

# Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Tribal Development in India: A Systematic Literature Review

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*“India will prosper when our tribal communities prosper; the welfare of tribal communities is our foremost priority.”*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

**Abstract:** As one of the signatory members of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, India is committed to incorporating the 17 SDGs in its policy and programs. The total size and scale of our country mean that the success of the global goals, to a large extent, depends on progress made by India. NITI Aayog oversees implementation by ministries and coordinates with States for the achievement of developmental targets as enshrined in the SDGs. However, the ambitious targets set under SDG 2030 requires a multi-dimensional, concerted and coordinated effort for influencing at all levels, and that no stakeholder can effect long-term change in isolation or silos. Additionally, as the Government of India commits itself to advancing SDGs and its accountability towards social inclusion and equitable growth, development partnerships must be promoted among the key stakeholders to see the desired impact of SDGs at the national level. Building on this context and in alignment with the ‘SDG 17 – Partnership for the Goals’, the article synthesizes key findings from literature review on the situation of tribal community in India, various initiatives undertaken by key stakeholders, the potential role of multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) for scaling the impact of development actions undertaken for tribal development. The research paper would be helpful for duty bearers, policymakers, academia, corporations, and development practitioners to broaden their perspective on integrating MSPs into program designs aimed at the development of tribal communities in India. Through this analysis, the article also aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on why building multi-stakeholder partnerships is important for scaling the impact of development actions and as a transformative tool for advancing the SDGs.

**Keywords:** multi-stakeholder partnership, Sustainable Development Goals, Tribal Development, Scaling Impact

## 1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 provides a common framework for governments, civil society, businesses, and international agencies to address social, economic, and environmental challenges, whilst integrating the principles of 5Ps – People, Planet, Profit, Peace, and Partnership. Among these, Goal 17 — Partnerships for the Goals — highlights the importance of collaborative approaches in achieving sustainable development outcomes. It promotes key stakeholders and participants to create multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) to combine diverse viewpoints, resources, and expertise in pursuit of shared objectives (United Nations, 2015). Researchers have observed that these collaborations are vital in tackling development and systemic issues by encouraging collective action, fostering confidence amongst participants, and reassuring that development programs are inclusive and locally pertinent. They observe that effective MSPs depend on transparency, balanced representation, and clear governance structures, making them a powerful strategy for advancing inclusive, community-driven progress, especially in contexts like tribal development, where diverse voices and localized knowledge are vital for meaningful impact (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016) [2].

However, socio-economic inequalities prevailing in a country have a profound impact on access to essential services such as quality education, healthcare, and sustainable livelihoods that disproportionately affect the holistic development of the marginalized communities (Singh, 2024) (Pandey, 2022) [3] [4]. Scheduled tribes are one of the marginalized communities in India who have been facing socio-economic disadvantages, including limited access to

education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. As per the Census of India 2011, Scheduled Tribes comprise 8.6% (about 104 million) of the nation's overall population. Among these, 94 million reside in remote rural areas, with over 50 percent of tribals inhabiting forested areas (GoI, TRIFED, 2019) [5]. India houses roughly 705 tribes, each possessing its own linguistic and cultural variety, distributed across 15 percent of the nation's geographical space. The socioeconomic indicators of the tribal communities remain dismal even after years of investment of funds for their development. Some of the challenges are related to on-ground policy implementation, policy coherence, administrative intricacies, and lack of community needs assessment, participation while designing and executing the project. MSP can act as a potential approach for effective utilization of funds and pooling of resources through joint planning undertaken by different stakeholders having priority of tribal development in a particular geographical area. This kind of approach would ensure effective implementation of policies and programs, increasing awareness about the various programs without duplication of efforts, and community involvement for attaining impact and improvements in the socio-economic conditions of India's tribal populations (Bhatnagar, 2024) [6].

Even though forging partnerships among stakeholders comes with its challenges, such as ensuring transparency, accountability, and establishing effective governance structures, this paper focuses on the merits of collaboration. The article highlights the importance of MSP in enhancing the effectiveness of development programs collaboratively undertaken by various stakeholders for tribal development, which has the potential to drive impact at scale and thus enable systemic change necessary for improving the

development indicators of tribal communities in India. Through utilizing varied expertise, shared resources, and collaborative action, partnerships can potentially promote innovation, enhance policy results, and develop sustainable solutions that would be hard to accomplish independently.

Thus, the paper discusses the role of multi-stakeholder partnership under Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG) as a potential pathway to address challenges of tribal development in India for scaling the impact of the initiatives undertaken by the stakeholders.

### 1) Development indicators of the tribal population in India

The socioeconomic progress of tribal societies can be understood by examining the essential development indicators of education, health, poverty, and livelihood, which are critical to sustainable advancement.

**Education:** As per the Tribal Development Report 2022, the literacy rate amongst Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) is merely 47.7%, well below the national mean of 77.3%. The literacy percentage for Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India is significantly below the national average, showing only 58.96% literacy against the national rate of 72.99%. This gap highlights the need for targeted educational interventions (Chakraborty et al., 2024) [7].

In numerous tribal areas, a deficit of educational infrastructure and healthcare services exists. This obstructs the progress of human resources and the overall welfare of the community (Tripathi & Preetha, 2024) [8] (Dey et al., 2013) [9] (Dey et al., 2024) [10]. Tribal communities often reside in remote areas, making access to education challenging. The curriculum is frequently disconnected from its cultural context, leading to low engagement and high dropout rates (Jabbar et al., 2024) [11] (Baidya & Barik, 2023) [12]. Educational institutions in tribal regions frequently lack essential infrastructure and competent instructors, thus impeding educational progress. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) declines significantly at higher education levels (Tayyab, 2023) [13]. The use of non-native languages in education and a curriculum that does not reflect tribal cultures contributes to educational disengagement (Jabbar et al., 2024) [11].

**Poverty:** The Tribal communities often experience high levels of poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment. For instance, the Katkari tribe in Maharashtra faces significant socio-economic challenges, including malnutrition and limited employment opportunities due to the decline of traditional occupations (Pardhi, 2024) [14]. According to the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, more than one in four ST households (27 per cent) have at least three deprivations as against a national average of 13 per cent. Nearly twice as high as the national mean, the STs possess the highest poverty rate among all social groups. The National Family Health Survey 2015 - 16 highlighted that 45.9% of ST are in the lowest wealth bracket. Moreover, the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (2015 - 2016) indicates an MPI head count ratio of 44.4 per cent for STs in India, highlighting the compounding vulnerabilities faced by the tribal communities. A considerable portion of the tribal

population resides below the poverty line, with restricted access to economic opportunities. In central India, issues such as poverty, unemployment, and indebtedness are particularly acute (Kumar, 2024) [15]. Economic advancement initiatives have been implemented, yet their efficacy is frequently hampered by administrative inefficiencies and a dearth of awareness within tribal communities (Bhatnagar, 2024) [6].

**Livelihood:** Industrialization and large-scale development projects have led to displacement and environmental degradation, affecting the traditional livelihoods and cultural identity of tribes like the Kharia Sabar (T, 2022) [16]. The Tribal communities often lack access to regulated markets, which hinders their ability to sell agricultural and forest products at fair prices. This is exacerbated by the absence of agro-based industries and limited awareness of developmental schemes (Bhilavekar et al., 2025) [17] (Kerketta & Pal, 2024) [18].

**Health:** Numerous tribal regions endure severe water shortages and substandard water quality, impacting health and means of support. Just a tiny proportion of tribal homes get potable water inside their dwellings (Acharya et al., 2024).

Various policies, such as the Tribal Sub-Plan and Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, aim to improve socio-economic conditions, but challenges persist due to inadequate implementation and monitoring (Bhatnagar, 2024) [6].

Holistic and participatory models that recognize the unique needs of tribal populations are essential for sustainable development and cultural preservation (Purnima, 2023) [20] ("Approaches to Tribal Development Models in India: Its Implications and Prospects," 2023)

### 2) Development actions undertaken for tribal development by different stakeholders

The issue of inadequate social development among tribals is often attributed to systemic challenges in implementing programs and inadequate service delivery mechanisms, among others.

**Government** – As part of tribal development initiatives, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, implements many programs such as Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Vikas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission, financial aid is provided to Voluntary Organizations, Mission Indradhanush, The Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY) among others. Under the Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP) also there is special focus on including tribal population in mainstream development. The Tribal Development Programme (TDP) aims to fast-track development in remote, tribal-inhabited regions. ABP uses a convergence of existing schemes, collaboration between various stakeholders, and competition among blocks to drive progress. TDPs focus on strengthening institutions, creating sustainable livelihoods, and empowering tribal communities.

**United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** - As per the 'Enhancing effectiveness of tribal development programmes results 2024 report', UNDP has been working with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs since 2012 to support the

implementation and monitoring of the Forest Rights Act and Tribal Sub Plan across India. This partnership was further strengthened in 2018 through Government Financing, which expanded the scope of the partnership and the establishment of a Project Management Unit (PMU). At the sub - national level, the portfolio supports the State Tribal Departments in strengthening the implementation and monitoring of tribal development schemes under both central and state programs.

**Non - Government Organizations (NGOs)** – In the NGO directory of the Darpan portal under Niti Aayog (<https://ngodarpan.gov.in/#/search-ngo>), more than a thousand organizations are registered as working on tribal welfare across India. Partnership with NGOs can help in understanding the community needs and accordingly develop participatory and evidence - based programs with other stakeholders.

**Corporations and Corporate Foundations** – There are quite a few corporations in India that are extending their support for tribal development, and some of them are providing support through general programs under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Act 2013.

### 3) Key findings from the literature review on the role of multi - stakeholder partnership (MSP) for scaling the impact of development actions.

The collaborations promote the merging of various resources, insights, and skills across different societal sectors, thus improving the ability to tackle intricate global issues. MSPs play a crucial role in promoting systemic change and sustainable development by allowing stakeholders from various sectors to collaborate towards shared goals. This collaborative approach is crucial for achieving system - wide change, which is necessary for sustainable development. They bring together diverse stakeholders to address complex social issues, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of SDG implementation (Altman & Fry, 2024) [21]. This collaborative effort is essential for mobilizing the necessary resources to support sustainable development initiatives globally (Makhura, 2024) [22]. By integrating perspectives from various fields, MSPs help foster interdisciplinary collaboration and address interconnected challenges and develop comprehensive solutions. This interdisciplinary approach is particularly important for advancing circular economy practices and optimizing resource efficiency (Ritter et al., 2024) [23]. These approaches create synergies essential for successful SDG implementation (Filho et al., 2024) [24].

Effective coherence in financing allocation is crucial for optimizing SDG implementation, making SDG 17 a comprehensive goal that encompasses finance, technology, capacity - building, and data monitoring. (Humphreys et al., 2019) [25]. This goal focuses on partnerships for the goals, highlighting that cooperation and resource sharing are crucial for overcoming obstacles such as financial constraints and social conflicts in the pursuit of sustainable development. (Arszulowicz, 2024) [26]. SDG 17 emphasizes the importance of multi - stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) in gathering and disseminating knowledge, skills, technologies, and financial assets to aid the global achievement of SDGs (Makhura, 2024) [22]. It encourages inclusive partnerships that prioritize people and the planet, fostering collaboration at

all levels—local, national, regional, and global (Dolan & Galvin, 2024) [27].

#### 4) Analysis of the Contemporary Relevance of Multistakeholder Partnerships by Developmental Organizations

The Government agencies, the UN, NGOs, and private sector organizations play crucial roles in multistakeholder partnerships for tribal development in India. These organizations bring varied resources, skills, and perspectives, which are crucial for addressing the complex difficulties encountered by tribal communities. By collaborating, they develop thorough strategies that address problems like malnutrition, socio - economic inequalities, and lack of access to essential services. The following sections detail the specific roles each stakeholder can play in these partnerships.

Government Agencies

- **Policy Formulation and Implementation:** The government is responsible for creating and putting into action policies designed for the particular needs of tribal communities. It is anticipated that the policies made are thorough, culturally sensitive, the unique requirements of tribal societies. (Dey et al., 2024) [10]. By ensuring that tribal development programs are in alignment with national goals and local needs, governments help create a framework that fosters long - term growth and social equity for marginalized communities (Chakraborty et al., 2024) [28].
- **Resource Allocation:** The government ensures the allocation of sufficient funds for key sectors of education, healthcare, and infrastructure development in tribal regions (Dey et al., 2024) [10]. Effective resource allocation supports the establishment of basic amenities and public services that are essential for improving the quality of life in tribal areas. This includes building schools, hospitals, and providing subsidies for tribal artisans and farmers (Chakraborty et al., 2024) [28].
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The Government plays a crucial role in establishing frameworks to track and assess the advancement of development programs. These systems help in assessing the effectiveness of policies, ensuring that they are implemented as planned and meet the desired outcomes (Dey et al., 2024) [10]. Through regular assessments, governments can make data - driven adjustments to programs, improving their efficiency and ensuring that resources are used effectively. This also promotes transparency and accountability in the development process (Chakraborty et al., 2024) [28].
- **Non - Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**
- **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Since NGOs work extends to the grassroots level, they possess the knowledge of engaging with the communities, understanding their needs and experience of implementing various development programs such as education, skill development. Stakeholders can leverage their strengths in community engagement and empowerment approaches. (Chaudhary, 2023) [29].
- **Experience in Targeted Development Initiatives:** Aligned with a rights - based approach, NGOs have obtained expertise and experience from executing focused development programs that tackle particular issues like malnutrition and poverty reduction via self - help groups

(SHGs) and other community - led efforts. (Geeta, 2017) [30].

- **Advocacy and Awareness:** NGOs can advocate for tribal rights and raise awareness about the challenges faced by these communities, influencing policy changes and public opinion (Thamminaina, 2018) [31].
- Private Sector Organizations
- **Resource Mobilization and Investment:** Private sector organizations bring critical financial resources, investment, and expertise to tribal development initiatives. They often have the capital and innovative approaches necessary to address development challenges such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education. Private sector companies, through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, invest in programs that focus on empowering marginalized communities, including the tribals, and contribute to social causes (Ritter et al., 2024) [23].
- **Transfer of knowledge on Innovation and Technology:** The private sector, through its business development aims, gains access to fresh technologies and innovative solutions. Such understanding of cutting - edge technology can be shared with different stakeholders when designing new projects to solve development challenges, like advancements in agricultural methods, healthcare remedies, and educational instruments. (Altman & Fry, 2024) [21]. By integrating modern technologies, private companies can improve the effectiveness and scalability of tribal development programs, ensuring that they are more sustainable and impactful (Filho et al., 2024) [24].
- **Market Access and Economic Opportunities:** One of the significant contributions of private sector organizations is providing market access for tribal products, such as handicrafts, agricultural produce, and forest products. By connecting tribal artisans and farmers with larger markets, private companies help boost income opportunities for these communities (Bhilavekar et al., 2025) [17]. Furthermore, private sector organizations create employment opportunities, particularly in industries like manufacturing, tourism, and natural resource management, which offer tribal populations a chance to diversify their livelihoods (Kerketta & Pal, 2024) [18].
- **Employee Volunteering for social impact** – One of the novel ways to enhance a company's social responsibility agenda is to involve its employees in the causes they support or provide avenues for them to choose social causes themselves. In this way, the employees have the opportunity to extend their voluntary support through capacity building and enhancing skills in areas such as entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and vocational training (Bhatnagar, 2024) [6]. Through partnerships with local governments and NGOs, private companies design training programs that improve employability and income - generating capacities among tribal populations (Ritter et al., 2024) [23].
- **Collaboration for Sustainable Development:** It is seen that most of the private sector companies align their actions toward sustainable development goals (SDGs) through the instruments of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG). Their participation in MSPs is essential in ensuring that development projects are not only profitable but also socially and environmentally responsible (Dolan & Galvin, 2024) [27]. The collaboration between the private sector and other stakeholders, such as governments, NGOs, and tribal communities, ensures that development is holistic and sustainable, addressing both immediate needs and long - term growth (Filho et al., 2024) [24].

While these stakeholders have distinct roles, it is seen that their collaboration is essential for the holistic development of tribal communities and to achieve an impact in the long run. It is also recognized that there are challenges of cultural differences, coordination among stakeholders, and long - term funding for the best utilization and effectiveness of these partnerships.

## 2. Conclusion and Recommendation

We can conclude from the article that multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) remain vital in tackling development challenges. When organized efficiently, they can generate creative solutions, promote systemic transformation, and foster a more inclusive and sustainable future. Their continued evolution will determine their long - term impact in addressing global challenges and opportunities. It serves as a crucial instrument to unite governments, businesses, civil society, and international organizations to collaboratively develop solutions by utilizing one another's strengths and areas of influence. Accordingly, it facilitates the pooling of resources, knowledge, and expertise to overcome operational challenges such as limited funding, lack of awareness of root causes of the problem, and enables scaling the impact of the tribal development programs. MSPs promote systemic change for sustainable development, enabling diverse stakeholders to invest and allocate their resources towards achieving common objectives. When implemented jointly by diverse stakeholders, the evidence - based programs can build the premise for innovation, policy development, and improvement, and lead to sustainable solutions to complex issues that would otherwise be difficult to solve in isolation. Simultaneously engaging with affected communities and incorporating their perspectives through NGOs and community - based organizations in program design is crucial to creating sustainable solutions. As such, the inclusion of tribal development could be focused more by allocating specific funds that bring together government bodies, NGOs, and community - based organizations to co - create programs involving representatives of the tribal community in various areas.

In summary, incorporating MSPs in tribal development programs can be a powerful strategy and tool that has the potential to advance SDGs, co - create sustainable solutions, leverage resources, and aim systemic change.

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