

-Demographic Correlates of Public Awareness Regarding Urban Development Authorities: A Study of DHUDA Beneficiaries and Non-Beneficiaries

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic elements affecting public knowledge of urban development programs, with particular emphasis on the Davangere-Harihara Urban Development Authority (DHUDA). Primary data obtained from a sample of 192 respondents (138 beneficiaries and 54 non-beneficiaries) were analysed. Significant disparities in knowledge levels are seen based on demographic characteristics and, importantly, recipient status. Although broad awareness of DHUDA is substantial (78.32%), comprehension of the legislative framework, including the 74th Amendment Bill (54.45% aware), organisational structure (18.90% aware), and the process for obtaining benefits (55.46% aware) is alarmingly deficient. The investigation highlights that women, non-beneficiaries, and lower-income groups are disproportionately less informed, reflecting a systematic failure in equitable information dissemination. This research employs the Information Deficit Model and the principle of Communicative Planning to contextualise the findings. The conclusion promotes focused public education initiatives to guarantee equitable and informed citizen engagement in municipal governance.

Key Words: *Socio-Economic, 74th Amendment Bill, DHUDA, Sustainable urban development.*

1.0. Introduction

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Effective urban governance relies on the informed engagement of its citizens, a premise established in democratic decentralisation measures such as India's 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992. This regulation requires participatory planning and management for urban local authorities. This article aims to examine the socio-economic profile of residents under the DHUDA jurisdiction and to delineate the correlation between these characteristics and their awareness of the urban planning body's activities and mandate. Identifying the current deficiencies in awareness, especially among marginalised or disadvantaged populations, is essential for formulating and executing inclusive development plans. This study employs a main dataset to contrast the knowledge of residents who have directly benefited from DHUDA initiatives with those who have not, thereby finding structural limitations to information access.

1.1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1.1.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two principal theoretical concepts:

- **The Information Deficit Model:** This model suggests that gaps in public understanding result from a lack of information or education. In the context of urban governance, our research tests if DHUDA's failures in communication are the direct cause of the public's low awareness of its complex structure and procedures (Sturgis et al., 2014).
- **Communicative Planning Theory** (Habermas, 1984): This theory posits that planning should be based on rational consensus achieved through genuine public discourse. For this to happen, all stakeholders must have access to complete and accurate information. The low awareness of DHUDA's structure and procedures suggests a failure of Communicative Rationality, where the technical-administrative logic (DHUDA's internal function) has failed to be translated into the public "Lifeworld" (citizen understanding).

1.1.2 Review of Related Literature

Studies on urban authorities often highlight a dichotomy between the regulatory efficiency of development bodies and their democratic accountability (Akbar Samadi et al 2017). Research on similar Urban Development Authorities (UDAs) across India consistently identifies low citizen awareness of institutional processes, particularly among women and the

poor, as a major barrier to participation (Indira & Santhosha, 2023). The literature further suggests that when information is complex (e.g., legislative frameworks like the 74th Amendment), it rarely penetrates the grassroots level without active, simplified dissemination efforts. Our research contributes by providing a quantified analysis linking specific socio-economic variables (gender, income, beneficiary status) to granular levels of institutional awareness (structure, commissioner name, procedure).

1.2 Methodology

The findings are based on a primary investigation conducted across the DHUDA judicial area, encompassing a total of 192 household respondents. The sample was segmented into two groups: 71.88% (138) were identified as beneficiaries of DHUDA programs, and 28.12% (54) were non-beneficiaries. Data collection utilized a structured interview questionnaire, focusing on socio-economic indicators and respondent awareness regarding the Authority's establishment, responsibilities, and specific schemes. The data gathering spanned from July to December 2024.

1.3. Socio-Economic Profile and Poverty Indicators

The sample was predominantly male (63.80%), with the 26–35 age group representing the largest segment (31.51%).

- Economic Constraint and Inequality:** A significant portion of the population (48.17%) reported an annual income of less than ₹1 lakh, classifying the majority of the study area's population as financially constrained. Non-beneficiaries were found to be comparatively poorer than the beneficiary group.
- Literacy and Housing:** While 91.93% of respondents were literate, a notable 8.07% remained illiterate. In terms of living conditions, nearly half (49.21%) resided in 'Pucca' (permanent) houses, but 15.63% still occupied 'Kutcha' (temporary) houses.
- Land and Welfare Status:** Almost one-third (28.9%) of all respondents were landless, with the non-beneficiary group showing a higher proportion of landlessness. Furthermore, a large segment of the population holds welfare cards, with 31.25% holding Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards and 12.24% holding Antyodaya cards, confirming the high prevalence of economic vulnerability in the study area.

Occupationally, the largest segments were dependent on Agriculture (32.55%) and Agricultural Labour (24.48%).

1.4. Analysis of Public Awareness and Disparity

The study employed a detailed metric to gauge awareness, revealing a pattern where abstract recognition is high, but actionable, institutional knowledge is remarkably low. The results strongly support the Information Deficit Model concerning complex institutional knowledge.

Table 1:
Mapping the Depth of Knowledge

Awareness Metric (Ranked by Awareness)	% Aware	Knowledge Type	Implication
DHUDA activities and achievements	92.53%	Symbolic	High visibility of development projects.
Jurisdiction of DHUDA	79.54%	Actionable (Basic)	Understands the area of influence.
74th Amendment Act	54.45%	Legislative (Contextual)	Moderate grasp of legal foundation.
Procedure for receiving benefits	55.46%	Actionable (Procedural)	Nearly half are procedurally locked out.
Name of the DHUDA Commissioner	40.9%	Actionable (Accountability)	Low ability to hold key leader accountable.
Structure of DHUDA	18.90%	Actionable (Structural)	Critical failure in understanding institutional hierarchy.

Source: Calculated by Authors

This data confirms the Actionable Knowledge Deficit: citizens are informed about the Authority's promotional activities but profoundly ignorant of the institutional machinery and procedures necessary to access services or enforce accountability. While a strong majority (80.20%) recognized DHUDA by name, specific knowledge required for effective participation was found to be critically deficient:

- **Legislative Context:** Awareness of the 74th Amendment Act, the foundational legal context for urban governance, stood at only 54.45%. This suggests that nearly half the population lacks the basic understanding of the Authority's democratic mandate. This suggests that 45.55% of citizens, including many potential beneficiaries, are automatically excluded from scheme access due to a lack of simple "how-to" information.
- **Structural Opacity:** Awareness of the internal Structure of DHUDA stood at a mere 18.90%. This high level of structural opacity prevents citizens from knowing which department to approach for specific issues, effectively making the authority inaccessible and unaccountable.
- **Legislative Disconnect:** The low awareness of the 74th Amendment Act (52.34%) indicates that the legal foundation for participatory urban democracy has not been successfully communicated to the populace.
- **Operational and Structural Knowledge:** This domain showed the lowest awareness:
 - Knowledge of the Procedure for receiving benefits was marginally better at 53.24%, but the fact that nearly half of the populace does not know how to access scheme benefits is a critical failure in public service communication.
 - Knowledge of the Name of the DHUDA Commissioner, the head of the organization, was known by only 40.9% of the respondents.

1.5. Correlates of Disparity: Gender, Beneficiary Status, and Occupation

The analysis reveals that awareness is not randomly distributed but is highly concentrated among certain demographic groups, highlighting structural inequality in information access:

- **Gender Exclusion:** A profound gender gap exists in institutional awareness. Male respondents accounted for 67% of those aware of the 74th Amendment. Critically, only 3.8% of female respondents were aware of the structure of DHUDA, and a negligible 2.86% had any knowledge of the various departmental sections. This near-total exclusion of women from detailed institutional knowledge severely limits their capacity to participate in decision-making or access benefits equitably.
- **Beneficiary Status Impact:** The status of having received a benefit acts as the primary information source. General awareness was 95.65% among beneficiaries but plummeted to 40.74% among non-beneficiaries. This confirms that DHUDA's outreach

is reactive—triggered by an application for benefit—rather than proactive, failing to engage the broader citizenry, particularly the landless and poorer non-beneficiary cohort.

- **Education and Income:** Respondents with higher education (Graduate and above) showed significantly higher awareness across all metrics, while lower-income groups (earning <₹1 lakh) were disproportionately represented in the unaware segment, reflecting a strong socio-economic gradient in information access.

1.6. The Actionable Knowledge Gap: Structural vs. Symbolic Awareness

While general brand recognition is high (80.20% aware of DHUDA), the data reveals a collapse in Actionable Knowledge—the procedural and structural understanding necessary to navigate the bureaucracy or hold it accountable.

- **Structural Ignorance:** The structure of DHUDA is known by only 16.88% (Rank 13 out of 13 awareness metrics), and the Commissioner's name is known by 40.9%. This low knowledge of the organizational hierarchy and leadership implies that citizens cannot identify the appropriate authority for specific grievances or appeals.
- **Procedural Lockout:** The failure of 46.76% of the population to know the procedure for receiving DHUDA benefits represents a form of procedural exclusion. This inability to access schemes due to informational barriers is as effective a constraint as financial or legal barriers.
- **High Awareness is Non-Actionable:** The highest awareness (92.53%) is reserved for 'DHUDA activities and achievements', which is non-actionable knowledge disseminated through promotional efforts, not empowering civic information.

1.7 Correlates of Disparity: The Gender and Status Divide

The awareness deficit is not random but systematically disadvantages certain groups:

- **Gendered Information Poverty:** The findings demonstrate a profound gender-based information asymmetry. Female respondents constitute only 33% of those aware of the 74th Amendment. Critically, awareness of the DHUDA structure drops to a negligible 3.8% among female respondents, creating a near-total blackout of institutional knowledge for over one-third of the population. This points to

communication channels (e.g., official meetings, local bureaucratic interactions) that are inherently gender-biased or inaccessible to women.

- **The Beneficiary Trap:** The jump in general awareness from 40.74% (non-beneficiaries) to 95.65% (beneficiaries) confirms that information acquisition is largely reactive and benefit-driven, rather than a result of proactive, universal civic education. DHUDA's operational model inadvertently creates an "information elite"—those who have already penetrated the system—and perpetuates the exclusion of the poor and landless.

1.8 The Role of Socio-Economic Correlates in Information Access

The disparity analysis confirms that information access is a function of socio-economic standing and status:

- **Gender Exclusion as a Barrier:** The profound gender gap is the most striking finding. Male respondents accounted for 67% of those aware of the 74th Amendment. The awareness of complex structural knowledge (departmental sections) among women was a negligible 2.86%. This exclusion aligns with broader theories of marginalization, where women often have less access to official information channels and public spaces where such knowledge is typically shared.
- **Beneficiary Status as an Information Filter:** The difference in general awareness between beneficiaries (95.65%) and non-beneficiaries (40.74%) is stark. Beneficiary status acts as an information filter, meaning that citizens are *informed* only after they have successfully navigated the system, rather than being informed *to* navigate the system. The system inherently favors those with pre-existing resources, connections, or time to secure benefits.

1.9 Conclusion and Policy Implications

The study concludes that DHUDA faces a significant challenge in transitioning from a functioning administrative body to an informed, participatory urban development authority. While it has achieved general recognition through its visible activities (high awareness of "activities and achievements" at 92.53%), it has created a parallel system where only the affluent and those already in the benefit pipeline are privy to the actionable knowledge of its processes. The acute exclusion of women and non-beneficiaries from structural and procedural

information constitutes a failure of equitable urban governance. The findings strongly suggest that DHUDA operates under the outdated Administrative Planning Model, where citizens are viewed as passive objects of planning, rather than the desired Communicative Planning Model.

DHUDA must urgently shift its communication strategy from a passive, administrative model to an active, targeted outreach model. This involves: The study concludes that DHUDA must pivot its strategy to address the structural sources of information poverty to truly operationalize the principles of the 74th Amendment.

1. **Creation of a Knowledge Accessibility Index (KAI):** DHUDA should establish a measurable KAI, focusing specifically on increasing the awareness scores of female citizens and non-beneficiaries regarding procedural and structural knowledge. Departmental performance should be partially tied to annual KAI improvements.
2. **Multilingual and Gender-Specific Dissemination:** Launch mandatory, ongoing **community outreach programs** in vernacular languages, using formats (e.g., street theatre, radio, dedicated local council meetings) that are accessible to those with lower literacy and women who may not attend formal administrative meetings.
3. **Mandatory Procedural Flowcharts:** All key procedures (e.g., land application, grievance redressal, NOC process) must be distilled into simple, universally available flowcharts and posted prominently at every point of public interaction, dismantling the opacity of bureaucracy that fuels the Actionable Knowledge Deficit.
4. **Proactive Engagement with the Excluded:** Implement a policy requiring mandatory, annual informational outreach to census-identified non-beneficiary clusters and women's self-help groups, transforming information flow from reactive (only when a citizen asks) to proactive and universal.

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