

MAINS MASTERY 2026 · GS PAPER II · QUESTION 6 · STUDENT EDITION

Tribal Development Policy and Equity-Based Governance

THE QUESTION, AS SET IN UPSC CSE MAINS 2026

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

Directive: Justify | 10 marks | 150 words | Governance: welfare of vulnerable sections

1 **PYQ Deep Decode**
Demand, hidden demand, structure, form

2 **PYQ Intelligence**
2013 to 2026: tribal rights, Scheduled Areas, displacement

3 **Additional information**
Design, delivery and the gap

4 **Pitfalls and variations**
Corrections and changed directives

5 **The model answer**
Socially grounded, equity-based, the gap

6 **Other ways to write it**
Outlines, and when each works

7 **Quick recall**
Sixteen facts for Mains and Prelims

8 **Write it yourself**
A seven-point self-check

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Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

1 PYQ Deep Decode

Read the question the way the examiner set it: the demand, the hidden demand, the structure that follows from both, and how the answer should be presented, opened and closed.

1.1 The demand

The question asks for a **verdict** on whether India's tribal development policy reflects two aspirations: **socially grounded** governance and **equity-based** governance. "Justify" means the verdict must be **argued with evidence on both sides**: what the policy gets right, where it falls short, and why the final judgement follows. A list of schemes, however long, does not answer the question; a reasoned "yes, in design; partly, in delivery" does.

Words in the question	What they ask you to do	What goes wrong if you miss them
Does … reflect	Take a position on how far policy mirrors the aspirations: fully, largely, partly or not at all. A graded verdict is stronger than a flat yes or no.	A description with no verdict.
India's tribal development policy	The whole architecture: constitutional (Fifth and Sixth Schedules, Articles 46, 244, 275(1)), legal (PESA 1996, FRA 2006), fiscal (Tribal Sub-Plan, now the Development Action Plan for STs) and programmatic (PM JANMAN, Dharti Aaba, Eklavya schools).	Judging the policy by one scheme.
the aspirations	Whose aspirations? Those of tribal communities themselves, and the constitutional vision of development on their own terms, voiced early in Nehru's Panchsheel for tribal policy.	Treating tribal people only as beneficiaries, not as people with their own goals.
socially grounded	Governance rooted in tribal society: its institutions (Gram Sabhas, customary councils), customs, knowledge, land and forest relationships, and consent.	Reducing it to "community participation" in a line.
equity-based governance	A fair share of resources, services and outcomes that corrects historical disadvantage; and governance, not only spending: rights, accountability, voice.	Equating equity with budget size.
Justify your answer	Support the verdict with laws, data, committee findings and outcomes, on both sides.	One-sided praise or one-sided criticism.

THE DEMAND IN ONE LINE

Judge, with evidence on both sides, whether India's tribal policy is rooted in tribal society and delivers fair outcomes, and show that the answer differs between its design and its delivery.

1.2 The hidden demand

The examiner is testing whether you can see the **gap between progressive law and its implementation**. On paper, India's tribal governance framework contains significant participatory safeguards: PESA makes the Gram Sabha competent to safeguard customs and community resources, and the FRA turns forest dwellers

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into right-holders. In practice, rules came late, claims are rejected in large numbers, displacement continues and flagship schemes deliver unevenly. A second layer: whether tribal people are treated as **decision-makers** (socially grounded) or as **beneficiaries of schemes designed elsewhere**. The best answers name this tension and close with what would bridge it.

Each point should name the aspiration, give the evidence for and against, and say what it means. The last column is where the hidden demand begins.

Aspiration	Evidence for and against	What it means
Socially grounded	PESA and the FRA place Gram Sabhas at the centre; yet Jharkhand notified its PESA rules only in January 2026, and 18.13 lakh of 54.02 lakh FRA claims had been rejected by 30 June 2026.	Strong law, slow practice.
Equity-based	Earmarked funds across 42 Ministries and Departments, saturation missions for PVTGs and tribal villages; yet by 31 December 2025 PM JANMAN had completed about half its houses and 15 per cent of its roads.	Wide coverage, uneven completion.

WEAK

The government has launched many schemes like PM JANMAN and EMRS, so tribal policy is equity-based, but corruption and lack of awareness are problems.

STRONG

The policy reflects participatory governance in design, through PESA and the FRA, but only partly in delivery: by June 2026, 18.13 lakh of 54.02 lakh forest-rights claims had been rejected (33.6 per cent), which calls for scrutiny of rejection reasons, procedural fairness and access to appeals, and Odisha still lacked final PESA rules in July 2026.

1.3 The structure

The question names **two aspirations**, so the body takes them in the question's order: socially grounded first, equity-based second. Within each, show where the policy reflects the aspiration and where it falls short. The hidden demand, closing the gap, becomes a short final part. The shares are of the body between the introduction and the conclusion; they are a teaching guide, not a UPSC rule.

Introduction | **1. Socially grounded** about two-fifths | **2. Equity-based** about two-fifths | **3. Closing the gap** about one-fifth | **Conclusion**

Part 1 **Socially grounded** about two-fifths

Reflects	Fifth and Sixth Schedules; PESA's Gram Sabha; FRA's individual and community rights; Panchsheel's respect for tribal genius.
Falls short	Late PESA rules; FRA rejections; displacement; contested consent.

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Part 2 **Equity-based** about two-fifths

Reflects	DAPST earmarking; PM JANMAN for PVTGs; Dharti Aaba village saturation; Eklavya schools.
Falls short	Uneven completion; schools yet to function; top-down design.

Part 3, closing the gap (about one-fifth): reasoned FRA decisions, PESA compliance, Gram Sabha-led village plans and outcome tracking.

1.4 How to present it

A "justify" question with two named dimensions reads best as **two headed parts, each split into "Reflects" and "Falls short"**. The labels make the balance visible to the examiner at a glance. A small design-versus-delivery table works equally well if you write tables quickly.

Form	Fit here	Reason
Headed parts with "Reflects / Falls short"	**Best**	Follows the question's two aspirations and shows both sides.
Design versus delivery table	Good	Shows the gap sharply; needs tight wording.
Chronological account	Weak	History crowds out the judgement.

1.5 The introduction and the conclusion

The introduction serves the whole question. It places the policy in its lineage, from Panchsheel to today's saturation missions, and states the graded verdict at once: yes in design, partly in delivery.

The conclusion settles the demand. It restates the verdict and says what would make governance truly socially grounded and equitable: Gram Sabhas deciding, not only receiving.

2 PYQ Intelligence 2013 to 2026

The question's context, its place in a long line of GS questions on tribal rights and development, and what to prepare next.

2.1 Why the subject was topical

Tribal policy was in the news through 2025 and 2026, before GS Paper II was held on 22 August 2026. Most directly, a parliamentary committee reported on PESA just three weeks before the paper. UPSC never states why it sets a question, so treat this as **context, not cause**.

When	What happened	Why it matters for this question
2025	The Ministry of Tribal Affairs launched the Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan, which aims to build a cadre of about 20 lakh change leaders and village-level plans prepared with communities.	An attempt to make governance responsive from below.
December 2025	The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment noted that Eklavya schools took	Equity in education is the Ministry's largest bet.

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When	What happened	Why it matters for this question
	47 per cent (₹7,088.60 crore) of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' 2025-26 budget.	
January 2026	Jharkhand notified its PESA rules, almost three decades after the Act; its cabinet had approved them on 23 December 2025.	Self-rule delayed by rule-making.
February 2026	Parliament was told that 499 of 723 sanctioned Eklavya schools were functional on 1 January 2026, against a target of 728; and that, by 31 December 2025, 25.44 lakh FRA titles had been distributed and 18.90 lakh claims rejected out of 51.92 lakh; PM JANMAN had completed 2.50 lakh of 4.90 lakh houses.	The hard evidence for "partly in delivery".
31 July 2026	The Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj reviewed PESA: Odisha was the only PESA State yet to notify rules; many Gram Sabha powers stayed under-used for want of awareness and support; it urged Gram Sabha-origin plans, tribal-language training and Gram Sabha verification of tribal land transactions.	The sharpest pre-exam evidence on "socially grounded".
August 2026	Ministry of Tribal Affairs data as on 30 June 2026: 54.02 lakh FRA claims, 25.42 lakh titles, 18.13 lakh rejected, 10.46 lakh pending.	The latest official FRA picture before the paper.

PESA was enacted in December 1996 and the FRA in December 2006, so 2026 marks thirty and twenty years of India's two Gram Sabha-centred tribal laws. After the examination, in August 2026, a reported communication from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs on Gram Sabha consent for forest diversion revived the same debate (see section 3).

2.2 The skill UPSC keeps testing

UPSC has asked about tribal rights, Scheduled Areas, displacement and the reach of welfare schemes for over a decade, across GS I, II and III. Questions are verbatim.

Year	The question as UPSC set it	What it asked of you	What changed in 2026
2013 GS III · Q24	Article 244 of the Indian Constitution relates to administration of scheduled areas and tribal areas. Analyse the impact of non-implementation of the provisions of the Fifth schedule on the growth of Left Wing extremism.	Cost of non-implementation.	The same gap, now judged against governance ideals.
2016 GS I · Q10	Why are the tribals in India referred to as 'the Scheduled Tribes'? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment.	Constitutional provisions.	From listing provisions to judging them.
2017 GS I · Q10	What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence, addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs) ?	Key laws.	Those laws now become evidence for a verdict.
2019 GS II · Q18	Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and	Participation in policy.	The closest precedent for "socially grounded".

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Year	The question as UPSC set it	What it asked of you	What changed in 2026
	active involvement at all stages of policy process. — Discuss.		
2023 GS II · Q17	"Development and welfare schemes for the vulnerable, by its nature, are discriminatory in approach." Do you agree ? Give reasons for your answer.	Equity versus equality.	The equity half of 2026.
2025 GS I · Q20	Does tribal development in India centre around two axes, those of displacement and of rehabilitation ? Give your opinion.	An opinion on tribal development.	Same subject, now in GS II as governance.

Also related, verbatim: 2022 GS I Q10: "Given the diversities among tribal communities in India, in which specific contexts should they be considered as a single category ?" 2021 GS I Q9: "Examine the uniqueness of tribal knowledge system when compared with mainstream knowledge and cultural systems." 2015 GS III Q19: "The persisting drives of the Government for development of large industries in backward areas have resulted in isolating the tribal population and the farmers who face multiple displacements. With Malkangiri and Naxalbari foci, discuss the corrective strategies needed to win the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) doctrine affected citizens back into the mainstream of social and economic growth." **In the same 2026 papers:** GS II Q5 on the enforcement powers of the NCSC and the NCST; GS III Q10 on the demand to extend the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh; GS IV Q1(b) on the ethical challenges of a project that could displace a forest community.

CARRY THIS METHOD TO ANY "DOES THIS POLICY REFLECT" QUESTION

1. **Decode** each ideal named in the question.
2. **Design**: the laws, institutions and funds that reflect it.
3. **Delivery**: data and findings on how far it has travelled.
4. **Verdict**: graded, not absolute.
5. **Bridge**: what would close the gap.

2.3 What to prepare next

THE CONSTITUTION

Article 244	Fifth Schedule Areas (clause 1) and Sixth Schedule tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram (clause 2).
Fifth Schedule	Governor's power to adapt laws and make regulations for peace and good government, including on land transfer; Tribes Advisory Councils.
Article 275(1)	Grants from the Consolidated Fund of India for ST welfare and Scheduled Area administration.
Articles 46, 338A, 342	Promotion of weaker sections' interests; the NCST; specification of Scheduled Tribes.

LAWS AND JUDGMENTS

PESA, 1996	Extends Part IX to Fifth Schedule Areas in ten States; Gram Sabha powers over customs, minor forest produce, land alienation and local plans.
FRA, 2006	Recognises individual and community forest rights; Gram Sabha initiates the process.
RFCTLARR Act, 2013	Section 41: acquisition in Scheduled Areas to be avoided as far as possible and used only as a demonstrable last resort; prior consent of the concerned Gram Sabha, Panchayat or autonomous District Council at the appropriate level, even in urgency.
Samatha (1997); Niyamgiri (2013)	Samatha: the Supreme Court applied Andhra Pradesh's Scheduled Areas land-transfer law to bar mining leases to non-tribal private interests in that State's Scheduled Areas. Niyamgiri: the Court asked Gram Sabhas to decide whether proposed mining affected religious and cultural rights protected under the FRA.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

3 Additional information

Everything needed to answer this question well. Tier 1 holds what the demand needs; Tier 2 places it within the long arc of tribal policy and its debates.

TIER 1 · ESSENTIAL: THE DESIGN, THE DELIVERY AND THE GAP

Where the design has reached, in numbers

DESIGN VERSUS DELIVERY: HOW FAR THE PROMISE HAS TRAVELLED

Official data as on 30 June 2026 (FRA), 31 December 2025 (PM JANMAN) and 1 January 2026 (EMRS)

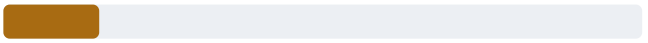
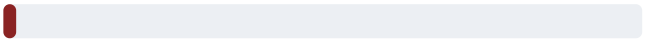
A. Forest Rights Act: what happened to 54.02 lakh claims (30 June 2026)



Titles distributed: 25.42 lakh (47%) **Rejected: 18.13 lakh (34%)** **Pending: 10.46 lakh (19%)**

Individual claims 51.87 lakh, community 2.15 lakh. Ministry of Tribal Affairs data reported to Parliament, August 2026.

B. Flagship delivery against target

PM JANMAN: households electrified 1,34,995 of 1,45,083		93%
Eklavya schools functional 499 of 728 targeted (723 sanctioned)		69%
PM JANMAN: pucca houses completed 2.50 of 4.90 lakh		51%
PM JANMAN: road length completed 1,196 of 8,000 km		15%
PM JANMAN: hostels completed 8 of 500		2%

PM JANMAN (mission period 2023 to 2026): Rajya Sabha Starred Question 130, 11 February 2026.
EMRS: as on 1 January 2026; Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question 627, 4 February 2026.

Reading: household-level items move fast; slow-build assets (roads, hostels) and rights (forest titles) lag. That is the gap between design and delivery.

Instrument	What it is (design)	What delivery shows
SOCIALLY GROUNDED: RIGHTS, SELF-RULE, PROTECTION		
Fifth Schedule	Scheduled Areas in ten States; Governor can adapt laws and regulate land transfer; Tribes Advisory Councils advise on ST welfare.	Use varies by State: judge it by regulations actually made, Tribes Advisory Council functioning and land-alienation safeguards; land alienation persists.
Sixth Schedule	Autonomous District Councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, with law-making powers over land, forests (other than reserved forests) and customs.	A distinct constitutional model of autonomous district governance; demands for its extension to Ladakh show its continuing relevance in debates on regional autonomy.
PESA, 1996	Gram Sabha competent to safeguard traditions, community resources and customary dispute resolution; consulted on land acquisition; ownership of minor forest produce.	Rules came late: Jharkhand notified them in January 2026; Odisha, with draft rules since 2023, was the only PESA State without notified rules (Standing Committee, 31 July 2026), which also found many Gram Sabha powers under-used.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

Instrument	What it is (design)	What delivery shows
Forest Rights Act, 2006	Recognises individual and community rights of forest-dwelling STs and other traditional forest dwellers; the Gram Sabha starts the process; no eviction until recognition is complete.	By 30 June 2026: 54.02 lakh claims, 25.42 lakh titles, **18.13 lakh rejected (33.6 per cent)**, 10.46 lakh pending. Rejections call for scrutiny of eligibility, reasoned orders and appeals.
EQUITY-BASED: FUNDS, SERVICES, SATURATION		
Tribal Sub-Plan to DAPST	Begun in the Fifth Plan (1974-75) to earmark funds in proportion to ST population; now the Development Action Plan for STs, with 42 Ministries and Departments earmarking 4.3 to 17.45 per cent of their budgets.	DAPST spending rose from ₹21,525 crore (2013-14) to ₹1,03,453 crore (2023-24); critics note that much of it relabels general schemes.
PM JANMAN	₹24,104 crore mission (Centre ₹15,336 crore, States ₹8,768 crore) for 75 PVTGs; 11 interventions through 9 Ministries; announced at Khunti on 15 November 2023.	By 31 December 2025: 2.50 lakh of 4.90 lakh houses, 1,196 of 8,000 km of roads, 8 of 500 hostels; 750 mobile medical units running.
Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan	₹79,156 crore (Centre ₹56,333 crore) over five years, launched on 2 October 2024; 25 interventions by 17 Ministries in 63,843 villages across 549 districts and 30 States and UTs; special focus on FRA patta holders.	Convergence by design; judge it by sector-wise physical progress reported to Parliament, not by the outlay.
Eklavya Model Residential Schools	Residential schooling from Class 6 to 12 in blocks with over 50 per cent ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons.	499 of 723 sanctioned schools functional on 1 January 2026, against a target of 728 (Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question 627, 4 February 2026).

Why "in design, yes". India's framework combines territorial safeguards, participatory institutions, statutory forest rights and earmarked development resources; the challenge is turning them into voice, secure rights and fair outcomes. Nehru's Panchsheel, that tribal people should **develop along the lines of their own genius** and that their rights in land and forests should be respected, is visibly written into PESA and the FRA.

Why "in delivery, partly". The Xaxa Committee (2014) observed that policy and practice have been slow to catch up with these laws, and cited estimates that **about 40 per cent of those displaced** by development projects were tribal. This is a historical estimate of a disproportionate burden, not a current displacement rate; STs were 8.6 per cent of the population in Census 2011.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

TIER 2 · EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING: THE WHOLE TOPIC AROUND IT

The arc of tribal policy

1. **Isolation, assimilation, integration:** Verrier Elwin's early protective view, G. S. Ghurye's view of tribes as "backward Hindus", and Nehru's middle path of integration with respect.
2. **Panchsheel (1958):** five principles in Nehru's foreword to Elwin's A Philosophy for NEFA: develop along their own genius; respect land and forest rights; train their own people; do not over-administer; judge by human character, not money spent.
3. **Dhebar Commission (1960-61)** and the **Tribal Sub-Plan (1974-75)**: area and fund earmarking.
4. **Bhuria Committee (1995)** to **PESA (1996)**; **FRA (2006)**: from welfare to rights.
5. **Xaxa Committee** (constituted August 2013, reported May 2014): livelihood, education, health, displacement and legal-constitutional issues.
6. **Saturation phase:** PM JANMAN (2023), Dharti Aaba (2024), Adi Karmayogi (2025).

Evidence beyond the schemes

1. **Supreme Court, 2019:** an eviction order against rejected FRA claimants (13 February) was stayed within a fortnight (28 February) for review of rejections.
2. **Niyamgiri (2013):** the Court let Gram Sabhas decide whether bauxite mining affected their religious and cultural rights; they rejected it.
3. **RFCTLARR Act, 2013, Section 41:** acquisition in Scheduled Areas to be avoided as far as possible and permitted only as a demonstrable last resort; prior consent of the concerned Gram Sabha, Panchayat or autonomous District Council, at the appropriate level, even in urgent cases.
4. **Community forest rights:** by 30 June 2026, 1.24 lakh community and 24.18 lakh individual titles had been distributed, against 2.15 lakh and 51.87 lakh claims received. Counts alone do not prove collective rights lag; examine community forest resource rights, area covered and real Gram Sabha control.
5. **Differentiated equity:** over 700 notified ST communities differ in language, livelihood, terrain and degree of disadvantage. Equity means differentiated responses: targeted PVTG support, secure tenure, schooling in accessible languages, responsive health and nutrition, and a voice for tribal women. Judge success by usable services and community-defined priorities, not only by assets sanctioned.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

Two debates worth knowing

Integration on whose terms?

Saturation missions bring roads, houses and schools fast; critics argue they are designed in Delhi and delivered to tribal villages rather than planned by them. The July 2026 Standing Committee found that 96 per cent of Gram Panchayats in PESA States prepared plans in 2025-26, yet asked that plans originate in the Gram Sabha and reflect livelihoods, natural resources and cultural priorities. The balanced reading: **saturation and self-rule are complementary** only when communities decide the content of the plan, not merely sign it.

Gram Sabha consent versus national projects

Distinguish the safeguards. PESA requires the Gram Sabha or Panchayat to be **consulted** before land acquisition in Scheduled Areas; Section 41 of the RFCTLARR Act requires prior **consent** of the appropriate local institution; FRA Section 3(2) requires the Gram Sabha's **recommendation** for specified small public facilities; and the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023 require the State or UT to ensure settlement of FRA rights before it issues the forest-diversion order, even though Central approval may come earlier. In August 2026, after the examination, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs reportedly told the Ministry of Power that the FRA has no express consent provision for forest diversion, a position critics contested. The balanced reading: do not equate these safeguards; insist on **settled rights and genuine Gram Sabha voice**, through transparent, time-bound procedures.

4 Pitfalls and variations

The mistakes that cost marks here, the claims never to make, and how the answer changes when the question changes.

4.1 Six pitfalls, each with its correction

No verdict

~~Tribal policy has strengths and weaknesses.~~

Yes in design; partly in delivery, with reasons.

Scheme catalogue

~~PM JANMAN, EMRS, DAJGUA, VDVK, TRIFED ...~~

Fewer instruments, each used as evidence.

Ignoring "socially grounded"

~~Budgets have risen, so policy is equitable.~~

Ask who decides: Gram Sabhas, customs, consent.

One-sided

~~Tribal policy has completely failed.~~

Credit the laws, then show the gap with data.

Vague gaps

~~Poor implementation and corruption.~~

33.6 per cent FRA rejections (June 2026); Odisha without PESA rules (July 2026); 499 of 723 schools working.

Schedules confused

~~PESA governs Sixth Schedule areas.~~

PESA covers Fifth Schedule Areas; the Sixth has District Councils.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

4.2 Never write these

- "The FRA gives new land to tribals."
  It recognises pre-existing rights, for land occupied before 13 December 2005.
- "PM JANMAN covers all Scheduled Tribes."
  It covers the 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.
- "Tribal Panchsheel is the 1954 India-China Panchsheel."
  A different set of five principles, in Nehru's foreword to Elwin.
- "The Tribal Sub-Plan began in 2017."
  It began in the Fifth Plan (1974-75); later renamed and now reported as DAPST.
- "Today 40 per cent of the displaced are tribal."
  A historical estimate cited by the Xaxa Committee, not a current rate.
- "Most FRA claims are rejected."
  About 34 per cent were rejected and about 47 per cent received titles; about 19 per cent were pending (30 June 2026).

4.3 If the question changes

If it asks	The structure becomes	What must change
Critically evaluate **PESA**	Provisions, achievements, gaps, reforms	One law, in depth.
Is the **FRA** an instrument of justice?	Historical injustice, rights, rejections, CFR	Forest governance focus.
Tribal development as **displacement and rehabilitation**	Agree or disagree, with other axes	Displacement data in front.
The same question for **15 marks**	Add thinkers, judgments, a Fifth versus Sixth Schedule comparison	Room for depth.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

5 The model answer

One model answer in three headed parts that follow the question's two aspirations, then a short bridge. The introduction states the graded verdict; the conclusion returns to who decides.

Model answer **Socially grounded, equity-based, the gap** **153 words**

From Nehru's Panchsheel ("develop along the lines of their own genius") to PM JANMAN, tribal policy reflects these aspirations strongly in design, partly in delivery.

1. Socially grounded governance

- **Reflects:** Fifth and Sixth Schedules protect land and customs; PESA empowers Gram Sabhas over community resources and land-acquisition consultation; FRA recognises individual and community forest rights.
- **Falls short:** Jharkhand notified PESA rules only in 2026, Odisha none by July; 18.13 lakh of 54.02 lakh FRA claims stood rejected (June 2026), warranting due-process scrutiny.

2. Equity-based governance

- **Reflects:** DAPST earmarks funds; PM JANMAN targets 75 PVTGs; Dharti Aaba covers 63,843 villages; EMRS widens schooling.
- **Falls short:** PM JANMAN completed 51% of houses, 15% of roads (December 2025); 499 of 723 sanctioned EMRS functioned.

3. Closing the gap

Reasoned FRA orders, appeals, Gram Sabha-originated plans, tribal-language services, outcome audits.

Thus, equity becomes real when tribal communities shape their own priorities through Gram Sabhas, not merely receive centrally designed benefits.

DEMAND
A graded verdict on both aspirations, justified with evidence on both sides

HIDDEN DEMAND
The gap between progressive law and its delivery, read through dated official data; tribal people as decision-makers, not only beneficiaries

STRUCTURE
Socially grounded and equity-based in the question's order, each with reflects and falls short; a short bridge

BALANCE
Introduction 25 words, conclusion 20 words; 153 words in all

Why it works: the introduction gives the policy's lineage and the graded verdict at once; the body follows the question's two aspirations in order, and each carries both sides, with laws for the design and official data for the delivery; the gap is named precisely, with dated official data, rather than as "poor implementation", and FRA rejections are treated as a due-process question rather than proof of wrongdoing; the short final part bridges the gap with remedies tied to each failure; the conclusion returns to the question's core, who decides, at about the length of the introduction.

6 Other ways to write it

The model answer above remains the answer. These outlines show how a different, equally valid answer could be built, and when each choice works.

Approach	How it is built	When it works
Design versus delivery table	Rows: Schedules, PESA, FRA, DAPST, PM JANMAN, EMRS; columns: design, delivery.	When you write tables quickly.
Panchsheel-led	Test today's policy against Nehru's five principles, one line each.	When you know the principles well.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

Approach	How it is built	When it works
Data-led	Open with the FRA figures; then design, delivery, bridge.	When the numbers are secure in memory.
For 15 marks	Compare Fifth and Sixth Schedule governance; develop Niyamgiri and the Ghurye-Elwin debate; add DAPST trends and differentiated tribal needs.	When there is room.

7 Quick recall and Prelims crossover

Facts for rapid revision and Prelims.

1	**Article 244(1)**: Fifth Schedule; **244(2)**: Sixth Schedule.	9	**PM JANMAN**: ₹24,104 crore; 75 PVTGs; 11 interventions.
2	Sixth Schedule States: **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram**.	10	PM JANMAN announced at **Khunti**, 15 November 2023.
3	Fifth Schedule Areas exist in **ten** States.	11	**Dharti Aaba**: ₹79,156 crore; 63,843 villages; 17 Ministries.
4	**PESA**, 1996, followed the **Bhuria Committee** (1995).	12	Dharti Aaba launched **2 October 2024**.
5	**FRA**, 2006: cut-off date **13 December 2005**.	13	**Tribal Sub-Plan**: Fifth Plan, 1974-75; now **DAPST**.
6	FRA to 30 June 2026: **25.42 lakh** titles; **18.13 lakh** rejected of 54.02 lakh.	14	**Xaxa Committee**: reported May 2014.
7	**RFCTLARR Act**, Section 41: last resort; prior consent of the appropriate Gram Sabha, Panchayat or District Council.	15	STs: **8.6 per cent** of population (Census 2011).
8	**Niyamgiri**, 2013: Gram Sabhas decide.	16	**Panchsheel**: Nehru's foreword to Elwin's A Philosophy for NEFA.

THE ONE SENTENCE TO CARRY OUT OF THIS DOCUMENT

India's laws recognise tribal self-government; the unfinished task is to make Gram Sabha decisions count in planning, rights recognition and accountability.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

8 Write it yourself

Write the answer in 150 words without looking back, then check it against each line below.

	Check	Yes / No
1	Is there a clear, **graded verdict** in the introduction?	
2	Are **both aspirations**, socially grounded and equity-based, addressed in the question's order?	
3	Does each part show **both sides**: where policy reflects the aspiration and where it falls short?	
4	Are **PESA and the FRA** used as evidence, not only named?	
5	Is the gap shown with **specific data**, not "poor implementation"?	
6	Does the conclusion settle the demand, at about the **length of the introduction**?	
7	Is it **150 to 153 words** under one consistent counting convention, with no claim from section 4.2?	

Sources

- Constitution of India, Articles 46, 244, 275(1), 338A and 342; the Fifth and Sixth Schedules.
- Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996; Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006; Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, Section 41.
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question 2072, "Claims under FRA, 2006", answered 12 February 2026 (FRA status as on 31 December 2025); national FRA data as on 30 June 2026, as reported to Parliament in August 2026 and at the Ministry's regional FRA review conference (September 2026).
- Rajya Sabha Starred Question 130, "Implementation of PM-JANMAN Scheme", answered 11 February 2026 (data as on 31 December 2025); PIB, Cabinet approval of PM JANMAN (November 2023) and of Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan (September 2024); Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan page.
- PIB backgrounder, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, August 2025: DAPST allocations 2013-14 to 2024-25 and the 42 Ministries and Departments.
- Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment, report on the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, presented 9 December 2025 (as reported by Deccan Chronicle); Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question 627, "Eklavya Model Residential Schools", answered 4 February 2026 (status as on 1 January 2026; PIB, 4 February 2026).
- Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Review of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, presented 31 July 2026 (PRS Legislative Research summary).
- Report of the High-Level Committee on Socio-Economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India (Xaxa Committee), May 2014.
- Jawaharlal Nehru, Foreword to the second edition (9 October 1958) of Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA.
- Reports on the Jharkhand PESA Rules (ThePrint, 3 January 2026), the Odisha Governor on PESA rules (OdishaBytes, October 2025) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' August 2026 communication on Gram Sabha consent (The Pioneer, September 2026).
- Supreme Court of India: Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1997); Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment and Forests (2013); Wildlife First v. Ministry of Environment and Forests, orders of 13 and 28 February 2019.
- UPSC Civil Services (Main): GS Paper I question papers for 2016, 2017, 2021, 2022 and 2025; GS Paper II for 2019, 2023 and 2026; GS Paper III for 2013, 2015 and 2026; GS Paper IV for 2026.

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance ? Justify your answer.

YOUR NEXT STEP

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1 Write the full paper in three hours — 2 Self-check this answer with section 8 — 3 Have the paper evaluated — 4 Read the feedback against this document

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