



## THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TOTO TRIBAL GROUPS IN WEST BENGAL: A REVIEW

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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### Abstract

The socio-economic and political circumstances of the Toto tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) that only resides in Totopara, Alipurduar district, West Bengal, are examined in this study. It examines their distinct socio-cultural traits, past population shifts, and the significant obstacles they face, such as linguistic endangerment, economic marginalisation, and land alienation. The intricacies of their conventional governance systems, their alleged lack of political engagement in the larger democratic context, and the effects of both governmental programs and non-governmental organisation initiatives are all highlighted in the report. The analysis's findings and suggestions are intended to promote sustainable development, protect their unique cultural heritage, and increase their level of empowerment.

**Keywords:** *Toto Tribe, Tribal Group, Socio-economic condition, Government, Sustainable development, Empowerment*

### Introduction

One of the smallest indigenous ethnic groups in the world, the Toto people are restricted to the remote village of West Bengal, Totopara, which is close to India's border with Bhutan. Their distinct culture and language, which set them apart from nearby communities like the Rajbongshis, Koch, Mech, or Bhutanese Sharchop, have historically been preserved by their geographic isolation. The Government of India has designated the Toto tribe as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), indicating a greater degree of vulnerability in comparison to other Scheduled Tribes. Hunting and gathering methods, low literacy rates, sluggish population expansion, and dependence on pre-agricultural economic systems are among the difficulties. With an estimated 1,000 speakers, the Toto language, Dengka, is listed by UNESCO as "critically endangered". This linguistic vulnerability is a key factor in the tribe's contemporary challenges, as the language is a fundamental pillar of their unique cultural identity.

### Historical Context and Demographic Evolution

The Toto tribe, an indigenous group, faced significant demographic challenges in the 1950s. Despite facing extinction, the tribe's population has rebounded, increasing from 321 in the 1950s to 1,670 by 2024. This growth is attributed to measures to protect their areas from external encroachment and the introduction of medical systems after 1956. The primary challenge for the tribe is maintaining their unique cultural integrity amidst increasing external influences and changing internal dynamics. The tribe's historical recognition dates back to 1815, highlighting their long-standing presence and cultural distinctiveness.

**Table 1: Toto Tribe Population Trends (1901-2024)**

Year	Toto Population
1901	171
1951	321
1991	926
2001	1,184
2011	1,387
2024 (Est.)	1,670

## **Socio-Economic Status**

### **1.1 Demography and Population Dynamics**

According to the 2011 India census, there are approximately 1,387 members of the Toto tribe in India. With a greater sex ratio of 1375 females to 1000 males, the population has changed dramatically since 1901. Nonetheless, there is now much less proportional representation of the Toto tribe in Totopara village. The Totos were the only people living in the settlement in 1901, but by 2011, they made up only 23.46% of the overall population. Nepalese communities make up the majority of the village's population, with minor percentages from Bihar and other regions of West Bengal. The Totos feel displaced as a result of this demographic shift, which has an impact on their traditional land holdings, economic prospects, political clout, and cultural unity. As the Toto population increases, their control over local resources and ability to maintain cultural distinctiveness face increasing pressure.

### **1.2 Livelihood and Economic Practices**

The Toto tribe's economy, which was formerly based on subsistence, has changed significantly over time, moving from a subsistence model to one that is focused on the market. Individual land holdings have replaced collective land ownership as a result of this change, and vocations now include daily wage labour, animal husbandry, and settled agriculture. The Toto tribe does, however, confront significant economic difficulties, such as land alienation, which has resulted in acute poverty and widespread landlessness for many families. The community's ability to support itself was further undermined by the Land Reform Act of 1979 and the advent of private land ownership in 1969, which pushed many into unstable wage labour. A lack of contemporary agricultural knowledge is another economic obstacle that restricts production and hinders diversification beyond conventional single-crop farming. Their traditional forest-based livelihoods have also been negatively impacted by deforestation, which has decreased the availability of resources on which they previously depended. Poverty, debt, and economic hardship are widespread problems in the neighbourhood. An only 1 percent of Totos work for the government, and their low level of education make it difficult for them to move into more stable and varied economic pursuits.

### **1.3 Education and Literacy**

Since the middle of the 1950s, the Toto community has been instituting formal education, and since 1979, notable advancements have been realised. The Toto's literacy rates, which were 33.33% in 2004 and 30.35% in 2011, are still low and far below the national average. Just 5.19% of Totos complete Class VI–VII, 2.96% complete secondary school, 1.30% complete higher secondary school, and 0.79% enrol in college, indicating that very few of them attain higher education levels. The primary language of instruction in schools is Bengali, which Toto children frequently find difficult to grasp, and thus poses a serious obstacle to scholastic progress. This linguistic mismatch impedes academic performance and sustains low literacy rates, resulting in a weak educational foundation. Since youngsters are compelled to acquire and communicate in dominant languages in order to access educational and employment opportunities, the language barrier also plays a role in the decline of the indigenous language of the Toto people. A lack of teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and low professional aspirations—especially among girls—are additional issues that are connected to the socio-economic status and educational level of their parents. The Toto community's lack of aspiration is sustained by a cycle of limited chances brought on by these circumstances.

### **1.4 Health and Well-being**

Due to high rates of morbidity and death, inadequate healthcare services, and a high frequency of Thalassaemia, a genetic blood illness, the Toto tribe is experiencing a serious health crisis. About 80% of Totos either carry the gene or are at risk of developing this hereditary disease. The problem is made worse by the tribe's traditional endogamous marriage customs, especially when it comes to marrying cousins. The Totos' average lifetime has decreased to 35 years, underscoring the seriousness of this illness. Their geographic location, particular eating practices, work dangers, and unsanitary living conditions are some of the factors that contribute to the illness load. The high frequency of tuberculosis is thought to be caused by environmental pollution, including air pollution from the mining of quartzite stones and the movement of stone chips. Severe illnesses need difficult travel to larger hospitals, and access to contemporary healthcare facilities is still restricted. The Totos' cultural customs and practical barriers to receiving official medical care are reflected in their reliance on traditional healers and self-medication with medicinal plants. The vigour and average lifespan of the tribe are significantly impacted by this multifaceted health catastrophe.

### **1.5 Social Structure and Cultural Practices**

Thirteen exogamous clans, totalling about 26 clans, make up the Toto tribe's primarily patrilocal and nuclear family structure. The most common type of marriage is monogamy, and remarriage is governed by particular customs. Negotiation, escape, capture, and love marriage are some strategies for acquiring a marriage. For the Totos, divorce is not a common occurrence.

The Toto dwellings, called 'na-ke-sha,' are raised bamboo huts with thatched roofs that are built five to six feet above the ground. Usually, a notched tree trunk known as "Kaibu" acts as stairs leading to the dwelling. However, because of better economic conditions and government housing programs like Indra Awas Yojona Gramin and Gitanjali Yojona, some Totos have recently moved to pucca (concrete) and semi-pucca homes. This action represents a possible assimilation or cultural adaptation in addition to higher living standards or the results of government action.

Rice, milk, curd, and marua chura (parched rice) are all part of the Toto cuisine, with marua being a major component of their staple meal. They eat a variety of meats, fish, and Haria Eu, a fermented liquor. The two main deities in religion and beliefs are Cheima, who protects the village and its residents from problems and sicknesses, and Ishpa, who is thought to live in the Bhutanese hills and bring about illness when he is upset.

Toto social life revolves around life-cycle rituals, including as marriage, birth, and death. Marriage customs include “Bagdan” (betrothal) and “Namalamee” (moving the girl to her beloved’s house after puberty), birth rituals include a naming ceremony called “Madingpapoua,” and death rituals include burying the deceased in the Torsa riverbed, smearing the body with oil, and keeping a piece of bamboo for a year as a symbol of mourning.

**Table 2: Key Socio-Economic Indicators of the Toto Tribe**

Indicator	Value/Description
Current Population (Est.)	~1,670 individuals
2011 Census Population	1,387 (737 M, 650 F)
2011 Sex Ratio	882 females per 1000 males
2011 Literacy Rate	30.35% (36.36% M, 23.53% F)
Primary Income Sources	Sale of betel nuts, settled agriculture, animal husbandry (pigs), day labor
Traditional Housing Type	Elevated bamboo huts (‘na-ke-sha’)
Prevalent Health Issues	Thalassemia (high prevalence), TB, dysentery, malaria, cold/cough
Land Ownership Status	Shift from collective to individual; significant land alienation post-1969/1979 acts
PVTG Classification	Yes, since 1975
Language Status	Critically Endangered (UNESCO)

### Political Status and Governance

- **Traditional Governance and Community Norms**

Toto society works with a village council to resolve internal issues and upholds social norms through oral traditions. A group of 16 priests, commanded by a top priest known as the Devpao or Kaiji and subordinates known as the Deosi, oversee religious and ceremonial life. The ‘Mondal’ is the person who holds the secular leadership. ‘Lachijanwa,’ or annual gatherings, are held in Demra or the Kaiji residence to talk about personal or family matters. Membership is typically accepted at the age of 18, and girls are not subject to any special qualifications. Concerns regarding the level of autonomy maintained by the tribe and possible areas of interaction or conflict between these two systems of authority are raised by the persistence of traditional governance structures, which imply a parallel system functioning alongside the official state-introduced political framework.

- **Political Participation and Representation**

Seventy-five percent of the 1,670 people who make up the Toto population are eligible to vote. Because of their small population and isolated location, many Totos feel excluded and powerless even if they participate in democratic procedures. They think their votes are worthless to any political party and that politicians have disregarded their issues. Their local issues, such as poor road infrastructure and inadequate health services, are neglected. Only 37 Totos were working in various government jobs as of January 2017, indicating their low representation in official employment. This lack of representation raises the possibility that the Toto community’s political impact is still illusive and points to a structural problem with how their minority status is incorporated into West Bengal’s larger political landscape.

- **Impact of Government Policies and Schemes**

In India, the Toto tribe was designated a Primitive Tribal Group (Vulnerable) in 1975 after being formally recognised as a Scheduled Tribe in 1956. Primary schools and welfare centres were established in Totopara as a result of government efforts to enhance education that started in 1951. A number of government programs, including PM-JANMAN and the Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana, have recently been implemented to support PVTGs. These programs concentrate on infrastructure, road building, Anganwadis, electricity, and water supply. Scholarship programs and the creation of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), which offer instruction on par with Navodaya Vidyalyas, are examples of educational efforts. The goal of programs like Van Dhan Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM) is to link tribal communities with markets for minor forest produce. The Toto tribe, however, frequently encounters major challenges to receiving the promised benefits, including a lack of working days and delayed wage payments, ongoing language barriers in the classroom, and unresolved infrastructure issues. These difficulties point to a gap between the creation of state or federal policies and their successful implementation on the ground. This gap may be caused by bureaucratic roadblocks, systemic problems with delivery systems, or implementing agencies’ lack of local knowledge and responsiveness.

### Land Rights and Alienation

The Toto community once owned Totopara, a 1,996.96-acre region, collectively. This was an essential part of their traditional way of life and subsistence economy. Only 17% of the original village property was set aside for the Totos when the government allowed private land ownership in 1969, allowing others to claim over 1,600 acres. The situation was made worse by the Land Reform Act of 1979, which turned the majority of the Toto’s farmland into khas land, or communal or government-owned land.

A large number of Toto families became landless farmers as a result of the outsiders' widespread exploitation of the community's agricultural land, which further added to their acute poverty. The community is now mostly landless and experiencing greater economic hardship as a result of the 1979 Land Reform Act and the move from collective to individual land ownership, which has exacerbated widespread land alienation. In an effort to draw attention to their continuous fight for ancestral rights, the community group "Toto Kalyan Samity" is aggressively pushing for the restitution of the land.

### Challenges and Preservation Efforts

- ❖ **Threats to Survival:** The Toto tribe faces a confluence of threats that jeopardize their survival and unique way of life.
- ❖ **Environmental Degradation:** Deforestation and the mining of quartzite stones are putting a great deal of strain on the Totopara ecosystem, which is endangering the people and rapidly depleting natural resources. Residents now have to fetch water from far-off forest sources because of the dry springs caused by this degradation. Stream beds have also widened due to soil erosion, necessitating the use of wire meshes and other protective measures. Because fewer forest products and therapeutic herbs are available, deforestation also has an impact on traditional livelihoods. In addition to contributing to economic hardship and the loss of their traditional way of life, environmental deterioration has an impact on the health and well-being of the Toto tribe.
- ❖ **Health Vulnerabilities:** Because to their endogamous marital customs, the Totos group has a high prevalence of hereditary illnesses, especially Thalassaemia. Other contagious illnesses, such as diarrhoea and tuberculosis, are common and frequently associated with unsanitary living circumstances and restricted access to medical care. According to reports, the community's average lifetime is 35 years.
- ❖ **Cultural Erosion:** Due to intense pressure from dominant languages like Bengali, Nepali, and Hindi, the Toto language, Dengka, is in grave danger of extinction. These more widely spoken languages are gradually replacing many indigenous Toto words with their equivalents. Toto people are frequently forced to travel due to the growing demand for economic opportunities, which further erodes their linguistic and cultural heritage as they integrate into larger socio-cultural fabric.
- ❖ **Economic Marginalization:** The community's ongoing economic suffering and poverty are exacerbated by the widespread problems of land alienation, a lack of varied livelihood opportunities, and the continued use of antiquated agricultural techniques.

### Cultural and Linguistic Preservation Initiatives

In response to the severe threats to their cultural and linguistic heritage, the Toto community has undertaken significant preservation efforts.

- **Language Script Development:** A pivotal initiative has been the development of a unique script for the Toto language (Dengka). Leading this initiative and writing a 37-letter script in 2015 was Dhaniram Toto, a revered community leader and Padma Shri award holder. After being approved by the Unicode technical committee in 2019 and then included in the Unicode Standard in 2021, this script gained recognition on a global scale. A community elder's proactive creation of a distinctive script for the severely endangered Toto language, followed by its Unicode encoding, is an example of exceptional community agency and resiliency in the face of linguistic and cultural deterioration, turning a passive threat into an active preservation effort. By empowering the community to take charge of their language's future, this project exemplifies how community-led and culturally appropriate preservation works best.
- **Educational Integration:** The recently created script is being used more and more in computing, education, and literature. By introducing it to local kids, young volunteers in the community are actively working to make its use more widely known. The Toto language is taught with other regional languages by establishments such as the Chittaranjan Toto Memorial Education Centre.
- **Documentation and Revival:** Bhakta Toto created a thorough dictionary of the Toto language in 2023 to further cement the language's future. This was an essential step in transferring the language from an oral tradition to a written one and documenting its extensive lexicon. In order to stop the irrevocable loss of this priceless oral heritage, concurrent efforts are being made to gather and document traditional songs, poems, and stories from tribe elders and young people.
- **Community Advocacy:** The Toto community is making a concerted effort to preserve its unique character and fight against the overwhelming cultural and economic influence of dominant languages. Well-known individuals such as Dhaniram Toto publicly stress how vital it is to preserve their distinctive linguistic symbol, which forms the basis of their identity.

### Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Since 1951, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played a significant role in aiding the Toto community's growth and preservation. The Bright Eyes Global Action Project (BEGAP), which was founded in 2009 to address educational issues and create a self-sustaining education and cultural heritage centre in Totopara, is one noteworthy example. The project intends to maintain the distinctive uniqueness of the Toto culture, provide education in the Toto language, transcribe the endangered Toto language, and generate local job possibilities. Through infrastructure development, livelihood, education, healthcare, economic growth, environmental preservation, and community empowerment, NGOs also support tribal development. They must, however, overcome linguistic obstacles and establish trust when working with native populations. These difficulties show how difficult tribal development work is and how long-term involvement and in-depth knowledge are required. Although a number of NGOs work in or serve the Totopara region, such as Sanmilanee, Krishi Vikas Pariyojna, Hirwani's World Organisation, and

Shibnathpur Yuba Sangha, their particular initiatives for the Toto tribe are not always well documented.

### Comparative Analysis with Other PVTGs in West Bengal

The Toto, Birhor, and Lodha communities are the three Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) that West Bengal formally recognises. Even though all three have basic vulnerabilities stemming from socioeconomic marginalisation, their unique historical backgrounds, cultural customs, and unique problems call for highly customised development interventions rather than a standard strategy.

With 108,707 members as of 2011, the Lodha community is the largest of the three PVTGs in West Bengal in terms of population. In 2011, the Toto population was 1,387 and is expected to grow to 1,670 by 2024, while the Birhor population was 2,241.

The marginalised status of all three PVTGs is a result of shared vulnerabilities. These include poor literacy rates in general, high rates of poverty and ongoing financial difficulties, landlessness, difficulties with accessibility and remoteness, a lack of basic facilities and healthcare, and social marginalisation.

However, each tribe also possesses distinctive characteristics and faces unique challenges:

- **Toto:** The distinctive and seriously endangered Dengka language is what sets the Toto tribe apart. Additionally, they have a high rate of Thalassaemia, a genetic condition made worse by their endogamous marriage customs. Their unique concentration in Totopara village is one of their distinguishing characteristics, which makes them especially vulnerable to localised pressures.
- **Birhor:** Originally a hunting-gathering, nomadic or semi-nomadic group, the Birhor are now progressively relocating to Purulia’s hill woods. As they adjust to settled life, they struggle with difficulties of insufficient infrastructural development and the deterioration of their traditional cultural customs.
- **Lodha:** The Lodha community bears a particular historical burden because they were labelled a “Criminal Tribe” by the British colonialists. This designation has changed throughout time, but it still carries a strong stigma. Although they used to hunt and gather, many now work as migrant and agricultural labourers. Due in part to their lack of agricultural land, the majority of Lodha families are economically vulnerable. According to studies, they have the highest rates of acute undernutrition among PVTGs in West Bengal, and they still experience severe social exclusion.

This comparative analysis demonstrates that while commonalities exist among PVTGs, their distinct historical trajectories, socio-cultural specificities, and unique vulnerabilities demand highly customized and culturally sensitive development interventions rather than a generalized approach.

**Table 3: Comparative Overview of PVTGs in West Bengal (Toto, Birhor, Lodha)**

Tribe Name	Approximate Population (2011/Est.)	Primary Livelihood (Traditional/Current)	Key Shared Vulnerabilities	Distinctive Features/Challenges	General Development Status	Source
Toto	1,387 (2011); ~1,670 (2024 Est.)	Hunter-gatherers, porters; now settled agriculture, betel nut sale, day labor, pig rearing	Low literacy, poverty, land alienation, poor healthcare, remoteness	Critically endangered unique language (Dengka), Thalassaemia prevalence due to endogamy, exclusive concentration in Totopara	Least developed; facing cultural erosion and land loss	
Birhor	2,241 (2011)	Nomadic/semi-nomadic hunting-gathering; now settling, forest produce, daily labor	Low literacy, poverty, landlessness, poor healthcare, remoteness	Traditionally nomadic, now settling in Purulia hill-forests; inadequate infrastructure, erosion of traditional practices	Economically backward; struggling with transition to settled life	
Lodha	108,707 (2011)	Hunter-gatherers; now agricultural laborers, migrant laborers, minor forest produce collection	Low literacy, poverty, landlessness, poor healthcare, social exclusion	Historical “Criminal Tribe” designation, deep-rooted stigma, highest undernutrition among PVTGs	Highly marginalized; struggling with social acceptance and economic stability	

### Key Findings

A critically endangered Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group in West Bengal, the Toto tribe offers a riveting case study of a people trying to preserve their culture and survival in the face of extreme socio-economic and political adversity. Due to targeted actions and their natural resilience, they have recovered demographically even though they were in danger of going extinct in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this growth and a significant shift in Totopara’s demographics – Totos are now a minority in their original hamlet—have raised questions about property ownership, economic supremacy, and cultural integrity.

Due mostly to previous land alienation laws that have left many members without land, the tribe's economic transition from subsistence to a market economy has not been without difficulties. Their traditional means of subsistence are further threatened by environmental degradation, such as mining and deforestation, which deplete vital natural resources. Despite efforts to construct schools, low literacy rates persist, mostly due to a structural linguistic barrier that keeps Toto students from receiving instruction in Bengali. The group has serious health problems, such as a high prevalence of Thalassaemia exacerbated by endogamous marriage practices, limited access to modern healthcare, and environmental health risks. In terms of politics, Totos who take part in democratic procedures feel extremely marginalised since they think that mainstream political parties don't give much thought to their issues because of their small numbers.

Crucially, the Toto tribe has demonstrated remarkable agency in cultural preservation, especially in the development of their own alphabet for their original language and its incorporation into Unicode. While non-governmental groups also face challenges in successfully executing their initiatives, they play an additional role and often provide more culturally appropriate care.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

A multifaceted and culturally sensitive approach is essential to promote sustainable development, guarantee cultural preservation, and strengthen the Toto tribe's empowerment:

#### **Land Rights and Economic Security**

1. **Strengthen Land Rights:** Implement robust legislative frameworks and effective governmental programs to preserve and restore the ancient Toto land rights. To ensure the community regains sovereignty over its ancestral lands, a critical evaluation of the long-term effects of the 1979 Land Reform Act is necessary, along with proactive steps to combat ongoing land alienation.
2. **Diversify Livelihoods:** Offer resources and focused agricultural training to enhance farming methods, going beyond conventional approaches and incorporating environmentally friendly, sustainable practices. Encourage people to pursue opportunities in ecotourism or other sustainable businesses that capitalise on their cultural heritage in order to diversify their sources of income beyond agriculture and conventional porter services.
3. **Assure Scheme Effectiveness:** Assure the timely and efficient implementation of government economic programs, including MGNREGA. This calls for resolving structural problems with fewer working days, postponed salary disbursements, and administrative roadblocks that keep the community from fully reaping the benefits.

#### **Education and Health**

1. **Mother-Tongue Education:** Give top priority to educating Toto children in their mother tongue. To improve engagement and learning outcomes, this requires hiring and training Toto-speaking educators, creating curriculum materials in the Toto language and script, and ensuring that the teaching content is culturally appropriate.
2. **Boost Access to Healthcare:** Improve Totopara's access to and infrastructure for healthcare. To respect the cultural sensitivities of the community, this entails setting up mobile medical units, regularly launching health awareness campaigns for common illnesses such as TB and Thalassaemia, and implementing thorough genetic counselling and screening programs for Thalassaemia.
3. **Address Environmental Health Hazards:** Implement laws to prevent environmental degradation, including water scarcity and air pollution from mining operations. This requires promoting sustainable resource management practices that protect the natural environment upon which the tribe's health and livelihoods depend.

#### **Participation and Governance**

1. **Strengthen Traditional governance:** Encourage and fortify the Toto community's traditional governing systems. In order to ensure that community norms and traditional leaders are respected and that local decision-making processes grant them more autonomy and self-determination, formal methods for their integration with local political systems should be investigated and established.
2. **Strengthen Representation:** Put in place focused initiatives to raise Toto political consciousness and representation in state and panchayat government. In order to combat their perceived political marginalisation, this entails encouraging the community's leadership development and providing forums for their issues to be properly discussed and resolved.

#### **Cultural and Linguistic Preservation**

1. **Encourage Linguistic Revival:** Keep up your strong support for neighbourhood-based initiatives to preserve languages. In order to guarantee their survival for future generations, this entails the continuous improvement and promotion of the Toto script, the creation and distribution of dictionaries, and the methodical documentation and preservation of oral traditions, such as songs, poetry, and tales.
2. **Encourage the transfer of traditional knowledge:** Promote and assist the transfer of information across generations, especially in the areas of ethnobotany, traditional farming methods, and other indigenous wisdom systems. Community workshops, cultural centres, and educational initiatives that respect and incorporate traditional knowledge with contemporary innovations might help achieve this.

### **Role of NGOs and Collaboration**

1. **Encourage Cooperation:** Encourage more robust mechanisms for cooperation between governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations, and the Toto community. This guarantees that development projects are long-term sustainable, culturally relevant, and directly responsive to community needs.
2. **Developing NGOs' Capacity:** Assist NGOs in overcoming linguistic obstacles and fostering community trust. Funding for community engagement experts, NGO employees, and participatory development techniques that enable the Totos to plan and carry out projects could be part of this.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Toto tribe of West Bengal faces unique political and socio-economic challenges shaped by their distinct cultural identity and historical marginalisation. Despite efforts by the government and various organisations to improve their living conditions through education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, the tribe continues to grapple with issues such as limited political representation, economic underdevelopment, and social exclusion. Sustainable progress for the Toto community requires a focused approach that respects their traditions while promoting inclusive policies to enhance their participation in political processes and access to economic opportunities. This balance is essential to ensuring the tribe's long-term empowerment and integration within the broader socio-political framework of West Bengal. The Toto tribe in West Bengal faces a complex political and socio-economic situation due to their unique cultural identity, language, and social structure. Despite constitutional safeguards and tribal welfare policies, they still face significant socio-economic hardships, such as inadequate access to quality education, healthcare, and sustainable livelihood opportunities. Traditional and subsistence-based economic activities hinder their integration into the market economy, limiting income generation and mobility. The tribe also grapples with the pressures of modernisation and external influences that threaten to erode their cultural fabric. Despite these challenges, recent initiatives promoting education, infrastructure development, and political inclusion have shown promise in improving their well-being. To achieve meaningful progress, a multifaceted approach is essential, including education, skill development, and sustainable economic programs tailored to their context. Strengthening local governance structures and increasing the tribe's representation in political forums will provide them with a stronger voice in shaping policies affecting their future. The sustainable development of the Toto tribe depends on a balanced strategy that fosters cultural preservation alongside socio-economic advancement.

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