

# MOBILE CONNECTIVITY PROJECT TO BENEFIT TRIBES

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Hooked on: A cyclist using his phone at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. BISWARANJAN ROUT  
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More than half of the over 7,200 uncovered villages, largely inhabited by tribal communities, that the Government aims to provide 4G connectivity by 2023 at an estimated cost of Rs. 6,466 crore, is in Odisha, according to official data.

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the provisioning of mobile services in 7,287 uncovered villages in 44 Aspirational Districts that are among the most under-developed districts in India, across five States – Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Odisha.

The decision comes close on the heels of Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the Birsa Munda museum in Ranchi on the first-ever 'Janjatiya Gaurav Divas' or tribal pride day, as part of efforts to reach out to the tribal community ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election. While the exact tribal population that would benefit from the decision was not available, an official said it was likely to be around 36 lakh people across these villages.

As per available data, 3,933 of the uncovered villages under the project fall in Odisha. These include districts such as Rayagada (962 villages), Kandhamal (1,094 villages), Malkangiri (306 villages), Gajapati (467), Nabarangapur (17 villages) and Koraput (520 villages), which have more than 50% Scheduled Tribe (ST) population as per the 2011 Census. Likewise, of the 700 villages in Chhattisgarh, 418 villages were in districts such as Bijapur, Narayanpur and Bastar, where the tribal population is in majority.

In Jharkhand, 827 uncovered villages would get connectivity across districts such as Bokaro, Hazaribagh, Khunti, Purbi Singhbhum, Sahibganj and Simdega. In Maharashtra, 610 villages would benefit in Gadchiroli and Nandurbar, and about 1,218 villages in Andhra Pradesh would get connectivity across Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and YSR. Most of these districts also had a significant tribal population.

As per Department of Telecom estimates, as of August, 5,72,551 of 5,97,618 inhabited Census villages of the country, including tribal and Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected areas, had mobile network coverage.

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