik (2023) documents how large-scale land grabs for SEZs, mining, and real estate in Odisha have displaced vulnerable tribal groups such as the Dongoria Kondhas, without meaningful consultation or consent. These cases reveal a persistent state–society conflict, where tribal claims to land are subordinated to industrial imperatives. The failure to embed development strategies within local ecological and cultural contexts not only threatens livelihoods but also undermines the legitimacy of inclusive growth narratives.

#### *Institutional Exclusion*

Institutional exclusion remains a persistent barrier to tribal entrepreneurship in India, manifesting through limited access to financial services, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic opacity. Generic financial institutions often lack outreach in tribal regions, resulting in poor penetration of banking services, credit facilities, and digital platforms. Other barriers to accessing credit, skill development, and market linkages include a lack of digital literacy and poor bank infrastructure, coupled with bureaucratic opacity. This exclusion is compounded by low levels of digital literacy and the absence of culturally responsive training programs, which prevent tribal entrepreneurs from fully engaging with formal economic systems. Despite the proliferation of schemes like Stand-Up India and Tech for Tribals, the disconnect between policy design and ground-level realities continues to marginalize indigenous participation.

Recent research by [Subramanyam and Rao \(2022\)](#) reveals that institutional frameworks often fail to accommodate tribal cultural identity and spatial realities, particularly in regions like the Visakha Agency of Andhra Pradesh. Their study highlights how modernization and administrative expansion have led to cultural erosion and social alienation, with tribal communities struggling to navigate systems that neither reflect their values nor recognize their traditional knowledge systems. Similarly, [Bramhane \(2024\)](#) argues that tribal exclusion is not merely logistical but deeply sociological—rooted in historical marginalization and perpetuated by systemic neglect. His analysis shows how institutional design reinforces cycles of poverty and limited mobility, especially when tribal voices are absent from decision-making processes.

Moreover, the lack of representation within institutional bodies—such as local governance, cooperative banks, and entrepreneurship incubators—further entrenches exclusion. Tribal entrepreneurs often face procedural hurdles in accessing government schemes due to documentation requirements, language barriers, and opaque eligibility criteria. Even when funds are sanctioned, delays in disbursement and lack of follow-up support hinder sustainability. Addressing institutional exclusion thus requires more than policy reform; it demands a structural reimagining of governance that centers tribal agency, decentralizes decision-making, and embeds cultural sensitivity into every layer of entrepreneurial support.

### ***Deficits in Education and Human Capital***

Lack of culturally relevant education and high dropout rates hinder the development of entrepreneurial skills. Deficits in education and human capital remain one of the most persistent barriers to tribal entrepreneurship in India. Tribal communities continue to face high dropout rates, limited access to quality schooling, and a lack of culturally relevant curricula. Most educational programs fail to integrate indigenous knowledge systems or offer instruction in vernacular languages, resulting in alienation and disengagement among tribal youth. These gaps not only hinder the development of entrepreneurial skills but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion from formal economic opportunities.

Recent studies underscore the urgency of addressing these educational disparities. [Tayyab \(2023\)](#) highlights that tribal students often struggle with language barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and curricula that ignore their cultural context. His analysis reveals that despite constitutional provisions and targeted schemes, tribal literacy and retention rates remain significantly lower than national averages. Similarly, [Velusamy \(2024\)](#) notes that only 10% of tribal education programs meet their intended targets, with most failing due to poor implementation, lack of community involvement, and insufficient teacher training. These findings suggest that without a holistic, community-centric approach, tribal education will continue to fall short of empowering indigenous youth for modern economic participation.

Moreover, the disconnect between education and employability is particularly stark in tribal regions. [Bindhani \(2021\)](#) documents how tribal students in Odisha's Koraput district face severe challenges in transitioning from school to vocational or entrepreneurial pathways. Economic hardship, household responsibilities, and the absence of localized skill development programs contribute to early school leaving and limited career mobility. Addressing these deficits requires not only infrastructural investment but also pedagogical reform—embedding tribal epistemologies, promoting bilingual instruction, and linking education to livelihood opportunities. Strengthening human capital in tribal communities is not merely a developmental imperative; it is foundational to building inclusive and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystems.

### **3.2 Identity Culture and Indigenous Knowledge**

The tribal concept is essentially communitarian, sustainable, and spiritually based on nature. These values often come into conflict with extractive market paradigms. On the other hand, they lead to eco entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship in Forest-based product development, Cultivation of medicinal plants, Traditional textiles and crafts, Extinguishing the use of indigenous languages disrupts the whole knowledge-sharing process and limits cultural continuity, thereby undermining intergenerational entrepreneurship.

The tribal worldview in India is fundamentally communitarian, ecologically embedded, and spiritually attuned to nature. These values often stand in stark contrast to extractive market paradigms that prioritize profit over sustainability. Yet, it is precisely this cultural distinctiveness that positions tribal communities as stewards of ecological entrepreneurship ([Pandya, 2022](#)). Practices such as forest-based product development, cultivation of medicinal plants, and traditional textile craftsmanship are not merely economic activities—they are expressions of identity, heritage, and intergenerational continuity.

However, the erosion of indigenous languages and oral traditions threatens this delicate knowledge ecosystem, disrupting the transmission of skills and weakening the cultural scaffolding that sustains tribal enterprise.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the urgency of preserving tribal contributions to India's broader knowledge systems. [Sonwane and Pradhan \(2025\)](#) argue that tribal epistemologies—rooted in oral traditions, ecological wisdom, and communal resource management—form a vital part of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), yet remain underrepresented in mainstream education and policy frameworks. His study calls for inclusive strategies that document, integrate, and celebrate tribal knowledge across domains such as health, agriculture, and environmental conservation. Similarly, [Dhall \(2024\)](#) highlights how indigenous knowledge systems offer sustainable solutions to contemporary ecological crises, from water management to seed preservation, and urges their incorporation into national development agendas.

Moreover, the commodification of tribal culture through tourism and market branding often risks diluting its authenticity. [Basumatary et al. \(2024\)](#) caution against extractive representations of tribal identity that serve external interests while sidelining community agency. Their scientometric review reveals a surge in research on ethnobotany, climate resilience, and intellectual property rights, yet notes a lack of participatory frameworks that empower tribal voices in shaping how their knowledge is used and protected. To foster truly inclusive entrepreneurship, it is imperative to move beyond tokenistic engagement and build platforms where tribal communities lead the narrative—preserving their cultural integrity while innovating on their own terms ([Ijatuyi et al., 2025](#)).

### 3.3 Policy Support (NITI Aayog, 2021)

#### ***Van Dhan Vikas Kendras established micro-enterprise clusters based on non-timber forest produce (NTFPs).***

The Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs), launched under the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana in 2018, represent a pivotal shift in India's approach to tribal entrepreneurship. These Kendras are designed to transform tribal Self-Help Groups (SHGs) into micro-enterprise clusters centered around the sustainable harvesting, processing, and marketing of non-timber forest produce (NTFPs). By leveraging traditional knowledge and forest-based resources, the initiative aims to generate income, preserve ecological balance, and foster community-led development. The Kendras serve as hubs for value addition—such as drying, packaging, and branding—enabling tribal gatherers to move up the value chain and access broader markets.

Recent evaluations underscore the program's impact and challenges. According to [Balkrishna et al. \(2022\)](#), VDVKs have significantly improved tribal livelihoods in forest-rich regions like Northeast India by integrating IT tools, training modules, and cooperative marketing strategies. However, gaps remain in implementation. A study by [SELCO Foundation \(2024\)](#) found that while over 50,000 VDVKs have been established across 27 states, many suffer from underutilization due to limited awareness, inadequate infrastructure, and delayed fund disbursement. The lack of decentralized governance and real-time monitoring mechanisms has also hindered the scalability and sustainability of these clusters, especially in remote tribal belts.

Despite these hurdles, the potential of VDVKs as engines of inclusive growth remains strong. [Vijaya and Misra \(2023\)](#) emphasize that the program's success hinges on culturally embedded skill training, localized value chain development, and participatory governance. When tribal communities are empowered to lead the process—from resource management to enterprise design—the Kendras evolve beyond economic units into platforms of cultural resilience and ecological stewardship. Strengthening these clusters through targeted policy support, digital integration, and gender-sensitive innovation can ensure that tribal entrepreneurship is not just viable, but transformative.

#### ***TRIFED provides marketing support, skill upgradation, and value-added chains.***

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) plays a pivotal role in bridging tribal producers with formal markets through a multi-pronged strategy that includes marketing support, skill enhancement, and value chain development. As a nodal agency under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, TRIFED facilitates the procurement and promotion of tribal products through its Tribes India outlets, exhibitions, and e-commerce platforms. This institutional support ensures that tribal artisans and forest gatherers receive fair prices, visibility, and sustained demand for their goods. By acting as both a facilitator and service provider, TRIFED helps tribal communities transition from subsistence-level production to structured, market-ready enterprises ([Sarkar & Singh, 2022](#)).

Skill upgradation is central to TRIFED's mission. Through partnerships with NGOs and training institutes, the federation offers tiered programs such as Primary Level Training (PLT), Advanced Level Training (ALT), and Design Workshop Training (DWT). These initiatives focus on enhancing craftsmanship, introducing modern techniques, and fostering innovation while preserving cultural authenticity. According to [Sarkar and Singh \(2022\)](#), TRIFED's training modules have empowered thousands of tribal artisans by equipping them with tools for quality control, branding, and product diversification. Moreover, the Tech for Tribals initiative complements these efforts by integrating digital literacy and entrepreneurship education, although recent reports indicate that only a fraction of sanctioned batches have been successfully delivered due to logistical and awareness challenges.

Value addition is another cornerstone of TRIFED's approach, particularly in the context of Minor Forest Produce (MFP). Through the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme and localized processing units, tribal gatherers are trained to convert raw materials into high-value products—such as herbal teas, natural dyes, and organic cosmetics. [Nayaka \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that this shift not only increases income but also strengthens ecological entrepreneurship by promoting sustainable harvesting and resource stewardship. However, challenges remain in scaling these models, especially in remote regions where infrastructure and market access are limited ([Pandya, 2022](#)). Strengthening TRIFED's outreach, decentralizing operations, and embedding tribal leadership in decision-making processes are essential to realizing the full potential of this policy support.

### ***Stand-Up India Scheme, these all are multi program performed by central government***

Launched in April 2016 and extended through 2025, the Stand-Up India Scheme is a flagship initiative by the Government of India aimed at promoting inclusive entrepreneurship among Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women ([Singh, 1994](#)). The scheme facilitates bank loans ranging from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore for greenfield enterprises in manufacturing, services, trading, and allied agricultural sectors. By mandating that each branch of Scheduled Commercial Banks support at least one SC/ST and one-woman entrepreneur, the program seeks to democratize access to capital and foster grassroots enterprise development. As of April 2023, over ₹40,700 crore has been sanctioned to more than 1.8 lakh accounts, with women entrepreneurs receiving the majority of disbursed loans ([Government of India, 2023](#)).

Beyond financial access, Stand-Up India also provides handholding support through the Stand-Up Mitra portal, Lead District Managers (LDMs), and bank-level facilitation. These mechanisms help aspiring entrepreneurs navigate documentation, project planning, and credit linkage. According to [Kumar and Singh \(2025\)](#), the scheme has been particularly impactful in rural and semi-urban regions, where traditional livelihoods dominate and formal entrepreneurship is rare. Their analysis of Uttarakhand's tribal districts shows that Stand-Up India has enabled marginalized groups to transition from informal labor to structured enterprise, especially in sectors like food processing, handicrafts, and eco-tourism.

However, challenges persist. A study by [Sharma et al. \(2023\)](#) notes that while the scheme has improved financial inclusion, many tribal entrepreneurs still face barriers such as low financial literacy, limited digital access, and bureaucratic delays. Moreover, the scheme's emphasis on greenfield projects excludes those seeking to expand existing informal businesses. To maximize its impact, experts recommend integrating Stand-Up India with localized incubation hubs, culturally embedded training programs, and tribal cooperative networks. When aligned with other central schemes like TRIFED and Van Dhan Yojana, Stand-Up India can serve as a powerful lever for systemic transformation—turning entrepreneurship into a tool for equity, empowerment, and cultural resilience ([Rao, 1992](#)).

### **3.4 Report Analysis**

This analysis aims to critically assess the financial and operational performance of key tribal entrepreneurship schemes implemented by the central government. Using budgetary data and implementation metrics to highlight gaps between policy intent and execution. The section highlights issues such as underutilization of funds, lack of awareness, and systemic inefficiencies that hinder the success of tribal enterprise programs. It also points to structural challenges such as documentation barriers, poor outreach, and limited technological access that prevent tribal entrepreneurs from fully benefiting from these schemes.

**Table 1.** Budgetary Performance of Tribal Entrepreneurship Schemes

Scheme	Budget Estimate (BE)	Revised Estimate (RE)	Expenditure
Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM)	₹499 Cr	₹140.27 Cr	₹135.27 Cr
Venture Capital Fund for STs	₹50 Cr	₹20 Cr	₹20 Cr
Institutional Support for Tribal Products	₹150 Cr	₹120 Cr	₹113.06 Cr
MSP for MFP	₹155 Cr	₹115 Cr	₹106.29 Cr
Van Dhan Yojana (VDY) Expansion and Outreach	3,225	1,009	₹83.95 crore

Source: TRIFED. (2022), *Annual Report 2021–2022*.

Table 1 presents a comparative view of five major schemes: Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM), Venture Capital Fund for STs, Institutional Support for Tribal Products, Minimum Support Price for Minor Forest Produce (MSP for MFP), and Van Dhan Yojana (VDY) Expansion and Outreach. For each scheme, it lists the Budget Estimate (BE), Revised Estimate (RE), and Actual Expenditure. The data reveals a consistent pattern of underutilization. For example, PMJVM was allocated ₹499 crore but only ₹135.27 crore was spent. Similarly, the Venture Capital Fund saw its allocation halved from ₹50 crore to ₹20 crore, with full expenditure only reaching the revised amount. This discrepancy reflects systemic inefficiencies, such as poor fund absorption capacity, lack of grassroots awareness, and bureaucratic delays.

The Van Dhan Yojana, despite its ambitious outreach, shows a particularly stark gap: from a BE of ₹3,225 crore, the RE dropped to ₹1,009 crore, with actual expenditure at just ₹83.95 crore. This suggests that while the scheme is conceptually strong, its execution suffers from logistical and administrative bottlenecks. The table thus serves as a diagnostic tool, revealing how tribal entrepreneurship programs are often compromised by weak implementation and insufficient support mechanisms.

As seen in Table 1, there is a significant gap between the estimated budget and actual expenditure, also for the entrepreneurship venture capital fund, revised to 20 crores out of 50 crores. This reflects the lack of awareness, underutilisation of funds, as well as a low level of decentralisation of the scheme (TRIFED, 2022; Annual Report 2021–22). Moreover, the above data also suggests that, due to a lack of documents, most entrepreneurs were unable to secure funding. Those who did secure funding did not survive due to meagre funding and a lack of Technology, among other factors. The Ministry also came up with Tech for Tribals programmes; they sanctioned 1477 batches, but actually delivered only 394. These happened due to a lack of awareness among communities at the grassroots level.

**Table 2.** Key Issues and Underlying Causes in Tribal Entrepreneurship

Issues	Reasons
Market Access	Many tribal groups still face logistical barriers in reaching wider markets.
Lack of Awareness	Inadequate training or understanding of pricing, branding, or quality control.
Dependence on Government Support	Delays in fund disbursement and administrative hurdles affect performance.
Sustainability Risk	Overharvesting due to rising income pressure may harm forest ecology.

Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2021)

Table 2 categorizes four major challenges—Market Access, Lack of Awareness, Dependence on Government Support, and Sustainability Risk—and links each to its root causes. For instance, market access is hindered by logistical barriers, such as poor transport infrastructure and limited digital connectivity in tribal regions. Lack of awareness stems from inadequate training in branding, pricing, and quality control, which are essential for competitive participation in broader markets. The table also

notes that tribal entrepreneurs often depend heavily on government schemes, but delays in fund disbursement and complex administrative procedures reduce their effectiveness.

Sustainability risk is a particularly insightful inclusion. It points out that rising income pressures may lead to overharvesting of forest resources, threatening ecological balance and long-term viability. This table complements the financial analysis by showing that even when funds are available, structural and cultural challenges can undermine outcomes. Together, the two tables provide a holistic view of both fiscal and operational dimensions of tribal entrepreneurship policy.

### 3.5 Recommendations

#### ***Entrepreneurial Education***

Integrate tribal youth into vocational skilling, entrepreneurship development programs via ITIs, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, and NSTI centers. To address the persistent gaps in tribal entrepreneurship, the first recommendation emphasizes the integration of entrepreneurial education into existing vocational and skilling platforms. Tribal youth often lack exposure to structured business training, which limits their ability to navigate formal markets and financial systems. By embedding entrepreneurship modules into Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Jan Shikshan Sansthan, and National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs), the government can create a pipeline of culturally aware, technically skilled tribal entrepreneurs. [Naik and Panda \(2023\)](#) found that tribal youth in Odisha who received contextualized training in business planning and digital literacy were significantly more likely to launch sustainable ventures. This approach not only builds human capital but also fosters confidence and autonomy among tribal learners.

#### ***Women-Centered Innovation***

Produce and promote women-led cooperative models sensitive to gender issues; create linkages for marketing via Mahila E-Haat and SHG Bank Linkage Program. The second suggestion calls for women-centered innovation, recognizing that tribal women are often the backbone of forest-based economies and informal enterprises. Promoting women-led cooperative models—especially those sensitive to gender roles and cultural dynamics—can unlock untapped entrepreneurial potential. Platforms like Mahila E-Haat and the SHG Bank Linkage Program offer digital and financial access, but their reach in tribal belts remains limited. [Kumari and Sharma \(2024\)](#) argue that tribal women face compounded barriers due to gender, geography, and institutional neglect. Their proposed framework advocates for localized mentorship, mobile-based training, and cooperative branding strategies to empower women as economic leaders. When tribal women are equipped with tools for enterprise, they not only uplift their families but also preserve cultural knowledge and ecological practices.

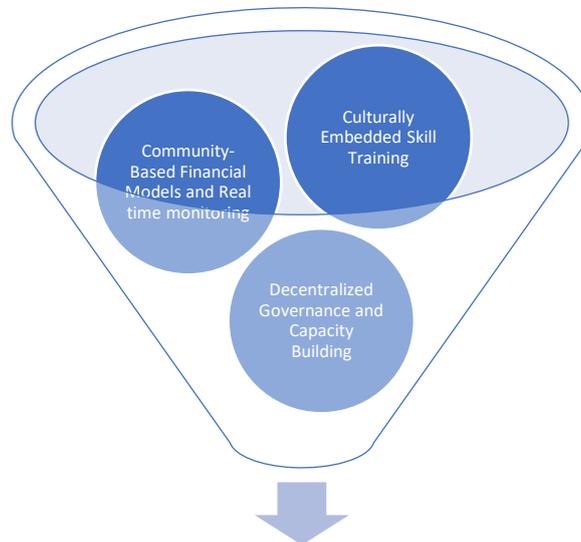
#### ***Establish an incubation and startup challenge for tribals, “Van Dhan” Innovation Challenge for Tribal Startup Incubation.***

The third recommendation proposes the establishment of a “Van Dhan Innovation Challenge for Tribal Startup Incubation”, aimed at fostering grassroots innovation and scalable tribal-led enterprises. This initiative would serve as a launchpad for tribal entrepreneurs to pitch ideas, receive seed funding, and access mentorship from academic and industry partners. A recent symposium hosted by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in January 2025 brought together venture capitalists and tribal innovators to explore precisely this model. The event underscored the importance of building a robust startup ecosystem that reflects tribal realities and aspirations. By decentralizing incubation and embedding it within tribal geographies, the challenge can catalyze a new generation of indigenous entrepreneurs who blend tradition with innovation.

[Figure 1](#) visualizes tribal entrepreneurship as a dynamic ecosystem sustained by three interconnected dimensions: Community-Based Financial Models and Real-Time Monitoring, Culturally Embedded Skill Training, and Decentralized Governance and Capacity Building. At the core of this circular model is the idea that tribal enterprise must be rooted in community agency, cultural relevance, and adaptive governance. The circular shape itself symbolizes continuity, feedback, and resilience—qualities essential for tribal entrepreneurs navigating both traditional knowledge systems and modern market demands.

The first dimension, Community-Based Financial Models and Real-Time Monitoring, emphasizes localized, cooperative financing structures such as tribal SHGs, forest-based producer groups, and microcredit collectives. These models reduce dependency on formal banking institutions, which often exclude tribal populations due to documentation and collateral barriers. Real-time

monitoring—enabled through mobile platforms and local data hubs—ensures transparency, tracks fund utilization, and supports timely interventions. A study by [Singh and Kumari \(2023\)](#) found that tribal cooperatives in Chhattisgarh using digital dashboards for fund tracking saw a 37% improvement in repayment rates and enterprise sustainability.



**Figure 1.** Efficient Tribal Entrepreneurs

The second dimension, Culturally Embedded Skill Training, highlights the importance of designing entrepreneurship programs that reflect tribal epistemologies, languages, and ecological practices. Generic skilling modules often alienate tribal youth; instead, training must be rooted in traditional crafts, forest-based livelihoods, and community storytelling. [Naik and Panda \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that when skill development programs in Odisha incorporated local dialects and indigenous knowledge, participation and retention rates increased significantly. This approach not only builds technical capacity but also affirms cultural identity, making entrepreneurship a form of heritage preservation.

The third dimension, Decentralized Governance and Capacity Building, calls for shifting decision-making power to tribal communities through local institutions, panchayats, and cooperative federations. Centralized schemes often fail to adapt to regional nuances, whereas decentralized governance allows for flexible, context-sensitive implementation. [Bramhane \(2025\)](#) argues that tribal entrepreneurship thrives when communities are involved in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own initiatives. Capacity building here includes leadership training, digital literacy, and participatory budgeting—tools that empower tribal entrepreneurs to shape their own economic futures.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurial mobilization of India's indigenous populations is a profoundly political and cultural process, not a simple economic one. As Adivasi entrepreneurs navigate the post-liberalisation context, they encounter the intersection of past injustices and new possibilities. To ensure their journey is sustainable and equitable, Indian policymaking has to reorient its frameworks towards placing indigenous voices at the center, recognizing cultural autonomy, and fostering equitable support ecosystems. According to the TRIFED 2021–2022 report, Van Dhan Yojana has helped tribal entrepreneurship grow significantly in both number and geographic reach. However, significant obstacles exist in areas such as value chain innovation, marketing integration, and capacity building. For tribal enterprise ecosystems to be self-sufficient and sustainable, a convergence model incorporating digital commerce, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), tribal cooperatives, and research institutions is essential. Can entrepreneurship then be the means of empowerment and not assimilation?

The entrepreneurial mobilization of India's tribal communities is not merely an economic phenomenon—it is a deeply political and cultural process shaped by historical dispossession, institutional exclusion, and evolving policy landscapes. As Adivasi entrepreneurs navigate the post-liberalization terrain, they confront the dual challenge of reclaiming agency while adapting to market-driven imperatives. This study underscores that tribal entrepreneurship, when rooted in indigenous knowledge and supported by inclusive frameworks, holds transformative potential—not just for economic upliftment, but for cultural resilience and ecological stewardship.

However, the research is not without limitations. It relies primarily on secondary data and qualitative analysis, which, while rich in context, may not capture the full diversity of tribal experiences across India's vast geographies. The absence of primary fieldwork limits the granularity of insights into localized entrepreneurial dynamics, especially in regions with unique socio-political histories. Additionally, the study focuses on central government schemes, leaving out comparative analysis with state-level innovations or private-sector interventions that may offer alternative models of success.

To strengthen future interventions, the study recommends three strategic directions. First, embed entrepreneurial education within tribal skilling ecosystems—through ITIs, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, and NSTIs—ensuring that training is culturally responsive and locally relevant. Second, promote women-led cooperative models that recognize gendered labor patterns and empower tribal women as economic agents. Third, launch a Van Dhan Innovation Challenge to incubate tribal startups, blending traditional knowledge with modern enterprise tools. These suggestions aim to bridge the gap between policy design and lived realities, fostering a more participatory and adaptive development approach.

In terms of contribution, this research offers practical insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and academic institutions. On the policy front, it advocates for a convergence model that integrates digital commerce, CSR partnerships, tribal cooperatives, and research institutions—creating a robust ecosystem for tribal entrepreneurship. On the practice side, it highlights the importance of culturally embedded skill training, decentralized governance, and community-based financial models as pillars of sustainable enterprise. By centering tribal voices and epistemologies, the study contributes to a reimagining of development—one that is inclusive, resilient, and rooted in indigenous agency.

### Abbreviations

TRIFED refers to various data repositories, particularly a trade directory and an internal Management Information System (MIS), managed by the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED).

IKS: Indian Knowledge System.

VDVKs: Van Dhan Vikas Kendras.

SHGs: Self-Help Groups.

NTFPs: Non-timber forest products.

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility.

NSTIs: National Skill Training Institutes.

ITIs: Industrial Training Institutes.

### Authors' contribution

Each author contributed equally to the research and writing the manuscript.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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### Availability of data and materials

All data and materials used in this study are available in the cited literature and can be accessed through public databases.

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