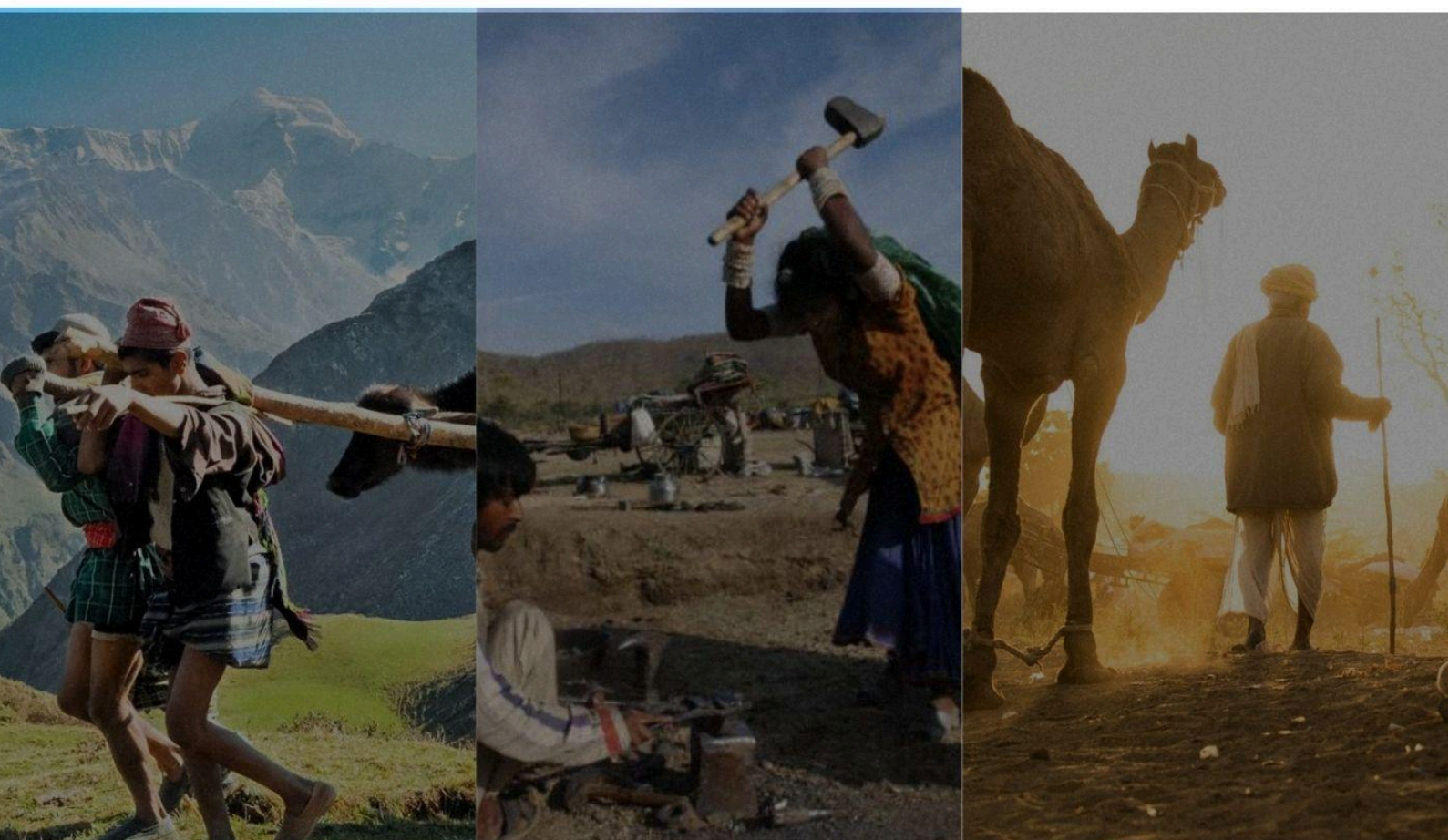


Report:
National
Consultation
with
**Denotified,
Nomadic & Semi-Nomadic
Tribes in India**



Civil Society Inputs to the 2025 Voluntary National Review



Anchored by:

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Foreword

On 7th March 2025, a national consultation with Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) and civil society organisations was held at Azim Premji University Hall, Bhopal, ahead of India's Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the UN High-Level Political Forum. Supported by UNDP India, the consultation was anchored by Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA) and the Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) to ensure that the voices, concerns, and aspirations of DNT communities are reflected in India's SDG commitments.

The consultation brought together participants from 30 organisations and community representatives, including Budhan Theatre, Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch, Coro India, Bhumi Gramutthanevam Sebhagi Gramin Vikas Samiti, Naya Jeevan Foundation Neemuch, ADECOM Network, Ollakhan Trust, Samarthya Sanstha, Vanchit Vikas Sanstha, Eco-net, Vimukt Jati Abhyuday Ashram, Kinnaur Lok Sahitya Anusandhan Sansthan, Jeevan Shiksha, TISS, Lok Nyas, Muskaan, and UN Women. Discussions centred on barriers of discrimination, social exclusion, and lack of recognition, alongside gender-specific challenges and limited access to education, healthcare, housing, and livelihoods.

The outcomes of the consultation fed into the India VNR process through submissions to NITI Aayog, highlighting the urgent need for universal social protection, equitable policies, and institutional changes. This engagement builds on WNTA and CSEI's longstanding work with DNT communities and civil society partners to amplify marginalised voices in both national and international development dialogues.

Expressing deep gratitude to the participants, and all those who gave their time and energy to make this possible.

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Historical Context

The nomadic lifestyle of DNT communities has historically been central to their survival. For generations, they moved from place to place in search of work and sustenance, which deprived them of fixed land and hindered their integration into mainstream society.

Their roots trace back to the Indus Valley civilization, with a history of diverse knowledge in animal husbandry, travel, and cultural exchange. Under royal patronage, they played key roles in transportation, communication, warfare, entertainment, and animal training. Despite their contributions, they were seldom acknowledged, allowing myths and misconceptions to further marginalize them.

Historical records from the Sultanate, Mughal, and British Imperial periods describe these communities as professional service providers, including warriors, tool makers, transporters, wildlife hunters, entertainers, medicine men, musicians, and genealogists. At that time, they were not associated with any criminal traits. However, the arrival of the East India Company in 1757 AD and the decline of the Mughal Empire led to a period of hardship for these groups.

After the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, which coincided with the East India Company Raj in India, a British officer named William Sleeman was tasked with documenting instances of looting and vandalism that took place all over the provinces of the Company Raj when soldiers of the Mughal empire along with many local groups referred to as 'thugs' clashed with Company soldiers. His report was sent to England and was to be the genesis of the Criminal Tribes Act. This act prescribed 'criminal traits' to certain groups and castes within India by birth, whilst also affording the power to define which castes are criminal to the British administration itself. The term 'wandering tribe' was specifically mentioned in the law to make it vague and capable of indicting all nomadic communities. The first War of Independence of 1857 got the British administration to suspect many among the wandering tribes as spies, messengers, and helpers to the freedom fighter sepoys. The CTA stripped these wandering tribes of their civil liberties, branding them as "Criminal Tribes" and the subsequent amendments in the CTA in 1911 and 1924 subsumed many communities under its purview.

The British exploitation of forest resources sparked conflicts with forest-dwelling communities, as their livelihoods and habitats were severely threatened. Communities like the Pardhi, Sansi, Kanjar, and Mogia were forced into a nomadic lifestyle, relying on hunting small game such as hares and partridges for survival. Often driven by hunger, they occasionally resorted to stealing crops. Their ability to wield weapons made them feared and disliked by settled communities, who barred them from living in villages. As a result, these groups were compelled to live in tents or in the open, on the edges of forests or village grazing lands. This marginalization marked the beginning of their stigmatization and exclusion from mainstream society.

The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) was repealed in 1952 following numerous appeals, but it was replaced by the Habitual Offenders Act (HOA). Under the HOA, the label shifted from "Criminal Tribes" to "Habitual Offenders," targeting individuals rather than entire communities or families.

Despite the repeal of the CTA, the stigma of criminality persists both administratively and socially. Even after 70+ years of Independence, this stigma remains a permanent blot on these communities.

Historically, Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) played key roles in India's socio-cultural, economic, and political systems. The Banjara managed grain transportation, while the Pardhi and Mogia assisted in royal hunting expeditions. The Gadia Lohar, sworn in service to Maharana Pratap, crafted weapons for battle before shifting to crafting of agricultural tools. Communities like the Nat, Bhat, and Mirasi were genealogists, bards, and performers, sustaining themselves through cultural performances and entertainment. The Bedia, Bachhada, and Kalbelia were hereditary dancers, with Kalbelia dance gaining global recognition as a UNESCO heritage practice. Some, like the Sansi and Kanjar, specialized in liquor-making, while others practiced farming or traditional medicine. The Madari and Qalandars trained animals for entertainment, and Gwariya women sold beauty products in villages. However, industrialization, unfair legal reforms and restrictions, and the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) criminalized many traditional practices of DNTs, restricting their mobility and placing them under surveillance. This led to their movements being restricted, and traditional practices being looked down upon by the majoritarian sedentary class¹.

Despite constitutional guarantees of citizenship rights, the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) remain voiceless due to illiteracy, socio-economic backwardness, lack of political participation, and the enduring stigma of criminality. Fragmented into various castes and scattered across remote areas, these communities remain invisible in India's highly populous landscape. Traditional practices of the DNTs have been severely restricted by laws related to forest and wildlife protection, state excise, prevention of beggary, and human trafficking, leading to the loss of indigenous knowledge and livelihoods. As a result, many are forced to migrate to cities, where they face exploitative working conditions, live in unhygienic slums, and lack access to basic amenities.

Despite the establishment of numerous commissions, committees, corporations, and welfare boards for their rehabilitation, the government has failed to implement concrete action plans. These communities are often excluded from the mandates of political parties and remain absent from their manifestos. The Renke (2008) and Idate (2017) Commissions have highlighted the dire conditions of DNTs, describing them as the "poorest among the poor," "marginalized," and "most downtrodden." However, their recommendations for amelioration have largely remained unimplemented due to a lack of effective follow-up and political will.

Situational Analysis

Legal and Institutional Criminalization

Restrictive Laws and Policies

Post-independence legislation, such as the Wildlife Protection Act and Anti-Vagrancy (begging) Laws, along with deep-rooted police stigma, have systematically targeted DNT communities. In

¹ [Voicing the Community: A Study on the De-notified and Nomadic Tribes of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh](https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/voicing-the-community-a-study-on-the-de-notified-and-nomadic-tribes-of-rajasthan-gujarat-and-madhya-pradesh/)
<https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/voicing-the-community-a-study-on-the-de-notified-and-nomadic-tribes-of-rajasthan-gujarat-and-madhya-pradesh/>

1959 the Government of India passed the Habitual Offenders Act, which many law enforcement officers have consistently used against these tribes. The bias against NTDNTs exists in the minds of law enforcement personnel and continues in many police manuals, which remained unchanged from colonial times. Members of the NTDNT communities continue to face ill-treatment and arbitrary detention by police for various offences committed near their settlements.

Criminalization in Police Training and Policy Documents

Police manuals across states, including Madhya Pradesh, continue to list DNT communities under outdated criminal tribe classifications. The "habitual offender" and "history-sheeter" frameworks influence various laws, including the Wildlife Protection Act, reinforcing systemic bias against these communities.

Maximum criminal cases registered against these communities by the police are for making illicit liquor and disputes within the community members or outside. This is common with the Kanjar community. Since the Pardhi and Kanjar are still hunters of wild species thus they are booked in a number of Wildlife Protection Act cases also.

Many cases are registered for making, storing, and selling illicit liquor, which is often a survival strategy in the absence of alternative livelihoods. Frequent police raids result in arrests under criminal activity charges, further reinforcing their stigmatization. Additionally, cases related to theft and murder arise. The hunting of protected species, often a part of traditional subsistence practices, leads to legal action under the Wildlife Protection Act. Some members face charges for theft of railway property, while incidents of purse and jewelry snatching also contribute to their criminal records. Many of these offenses highlight the structural challenges DNT communities face, where systemic exclusion and lack of legal livelihood options push them into vulnerable situations.

Targeting of Cultural and Livelihood Practices

Traditional occupations of NT DNT communities remain criminalized, such as snake charming (Sapera) and Mahua liquor production by Vimukt Jaatis. While the government of Madhya Pradesh produces Mahua liquor commercially and is marketing it as a heritage liquor, DNT communities are denied the same rights to produce and sell themselves. Mahua makers should be recognized as traditional malt liquor producers and included in the formal production processes by state governments to ensure economic inclusion.

Restricted Mobility and Policing of Movement

DNT communities face constant surveillance, police harassment, and restrictions on movement, further marginalizing their way of life. The cases of police visits among the Kanjar and Sansi are highest because in most of their villages police chowkis have been established for regular patrolling and watch on their activities. There are cases of frequent police raids at night to catch the suspects or keep a watch on them. Whenever there are thefts and dacoity in the region, houses of Kanjar, Sansi, Pardhi and Kalbelia are frisked first. If there are temporary encampments of Kalbelia and Nat in the region they are raided by the police, mostly at midnight when men are at home.

Challenges in Accessing Legal Support

Exclusionary DLSA System

The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) often operates as a pre-litigation mechanism favoring elites over marginalized communities. DNT individuals face pressure to accept unfair settlements, unnecessary fees, and prolonged legal proceedings. Legal aid mechanisms must be reformed to ensure fair treatment of DNT cases.

Discrimination Against Women and Children

Women and children in DNT communities, especially those living in FRA-protected areas, frequently face violence and false cases filed by the forest department. When women attempt to file FIRs, they are often denied access to police stations.

Lack of Dedicated Legal Protection

There is an urgent need for specialized legal protection through dedicated DNT legal cells. DNT individuals report discrimination and threats from legal aid institutions like NALSA and DLSA, highlighting the systemic barriers to justice they face.

Invisibility of Nomadic and Denotified Tribes (DNT) in India

Lack of Legal Documentation

DNT communities face systemic exclusion due to the absence of legal identity and land documentation. Without identity proof, they are denied access to government schemes, education, healthcare, and voting rights. These communities face severe caste discrimination, including from local authorities like the Sarpanch and Panchayat Secretary, limiting their access to MGNREGA job cards. Their small population makes them politically insignificant, and stigma forces them to hide their identities and seek work in mining or agriculture far from home. Social exclusion at MGNREGA sites further discourages participation. Additionally, a lack of awareness about entitlements and government schemes contributes to their minimal involvement in welfare programs.

- Pastoralist communities in Jammu & Kashmir receive official recognition and benefits, yet in Uttarakhand, the same status is denied.
- The Pardhi community has hardly any land rights, and most of the community is residing on leased land. Many have lived in the same administrative areas for decades but remain undocumented and are evicted arbitrarily by the local administration.
- The Banjara community, historically traders of tools and spices, now engages in small-scale agriculture and other professions but lacks official documentation, making them invisible in government records.
- Sex workers from DNT communities struggle to obtain caste certificates for their children, as authorities require the name of a father or husband. They should be granted caste certificates based on their status as single women to ensure access to entitlements.

- Due to lack of citizenship documents, the DNT communities are not able to avail basic entitlement facilities like Ration Card, Job Card, BPL Card, health facilities in hospitals, caste certificates, domicile certificates, etc. During the protest and debate on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) Bill one of the concerns raised was regarding the DNTs among whom all the members do not have citizenship documents to prove their identity.

Absence of Constitutional Recognition

- DNT communities are not officially counted in the Census, leaving their presence unmapped and unaccounted for in policymaking.
- Although there is presence of intra community quasi-judicial committees similar to Khap Panchayats, DNT communities have little to no political representation in the state governments or national government
- NT DNT communities lack safe, inclusive local platforms to voice their concerns without fear of intimidation.

Preservation of Cultural and Traditional Knowledge

With most DNT histories, languages, and traditions passed down orally, there is an urgent need for investment in documentation, translation, and research to preserve their unique knowledge systems.

Livelihood, Education, and Health Challenges for Nomadic and Denotified Tribes (DNT) in India

Livelihood Challenges

DNT communities engage in diverse occupations, yet their traditional knowledge remains unrecognized, often criminalized, or strictly regulated. DNT communities are undergoing occupational transitions. While some still practice traditional professions, many have moved to unorganized labor, collecting plastic scrap, begging, or selling toys and blankets. Increased education has led some to private-sector jobs, while artist communities have started enterprises like DJ bands and performance groups. Those with agricultural land engage in farming, but small landholdings force them to seek additional work. Government jobs remain rare (less than 1%) due to competitive disadvantages in reserved and general categories. Many traditional occupations are now illegal under laws like the Wildlife (Protection) Act-1972, Excise Act, and Beggary Prevention Act. Communities such as Pardhi, Kanjar, Sansi, Kalbelia, and Kanjar remain stigmatized as criminal gangs, facing constant suspicion and legal action, further restricting their livelihood options.

- **Erosion of Traditional Occupations**
 - Forest Restrictions – Wildlife reserves with high boundary walls now block Pardhi, Van Gujjar and other pastoralist NT DNT communities from hunting and gathering/foraging for food.

- Snake Charming Ban – The 1991 ban under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (Schedule-2, Part-1) has severely impacted the Kalbelia, who still face police raids and suspicion.
 - Hunting Prohibitions – The Pardhi and Kanjar are banned from hunting partridges under Schedule-4 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
 - Decline in Traditional Pigments – The shift to concrete houses has ended the demand for raw geru and khadiya colors, affecting the Kalbelia, who once sold them for kutchha wall painting.
 - Exit from Prostitution – Young girls from the Bedia, Bachhada, and Kanjar communities are increasingly leaving prostitution for a more stable life, with many opting for marriage.
 - Illicit Liquor Crackdown – The State Excise Act and National Security Act criminalize liquor production, leading to police extortion of Kanjar, Sansi, Bachhada, and Nat communities. Many have abandoned this livelihood.
 - Decline in Iron Tool Making – With the rise of machinery, Gadia Luhars have shifted from making agricultural tools to selling utensils or scrap from demolished houses. Lohar Pita artisans, once skilled utensil makers, struggle as their trade diminishes without education or institutional support.
 - Grazing Restrictions – Encroachments and buffer zone bans have forced many cattle grazers to abandon livestock.
 - Loss of Patronage for Nat and Kanjar – Once honored for reciting genealogies and performing acrobatics, they are now seen as beggars and avoided by former patrons.
 - Behrupiya Stigma – Once respected as performers, Behrupiyas are now suspected of burglary and often charged under the Anti-Beggary Act.
 - Loss of old trading practices: Banjara community, historically traders of tools and spices, now engages in small-scale agriculture and various services but lacks documentation, making their lineage and professions invisible in the modern economy.
- **Lack of Institutional Support for Arts & Crafts:** Many traditional occupations such as sweeping have disappeared due to neglect and the absence of government initiatives to sustain them.
 - **Limited Access to Natural Resources:** Many DNT communities depend on forests and grazing lands, but restrictive policies under the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** and the declaration of National Parks have disrupted their way of life.

- **Van Gujjars**, known for their vast ecological knowledge, once sourced food and medicine from over 300 plant species in Shivalik hills and alpine meadows. National Park restrictions now limit their access to both nutrition and income. Their traditional seasonal migration every six months has been curtailed, forcing them into illegal settlements and increasing their vulnerability.
- Heavy **taxes on animals transported across state borders** (e.g., camels from Rajasthan to Gujarat) disproportionately burden nomadic pastoralists. These cross-state fees should be abolished for DNTs, given their inherently borderless way of life and livelihood.

Education Barriers

A 2021 survey notes that the average literacy rate among the DNTs stands at a concerning 47 per cent, in contrast to the 2017-18 national average of 77.7 per cent. The survey notes that only 2.4 per cent of the currently enrolled individuals were studying at the college level. Caste discrimination, lack of documents, language barriers, stigma and poverty are primary reasons for children either not attending or dropping out of school. Access to education remains severely restricted due to poverty, language barriers, and systemic exclusion.

- **Barriers to School Admission:** The lack of essential identity documents such as Aadhaar cards, caste certificates, birth certificates, and ration cards creates significant barriers for DNT communities. Additionally, issues with the online registration system of the education department further complicate access to schooling. Financial constraints prevent many families from affording private education or higher studies, while caste discrimination remains a persistent challenge, limiting educational opportunities for children from these communities.
- **Low Female Enrolment:** In states like Madhya Pradesh, education rates for women in DNT communities are among the lowest.
- **Lack of Connection Between Education and Employment:** Many DNTs do not see formal education leading to stable livelihoods, leading to low participation. Vocational training should include stipends to prevent income loss for dropouts.
- **Language Barriers:** DNT children frequently move across regions, learning different languages, which disrupts their schooling. Translating educational materials into their languages and increasing access to **residential schools** could improve retention.
- **Parents Dissatisfied with Education:** Parents are dissatisfied with the education provided in schools, as children attend regularly but struggle with basic literacy. Teachers are inattentive, and their insulting attitude, along with a poor school environment, discourages learning. Government schools offer low-quality education, and children face discrimination and harassment from peers. Migration disrupts their studies, leading to irregular attendance, while parents, occupied with labor work, are unable to support their education at home.

- **Forced Child Labor:** Pardhi children are often contracted for months-long work in agriculture, such as chili harvesting, disrupting their education permanently.
- **Exclusion from Hostels:** DNT children are often denied hostel access, which is largely reserved for SC students.
- **Early Marriages Due to Economic Hardship:** Girls are married off at **14-15 years** to assist in agricultural labor, while boys marry at **17** to secure higher wages.
- **Teacher Discrimination:** Ashram and Vimukt schools rarely have teachers from DNT backgrounds, further alienating students. The education system must be adapted to the needs of these communities to ensure meaningful inclusion.

Health and Welfare Gaps

Health is a major concern among DNT communities. Malnutrition, infectious diseases like tuberculosis, and silicosis from working in mines are prevalent. Women suffer from high rates of anaemia, while skin diseases are common among those living in unhygienic conditions in slums or along roadsides. Seasonal illnesses like viral fever, diarrhoea, and typhoid reoccur annually.

DNT communities, especially women, face severe health and sanitation issues. AIDS cases are also present among the Bachhada, Bedia, and Kanjar communities, with organizations like NACO working in some clusters. Due to discrimination in government hospitals, many prefer private healthcare despite the high costs, often leading to debt as they are forced to borrow money at high interest rates from moneylenders.

- **Lack of Occupation-Specific Healthcare:** Nomadic and pastoralist communities need healthcare tailored to their traditional livelihoods and mobility.
- **Exclusion from Welfare Schemes:** Lack of documentation prevents access to government benefits, financial assistance, and employment programs.
- **Women's Safety & Sanitation:** Van Gujjar women, among others, face persistent issues related to hygiene, security, and access to healthcare.

Stigmatization and Systemic Exclusion

Widespread Stigma and Social Marginalization

DNT communities face deep-rooted societal mistrust, which manifests in exclusion from education, employment, and even burial rights. Women, in particular, bear the brunt of stigma, making it difficult for them to access training, livelihood opportunities, and social mobility.

- **Entrenched Mistrust:** DNT communities are consistently viewed with suspicion and denied basic dignity. Their exclusion is not just legal or economic but deeply social, preventing integration into mainstream society.
- **Caste-Based Surveillance and Policing:** On **January 29, 2025**, the Madhya Pradesh government issued **advisory 02/2023-24**, now a **national red alert**, ordering strict

surveillance on nomadic and hunting communities such as **Bawaria, Pardhi, Sapera, Mongya, Kanjar, Banjara, and Bahelia.**

- This directive authorizes random search operations with dog squads.
- Officials and even civilians are allowed to question DNT individuals about their livelihoods and residences.
- The police have been given powers to dig up lands under suspicion of hiding animal remains.
- This blatant **caste-based targeting** violates constitutional rights and institutionalizes discrimination.
- **Denial of Caste Benefits & Documentation:**
 - The **Pardhi community** in Madhya Pradesh, historically dependent on forest-based livelihoods and eligible under **FRA 2006**, is now being issued "**non-reserved**" **caste certificates**, effectively barring them from social welfare benefits.
 - DNT hostels remain largely inaccessible to DNT students due to **lack of documentation** and **administrative exclusion**.
 - There is a **deliberate attempt to blur caste classifications** for DNTs, making it harder for them to claim entitlements.
 - In some instances, **police raids have targeted villages and confiscated DNT caste certificates**, further pushing them into statelessness.
- **Discrimination in Trade and Public Spaces:**
 - DNT women and children often face harassment at major trade fairs and public events across India.
 - They are seen as 'outsiders' even in spaces where their communities have historically played an integral role.

Barriers in Education

Access to education remains a critical challenge, with systemic biases reinforcing exclusion.

- **High Risk of Child Labor:** In many impoverished DNT households, children are pulled out of schools to engage in traditional livelihoods, worsening intergenerational poverty.
- **Poor-Quality Schools & Hostels:**
 - Even when DNT children overcome hurdles to attend school, **education quality remains abysmally low.**
 - **Hostels are either unsafe or located too far away**, making them impractical for most families.

- **Mental Health & Suicides:**

- Persistent **discrimination in schools, colleges, and even at the panchayat level** has contributed to **alarming high suicide rates** among DNT men and youth.
- There is an urgent need for **mental health helplines, helpdesks, and counsellors at every sub-centre**, alongside **Aanganwadi workers** who can provide community-based support.

Economic Discrimination & Livelihood Barriers

Despite being highly skilled in traditional occupations, DNT communities face systematic barriers in employment and economic inclusion.

- **Historical Context:** These communities once held **prestigious roles, providing essential services to royal courts**. The British, however, labelled them as “**criminal tribes**”, leading to mass incarceration and criminalization. This stigma **persists to this day**, reinforced by excessive police verification requirements for basic services and employment.
- **Limited Livelihood Opportunities:**
 - Even when DNT individuals **receive training and education**, they face **discrimination in the job market**.
 - The **Prevention of Atrocities (POA) Act** should be enforced to **protect DNT job seekers from employment discrimination**.
- **Sexual Exploitation & Stigma:**
 - **Bedia community women** have been **traditionally pushed into sex work** for generations and face severe **social exclusion**, even within DNT communities.
 - **Women from performing arts backgrounds** who were forced into sex work experience **double discrimination**—ostracized both by their own communities and society at large.
 - Healthcare and workplace safety in **sex work remains almost non-existent**, leaving these women in extreme vulnerability.

Recommendations for Way Forward

As described in the report here, DNT communities face a unique set of challenges rooted in historical marginalization, social exclusion, and systemic discrimination. Despite their significant cultural contributions, these communities struggle with limited access to education, healthcare, livelihoods, legal protections, and representation. A range of targeted actions were identified in the consultation to address their specific needs and promote their inclusion. These recommendations are categorized into four key areas: actions at the national level, actions at the state/regional level,

actions by the UN, and actions by civil society. Each of these sectors has a critical role to play in fostering an environment where DNT communities can thrive with dignity and equality. The following actions are aimed at creating a more inclusive, just, and equitable society for DNTs in India.

Recommendations for national-level actions

- 1. Allot free residential plots/residential leases in rural/urban areas to permanently settle nomadic communities and pass the Homestead Act to give legal rights to residential land to every nomadic family.**
 - i. Every nomadic family must be compulsorily sanctioned housing under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
- 2. Repeal all legislative orders, notifications, advisories and laws criminalising the existence and livelihood of DNT communities**
 - i. Repeal of Habitual Offenders Acts from all states in all forms in compliance with the National Human Rights Commission's recommendation
 - ii. Repeal Preventions/Prohibition of Beggary Acts from all states in all forms
 - iii. Withdraw and repeal discriminatory and unconstitutional government notifications/advisories ordering strict surveillance on wanderers, nomadic and hunting communities due to alleged animal cruelty, such as the advisory no 02/2023-24 released by Madhya Pradesh government
 - iv. Due to the strictness on transportation of cattle and milch animals for agriculture under the Animal Cruelty Act and Cow Slaughter Prohibition Act, the nomadic traders are facing livelihood crisis, hence this ban should be considered to be lifted or selected NT DNT Communities should be granted an exemption.
- 3. Review and revise policies detrimental to livelihoods of DNT communities**
 - i. Remove internal cross border taxation on moving livestock between states to support the nomadic nature of DNT communities' livelihood
 - ii. Revise police training curriculum to stop teaching police trainees about criminal tribes and criminality associated with one community
 - iii. Link participation in all vocational training and rehabilitation programmes with a supporting stipend to ensure existing livelihood is not detrimentally impacted
- 4. Invest in creating and increasing knowledge on the lives and challenges of DNT communities**
 - i. Enumerate DNT communities as an additional category in Census
 - ii. Support research and fact-finding surveys on the status of DNT communities
 - iii. Organise public hearings to settle claims of land / homestead and access to documents which can help them access schemes and reservations - by regular public convenings and scheduled visits to community habitations to overcome the information gap and develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced
 - iv. Theatre groups and film festivals featuring and engaging with DNT communities could be incentivised

- v. Traditional artists and performers from DNT communities could be identified to perform in a series of government-supported events across their respective states and the country where they would be allowed a platform to showcase their various talents. Similar series of events have been organised in the past under the banner of 'Festival of India', 'Apna Utsav' etc , with a broader aim to display Indian traditions both within and outside the country.
- 5. Strengthen existing provisions for DNT communities**
 - i. Critically analyse the design and implementation of Jabali scheme in Madhya Pradesh and use learnings to inform a national scheme for the welfare and development of women and children of more DNT groups who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation, with the goal of eliminating such exploitation
 - ii. Change policy of granting caste certificates to enable issuing them on the basis of the mother's details alone, allowing children of women in sex work and single women to obtain caste certificates through dignified processes
 - 6. Extend existing legal protections available for marginalised communities to include DNTs**
 - i. Extend the scope of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act to include DNT communities. Alternatively, enact a similar act offering the same protections to DNT communities.
 - ii. Establish DNT cells under Human Rights Commissions, Commissions for Women, SC ST Commissions, and Minority Commissions at national and state levels to adequately address the issues of DNT communities which often overlap with these categories
 - 7. Increase legal recognition and representation of DNT communities**
 - i. Recognise the identity of DNT communities as a consolidated constitutional category, removing the overlap into Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This would address the exceptional stigma and violence faced by DNT communities through proper documentation and protections.
 - ii. The same community is known by different names in different regions, which creates difficulties in making and verifying caste certificates. Therefore, to eliminate this caste anomaly, a comprehensive caste review should be done in every state.
 - iii. Reserve seats for DNT communities in local, state and national elections to ensure political representation of the communities at all decision-making platforms
 - 8. Implement recommendations of Renke and Idate Commissions**

Recommendations for state and/or regional level actions

- 1. Institute permanent commissions for DNT communities at the state level with dedicated budgets and the possibility of obtaining CSR funds for community-first actions**
- 2. Organise state/regional public fairs focused on giving a space to DNT communities to showcase their rich history through dance, music, films, artisanal and utility products at a government-supported platform**

3. Address challenges in obtaining legal identification

- i. Remove the requirement of a domicile certificate to obtain any identity documents or access to government schemes, recognizing the difficulty in proving long-term residence given the nomadic history and continuing social stigma
- ii. Establish legal provisions to organize localized camps for providing essential documents including caste certificates for DNT communities
- iii. Allow the issuance of caste certificates to be based on multi-generational oral testimonies, ensuring a process that adapts to include community's own narratives

4. Move towards a legal system more responsive to the needs of DNT communities

- i. Establish a dedicated DNT Cell within the District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) to address issues specific to DNT communities
- ii. Implement mechanisms to track specific crimes targeting DNT communities, including the ones targeting women from the community, to understand the prevalence of continuing stigma and discrimination
- iii. Fast track all cases of violence, torture, atrocities against DNTs and avail justice to the victims of such violence and their family members. Additionally, immediately provide interim relief by providing compensation to the families who are struggling to avail justice.
- iv. Conduct a study of the state-level police training curriculum to identify and eliminate content that criminalizes or promotes a bias against DNT communities
- v. Address the discrimination and violence faced by women and children, particularly land-owning women in Forest Rights Act (FRA) protected areas, ensuring they are able to file FIRs without facing further abuse or discrimination

5. Enable working conditions to support livelihood generation for DNTs while also recognising the value of the knowledge and experience of their traditional occupations

- i. Provide childcare and creche services for communities in entertaining professions (such as Nat, Bediya, Kalbeliya, etc.) who need to leave their children behind while working, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for their children
- ii. Contract folk artists linked to employment guarantee programmes to perform in functions organised in and/or by colleges, government offices, schools, and hospitals.
- iii. Provide an employment guarantee to traditional artists from DNT communities, helping them sustain their traditions while ensuring they are paid for their work
- iv. Enable and prioritise the employment of performers from DNT communities in all state theatre manch and festivals organised
- v. Invest in documenting the traditional knowledge of flora and fauna present among forest-dwelling and pastoralist communities to understand and promote sustainable practices of wellness and nutrition
- vi. Apprenticeships to engage DNT youth in making films and radio programmes can be explored to engage the artistic and oratory skills culturally present in several of these communities while also creating more visibility for them.

- vii. **Recognise that the traditional knowledge of DNT communities and their occupations has possible modern applications and enable the use of their existing skill set** along the lines of the suggestions made in the table below.

Community Name	Traditional Occupation	Potential Modern Application
Vadar	Stone Workers	Could be employed or trained in drilling and machinery that is used for road building, other stone works
Kanjar	Producing liquor (like Mahua)	Could be employed to produce mahua for the government instead of being banned from producing it
		Alcohol production can also be linked to medicinal and pharmaceutical use
Nat	Acrobats/Performers	People from the community are known to be inherently agile and good at acrobatics and martial arts - this talent should be institutionally promoted
Van Gujjar	Pastoralist/Cattle breeders	Have great knowledge of milk products, and milk, they can be included in milk production formal networks
		Can be engaged in guided tours, trekking tours etc. on forest/mountain terrains and promote sustainable tourism practices
Sapera/Kalbelia	Snake Charmers	State-wise venom banks can be set up to collect venom - which the people from these communities are skilled at procuring - and enable its use for medicinal purposes

- viii. *Only those who are currently involved in traditional businesses should be offered similar modernised occupations while the next generation should be provided optimum education including vocational training. Only if the next generation is genuinely interested in their traditional occupation, should they be encouraged to practice the modernised occupation or should be encouraged to opt for new livelihood opportunities depending upon their educational qualification. *(DNT communities are also discriminated against based on their occupation, if they are*

encouraged to perform their traditional occupation in the modern era for stigma would persist).

6. Recognise and address learning challenges faced by children of DNT communities

- i. Develop a policy for separate residential schools specifically for DNT communities who face discrimination in regular schools, leading to higher dropout rates. Reservation for students from DNT communities in existing residential schools can be done as an immediate step towards that
- ii. Open schools near DNT residences, especially near their forest dwellings, to integrate their children into the formal educational framework in a non-isolating manner
- iii. Increase the number of student intake and classes offered in schools dedicated for Vimukt Janjatis and Nomadic Tribes
- iv. Build supporting infrastructure including hostels which safe, secure, and located near the schools to address the drop-out challenges due to discrimination and migration
- v. Recognise the language and cultural barriers causing learning challenges among students from DNT communities and provide resources for translating books and tuition assistance centres located within communities
- vi. Ensure reservation for the appointment of teachers in local schools, including Vimukt and Ashram schools, to better represent and address the needs of DNT communities.

7. Recognise the specific health needs of DNT communities and develop systems to address them

- i. Promote mental health awareness and interventions to address the high suicide rates and trauma faced by DNTs, especially related to historical injustice, discrimination, and exclusion at schools, colleges, workplaces and in society in general
- ii. Establish helplines, helpdesks, and mental health counselling services at every sub-centre, alongside Aanganwadi workers, to support individuals facing mental health challenges
- iii. Distribute modern HIV prevention tools, such as silicon layered vaginal rings and post-prophylactic medicines, to DNT communities engaged in sex work to safeguard their health
- iv. Enable mobile health units and outreach programs that bring healthcare services directly to nomadic populations, ensuring that DNTs in remote areas are not left behind

Recommendations for UN support

1. Advocate for the inclusion of DNTs in all development publications that address issues of marginalized communities

UN and allied publications are critical for shaping public policy, guiding social welfare

interventions, and influencing global discussions on human rights and inclusive development. DNTs, who have historically been left out of these discussions, must be represented in UN Development Reports, UN Annual Reports on Indigenous Peoples, Reports from UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and other global human rights and Leave No One Behind frameworks and publications to ensure their unique challenges are acknowledged and addressed.

- 2. Support the mapping of community-based organisations working with DNT communities**
In collaboration with civil society, facilitate a mapping of community-based organisation located within DNT communities and a history of working for their developmental progress. This will help increasing coordination and collaboration within these organisations which are currently primarily invisible or working in silos and also enable better-targeted interventions and a stronger advocacy platform for the communities.

Recommendations for Civil Society support

- 1. Tracking of Specific Crimes Against DNTs**
Civil society should collaborate with law enforcement agencies, human rights organizations, and legal experts to track specific crimes committed against DNTs. This includes violence, discrimination, and exploitation. Establishing a routine tracking mechanism will help document abuses, raise awareness, and advocate for legal reforms to protect these marginalized communities.
- 2. Promote Alternative Livelihoods Based on Traditional Livelihoods**
Facilitate skill development workshops and market linkages for traditional artisans and farmers, ensuring access to sustainable income opportunities
- 3. Facilitate studies that explore the potential of incorporating traditional crafts, skills, and knowledge into the modern economy**
Study traditional forms of employment within DNT communities. Understanding how these communities have historically engaged with the economy will help identify modern adaptations and opportunities for integrating traditional knowledge into the contemporary workforce
- 4. Collaborate with educational NGOs, translators, and local governments to facilitate the translation and distribution of educational materials for DNT children**
- 5. Support training programs on sustainable farming practices, provide access to tools, and help build networks for joint farming ventures, especially learning from lucrative examples set by Ramoshi community in Maharashtra**
- 6. Partner with urban planners, architects, and cultural activists to push for the designation of DNT residential zones as cultural and artistic spaces, and advocate for policies that allow for cultural preservation, local art exhibitions, and public performances**



Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA), initiated in 2004, is a national civil society platform with over 3,000 member organisations working to ensure governance accountability and eliminate poverty and social exclusion in India. It publishes annual reviews of government performance and SDG progress, and articulates people’s demands through the *People’s Manifesto*. As the national partner of the Global Call for Action against Poverty (GCAP), WNTA focuses on the Right to Livelihood, Health, and Education, with special emphasis on the concerns of socially excluded communities including Dalits, Adivasis, Nomadic Tribes, women, children, youth, and persons with disabilities. WNTA has been engaged with campaigns concerning the rights of marginalised groups, including Denotified Tribes (DNTs), and has consistently amplified their voices in national and international development dialogues.

CSEI (Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion) works to empower young people from disadvantaged communities through learning, leadership, and a ‘self-to-society’ approach. With its focus on “youth development and youth for development,” CSEI builds skills in areas such as constitutional literacy, equity and inclusion, gender rights, and human rights. It partners with civil society forums and the UN in India to strengthen SDG accountability, guided by community experiences and citizen-generated data to amplify the voices of invisible communities and ensure no one is left behind. As part of networks like WNTA and GCAP, CSEI brings strong experience in advocacy, coalition-building, and campaign design. Together, CSEI and WNTA have anchored key national consultations, including with NITI Aayog and the UN, making them well-placed to facilitate a platform for CSOs working with DNT communities.