

Demand Determinants in Access to Public Schemes Information and Entitlement Benefits for the Tea Tribe Community in Assam

A Qualitative Study





BACKGROUND

There have been efforts to undertake critical measures and steps by the State Government of Assam for improving social and economic conditions of the vulnerable tea tribe community in recent years, the community producing 53% of India's total tea production. A slew of public schemes have been designed and being delivered by the State Tea Tribe Welfare Directorate in regular intervals, as well as schemes and delivery at State inter-departmental levels in tea tribe areas. However, the access to government scheme, social protection measures have been a major access related demand and supply centric challenges at community level. Earlier studies have looked at wider issues of working conditions and provisions in basic facilities for the workers community. However, it is recognised that this qualitative study will add nuances to the deeper issues of identifying key areas in access related challenges to critical and life empowering social protection and welfare schemes by the tea garden community in Assam and improving demand and uptakes.

METHODS

Minimally structured, qualitative interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at the garden, Panchayat, block, district, and State levels. Focus group discussions were also undertaken at the community level. Inductive and content analytic approach was used and transcripts were analysed to identify and define factor determinants that explain barriers in access to public schemes information and entitlement benefits. Qualitative research method was used to collect data through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) in six districts of Assam.



RESULTS

The results are presented in three broad themes: sociocultural, socioeconomic and institutional –process-systemic factors. Sociocultural factors identified were 1) cultural norms and practises; 2) vulnerability, ignorance and apathy; (3) Dialect and language. The socioeconomic vulnerability included: 1) Illiteracy, 2) Absence of information and digital literacy; 3) BPL and Affordability issues. Institutional-Process-System-wide factors were 1) Poor access, facilitation, infrastructure and service points; 2) weak information, communication, content processes and mechanisms; 3) Weak processes in identification and selection of beneficiaries, and 4) Poor quality of response and care to deliver to increase access, uptake and demand for schemes.

CONCLUSIONS

Mapping the interplay of these dynamic relations between the social protection and welfare programmes, the tea garden community as client and service providers, the study identifies critical factors at the access level, access specific service provider level, policy and programme making level, and client level (reflective in household and community level institutional arrangements) that affect access to public and social protection schemes information, enrolment and linkages with critical scheme benefits. Our findings inform a number of potential solutions in the area of access to schemes and entitlement benefits and resources to expand coverage, increase choices, uptake and demand and meeting the needs of the garden community in a sustainable, time bound, accountable and transparent manner.

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