

Promoting and Backing Tribal Entrepreneurship in North-East India by the Virtue of *Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojna*

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ABSTRACT

Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojna (PMVDVY), a Central Government initiative, aims to bring a paradigm shift in entrepreneurship by improving tribal livelihood and sustainably harnessing the wealth of the forest. *Van Dhan Yojna* is a tribal entrepreneurship market-linked development program that focuses on building tribal SHG clusters and developing them into Tribal *Van Dhan Kendras*. It also tackles major issues that Indian tribes confront, such as land/house ownership with no rights, MFP collecting limits, middleman exploitation, shift from natural sanctuaries and national parks, and absence in forest communities' development. It is now used in 27 states. The current study depicts the image of PMVDVY in the north-eastern part of the country. The North-East area has the most forest cover and unique natural resources. It promotes the notion of 'Atma-Nirbhar Bharat' as an important 'Engines of Growth' for tribal groups in the North-East. Collective efforts of tribes from forest product collection through value-addition have resulted in the tremendous achievement of PMVDVY in tribal regions of Northeast India. TRIFED's 'Aatmanirbhar Abhiyan' program to make India self-sufficient, with the slogan 'Go Vocal for Local Go Tribal-Mera Van Mera Dhan Mera Udyam,' will help in the complete transformation of the country's tribal economy.

HIGHLIGHTS

- PMVDVY has supported tribals' traditional knowledge and skill sets by using technology and IT and turned them into a long-term beneficial economic activity.

Keywords: *Van Dhan Yojna*, North- East India, Entrepreneurship, Livelihood, Forest product

The *Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojna* (PMVDVY) is a Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED program that was inaugurated by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji on 14th April 2018 in Bijapur, Chattisgarh, during the festivities of Ambedkar Jayanti. The goal of this *yojana* is to boost tribal incomes by adding value to tribal items. PMVDVY is an initiative that intends to produce money for tribals by utilizing the forest's richness, namely *Van*

Dhan, in a sustainable manner. The PMVDVY will be implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs as the Central Nodal Department and TRIFED as the National

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Nodal Agency. The State Nodal Agency for Minor Forest Produces (MFPs) and District Collectors are expected to play a key role in scheme implementation at the grassroots level at the state level. Locally, the Kendras will be controlled by a Managing Committee (a Self Help Group (SHG)) made up of delegates from the Van Dhan SHGs in the cluster (Vikaspedia, 2021). “*Van Dhan, Jan Dhan, and Gobar Dhan* will be the cornerstone for reforming the rural and tribal economy in the future,” as value addition in enhancing tribal wages.

The initiative intends to access tribals’ traditional knowledge and skill sets by using technology and information technology to develop them at each level and turn tribal wisdom into a long-term economic activity. It is a technique for selling MFP through the establishment of a Minimum Support Price (MSP) and value chain development. Ten tribal *Van Dhan Vikas* SHGs would create *Van Dhan Vikas Kendras* (VDVKs). Up to 30 MFP gatherers will be assigned to each SHG, resulting in around 300 beneficiaries per *Kendra*. The Government of India has approved ₹ 2.26 crore for the construction of 17 VDVks, with 4256 beneficiaries from 249 SHGs, for the acquisition and adding the value of MFP such as Broom Grass, Amla tamarind, Gandhaki, and so on, during the fiscal year 2019-20. VDVks will be provided with tool kits, training, and raw materials among other things in the first phase. In the second phase, each VDVk will get cash to enhance *Pucca* House, warehouse, storage, and add-on equipment, among other things. The Government of India’s Ministry of Tribal Affairs has approved a budget of Rs. 144.60 lakh for 10 VDVks in 2020-21 (*Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana*, 2021). In less than 18 months, according to TRIFED. As of March 31, 2021, TRIFED has sanctioned 33,360 VDVks, which had been combined into 2224 *Van Dhan Vikas Kendra Clusters* (VDVKCs) with each 300 forest inhabitants. According to TRIFED, a normal *Van Dhan Vikas Kendra* comprises 20 tribal members, and one VDVkC is made up of 15 identical VDVks. The *Van Dhan Vikas Kendra Clusters* will provide Tribal forest gatherers in 23 states and two union territories with scale economies, livelihood, and market links, as well as entrepreneurial prospects (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021b).

The total forest cover in India was 7,12,249 square kilometres, or 21.67 percent of its geographical area, according to the Forest Survey of India’s 2019 India State of Forest Report (ISFR). Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Maharashtra have the most forest cover in terms of area. Mizoram (85.41%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.63%), Meghalaya (76.33%), Manipur (75.46%), and Nagaland (75.31%) were the top five states in terms of forest coverage as a proportion of total geographical area. Because their economy, culture, and other aspects of life are inextricably linked to woods, India’s forests have thrived in areas with a high concentration of tribes. They have amassed a vast repository of traditional forest and forest product expertise throughout the years. In India, the Van Dhan Yojna has been implemented in 27 states. And the current research focuses on the impact of PMVDVY on several states in North-East India’s forest-rich region, as well as the results for the tribal community (The Sentinel, 2021; IBEF, 2021b).

Initiative steps involved in PMVDVY

The government follows a cascade of steps to initiate the PMVDVY (Fig. 1). Firstly, identification of location and MFPs. Then, they prepare an annual gathering plan *to instil ownership* and for this gathering plan, their next step is to identify the tribal gatherers. From the tribal gatherers, they formed SHGs composed of 20 members. *Panchayats and District Administration provides operational premises to SHGs. After making the groups, they give them master training for the efficient and smooth working of VDVks, procurement of value additions equipment to enhance the quality of MFPs, and the management of enterprises. Identification of local, district level, state level, national, global buyers for MFP Value Added Products. These products are stored properly and reach the consumers on time. They also manage the Logistics & Transportations arrangement. This is how by moving through the different steps, the VDVk is progressing (TRIFED, 2021).*

PMVDVY in North-Eastern states

North-East India leads the way, accounting for 80 percent of all established VDVks. Manipur has appeared as the Champion state, with the Van Dhan program providing

important economic opportunities for indigenous tribals. Since the program's beginning in the state in October 2019, 100 VDVKs have been built throughout the state, with 77 of them presently operational. These 1500 VDVKs enable 30,000 tribal entrepreneurs in the collecting, processing, packaging, and selling of MFP value-added items. Yojna's implementation paradigm's scalability and replicability are a plus since it has helped in its spread across India. A sum of ₹ 150 crore effort will be launched soon for the local and international marketing of Van Dhan products from the northeast. The goal of this project is to build 15 centers in each district (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021b).

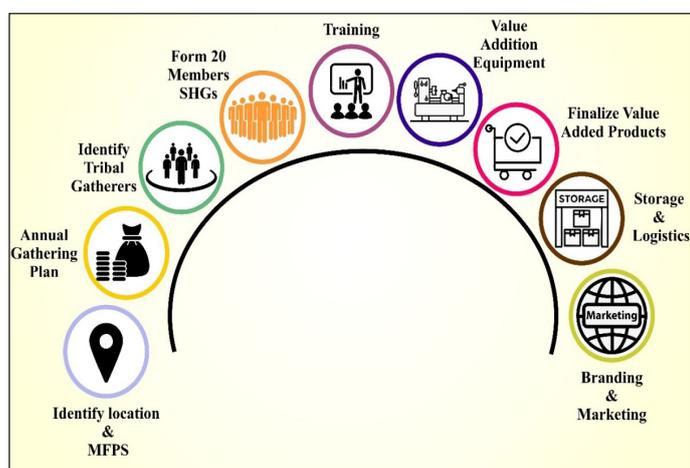


Fig. 1: Steps involved in Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Vikas Yojana (PMVDVY)

Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is a mountainous state in North-East India, bordered to the west by the kingdom of Bhutan. Arunachal Pradesh's capital is Itanagar. Arunachal Pradesh, which translates as "Land of the Rising Sun," has long been recognized as a region of the Indian subcontinent, having been mentioned in ancient Hindu texts such as the Kalika-purana and the epic poems Mahabharata and Ramayana (Lodrick, 2019). On March 19, 2021, TRIFED and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to implement the MSP for MFP Scheme and the PMVDVY in Arunachal Pradesh. TRIFED has implemented a number of programmes and initiatives

to improve the lives of tribals (both forest dwellers and craftspeople) and to promote tribal empowerment. The Rural Development Department of the State of Arunachal Pradesh would be the nodal agency for the scheme's implementation, with the Arunachal Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission serving as the State Implementation Agency (ArSRLM). By 2021, this agreement plans for the creation of 100 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras across the state (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021a). 85 VDVKs have been identified in Arunachal Pradesh, and measures are being made to guarantee that they are sanctioned as quickly as possible. TRIFED has approved 1770 VDVKs in 21 states and one union territory (UT), employing 5.3 lakh tribal gatherers. This includes 586 VDVKs approved in the North-Eastern States, each of which is linked to 1.73 tribal beneficiaries. Work will now begin in Arunachal Pradesh as a result of the MoU's implementation. TRIFED continues to work to provide income and a means of subsistence for tribal people via flagship programs including MSP for MFP and PMVDVY (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021a). As indicated in Fig. 3, In Arunachal Pradesh has reported 10 VDVKs in 10 districts with 91.20 percent Beneficiaries onboarded.

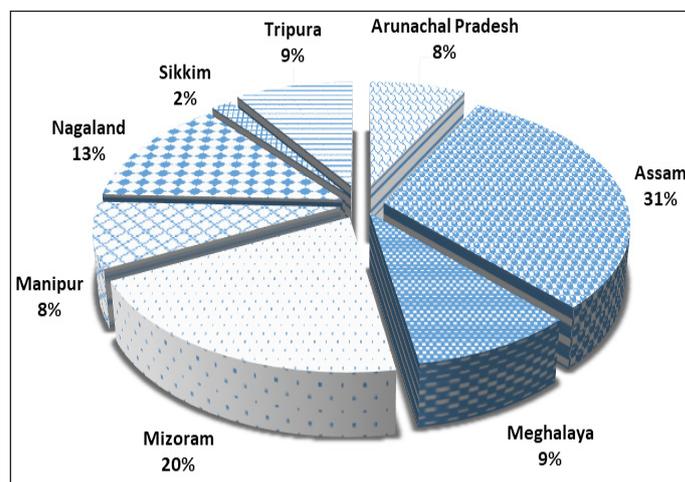


Fig. 2: Tribal population of different states of North-East India

Assam

Assam is a northeastern Indian state famous for its biodiversity, ancient monuments, and tea plantations.

Guwahati, Assam's largest city, has silk bazaars and, to the west, the hilltop Kamakhya Temple. The capital of Assam is Dispur. Assam has a sizable tribal population, accounting for 12.4% of the total population with 3,308,570 forest dwellers. 400 VDVks will be established in Assam to focus on job creation for the tribal population. According to the statement, VDVks can be a game changer for promoting tribal livelihoods and enterprises in Assam, while *Ekalavya Vidyalayas* will provide uniform and high-quality education to tribal children. The Tribal Affairs Ministry has given TRISSAM of Assam, The Gateway to Northeast, the *Van Dhan* National Award 2021-22 in the category of Collaborative Initiative for co-branding in *Van Dhan Yojana* (Eastmojo, 2021). As per information, Assam has been reported 1920 VDVks and 128 VDVkCs in 16 districts with 100% Beneficiaries onboarded as shown in Fig. 3.

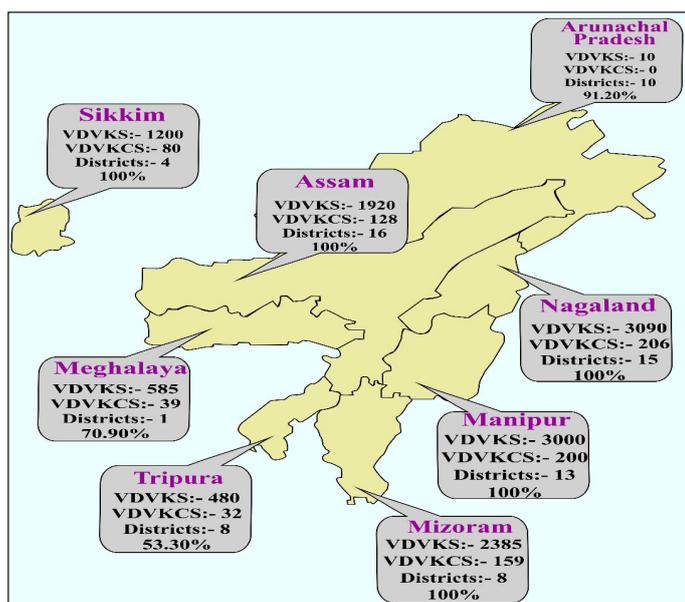


Fig. 3: *Van Dhan Vikas Kendras* (VDVks), *Van Dhan Vikas Kendras* clusters (VDVkcCs), Districts, and beneficiaries onboarded

Meghalaya

Meghalaya, one of the most beautiful states in India, lies tucked away in the highlands of the eastern sub-Himalayas. The capital of Meghalaya is Shillong (Government of Meghalaya, 2021). As per information,

Meghalaya has been reported 585 VDVks and 39 VDVkCs in 1 district with 70.90% beneficiaries onboarded as shown in Fig. 3.

Manipur

Manipur is located in northeast India's easternmost region, sharing borders with Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam, as well as the neighboring nation of Myanmar. Manipur has been characterized as a 'bloom on towering heights,' a 'jewel of India,' and the 'Switzerland of the East' due to its abundance of flora and animals. Imphal is Manipur's capital (IBEF, 2021a). Its breathtaking natural beauty makes it a tourist's dream. In Manipur, the PMVDVY was approved on September 14, 2019, and 77 VDVks have been built in the state since then for value addition and processing of forest products (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021b). Since the program's inception in the state in October 2019, 100 VDVks have been formed. These 1500 SHGs help 30,000 tribal entrepreneurs who work in the collecting, processing, adding value, packing, and marketing of value-added goods made from MFP. The *Van Dhan Kendras* in Manipur has proven to be a model enterprise for the rest of the country, thanks to this active collaboration and participation of the state government at every level. The nodal office in collaboration with the implementing agencies and with the assistance of District administration and other stakeholders has been essential in guiding tribal entrepreneurs through team meetings, advocacy, seminars, and training. Various cluster-specific training/skill growth and up-gradation for NTFP value addition and entrepreneurial management have also been organized at the district level in partnership with existing enterprises such as Zingran Foods, Meira Foods, Kangla Foods, and Thangjam Agro Industries (Likla). 77 VDVks have become operational and released their products to date. The exercise's overall brilliance is that it has managed to establish market links. Many of the tribal businesses are connected to the market. *Van Dhan Products* have been launched under the brand names Manipur *Van Dhan Naturals* and CCPur with a wide range of products such as fruit candies, juice & squash, spices, and pickles. TRIFED/ TRIBES INDIA has sourced around 144 Manipur *Van Dhan Products*. Manipur *Van*

Table 1: Tribes and Minor Forest Produces (MFPs) of different states of North-eastern India

States	Tribes	Minor forest Produces (MFPs)
Arunachal Pradesh	Nyishi, Galong, Adi, Tagin, Wancho	
Assam	Borokachari, Miri, Karbi, Rabha, Sonwal	Honey, Sal leaves, Bamboo, Bael, Bahada, Hillbroom, Betelnut, Neemseed, Tamarind, Spices, Jamun, Amla
Manipur	Thadou, Tangkhul, Poumai Naga, Kabui, Mao, Kacha Naga	Amla, Broomgrass, Wild Apple, Bamboo shoot, Bamboo cane, Mushroom, Fig, Banana stem, Wild fiber & roots, Dalchini, Black Olive, Heimag, Rhussemiliata
Meghalaya	Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam, Garo	
Mizoram	Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes, Chakma, Pawi	Hill broom, Bamboo shoot, Wild fruits, Anchiri, Tumbu, Aidu, Hruizik, Amla, Tezpatta, Areca nut, Turmeric, Aloe vera, Honey, Ginger, Chilli
Nagaland	Naga	Amla, Hillbroom grass, Bael, Baheda, Chironjee pods, Lac, Myrobalan, Nagarmotha, Neem seeds, Puwad seeds, Shatavari dried, Shikakai, Tamarind (with seed & de-seeded), Wild honey, Karanj seeds, Jamun, Soapnut
Tripura	Tripura, Tripuri, Trippera, Rieng, Jamatia, Chakma	Honey, Sal leaves, Bamboo, Bael, Bahada, Hillbroom, Betelnut, Neemseed, Tamarind, Spices, Jamun, Amla
Sikkim	Bhutia, Limboo, Lepcha, Tamang	Hillbroom, Bael, Sonapatha

Dhan Naturals has entered the retail market in 13 major Indian cities through TRIBES INDIA and the TRIFED e-Marketplace. VDVks from 14 districts are now taking part in a state-level exhibition called 'Mai-own 2021', which is being held in Imphal from 16th- 22nd March 2021 and was launched by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021c; Orissadiary.com, 2021).

Manipur received five national prizes for the excellent implementation of PMVDVY during the inaugural *Van Dhan* Annual Awards, 2020-21, held in conjunction with the 34th foundation day of TRIFED, Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The five prizes are titled 'The Most Proactive State,' 'Best Digital Friendly State,' 'Best Sales Generated (2nd Place),' 'Most *Van Dhan* Vikas Kendras Established (2nd Place),' and 'Best Training' (2nd place) (Imphal Free Press, 2021).

According to TRIFED, since the program's inception in the state in October 2019, 100 VDVkCs have been constructed, with 77 of them active. These are 1500 VDVkCs that help 30,000 tribal entrepreneurs that are involved in collecting, packaging, processing, and distributing MFP value-added goods. The scalability and replicability of the scheme's execution methodology

have assisted in its spread across India (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021b & c). Manipur has reported 3000 VDVks and 200 VDVkCs in 13 districts, with 100 percent beneficiaries onboarded (Fig. 3).

Mizoram

Mizoram also known as the land of the Mizo people is one of North Eastern India's Seven Sister States. Mizoram became India's 23rd state on February 20, 1987, and its capital is Aizawl (Iumizoram, 2019). Following the scheme's guidelines, Mizoram's Cooperation Department organized SHGs into several VDVk across the state. So far, 44 VDVks have been successfully established in the first phase, and 115 VDVks have been established in the second phase (Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Government of Mizoram, 2021). PMVDVY, a Tribal Affairs Ministry initiative, was launched in Mizoram by the Cooperation Department on July 14, 2020. The programme aims to provide forest-based tribals with a sustainable livelihood by facilitating skill development, capacity building, including training in primary processing and primary processing facilities, and promoting value addition to minor forest produce (MFPs). 43 VDVks will be established across Mizoram, with Primary

Cooperative Societies serving as these *Kendras*. Each Kendra will have a maximum capacity of 15 SHGs with an assistance of ₹ 1 lakh and a sum of ₹ 50,000 as working capital (Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Government of Mizoram, 2020). Mizoram has been reported 2385 VDVks and 159 VDVkCs in 8 districts with 100% beneficiaries onboarded as shown in Fig. 3.

Nagaland

Nagaland is a mountainous state in India's north-eastern region. It is home to numerous indigenous tribes, with festivals and markets celebrating the cultures of the various tribes, and its capital is Kohima (The land of wanderlust, 2019). Nagaland has performed well in various categories of *Van Dhan Vikas Yojana* (VDVY) and Minimum Support Price (MSP) schemes and received 7 national awards by Tribal Ministry. It generated best sale of 115,86,000 and got 3rd prize. It also provided creative and innovative product ideas for supply gooseberry, mushroom, beekeeping and honey etc. The VDVY and MSP for Minor Forest Produce (MFP) schemes promote farmer entrepreneurship by processing, packaging, branding, and marketing locally available products (The Northeast Today, 2021).

TRIFED is in charge of implementing the *Van Dhan* programme in 27 states and 307 districts where MFPs are available and there is a significant tribal population living in the forest. According to the TRIFED website, the collection and sale of MFPs contribute 40-60% of tribal annual earnings, and Value Addition helps to triple or quadruple their income (Outlook, 2021). The programme addresses the daunting issues that tribals face, such as land ownership with no rights, boundaries on MFP collection, exploitation by middlemen, displacement from national parks and wild sanctuaries, lack of development in forest villages, and so on. (Eastmojo, 2021). According to available statistics, Nagaland has reported 3090 VDVks and 206 VDVkCs in 15 districts with 100% beneficiaries onboarded, as shown in Fig. 3.

Tripura

Tripura is a North-East Indian state and its capital is Agartala. On January 11, 2020, the Hon'ble Chief Minister inaugurated the PMVDVY in Tripura

intending to encourage entrepreneurship among MFP gatherers and craftsmen. The Government of India has sanctioned a sum of ₹ 2.26 crore for the establishment of 17 VDVks involving 4256 beneficiaries of 249 SHGs for the purchase and value-added MFPs such as amla, broom grass, tamarind and gandhaki etc. during 2019-20. VDVks will be supported with tool kits, training, and raw materials in the first phase. Funds will be allocated to each VDVk for the improvement of *Pucca* House, warehouse, storage, and add-on equipment in the second phase. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, has sanctioned a sum of ₹ 144.60 lakh for ten VDVks (*Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana*, 2021) for the fiscal year 2020-21. According to available statistics, Tripura has reported 1200 VDVks and 80 VDVkCs in four districts, with 100 percent beneficiaries enrolled (Fig. 3).

Sikkim

Sikkim is India's second-smallest state, located in north-eastern India. Its capital is Gangtok (Times of India, 2021). TRIFED held an outreach session with Sikkim's state teams and VDVks on May 11, 2021. Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are the most recent North-East entrants. Attendees from both states (SIAs, SNAs, and VDVkCs) are pumped and ready to launch 1250 and 1330 VDVks, which will be divided into 80 VDVk Clusters in Sikkim and 85 VDVkCs in Arunachal Pradesh, respectively. Shri Pravir Krishna MD, TRIFED, discussed the importance of implementing the MSP for MFP Scheme, PMVDVY, and other convergence projects that aid in occupation and income generation for tribal people, all while keeping in mind and implementing complete safety measures during the pandemic times. The PMVDVY has already been approved for Sikkim at a cost of ₹ 1200 Lakh (Orissadiary, 2021).

MFP: a key source of income

MFP is an important source of income for tribals who live in forest regions. A large number of forest dwellers rely on Minor Forest Products (MFPs) for food, housing, medications, and financial support demonstrates the relevance of MFPs for this segment of society. It supplies them with vital food during the lean seasons, especially

for primitive tribal collections like hunter-gatherers and the landless. MFP accounts for 20-40% of tribals' annual income, on which they spend the majority of their time. This practice is strongly linked with women's financial empowerment because the majority of women collect, use, and sell MFPs. Every year, the MFP industry has the potential to generate approximately 10 million workdays in the country (Vikaspedia, 2021). Different states of North-eastern India have their different tribes and minor forest produces (MFPs). Because MFPs account for 20-40% of tribal revenue, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) implemented a measure to support MFP market development and ensure fair returns to tribal gatherers. MoTA launched 'MSP for MFP' scheme (a mechanism to market MFP through MSP and develop a value chain for MFP) in 2011. The MSP list contained 87 MFPs as of January 2021 (IBEF, 2021).

North-eastern states are pioneering the use of *Van Dhan Kendras*. Their value-added products, such as hill brooms, wild honey, bamboo bottles, rock beeswax candles and ointments, aloe vera soaps, and amla murabba, provide income and employment opportunities for tribal communities (The Sentinel, 2021).

CONCLUSION

PMVDVY is heavily promoting and supporting tribal entrepreneurship. PMVDVY played a critical role in North-Eastern states, proving to be a key engine of growth for tribal people in the region. Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram have the most VDVKS and VDVKCs among the North-Eastern states, while Arunachal Pradesh has only 10 VDVKS across ten districts. Manipur has recently emerged as the PMVDVY model state. The *Van Dhan Vikas Kendras* would be a watershed moment in the economic development of tribals participating in MFP collecting by assisting them in making the most use of natural resources and providing long-term MFP-based livelihood in MFP-rich districts. Because the sale of these items has increased the income and livelihoods of these tribal people, it is important to note that this has only been achieved because of the honest efforts of the stakeholders involved, namely the tribal community and the government. With the

assistance of the state government and the nodal office, the tribal entrepreneurs' sincere efforts, dedication, and determination in working together from collecting MFPs have made this initiative a huge success and made India self-sufficient. With the realization of the slogan 'Go Vocal for Local, Go Tribal—*Mera Van Mera Dhan Mera Udyam*,' a new changed country with a groomed tribal economy would be portrayed/established.

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