

3. Denotified and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Communities - Economy

Welfare board for nomadic, denotified groups tells PM it needs funds, staff, permanent commission status. The non-statutory board for Denotified and Nomadic Tribes is demanding legal status and financial powers to address the persistent exclusion of these communities. Historically stigmatized under the colonial-era "Criminal Tribes Act," these groups lack proper classification and access to welfare schemes.

DWBDNC Seeks Greater Powers and Recognition

Members of the Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Communities (DWBDNC) have formally appealed to the Prime Minister, seeking significant reforms to empower the board and secure the rights of the communities they represent. Their key demands include granting the board statutory status, providing it with financial autonomy, and ensuring legal recognition for all identified communities.

Core Demands of the DWBDNC Members

The board members have outlined a series of critical reforms needed to address the long-standing issues faced by Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NTDNTs).

Statutory Recognition for Communities - A primary demand is the legal recognition of the full list of identified communities through official Gazette notifications. This would formally categorize them as SC/DNT, ST/DNT, OBC/DNT, or General/DNT, ensuring their inclusion in the constitutional framework.

Establishment of a Permanent Commission - Members have called for the board to be upgraded into a Permanent Commission with statutory powers. This aligns with the original key recommendation of the Idade Commission, which would give the body legal authority and permanence.

Dedicated Financial Support - To function effectively, the board is seeking dedicated budget allocations at both the Central and State levels. They have also requested greater financial authority to be delegated directly to the board to implement welfare schemes efficiently.

Strengthening of Administrative Structure - The board has requested the appointment of essential administrative staff, including Deputy Secretaries, Undersecretaries, and a financial adviser. They also seek parity of pay scales for board officials with the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India.

Reforms in the SEED Scheme - Members have proposed crucial modifications to the Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED) to make it more impactful. These include -

1. Adding provisions for assistance in purchasing housing and land.
2. Granting No-Objection Certificates (NOCs) to families who have resided in kutcha (temporary) homes for over 20 years, formalizing their settlements.
3. Ensuring educational benefits for DNT students are on par with those provided to SC/ST students.

Standardised Community Certificates - There is an urgent call for a nationwide directive to standardize the issuance of community certificates. Currently, these essential documents, which are required to access benefits, are issued in only seven States.

Creation of Research Centres - Due to a significant lack of region-specific data, the members have called for the establishment of research and capacity-building centres in every State and Union Territory to facilitate evidence-based policymaking.

About the Development and Welfare Board (DWBDNC)

The DWBDNC was established to focus on the welfare of these marginalized communities, but its current structure has limitations.

Legal Status - The board is not a statutory body. It is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, which limits its powers and authority. It was established in 2019 and is headquartered in New Delhi.

Composition - The board is chaired by an appointee of the Government of India. Its administrative functions are led by a Member Secretary / CEO of Joint Secretary rank. It includes ex-officio members

from the Ministries of Social Justice & Empowerment and Tribal Affairs, the Department of School Education, and five nominated eminent persons working for these communities.

Mandate (Terms of Reference) – The board is tasked with formulating and implementing welfare programmes, identifying areas where these communities are concentrated, adapting existing government schemes to their specific needs, and monitoring the progress of these schemes.

Historical Background and Current Status of NTDNTs – The challenges faced by these communities are rooted in a history of colonial-era legislation and subsequent policy neglect.

Historical Context – During British rule, the infamous Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 notified around 200 communities as “criminal tribes.” This legislation subjected them to constant surveillance, restricted their movement, and created a deep-seated social stigma. After Independence, this Act was repealed in 1952, and the communities were officially “denotified.” However, the social stigma of being “born criminals” persisted, and many of these groups were left out of the mainstream caste categories (SC, ST, OBC), leading to their exclusion from constitutional benefits and welfare schemes.

Key Commission Reports

The Renke Commission (2008) highlighted the extreme marginalization of these communities and recommended targeted welfare measures. The Idate Commission (2017) identified about 1,200 DNT, NT, and SNT communities already in SC, ST, or OBC lists but pointed out that 269 communities were yet to be classified, leaving them in a state of administrative limbo.

Current Status and Major Challenges

Population – The NTDNT population is estimated to be around 10 crore people (as per the Renke Commission) spread across more than 1,200 distinct communities in India.

Persistent Stigma – The historical perception of being “criminal tribes” continues to fuel discrimination in employment, housing, and education, leading to social ostracization.

Identity and Documentation – The lack of standardized community certificates is a major barrier, preventing access to reservations, scholarships, and welfare benefits.

Policy Neglect – Despite multiple high-level commission reports, a comprehensive national policy for the welfare of NTDNTs has not been formulated.

Lack of Data – A severe scarcity of community-level and region-specific data makes it difficult for policymakers to design effective, targeted interventions.

Socio-economic Deprivation – These communities suffer from very low literacy rates, high rates of child labour, a lack of settled livelihoods, and frequent displacement due to their nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles.

Government Welfare Measures and Initiatives

Over the years, several steps have been taken to address the issues of NTDNTs, but they have often lacked the necessary authority and resources.

Commissions – The Renke Commission (2008) and the Idate Commission (2017) were instrumental in documenting the communities' plight and recommending solutions, including the call for a Permanent Commission.

DWBDNC (2019) – The establishment of the current Development and Welfare Board was a step forward, but its non-statutory nature has been a major handicap.

SEED Scheme (2022) – The Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs was launched to provide interventions in housing, livelihood, education, and health, but board members are now calling for reforms to make it more comprehensive.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/welfare-board-for-nomadic-denotified-groups-tells-pm-it-needs-funds-staff-permanent-commission-status/article70061318.ece>