



Constraints Faced by Developmental Personnel Concerning Livelihood Programmes Across Paniya and Kanikkar Tribes, Kerala

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Institutional and administrative constraints were more severe among personnel working with the Paniya community.
- Political influence affected beneficiary selection more prominently in the Kanikkar region.
- Excessive workload limited sustained field engagement in both districts
- Staffing shortages in Wayanad and poor connectivity in Thiruvananthapuram were reported.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the constraints faced by developmental personnel concerning tribal Livelihood Development Programmes (LDPs) among the Paniya community in Wayanad and the Kanikkar community in Thiruvananthapuram. Data were collected from 120 personnel between January and May 2025 using a structured schedule, and constraints were prioritised using Garrett's ranking technique. The results showed that excessive workload was a major challenge in both regions. However, personnel working with the Paniya community reported greater institutional delays and limited field-level staffing, while those working with the Kanikkar community faced stronger political influence and poor transport connectivity. Limited exposure to indigenous knowledge and seasonal migration of household head were notable socio-cultural barriers in both contexts. The findings underline that operational constraints faced by developmental personnel vary across tribal settings and are shaped by administrative, socio-cultural, and infrastructural factors. Addressing these constraints through context-specific planning, improved institutional coordination, and strengthened field-level support is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of livelihood interventions in tribal areas.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal communities in India form an essential part of the nation's socio-cultural fabric, sustaining diverse ecological knowledge systems, indigenous livelihood practices, and community-based resource management traditions. Scheduled Tribes constitute 8.6% of the population, largely residing in forested and ecologically sensitive regions (Dakua et al., 2020). Their livelihoods, rooted in natural resource dependence and wage labour, remain vulnerable to

environmental degradation, land-use changes, market shifts, and socio-economic marginalization (Babu et al., 2024). In Kerala, of the 37 tribal communities, comprising 1.45% of the State population, major tribes include Paniya, Kurichiya, Kattunayakan, Kani (Kanikkaran), Muthuvan, and Kuruman, prominently concentrated in Wayanad, Idukki, and the Western Ghats (Balakrishnan & Kurup, 2024). The Paniya community remains one of the most socio-economically marginalized groups, dependent mainly on wage labour and limited land resources (Narayanan et

al., 2011). In contrast, the Kanikkar tribe in Thiruvananthapuram shows gradual livelihood diversification into farming, wage work, and service sector employment, supported by comparatively higher literacy and landholding (Joy & Ajithkumar, 2018).

Recognizing the need to strengthen livelihood security among tribal communities, various LDPs are implemented through the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD), Local Self-Governments, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), and Non-governmental Organisation (NGOs) (Kuriakose & Ramesh, 2025). These include skill development, income-generation activities, agricultural extension, credit support, and enterprise promotion (Manoj & Aithal, 2025). The effectiveness of these programmes depends largely on developmental personnel, who bridge policy and field realities and provide insights into operational constraints and context-specific improvements (Anshuman et al., 2023). Although substantial funds are allocated for tribal development, resource allocation and actual community well-being often do not align. Most studies focus on tribal households rather than the perspectives of those implementing development interventions (Suman et al., 2025). Therefore, examining the constraints faced by developmental personnel is essential, as their insights reflect field-level realities and can guide policymakers in designing context-responsive and operationally feasible livelihood strategies (Kumar et al., 2024).

With this backdrop, the present study examines the constraints perceived by developmental personnel involved in LDPs for the Paniya and Kanikkar communities in Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram. Understanding these perspectives will support improvements in programme planning, coordination, and delivery. Comparing two contrasting tribal contexts enables insights across different stages of tribal livelihood development interventions related to health, food and nutrition, water and sanitation, agriculture and allied activities, income generation, and basic welfare services. The study tests the hypothesis: H_0 : no significant difference in the constraints between the two groups; H_1 : a significant difference exists.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among the developmental personnel in Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram, where the Paniya and Kanikkar communities predominantly reside. The respondents, directly involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of LDPs for the Paniya and Kanikkar communities, were selected. To ensure meaningful field experience, only individuals with a minimum of one year of direct engagement with either community were included. Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted, followed by expert validation to refine the schedule of constraints. Purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select personnel from various institutions actively involved in livelihood interventions. In Wayanad, respondents were drawn from the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) (20), Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS) (10), Tribal Extension Office (15), and M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) (15). In Thiruvananthapuram, respondents were selected from ITDP (18), Tribal Extension Offices (14), the STDD (16), and the Office of the Chief Wildlife Warden (12). In total, 120 developmental

personnel (60 from each district) were surveyed between January and May 2025, ensuring adequate time for field contact and verification. Since the nature of responsibilities, administrative conditions, and socio-cultural contexts vary across regions and tribal groups, the constraints experienced by the respondents were assessed separately in the two districts. The constraints were categorised under four broad dimensions (Lakshmi et al., 2025; Satpathy et al., 2025) and the constraints were prioritised meaningfully, adopting Garrett's ranking technique (Gupta et al. 2020; Bahubalendra et al., 2025; Adithyan et al., 2025; Chaudhary et al., 2025).

RESULTS

Institutional and administrative constraints

These constraints pose major operational challenges to programme implementation. As shown in Table 1, excessive workload was the most serious issue in both Wayanad and Thiruvananthapuram (Rank 1), indicating limited staffing for multiple responsibilities. In Wayanad, delays in administrative approvals followed (Rank 2), while in Thiruvananthapuram, political influence in beneficiary selection and programme prioritisation emerged next (Rank 2). Limited involvement of local self-governance institutions and weak inter-departmental coordination appeared in later ranks. Similar issues of administrative delays and inadequate institutional convergence affecting programme continuity were reported by Das (2025).

Technology and knowledge constraints

Technology and knowledge barriers primarily stem from limitations in cultural familiarity and technical support. As presented in Table 1, in Wayanad, insufficient exposure to indigenous livelihood systems was ranked first (Rank 1), followed by lack of appropriate tools for practical demonstrations (Rank 2), while challenges in culturally relevant dissemination and limited training opportunities followed (Ranks 3–4). In Thiruvananthapuram, inadequate specialist technical support was the foremost issue (Rank 1), with limited exposure to traditional knowledge next (Rank 2), and dissemination and material constraints ranked thereafter (Ranks 3–4). Similar gaps in awareness, demonstration capacity, and adaptation knowledge were reported by Paul et al., (2015), Singh et al. (2018) and Choudhary et al. (2025).

Social and cultural constraints

As indicated in Table 1, in Wayanad, reluctance to adopt new livelihood practices was ranked highest (Rank 1), followed by seasonal migration (Rank 2), gender-based participation differences (Rank 3), and language or communication barriers (Rank 4). In Thiruvananthapuram, seasonal migration was the major constraint (Rank 1), reluctance toward livelihood diversification ranked next (Rank 2), gender-related participation patterns followed (Rank III), and communication challenges appeared least severe (Rank 4). These findings align with Kumar et al. (2024), who emphasised that cultural identity and social hierarchies strongly influence community engagement in development programmes.

Table 1. Constraints as perceived by developmental personnel concerning LDP's (N=120)

S.N.	Constraints	Wayanad		Thiruvananthapuram	
		GMS	R	GMS	R
A.	Institutional and Administrative				
1.	Insufficient time to conduct participatory planning	33.72	5	30.52	7
2.	Delays in administrative approvals	64.74	1	34.26	5
3.	Lack of clarity in programme guidelines	33.5	6	32.8	6
4.	Excessive workload limiting adequate field support	64.16	2	65.34	1
5.	Limited coordination between departments	30.78	7	64.1	4
6.	Limited involvement of local self-governance institutions	62.78	3	61.02	4
7.	Political influences on priority setting and beneficiary selection	60.32	4	61.54	3
B.	Technical and Knowledge				
8.	Limited exposure to indigenous livelihood systems and traditional knowledge	53.7	1	57.3	2
9.	Inadequate training opportunities on tribal livelihood strategies	47.5	4	30.3	5
10.	Difficulty in disseminating livelihood practices in culturally relevant ways	50.1	3	50.5	3
11.	Lack of appropriate tools to demonstrate livelihood practices	51.4	2	43.2	4
12.	Limited availability of technical support from specialist institutions	47.3	5	68.7	1
C.	Social and Cultural				
13.	Language and communication barriers	33.84	4	34.16	4
14.	Reluctance of some tribal households to adopt new livelihood practices	65.48	1	54	2
15.	Gender-based influence on participation in programme activities	47.52	3	47.76	3
16.	Seasonal migration of families disrupting continuity of programme activities	55.16	2	66.08	1
D.	Infrastructural and Logistic				
17.	Poor transport and road connectivity	45.48	3	67.24	1
18.	Inadequate supply of essential inputs for livelihood activities	57.64	2	33.92	4
19.	Lack of storage and processing facilities	33.88	4	53.56	2
20.	Insufficient field-level staff	65.00	1	47.28	3

GS – Garrett Score, GMS – Garrett Mean Score, R- Rank

Infrastructural and logistical constraints

As shown in Table 1, infrastructural and logistical constraints varied across regions. In Wayanad, insufficient field-level staff was ranked highest (Rank 1), followed by inadequate supply of essential inputs (Rank 2), poor transport connectivity (Rank 3), and lack of storage and processing facilities (Rank 4). In Thiruvananthapuram, poor road connectivity to forest-fringe settlements emerged as the major constraint (Rank 1), followed by limited storage and processing facilities (Rank 2), insufficient staffing (Rank 3), and inadequate input supply (Rank 4). Similar constraints linked to weak connectivity and restricted market access were also reported by Abera et al. (2021).

DISCUSSION

In the institutional and administrative dimension, excessive workload in Wayanad limits sustained field engagement and follow-up, while administrative delays hinder timely delivery of programme benefits. In Thiruvananthapuram, weak involvement of local self-governance bodies and poor inter-departmental coordination reduce community ownership and resource convergence. Monisha and Thomas (2021) similarly reported that bureaucratic delays and procedural rigidity slow tribal development efforts. Choudhary et al. (2025) further noted that fragmented institutional linkages and lack of collaborative planning reduce the effectiveness of livelihood interventions.

Regarding technology and knowledge constraints, limited cultural understanding and weak familiarity with indigenous

practices reduce the effectiveness of communication and skill transfer in Wayanad. In Thiruvananthapuram, insufficient technical support restricts the Kanikkars' ability to adopt forest-based and value-addition livelihoods. Earlier work by Nair and Vishnu (2018) also noted that lack of culturally grounded approaches and institutional linkages weakens programme relevance. Limited awareness of adaptation technologies and benefits further reduces adoption, while inadequate training exposure restricts sustainable skill development (Kumar & Nain, 2012; Singh et al., 2018).

With regard to socio-cultural factors, reluctance to adopt new livelihood practices among the Paniyas reduces participation in training and uptake of interventions, while seasonal migration among the Kanikkars interrupts follow-up and programme continuity. Kumar et al., (2024) also noted that when cultural identities and social hierarchies are overlooked, development efforts fail to align with community priorities. Further, Bilavekar et al. (2025) revealed that developmental officials reported limited literacy and low awareness of government schemes continue to impede effective communication and knowledge transfer.

Concerning infrastructural and logistical constraints, limited field-level staffing in Wayanad weakens follow-up and disrupts the continuity of programme activities. In Thiruvananthapuram, poor road connectivity and difficult terrain form the major barriers, restricting mobility, training access, and timely service delivery. Joy and Ajithkumar (2018) also noted that inadequate staffing reduces field presence and programme momentum, while Meeral et al. (2024) highlighted that physical isolation limits value addition and market

opportunities. Additionally, dispersed settlements and weak communication infrastructure further hinder resource delivery and coordination (Kapoor et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights that developmental personnel working with tribal communities experience varied operational and contextual challenges shaped by the socio-cultural and geographical settings of each region. While excessive workload was common across both districts, institutional delays and inadequate field staffing were more critical in Wayanad, whereas political influence and poor connectivity affected implementation in Thiruvananthapuram. Differences in cultural familiarity, technical support, and community engagement further influenced programme outcomes. Strengthening inter-departmental coordination, ensuring timely administrative support, enhancing culturally relevant training, and improving infrastructural access are essential for improving programme delivery. Context-specific, participatory, and sustained interventions are crucial to ensure that livelihood development initiatives effectively support the socio-economic advancement of the Paniya and Kanikkar communities.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and informed consent: Informed consent was sought from the developmental personnel respondents during the course of the research.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationship that could be a potential conflict of interest.

The authors declare that during the preparation of this work, they thoroughly reviewed, revised, and edited the content as needed. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of this publication.

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