

From Subsistence to Sustainability: A Quantitative Assessment of Government Scheme Impact on the Reang (Bru) PVTG of Dhalai District, Tripura

Jim Mmungthangha Reang^{1*}, Dr. Nongmaithem Kishorchand Singh²

¹Research Scholar at Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. Email: meskajim@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor at Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Abstract

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India remain among the most marginalized populations despite extensive state-sponsored welfare programmes. The Reang (Bru) community of Dhalai District, Tripura, presents a compelling case of persistent socio-economic exclusion despite targeted policy intervention. This study quantitatively assesses the extent to which government development schemes reach and benefit Reang households, and identifies the structural barriers that produce implementation failures. Primary data were collected from 363 households across four sub-divisions of Dhalai District (Longtrai Valley, Ambasa, Kamalpur, and Gandacherra) using proportional stratified sampling based on the Yamane (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level. Survey instruments captured scheme awareness, access, barriers to access, nature of benefits received, and perceived economic impact. While 59.6% of Reang households reported awareness of PVTG-specific schemes, only 19.1% had successfully accessed benefits. An Awareness-Access Gap of approximately 40 percentage points. Corruption and favouritism were identified as the primary structural barrier by 28.4% of respondents, significantly outweighing procedural complexity (5.3%). Among those receiving benefits, plantation-based inputs (11.9%) and housing assistance (7.1%) were most common; however, 80.4% of respondents reported no discernible economic improvement. The findings indicate a systemic implementation gap driven by governance failure rather than by demand-side deficits. Transitioning to Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanisms and strengthening institutional accountability are recommended as priority interventions.

Keywords: Dhalai District; Reang (Bru); PVTG; Livelihood Security; Government Schemes; Implementation Gap; Tribal Development; Tripura

1. Introduction

The socio-economic marginalisation of Scheduled Tribes constitutes one of the most enduring challenges of India's post-independence developmental trajectory. Article 46 of the Constitution of India (1950) mandates the state to protect and advance the educational and economic interests of weaker sections; nevertheless, tribal communities and particularly the sub-category of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) have remained substantially outside the ambit of mainstream economic development (Xaxa, 2005). PVTGs, previously designated as Primitive Tribal Groups, are distinguished by pre-agricultural subsistence economies, stagnant or declining population growth rates, and persistently low literacy levels. As of 2019, 75 such communities were officially recognised across 18 states and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Ministry of Tribal Affairs [MoTA], 2019).

National policy approaches to PVTGs have oscillated between protectionist welfare and integrative development paradigms. The Dhebar Commission (1961) first articulated the need for a targeted policy category, recognising the differential vulnerability of these communities relative to other Scheduled Tribes. In the contemporary period, the developmental framework has shifted towards market integration and enterprise promotion, as reflected in flagship programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha

Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) and the Van Dhan Vikas Yojana, which prioritise value addition to Minor Forest Produce (MFP), skill development, and Self-Help Group formation (Press Information Bureau, 2023; Tripathy, 2021).

Despite these policy developments, evidence consistently indicates that last-mile delivery of welfare benefits remains structurally compromised in tribal regions. The Xaxa Committee Report (MoTA, 2014) documented pervasive governance deficits in tribal areas, suggesting that the central problem is not the absence of policy intent but the structural failure of implementation mechanisms. Complex bureaucratic procedures, limited rural banking access, and the disproportionate influence of informal intermediaries collectively constitute barriers that prevent eligible households from converting policy entitlements into material benefits (Pritchett et al., 2013). For the Reang (Bru) community of Dhalai District, Tripura, these structural constraints have effectively stalled the transition from subsistence-based livelihoods to market-integrated sustainability.

2. Contextual Background: The Reang PVTG in Dhalai District

Among the 19 Scheduled Tribes of Tripura, the Reang (also referred to as Bru) community is the sole group accorded PVTG status, based on the persistence of three defining characteristics: a stagnant or declining population growth rate, literacy levels significantly below the state average, and continued reliance on pre-agricultural technology, principally shifting cultivation (Jhum) (Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council [TTAADC], 2020; Sil, 2016). Unlike co-resident communities that have transitioned to settled agriculture or service sector employment, the Reang community remains structurally anchored to a forest-based subsistence economy, rendering it disproportionately vulnerable to climate variability and volatile informal market prices for Minor Forest Produce such as rubber and broom grass (Das, 2019).

Dhalai District, the geographic focus of this study, exemplifies a developmental paradox common to peripheral regions of Northeast India. Its rugged, heavily forested terrain traversed by the Longtharai and Atharamura ranges creates a sharply differentiated settlement landscape. On the one hand, NITI Aayog (2018) has designated Dhalai as an 'Aspirational District,' signalling the severity of its deficits in health, nutrition, and basic infrastructure. On the other hand, intensified state attention has not translated into commensurate improvements at the community level, particularly for Reang settlements in the district's more geographically isolated sub-divisions. This core-periphery dynamic creates intra-district spatial inequalities that render uniform policy prescriptions largely ineffective (Chambers, 1983).

3. Literature Review

The conceptual foundation for analysing welfare delivery failures in tribal contexts draws on Pritchett et al.'s (2013) framework of 'implementation gaps,' wherein the policy intent of the state is systemically undermined by bureaucratic incapacity, procedural complexity, and corruption within delivery mechanisms. Applied to India's tribal welfare context, this framework helps explain why high-level policy commitments do not automatically translate into improvements in household-level economic outcomes.

Studies of tribal development in Northeast India have documented the persistent role of informal intermediaries in shaping welfare access. Platteau (2004) identified 'elite capture' as a structural problem in community-driven development programmes, wherein local power-holders divert or mediate public resources to serve clientelistic interests. Within the Reang context specifically, Sil (2016) and Das (2019) have documented reliance on forest-based livelihoods and susceptibility to market and climatic shocks, while also noting the community's peripheral relationship to formal administrative institutions. The broader literature on tribal welfare in Tripura (TTAADC, 2020) confirms persistent gaps between policy provision and ground-level uptake, though quantitative, scheme-specific evidence at the household level has remained scarce.

The governance literature on corruption in social protection delivery is also relevant here. Drèze and Sen (2013) argue that leakages in India's welfare architecture stem not merely from administrative inefficiency but from the active subversion of entitlement processes by rent-seeking actors. This characterisation aligns with the findings of the Xaxa Committee (MoTA, 2014), which recommended direct-to-beneficiary transfer mechanisms as a corrective to intermediary-induced exclusion. The present study contributes to this literature by providing disaggregated, village-level quantitative evidence of the awareness-access gap and the relative weight of corruption versus procedural complexity as structural barriers in a PVTG context.

4. Research Problem and Objectives

4.1 Research Problem

The central research problem is what this study terms the ‘Implementation Paradox’: a condition in which a high level of scheme awareness coexists with minimal benefit access and negligible perceived economic impact. Survey data indicate that approximately 59.6% of Reang households in Dhalai District are aware of government schemes specifically targeting PVTGs. Under standard welfare delivery assumptions, high awareness rates are expected to correlate with uptake and, by extension, with positive livelihood outcomes. However, the present data reveal that only 19.1% of households successfully accessed benefits, and 80.4% reported no concrete economic improvement. This disjuncture suggests that the principal barrier to welfare outcomes is neither informational nor attitudinal but resides in structural governance failures that interrupt the delivery pipeline between policy design and beneficiary impact (Pei and Mazur, 2021).

4.2 Research Gap

Although the socio-economic marginalisation of tribal communities in Northeast India is well-documented, empirical, quantitative research specifically examining the implementation gap for PVTGs in Tripura remains limited. Existing scholarship has concentrated on qualitative ethnographies of Reang community life and broad evaluations of national welfare policy. The quantitative disaggregation of barriers to access—specifically the comparative prevalence of corruption versus procedural complexity as determinants of exclusion—has not previously been attempted for this population. This study addresses that gap.

4.3 Research Objectives

This study is guided by four specific objectives derived from primary survey data:

- (1) To assess the degree of scheme awareness and the relative role of informal (community leaders) versus formal (government officials) channels in information dissemination among Reang households.
- (2) To quantify the Awareness-Access Gap by measuring the statistical difference between households aware of PVTG schemes and those that have successfully accessed benefits.
- (3) To identify and rank the structural barriers to entitlement access, particularly comparing the prevalence of corruption and favouritism against procedural and documentation barriers.
- (4) To evaluate the perceived economic impact of benefits received, distinguishing between asset-based (e.g., housing) and livelihood-generating (e.g., plantation) schemes.

5. Methodology

5.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Dhalai District, Tripura, across four administrative sub-divisions: Longtraí Valley, Ambasa, Kamalpur, and Gandacherra. These sub-divisions were selected because they encompass the full spectrum of infrastructural development, road connectivity, and administrative reach characteristic of Reang PVTG settlements in the district.

5.2 Sampling Design

A proportional stratified sampling strategy was employed. From each sub-division, the two most populous (High) and two least populous (low) village panchayats with Reang PVTG presence were purposively selected, ensuring representation of both well-networked and geographically isolated settlements. The sample size of 363 households was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level. Proportional allocation was applied across panchayats. Table 1 summarises the sample distribution.

Sub-Division	Village Panchayat	Type	HH Population	Sample (n)
Longtraí Valley	West Kathalchara	High	445	40
	East Malidhar	High	503	45
	Jamirchera	Low	1	1
	Makorchera	Low	1	1
Ambasa	Kornomoni Para	High	1347	123
	Kulai RF	High	562	51
	Lalchari	Low	10	1

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	Kamalachera	Low	13	1
Kamalpur	Setrai	High	134	11
	Sambuchak	High	57	5
	Mendi	Low	3	1
	Dhanchandra Chow Para	Low	9	1
Gandacherra	Ultacherra	High	504	45
	Chitrajhari	High	380	34
	Dalapati	Low	2	1
	Narikelkunj	Low	5	1
TOTAL			3976	363

Table 1: Sample Distribution Across Sub-Divisions and Village Panchayats

5.3 Data Collection and Instrument

Structured household interviews were conducted using a pre-tested survey instrument comprising five thematic modules: (i) scheme awareness and information source, (ii) benefit access and application experience, (iii) perceived barriers to access, (iv) nature and adequacy of benefits received, and (v) perceived household economic impact. Interviews were conducted in the respondents' native language (Kaubru) and subsequently transcribed into English. Fieldwork was carried out between May 2025 and December 2025. Prior to full-scale data collection, the survey instrument was pre-tested for reliability and cultural validity among a pilot group of 12 households. Ethical guidelines concerning research on vulnerable populations were strictly adhered to, with participation remaining entirely voluntary and informed oral consent secured from every respondent.

5.4 Data Analysis

Bivariate Correlation Analysis

Correlations	
What is the most important area for improvement in PVTG related schemes	What has been the most significant benefit your family has received from PVTG related schemes?
How has your family's economic condition improved due to PVTG related schemes?	What is the main barrier your family faces in accessing government schemes for PVTGs?
Has your family benefited from any government schemes specifically targeting PVTGs?	How did your family first learn about PVTG-related government schemes?
Is your family aware of the government schemes that target PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups)?	

.360*	.00 0	36 3	.375*	.00 0	36 3	.776*	.00 0	36 3	.330*	.00 0	36 3	.772*	.00 0	36 3	.766*	.00 0	36 3	1		363
.371*	.00 0	36 3	.353*	.00 0	36 3	.905*	.00 0	36 3	.405*	.00 0	36 3	.892*	.00 0	36 3	1		36 3	.766*	.00 0	363
.400*	.00 0	36 3	.351*	.00 0	36 3	.943*	.00 0	36 3	.430*	.00 0	36 3	1		36 3	.892*	.00 0	36 3	.772*	.00 0	363
.698*	.00 0	36 3	.621*	.00 0	36 3	.422*	.00 0	36 3	1		36 3	.430*	.00 0	36 3	.405*	.00 0	36 3	.330*	.00 0	363
.396*	.00 0	36 3	.368*	.00 0	36 3	1		36 3	.422*	.00 0	36 3	.943*	.00 0	36 3	.905*	.00 0	36 3	.776*	.00 0	363
.800*	.00 0	36 3	1		36 3	.368*	.00 0	36 3	.621*	.00 0	36 3	.351*	.00 0	36 3	.353*	.00 0	36 3	.375*	.00 0	363
1		36 3	.800*	.00 0	36 3	.396*	.00 0	36 3	.698*	.00 0	36 3	.400*	.00 0	36 3	.371*	.00 0	36 3	.360*	.00 0	363
Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N	Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N	Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N	Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N	Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N	Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N	Pears on Correl ation	Sig. (2- tail ed)	N
Is your family aware of the government schemes that target PVTGs (Particularly			How did your family first learn about PVTG-related government schemes?			Has your family benefited from any government schemes specifically targeting PVTGs			What is the main barrier your family faces in accessing government schemes for			How has your family's economic condition improved due to PVTG related			What has been the most significant benefit your family has received from			What is the most important area for improvement in PVTG related schemes according to your		

	Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
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To further investigate the dynamics of welfare exclusion among the Reang community, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted across key survey variables (\$N = 363\$). All reported correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Most notably, the analysis mathematically corroborates the observed awareness-access gap. The correlation between a family's awareness of PVTG-targeted schemes and actually benefiting from them is positive but notably moderate ($r = 0.396$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that mere knowledge of government programmes does not reliably translate into successful access. However, awareness is strongly correlated with the source of information ($r = 0.800$, $p < 0.01$) and the identification of structural barriers ($r = 0.698$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as households become more informed about the schemes, they simultaneously become acutely aware of the systemic roadblocks—such as corruption and favouritism—that prevent them from accessing their entitlements.

Conversely, exceptionally strong relationships emerge among post-access variables. The correlation between having benefited from a scheme and experiencing an improvement in economic condition is near-perfect ($r = 0.943$, $p < 0.01$). This variable is also highly correlated with the specific type of significant benefit received ($r = 0.905$, $p < 0.01$). Ultimately, the correlation matrix demonstrates that while the economic impact is intrinsically tied to the actual receipt of targeted benefits, the primary bottleneck in welfare administration lies in the transition from awareness to access.

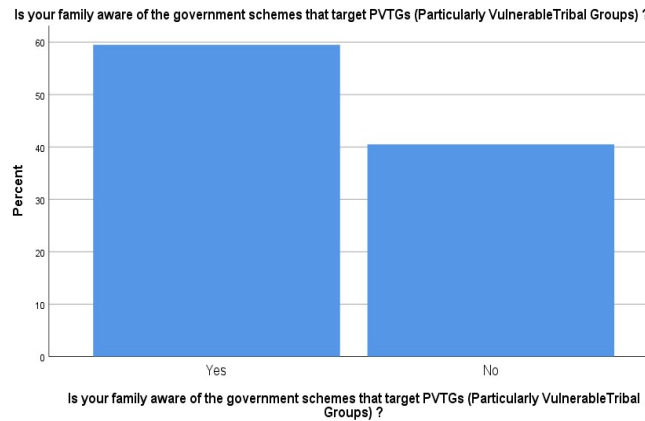
6. Results and Findings

The Awareness-Access Disparity

The first task of the study was to determine the experience of state-led development initiatives among the Reang households. The results indicate that there is a clear gap between scheme knowledge and access to benefits. A significant number of respondents (59.6%) stated that they had been aware of government schemes that are specifically targeted at PVTGs as demonstrated in Figure 1. This implies the announcements, or even the overall concepts of the provision of welfare have permeated the community to some level.

Figure 1:

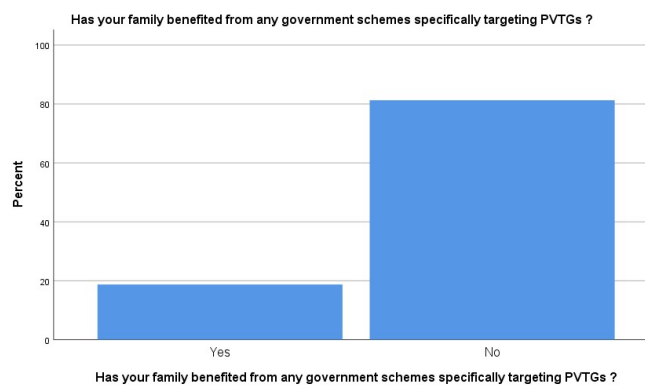
Source: Field Survey



But awareness in itself has not resulted into concrete results. As can be seen in Figure 2, the percentage received benefits successfully stood at 19.1, whereas the percentage of those who did not receive any scheme was large at 80.9. This leads to an implementation gap of about 40.5 percentage points demonstrating a system failure between policy will and ground level performance. The difference indicates that the presence of the states is mostly just formal-they can be seen on paper, but not put to practice, which repeats a tendency wherein welfare has been merely a promise on paper by the administration rather than a reality (Kochanek, 1987).

Figure 2:

Source: Field Survey



Dependence on Informal Intermediaries

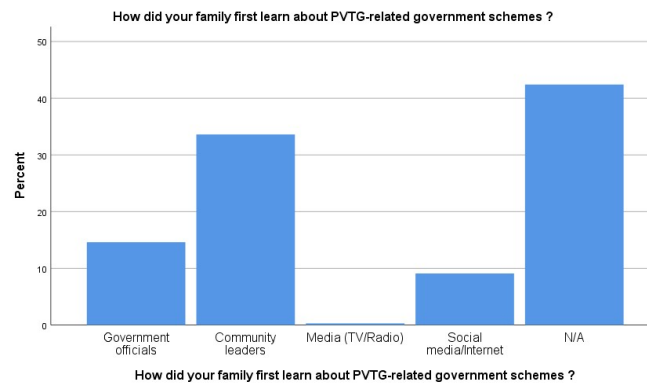
The paper under analysis studied sources of information to determine how the information about schemes flows in the community. Figure 3 shows that the reliance on informal and localized intermediaries instead of direct interaction with the state is high. This identified community leaders as the key resultant source of information to 33.7% of respondents, as such they were the most viable actors in the information chain.

On the contrary, the formal government officials were used as the source of information only in 14.9%. Such imbalance implies that the institutional outreach machinery like block offices, field officials or awareness camps does not exist at all, are not regular or not effective in interior Reang villages. The prevalence of Community Leaders (14.9) against formal Government Officials (33.7%)- there is a danger of replicating

between intra-community inequalities by what development scholars define as elites capture (Platteau, 2004). Consequently, the influences impose mediation of access to information based on social hierarchies, personal networks, and the local power structures. Although community leaders might be facilitative, excessive use of informal intermediaries also heightens chances of selective distribution, misinformation, and gatekeeping, therefore, defining unequal access to state resources.

Figure 3:

Source: Field Survey



Structural Barriers

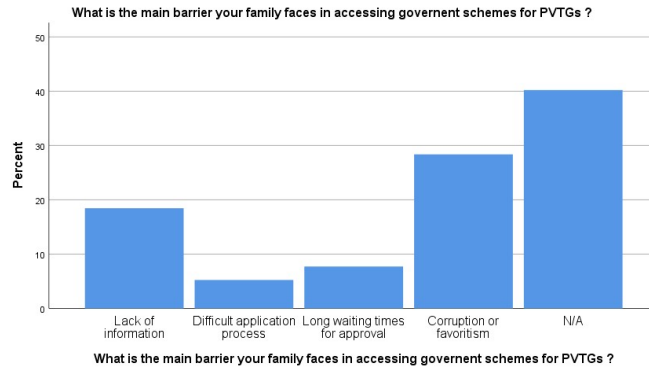
The Prevalence of Corruption

When the respondents were questioned to provide a single most important account as to why they cannot access developmental schemes, the constraints that arise were those that are related to governance. As Figure 4 shows, corruption or favoritism was cited by 28.4% of households as the greatest barrier significantly out of procedural challenges like difficult application procedures (5.3%).

This observation highlights the argument that exclusion is never mainly due to technical complexity or documentations deficiency but they are designed by informal practices that are entrenched in the implementation machinery. It was shown that access to the place depends on affiliations, as well as bribes and political loyalty of the individuals, more than on the eligibility of a respondent. These perceptions build mistrust in government bodies and deter application by households, therefore making exclusion normalized and a disengagement loop cycle ensured. The labeling of Corruption and Favoritism (28.4%) as the key impediment... is indicative of in-rooted governance malfunctions. This statistical outlier nullifies the fact that tribal exclusion is due to the lack of literacy, but rather points to the fact that exclusion is structured and predatory (Dreze and Sen, 2013).

Figure 4:

Source: Field Survey



Nature of Benefits and Economic Stagnation

The inability of these schemes to cause much development is further contextualized by an analysis of the nature of the benefits garnered. Figure 5 indicates that a larger portion of benefits received was plantation-based ones (rubber, pineapple, arecanut, 11.9%), and the next largest benefit was housing or land-related assistance (7.1%). Although theoretically these interventions are meant to increase the livelihoods, they are small-scaled and not sustainable.

Figure 5:

Source: Field Survey

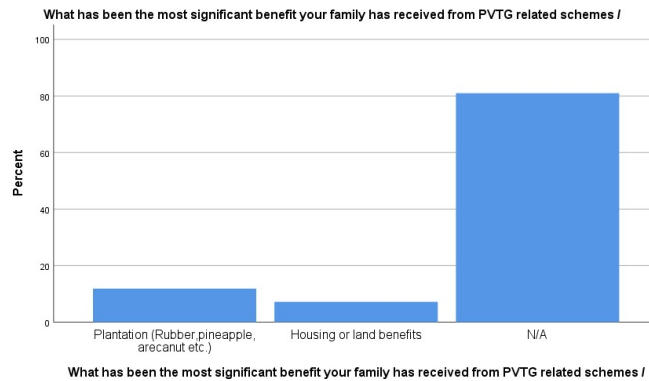
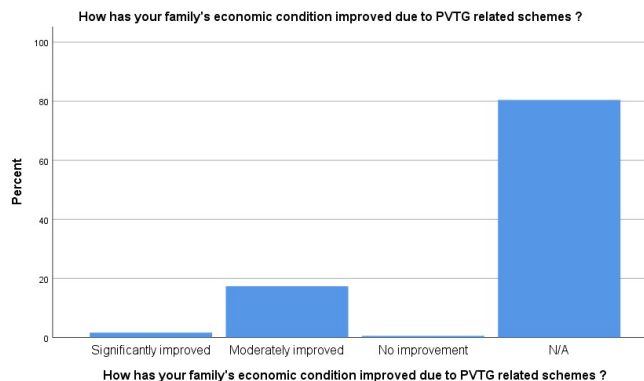


Figure 6:

Source: Field Survey

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The cumulative effect of these interventions on the economic situation in the household is shown in figure 6. It is interesting how a startling 80.4% respondents indicated that they did not see any economic improvement whereas only 1.4% of respondents reported a significant improvement in the same. This means that despite the access to benefits which are usually inadequate, they do not help to counter the structural weaknesses like land insecurity, unstable employment, indebtedness and isolation in the market. The developmental plans therefore seem weak in the sense that they are broken and short-lived and hence do not produce sustainable livelihood insecurity or rising economic ladder.

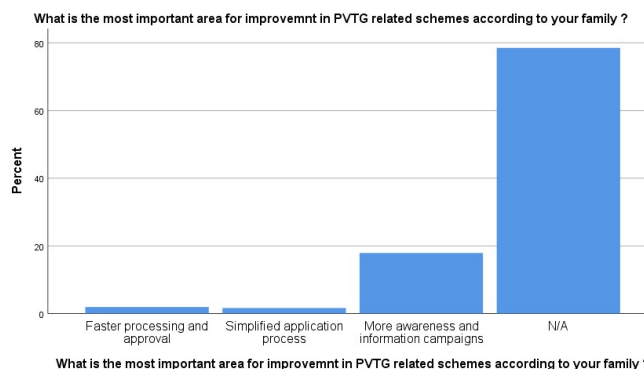
Community Perspectives on Remediation

The last section gives a reflection of what the community feels about the way the improvement should take place. As Figure 7 shows, more awareness and information campaigns were mentioned the most (18.2 percent of respondents). This reaction shows a collective view that transparency and effective communication would help lessen uncertainty and having an upper hand on intermediary manipulations and the vice of corruption.

Notably, this call does not necessarily represent the lack of knowledge, but the need to be directly and personally involved with the state. Respondents stressed the importance of available information, through available local languages, at village level and through formal sources of information that is trusted by the wealthy but formal, would enable the households to exercise their claim on entitlements without any involvement of the authorities. Such focus on awareness therefore represents a wider desire of procedural justice, transparency and dignity in the provision of welfare services.

Figure 7:

Source: Field Survey



7. Discussion

7.1 The Awareness-Access Gap as Administrative Distance

The 40-percentage-point gap between scheme awareness and benefit access in this study reflects what Pritchett et al. (2013) term 'administrative distance': a condition in which welfare systems are formally visible to communities but functionally inaccessible. For Reang households, this translates into a relationship with the state characterised by symbolic rather than substantive inclusion: communities are informed of their entitlements but structurally prevented from claiming them. These findings echo Drèze and Sen's (2013) broader critique of India's welfare architecture, in which bureaucratic complexity and intermediary dependence routinely convert rights-based entitlements into conditional benefits distributed through patron-client networks.

7.2 Informalisation of Welfare Delivery and Elite Capture

The dominance of community leaders (33.7%) over formal government officials (14.9%) as information intermediaries signals a broader informalisation of welfare delivery in this context. While informal actors can theoretically bridge the information deficit between the state and marginalised communities, their unchecked centrality in the current system reflects and potentially exacerbates intra-community inequality. Platteau's (2004) concept of 'elite capture' is directly applicable here: households with social proximity to community leaders or political networks are disproportionately positioned to navigate informal access channels, systematically disadvantaging the most marginalised Reang households despite their formal eligibility.

7.3 Corruption as Systemic Rather Than Incidental

The statistical predominance of corruption and favouritism (28.4%) over procedural barriers (5.3%) as cited obstacles represents an important theoretical contribution. This finding challenges the deficit-based explanation of tribal exclusion: the assumption that non-access results from illiteracy or inability to complete application procedures. Instead, the data are consistent with Drèze and Sen's (2013) characterisation of exclusion as 'structured and predatory': entitlements are not merely difficult to access but are actively monetised or exchanged for political loyalty by actors within the delivery pipeline. The psychological consequence of normalised corruption: rational disengagement by eligible households who calculate that participation costs exceed probable benefits further reduces effective demand for welfare, producing a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion.

7.4 Limits of Current Benefit Modalities

The predominance of plantation-based and housing assistance among received benefits, combined with the 80.4% non-improvement rate, reflects the fragmented design of current welfare interventions. Housing provides shelter but generates no income; plantation schemes (rubber, arecanut) entail gestation periods of six to eight years and require market linkages that are typically absent in remote Reang settlements. Without complementary supports: immediate credit access, market integration, and technical extension: these inputs function as isolated welfare transfers rather than catalysts for structural livelihood transformation. This finding supports Chambers' (1983) argument that interventions designed without attention to local ecological and economic realities are unlikely to produce lasting change.

7.5 Community Demand for Procedural Justice

The finding that 18.2% of respondents prioritised awareness and information campaigns as the most desired improvement: rather than increased funding or faster processing: warrants interpretive attention. This preference reflects not information deficit per se but a demand for procedural justice: transparent, predictable, and accessible information that reduces households' dependence on unaccountable intermediaries. In this sense, the community's articulation of awareness as the primary remedial priority represents a sophisticated recognition that information asymmetry is a principal mechanism through which corruption operates. This finding problematises deficit-driven characterisations of PVTG communities as passive welfare recipients and underscores the community's agency in diagnosing and articulating solutions to its own exclusion.

8. Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings.

First, sampling constraints: the Yamane formula-derived sample of 363 households, while statistically adequate at the 95% confidence level, results in very small cell sizes for the least populous village panchayats ($n = 1$ in several cases). This limits the reliability of sub-division-level comparisons and restricts the statistical power of inferential tests applied at this level of disaggregation.

Second, recall bias: questions regarding perceived economic improvement and past benefit receipt depend on respondent recall, which may be subject to telescoping or social desirability bias. Households may overreport or underreport scheme awareness depending on the perceived consequences of their responses.

Third, geographic limitations: the study is confined to Dhalai District and its Reang PVTG population. Findings may not be generalisable to other PVTG communities within Tripura, to the Reang diaspora in other states, or to other tribal districts with different administrative and ecological configurations.

Fourth, self-reported data: all outcome variables including economic impact and barrier identification are based on respondents' subjective perceptions rather than administrative records or objective economic measurements. Future studies should triangulate self-reported data with official beneficiary registers and independent income assessments where feasible.

9. Conclusion

This study provides quantitative evidence of a systemic implementation failure in the delivery of PVTG welfare schemes to the Reang community of Dhalai District, Tripura. The co-existence of relatively high scheme awareness (59.6%) with minimal benefit access (19.1%) and negligible perceived economic improvement (80.4% reporting no change) constitutes a measurable implementation gap that cannot be attributed to demand-side deficits or informational failures alone. The statistical dominance of corruption and favouritism as barriers significantly outweighing procedural complexity indicates that the fundamental problem is one of governance integrity rather than administrative efficiency.

The study's contribution lies in disaggregating this implementation gap empirically and in demonstrating that informal intermediary dependence, though operationally functional, reproduces intra-community inequalities that formal eligibility criteria are insufficient to correct. These findings have direct implications for policy design: increasing budgetary allocations to existing schemes without reforming delivery mechanisms is unlikely to improve livelihood outcomes for the most marginalised Reang households.

Future research should pursue longitudinal designs to track benefit access and economic impact across multiple policy cycles, and should employ administrative data triangulation to validate self-reported findings. Quantitative examination of sub-group differences within the Reang community by gender, age, literacy, and geographic isolation would further illuminate the distributional dynamics of welfare exclusion identified in this study.

10. Policy Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, the following policy interventions are recommended in order of priority:

Recommendation 1 Expand Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Coverage. Given that corruption and favouritism constitute the primary structural barrier (28.4%), transitioning from intermediary-mediated delivery to direct bank-to-beneficiary transfers is the highest-priority reform. This requires coordinated efforts to complete financial inclusion (bank account linkage) for all Reang households and to integrate PVTG scheme accounts with the Aadhaar-linked DBT platform.

Recommendation 2 Formalise and Accountability-Link Community Intermediaries. Since community leaders remain the dominant information channel (33.7%), they should be integrated into a formal accountability framework under the Tribal Welfare Department. Formalised 'Scheme Saathi' or 'Gram Kalyan Prahari' roles, with performance-linked incentives tied to verified application completion rates, would convert informal gatekeepers into accountable facilitators.

Recommendation 3 Institutionalise Gram Sabha-Level Social Audits. Mandatory bi-annual social audits, conducted in the Kaubru language at the village level, should publicly disclose beneficiary lists, pending application status, and grievance redressal outcomes. This mechanism aligns with the community's expressed demand for transparency (18.2%) and constitutes a structural deterrent to favouritism.

Recommendation 4 Shift Benefit Modality from Inputs to Integrated Value-Chain Support. Plantation schemes (11.9% of received benefits) have not generated economic improvement because they are delivered as isolated inputs without market linkages. Future programmes should adopt a whole-value-chain approach, pairing rubber or arecanut saplings with establishment of local collection centres, Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, and forward-pricing agreements to ensure income realisation.

Recommendation 5 Localise IEC Campaigns. Mass media information campaigns (TV, radio) have negligible reach among Reang households (<1% citation rate). Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials must be hyper-localised: audio-visual content delivered via community mobile platforms, Kaubru-

language street plays, and trained village-level communicators who explain both scheme entitlements and grievance mechanisms.

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