



PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN TRIPURA

Dr. Sumon Ali

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

Guest Faculty, Department of
Political Science, Tripura University,
Suryamaninagar, Agartala, Tripura,
India

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Sumon Ali

Abstract

Policy implementation is the critical interface between the state and society, translating governmental objectives into public programmes, services and developmental outcomes. This article examines public affairs and policy implementation in Tripura, focusing on the gap between policy design and local realities. The study is theoretically informed by public administration, development administration, policy implementation and governance perspectives, with particular reference to Indian scholars such as Mohit Bhattacharya, Avasthi S. R. Maheshwari, and Rumki Basu alongside the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach based on government documents, official portals, policy frameworks and academic literature. It explores Tripura's multilevel governance framework, involving state departments, district administration, Panchayati Raj institutions, urban local bodies, autonomous institutions, frontline officials and citizens. Particular attention is given to e-District services, CPGRAMS, Aamar Sarkar and participatory Panchayat planning. The article argues that effective implementation depends on administrative capacity, institutional coordination, citizen participation, digital inclusion, accessibility, responsiveness and policy feedback. It further highlights the importance of translating the Viksit Bharat@2047 vision into locally responsive governance outcomes. The study proposes a feedback-oriented model of citizen-centric policy implementation in Tripura, integrating local knowledge, grievance redressal and public participation to strengthen policy learning, administrative accountability and governance effectiveness.

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Introduction

The effectiveness of a democratic state is experienced not merely through legislation, policy announcements or budgetary allocations, but through everyday public service delivery and institutional responsiveness to citizens. A policy may be politically desirable, well designed and adequately funded, yet its outcomes may differ significantly at the implementation level. The gap between policy intention and actual outcomes is therefore a central concern of Political Science and Public Administration. In India, this issue has gained importance with the expansion of the state from a colonial administrative structure into a welfare-oriented, developmental and democratic system. Public administration now extends beyond law and order to development, poverty reduction, education, health, social justice and empowerment. Mohit Bhattacharya (2016) argues that contemporary public administration must move beyond a narrowly bureaucratic approach towards governance, development and citizen participation. This transformation is particularly significant in India's socially and regionally diverse context, where policies are implemented within complex political, economic and institutional environments. Indian administration has consequently moved from government towards governance, and increasingly from bureaucratic control towards citizen-centric, digital and participatory administration. Rumki Basu (2018) highlights the importance of constitutional structures, district administration, Panchayati Raj, accountability, transparency, administrative reforms and e-governance. Avasthi and Maheshwari similarly emphasise the institutional and operational dimensions of administration, while S. R. Maheshwari's analysis demonstrates the interrelationship between constitutional arrangements, political institutions and administrative structures. These perspectives indicate that policy implementation is both an administrative and political process.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) placed citizen-centric administration at the centre of governance, emphasising transparency, accountability, participation, simplified procedures, grievance redressal, stakeholder consultation and coordination with local governments (ARC, 2009). These concerns have gained further significance through digital governance

and the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047. The 2025 NITI Aayog Governing Council theme, “Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047,” highlighted the role of states in translating national aspirations into transformative outcomes grounded in local realities.

Within this broader Indian context, Tripura provides an important case for examining the relationship between policy design and implementation. As a northeastern border state, its distinctive geographical, social and institutional conditions shape governance. Policy implementation operates through state departments, district and sub-district administration, Panchayati Raj institutions, urban local bodies and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council.

Tripura has also introduced several citizen-centric mechanisms. Its *e-District* platform seeks to provide integrated digital services through automation and backend computerisation, with emphasis on efficient, transparent and accountable service delivery. The state's *CPGRAMS* enables citizens to lodge and track grievances, while the General Administration (Administrative Reforms) Department performs a nodal coordination role. *Aamar Sarkar* provides another digital mechanism for grievance reporting, citizen feedback and monitoring of development and basic-service issues at the Panchayat level.

These initiatives raise a crucial Political Science question: Do institutional reforms and policy mechanisms necessarily produce effective implementation at the local level? This article argues that the answer depends not simply on the existence of policies or institutions, but on their interaction with administrative capacity, institutional coordination, local governance, citizen participation, digital accessibility and continuous policy feedback.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Public Administration and the Changing Role of the State: Public administration has evolved from the Weberian emphasis on hierarchy, rules and formal authority towards a developmental and citizen-centric approach. Development administration views the state as an instrument of socioeconomic transformation, emphasising institutional capacity, public participation and programme implementation. Mohit Bhattacharya (2016) highlights the growing importance of governance, accountability, development and state–society relations. This perspective is relevant to Tripura, where policy implementation involves continuous interaction between administrative institutions and citizens.

Indian Administrative Perspective: India's constitutional democracy operates through federalism, parliamentary institutions, judicial review and decentralised governance. Avasthi and Maheshwari, Maheshwari (2001) and Rumki Basu (2018) examine administrative structures, district administration, local government, accountability, administrative reforms and e-governance. Their contributions provide a framework for analysing policy implementation across different levels of government. Accordingly, implementation in Tripura can be understood through the interaction of political authority, administrative institutions, local government and citizens.

Politics–Administration Relationship: The classical politics–administration dichotomy has limited explanatory value in contemporary governance. While political institutions determine policy priorities, administrators interpret and implement them within institutional, financial and social constraints. Basu (1989) highlights the relationship between political processes and development administration. In Tripura, policy outcomes consequently depend on the interaction between political direction, administrative capacity, local institutions and public expectations.

Policy Implementation Theory: Policy implementation theory explains why policy decisions do not automatically produce intended outcomes. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) emphasise institutional coordination and implementation difficulties, while Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) highlight policy objectives, legal frameworks, resources and contextual conditions. Lipsky (1980), through the concept of street-level bureaucracy, demonstrates how frontline officials exercise discretion in service delivery. These perspectives are relevant to Tripura, where grassroots outcomes depend on administrative practices and citizen interactions. Accordingly, policy implementation is conceptualised as a continuous process: Policy Formulation → Administrative Interpretation → Local Implementation → Citizen Experience → Feedback.

Literature Review

Indian scholarship has increasingly moved from the study of administration towards governance, accountability and citizen participation. Mohit Bhattacharya's work on new public administration emphasises the importance of relevance, social equity, participation and responsiveness. His approach provides a theoretical bridge between conventional public administration and contemporary governance. Rumki Basu's scholarship further broadens this perspective by connecting public administration with democracy, public policy, governance and the changing role of the state. Her work on Indian administration identifies district administration, Panchayati Raj, accountability, transparency and e-governance as important dimensions of contemporary governance (Basu, 2018).

Avasthi and Maheshwari's writings provide a foundational understanding of administrative structures and processes, particularly in the Indian setting. Their approach is valuable for examining how formal institutional arrangements influence actual administrative functioning. S. R. Maheshwari (2001) similarly demonstrates the importance of understanding Indian administration historically and institutionally rather than treating it as a purely technical apparatus. Mahendra Prasad Singh's scholarship on Indian political institutions and administration is also relevant because the functioning of Indian public administration cannot be separated from federalism, political institutions and democratic accountability. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission provides an important policy-oriented extension of this academic literature. Its citizen-centric administration report argues that good governance requires transparency, accountability, participation, accessible services and effective grievance mechanisms. The Commission specifically emphasised stakeholder consultation and citizen involvement

in governance. The ARC's recommendations therefore provide a normative benchmark against which contemporary governance initiatives in Tripura can be analysed.

Research Gap

The existing Indian literature provides strong theoretical and institutional explanations of public administration, governance and administrative reform. However, three gaps remain. First, much of the literature examines Indian administration at the national level. State-specific empirical studies are necessary because policy implementation is shaped by distinctive political, geographical and institutional contexts. Second, policy implementation is often examined primarily as an administrative question, whereas the public-affairs dimension—communication, citizen participation, grievance redressal and feedback—requires greater attention. Third, there is limited integrated analysis of how these dimensions interact within Tripura's contemporary governance architecture. This study therefore treats Tripura as the principal case and connects classical and contemporary Indian administrative theory with policy implementation and citizen-centric governance.

Research Objectives

The study has three objectives:

Objective 1: To examine the institutional and administrative processes through which selected public policies are implemented in Tripura.

Objective 2: To analyse the role of citizen participation, digital governance, public grievance redressal and local institutions in bridging the gap between policy design and local implementation.

Objective 3: To develop an analytical framework for strengthening citizen-centric and feedback-oriented policy implementation in Tripura in the context of contemporary governance and the Viksit Bharat@2047 agenda.

Research Questions

The study addresses four research questions:

RQ1: How do institutional and administrative structures influence the implementation of public policies in Tripura?

RQ2: What factors contribute to the gap between policy design and local implementation in Tripura?

RQ3: How do digital governance, public grievance redressal and participatory institutions shape citizen–government relations in the implementation process?

RQ4: How can policy feedback, institutional coordination and citizen participation be strengthened to promote more effective and inclusive governance in Tripura?

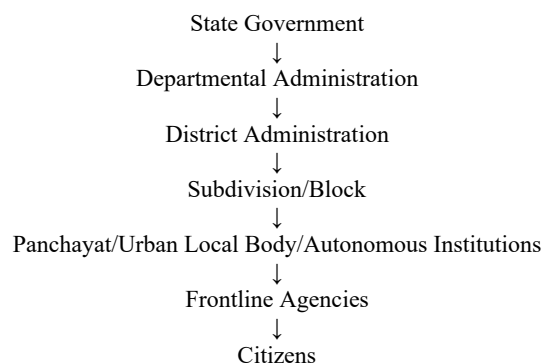
Methodology

The study follows a qualitative, exploratory and analytical research design. Rather than presenting fabricated survey results, it analyses policy and administrative arrangements through documentary research. The primary sources include: Government of Tripura policy documents; official administrative reports; Tripura e-District portal; Tripura CPGRAMS; Panchayat-related documents; state planning documents; national policy and administrative reform documents; Second Administrative Reforms Commission reports; and relevant academic literature. The analysis focuses on four major dimensions: Policy Design → Institutional Capacity → Citizen Interface → Policy Feedback. The study uses Tripura as a case study of multilevel policy implementation.

Tripura as the Principal Area of Study

Tripura offers a distinctive setting for studying policy implementation because governance operates through several institutional layers. At the state level, departments formulate policies and programmes. At the district level, administrative institutions translate policy decisions into operational programmes. At the local level, Panchayats and urban institutions provide important interfaces with citizens. The TTAADC adds an important dimension to governance in areas under its jurisdiction. Consequently, the policy implementation structure is not a simple hierarchy.

It can be conceptualised as:



Each layer can facilitate or constrain implementation. The importance of local context is particularly relevant in a state where geographical accessibility, social diversity, rural–urban differences and institutional variation can affect citizens' interaction with government. Therefore, the question is not simply whether a policy is available in Tripura but whether it is accessible, understandable, responsive and locally adaptable.

Selected Examples of Policy and Governance Initiatives in Tripura

e-District: Digitalisation of Citizen Services: Tripura's e-District initiative represents an important shift towards digital citizen-centric administration. The official portal describes districts as the governmental front end for government-to-citizen interaction and states that e-District seeks to improve departmental efficiency through workflow automation, backend computerisation and digitisation. Its objectives include improved service levels, capacity building of field functionaries, reliable and transparent services, and reduction of time and cost for government and citizens. The platform provides services relating to certificates and other citizen requirements. From the perspective of policy implementation theory, e-District attempts to reduce the institutional distance between policy entitlement and service delivery. The traditional administrative model often requires citizens to physically approach several offices. Digital governance attempts to restructure this relationship by creating a standardised interface. Yet digitisation alone does not resolve every implementation problem. The central analytical distinction is: *Digital availability does not automatically equal effective digital accessibility*. Citizens may differ in: digital literacy; internet access; language proficiency; ability to upload documents; awareness of procedures; and capacity to navigate online platforms. Thus, the effectiveness of e-District ultimately depends upon the interaction between technology and human administrative support.

CPGRAMS: Grievance Redressal as Citizen-Centred Administration: The Tripura CPGRAMS platform provides an institutional mechanism through which citizens can lodge and track grievances. The platform states that grievances can be submitted online and tracked through a unique registration number. The General Administration (Administrative Reforms) Department functions as the nodal policy-making, monitoring and coordinating department for public grievances, while redressal is undertaken by the concerned departments. This arrangement reflects the principles recommended by the Second ARC. However, grievance redressal should not be viewed simply as an administrative disposal mechanism. It can also be a policy feedback mechanism. Suppose several citizens independently report similar problems with a particular service. Those complaints may reveal a systemic implementation problem rather than isolated individual dissatisfaction. The administrative question should therefore move from: *“Was the complaint disposed of?”* to: *“What does the pattern of complaints tell us about policy implementation?”* This transformation would make grievance redressal an instrument of policy learning.

Aamar Sarkar: Rural Citizen–Government Interface: The emergence of Aamar Sarkar represents another important development in Tripura's governance architecture. A State Panchayat Resource Centre publication describes the platform as a digital mechanism for rural grievance redressal, feedback and reporting of development and basic-service issues relating to government departments. It also states that numerous departments have been onboarded. Its significance lies in the possibility of connecting local-level governance with digital reporting. This can potentially strengthen the feedback relationship: *Citizen → Panchayat/Local Institution → Department → Administrative Response*. If properly institutionalised, such a mechanism can reduce the informational distance between citizens and government. However, its effectiveness depends upon whether local complaints are systematically analysed and whether recurring problems influence policy decisions.

Participatory Panchayat Planning: Participatory governance provides another important area for examining implementation. The constitutional framework recognises Gram Sabha and provides a basis for Panchayats to undertake functions relating to economic development and social justice. Tripura's Panchayat planning framework incorporates participatory processes such as Gram Sabha and other community-level consultations in the preparation of Panchayat Development Plans. This demonstrates an institutional movement from: *Government decides → community receives towards: Community participates → local institution plans → government implements*. However, formal participation should not be equated with effective participation. The Political Science question is whether local participation influences: priority selection; allocation of resources; identification of beneficiaries; implementation monitoring; and evaluation. Thus, participatory institutions should be evaluated in terms of their substantive influence, not merely their procedural existence.

Administrative Capacity and Implementation in Tripura: The implementation of policy depends upon institutional capacity. Administrative capacity involves more than the number of officials. It includes:

- professional competence;
- financial resources;
- technical infrastructure;
- information systems;
- coordination mechanisms;
- leadership;
- monitoring; and
- organisational learning.

Indian public administration has long confronted the tension between expanding developmental responsibilities and limited administrative capacity. Mohit Bhattacharya's analysis of development administration is particularly relevant here because development-oriented administration requires institutions capable of managing change rather than merely enforcing rules. The challenge for Tripura is therefore not simply to introduce new policies but to ensure that implementing institutions possess the

capacity to translate those policies into local outcomes. This becomes especially significant when multiple departments are involved. A policy may require: *Finance + Rural Development + Health + Education + Local Government + District Administration*. Without effective coordination, responsibility may become fragmented. Thus, Coordination capacity is itself an important component of policy implementation capacity.

Politics, Bureaucracy and Policy Implementation: Policy implementation in a democracy cannot be separated from politics. Political institutions determine broad policy priorities, allocate resources and establish legal and institutional frameworks. Bureaucracy provides continuity, technical expertise and implementation capacity. The relationship is therefore not necessarily one of conflict. Rather: *Political Direction + Administrative Expertise + Institutional Accountability* can produce effective policy implementation. However, tensions can arise when policy objectives are unclear, administrative responsibilities overlap or institutional incentives diverge. Rumki Basu's analysis of the politico-administrative relationship in Indian development administration remains useful because it highlights the necessity of understanding administration within its political environment. In Tripura, therefore, policy implementation should be studied as an interaction between political leadership, elected representatives, permanent administration and local institutions.

Local Realities and the Implementation Gap

The phrase “local realities” in this article refers to the circumstances that policy designers may not fully capture at the formulation stage. These include:

- geographical conditions;
- local socioeconomic conditions;
- institutional capacity;
- community expectations;
- local knowledge;
- accessibility;
- digital capability;
- administrative practices.

The implementation gap emerges when policy assumptions do not correspond sufficiently with these realities. For analytical purposes, the gap can be divided into five major categories.

- Information Gap: A policy may exist without adequate citizen awareness.
- Accessibility Gap: A service may exist but remain difficult to obtain.
- Capacity Gap: Implementing agencies may lack sufficient personnel, technology or resources.
- Participation Gap: Formal participatory institutions may not always translate into substantive influence.
- Feedback Gap: Citizen complaints may be resolved individually without contributing to policy redesign.

These gaps should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of administrative failure. They should be investigated empirically as possible sources of variation in policy outcomes.

Viksit Bharat@2047 and the State-Level Governance Challenge

The contemporary policy context adds another important dimension. The *Viksit Bharat@2047* vision seeks to position India as a developed nation by 2047. The role of states is central because national development outcomes are ultimately produced through state and local institutions. The NITI Aayog Governing Council's 2025 theme, “Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047,” explicitly recognised the role of states in translating national aspirations into grassroots transformation and emphasised the importance of grounding long-term vision in local realities. This is directly relevant to the present study. For Tripura, *Viksit Bharat@2047* should not be understood solely in terms of economic growth or infrastructure. It also requires:

- effective institutions;
- accessible public services;
- accountable administration;
- responsive local government;
- digital inclusion;
- social participation;
- human development; and
- Citizen trust.

The concept of *Viksit Rajya* therefore provides an opportunity to rethink the relationship between state-level policy and local implementation. A developed state cannot simply have ambitious policies; it must possess institutions capable of translating those policies into everyday improvements in citizens' lives. Recent national administrative reform discussions similarly emphasise the importance of “reaching the last mile” and using governance reforms to improve citizen experience.

From Government To Governance: The Tripura Context

The transition from government to governance represents a conceptual change in the role of the state. Government traditionally emphasises: Authority → Hierarchy → Rules → Administration. Governance increasingly emphasises: Coordination → Participation → Networks → Accountability → Feedback

Mohit Bhattacharya's new public administration perspective and Rumki Basu's work on contemporary public administration are useful for understanding this transformation. In Tripura, this transformation can be observed through:

- e-District;
- CPGRAMS;
- Aamar Sarkar;
- Panchayat participation;
- digital public services;
- local government institutions.

These mechanisms indicate a movement towards a more interactive state–citizen relationship. However, governance should not be equated with technological innovation alone.

- A digital platform without citizen accessibility remains limited.
- A grievance portal without institutional responsiveness remains procedural.
- A Gram Sabha without meaningful influence remains participatory in form but potentially limited in substance.

Therefore, institutional quality determines whether governance innovations produce democratic and developmental value.

Towards a Citizen-Centric Policy Implementation Model for Tripura

Based on the theoretical and empirical discussion, this article proposes a Tripura Citizen-Centric Policy Implementation Model (TCCPIM). The model consists of six interconnected stages:

1. **Policy Design:** Policies should be based on clearly identified problems and realistic objectives.
2. **Institutional Capacity:** Implementing agencies should possess adequate human, financial, technological and organisational resources.
3. **Local Adaptation:** Policies should accommodate local conditions through district and local institutions.
4. **Citizen Interface:** Citizens should receive information and accessible channels for participation and service delivery.
5. **Grievance and Feedback:** Citizen complaints and experiences should be systematically documented.
6. **Policy Learning:** Feedback should inform administrative reform and subsequent policy redesign.

The process should therefore be circular, rather than linear.



Fig.1 : Tripura Citizen-Centric Policy Implementation Model (TCCPIM)

Analytical Discussion

The central finding of this conceptual and documentary analysis is that policy implementation is fundamentally a political-administrative process.

1. The first implication is that policy design and implementation cannot be separated completely. A poorly designed policy may create implementation problems even when administrative institutions function efficiently.
2. The second implication is that administrative capacity must be understood broadly. Staffing and finance are important, but technological capacity, coordination, communication and organisational learning are equally significant.
3. The third implication concerns citizen participation. Democratic participation should not end with elections. Citizens must have institutional opportunities to communicate needs, access services, raise grievances and provide feedback.
4. The fourth implication concerns digital governance. Technology can improve accessibility and transparency, but only when combined with digital inclusion and responsive backend administration.
5. The fifth implication concerns local government. Panchayats and other local institutions can contribute local knowledge that centralised policy design may not capture adequately.
6. Finally, grievance redressal should be transformed from a reactive mechanism into a proactive instrument of policy learning.

These arguments correspond closely with the Second ARC's citizen-centric vision, which emphasises participation, transparency, accountability, simplified procedures and accessible grievance mechanisms.

Policy Implications for Tripura

The analysis suggests several interconnected policy directions. First, Tripura should strengthen policy feedback mechanisms so that information generated at the local level reaches state-level policy institutions. Second, digital governance should be accompanied by assisted digital access, particularly for citizens who may experience technological or informational barriers.

Third, grievance systems such as CPGRAMS and Aamar Sarkar can be used not merely to dispose of complaints but to identify recurring systemic implementation problems. Fourth, participatory planning should focus on the substantive incorporation of citizen priorities rather than merely fulfilling procedural requirements. Fifth, district and local officials should receive continuous capacity-building in: digital governance; citizen communication; grievance handling; policy interpretation; data-based monitoring; and participatory administration. Sixth, interdepartmental coordination should be strengthened for policies requiring multiple agencies. Seventh, policy evaluation should distinguish between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. For example:

Input: financial allocation

Output: number of services delivered

Outcome: improved access

Impact: improvement in quality of life

The last two dimensions are particularly important for evaluating citizen-centric governance.

Conclusion

The central concern of this article has been the relationship between policy design and local realities in Tripura. Drawing upon Indian administrative thought, policy implementation theory and contemporary governance perspectives, the study has argued that implementation cannot be reduced to the mechanical execution of policy decisions. The Indian experience demonstrates that public administration has evolved from a predominantly regulatory and hierarchical system towards a developmental, democratic and increasingly citizen-centric form of governance. Mohit Bhattacharya's conception of new public administration, the institutional perspectives of Avasthi and Maheshwari and S. R. Maheshwari, Rumki Basu's analysis of Indian administration and the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission collectively demonstrate the importance of responsiveness, participation, accountability and administrative capacity.

Tripura illustrates these transformations through its evolving governance architecture. The e-District platform seeks to make citizen services more efficient and transparent. CPGRAMS creates a formal channel for grievance redressal. Aamar Sarkar attempts to connect rural citizens and local governance institutions through digital feedback. Participatory planning mechanisms provide institutional spaces for local consultation. Yet the existence of these mechanisms does not by itself establish successful policy implementation. Their effectiveness depends upon the quality of institutional interaction, administrative capacity, accessibility, citizen awareness, participation and responsiveness.

The major analytical conclusion is therefore that the implementation gap is not simply a gap between policy and administration; it is a gap between policy assumptions and lived institutional and social realities. For Tripura, the challenge is to develop a governance system in which policy design is informed by local knowledge, implementation is supported by adequate institutional capacity, citizens have meaningful access to government and feedback is systematically incorporated into policy learning. This becomes particularly significant in the context of Viksit Bharat@2047. The vision of a developed India necessarily depends upon the development of capable and responsive states. The idea of Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat therefore requires Tripura to translate national developmental aspirations into locally meaningful institutional outcomes.

The most appropriate model is consequently not: Government designs → Administration implements → Citizen receives. It should instead be: Government designs → Institutions implement → Citizens experience → Citizens provide feedback → Institutions learn → Policy is improved. Such a feedback-oriented model can help transform public affairs from a peripheral communication function into a central component of democratic policy implementation. In this sense, bridging the gap between policy design and local realities is not merely an administrative objective. It is a democratic imperative. The quality of a state's governance is ultimately reflected in the extent to which citizens can experience public policy as accessible, accountable, responsive and meaningful in their everyday lives.

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