



Survey Research Lanka Pvt. Ltd



The Island-wide Assessment of the Usage of Dispute Intake Boxes

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-STRIDE



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Acronyms

CBO - Community-Based Organizations
 DIB - Dispute intake box
 DOs – Development Officers
 DS - Divisional Secretariat
 DSD - Divisional Secretarial Division
 GN - Grama Niladari
 GNO - Grama Niladari Officer
 IDIs - In-depth Interviews
 JD – Job Description
 JPs – Justice of the Peace
 MBC - Mediation Boards Commission
 MDO – Mediation Development Officers
 MTO - Mediation Training Officers
 SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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We sincerely thank all the stakeholders who contributed by participating in this study amidst their busy schedules. Special thanks to the Mediation Training Officers, Mediation Development Officers, and Community-Based Organizations. Further, we highly acknowledge the support of Mediation Board Chairpersons, Grama Niladari Officers, Police Officers, and all other community intermediaries and stakeholders whose cooperation ensured the smooth implementation of the data collection of this study across various regions. This enables a robust understanding of the ground-level realities of DIB implementation and the possibility of improving its performance.

Lastly, and most importantly, the research, data collection, quality control, and data analysis team of Survey Research Lanka, an independent research company, is appreciated and acknowledged for their commitment to conducting this study through a more rigorous and ethical research process and generating an impactful research report with actionable recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study evaluates the effectiveness of Dispute Intake Boxes (DIBs) introduced by the Mediation Boards Commission (MBC) in Sri Lanka, aiming to improve access to dispute resolution services. DIBs were placed in Divisional Secretariat (DS) Offices nationwide in 2022 to streamline dispute submissions, addressing difficulties in accessing Mediation Board Chairpersons. Despite the DIBs being designed with instructional materials and forms to facilitate dispute resolution, early data from 2023 showed low usage, prompting the MBC to investigate the barriers to adoption. The study highlighted several assumptions that may serve as barriers to the effective usage of the DIB system. These include the lack of availability and visibility of DIB, which could hinder access; insufficient public awareness of the system, limiting its adoption; unfamiliarity with how the DIB system works, potentially discouraging users; a lack of confidence in its effectiveness, leading to low engagement; and negative attitudes toward DIB and its processes, which may result in reluctance or refusal to use the system altogether. These assumptions were put forward to identify factors that could impact the low usage of DIB across the country. The study used a mixed-method approach, through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with intermediaries to gather qualitative insights, surveys to collect quantitative data from the intermediaries, and participatory observations of the DIB implementation at the DS office, incorporating a mystery disputant audit approach, for gathering data from a range of community and institutional representatives, including Mediation Development Officers (MDOs), Grama Niladari Officers (GNOs), and local leaders. The data collection of the research was conducted from October 4th to November 5th, 2024. The study faced challenges in sourcing disputants due to confidentiality concerns, leading to the use of intermediaries as proxies to understand low DIB usage. Additional difficulties included limited access to some intermediaries and the reluctance of certain officers to participate due to privacy concerns, which further restricted the survey sample. Key findings revealed that the actual usage of DIBs is low. Chairpersons noted that disputes are rarely submitted via DIBs, despite recognizing the system's potential to expedite the resolution process. Challenges included the unavailability of DIBs and supporting documents in several DS Offices, poor maintenance, lack of privacy, and negative perceptions of the DS Office as a venue for dispute resolution. Additionally, MDOs, while aware of the DIB, were not proactive in recommending it to disputants. The study suggests that improving awareness, training stakeholders, enhancing DIB visibility, and creating a formal follow-up system for submitted disputes could increase community engagement. A comprehensive strategy, involving all stakeholders and addressing barriers, is crucial for ensuring the DIB system's sustainability and success in Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER 01: INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Mediation Boards in Sri Lanka provide a grassroots alternative dispute resolution system designed to offer a community-centered, cost-effective, and timely process for resolving local disputes outside formal court systems. Traditionally, cases have been referred to the Mediation Boards by the police and courts or submitted directly by disputants to the Chairpersons of the Boards. However, challenges in accessing Chairpersons were identified in 2020, with many disputants facing difficulties in reaching them, leading to delays and limited accessibility. In response, the Mediation Boards Commission (MBC) introduced Dispute Intake Boxes (DIBs) in 2022 to streamline the process. A total of 329 DIBs were placed across Divisional Secretariat (DS) Offices nationwide, accompanied by instructional materials and intake forms to assist disputants in understanding the submission process. Mediation Development Officers (MDOs) were assigned to manage the DIBs, collect applications, and ensure timely delivery to the appropriate Chairpersons. Despite the initiative's goal to increase access and convenience, reports from the MBC revealed low usage of DIBs in the first quarter of 2023. This limited uptake prompted the MBC to recommend a comprehensive assessment to evaluate the effectiveness and usage of the DIBs across the country. The assessment aims to assess current usage patterns, identify barriers to adoption, and explore opportunities to improve public awareness and engagement with the DIB system. By addressing these issues, the MBC aims to enhance the accessibility of mediation services, ensuring that the DIB system becomes an effective tool for dispute resolution in Sri Lanka.

1.2. STUDY ASSUMPTIONS

Against this backdrop, it was clear that the DIB was launched to make it convenient for disputants to submit their dispute applications, thereby increasing their access to Mediation Boards for dispute submission. However, as it was found already that the usage of DIB has been far lower than the expectation of the initiatives, this study aims to conjecture possible factors that may impact the low usage of DIB across the country. As a result, the following five assumptions were put forward for experimentation in this study to uncover suitable recommendations for increasing the usage of DIB.

A1: Lack of availability and visibility of DIB will impact reduced DIB usage.

A2: Lack of public awareness of DIB will impact reduced DIB usage.

A3: Lack of familiarity with the DIB system will impact reduced DIB usage.

A4: Lack of confidence in DIB will result in low or no usage of DIB.

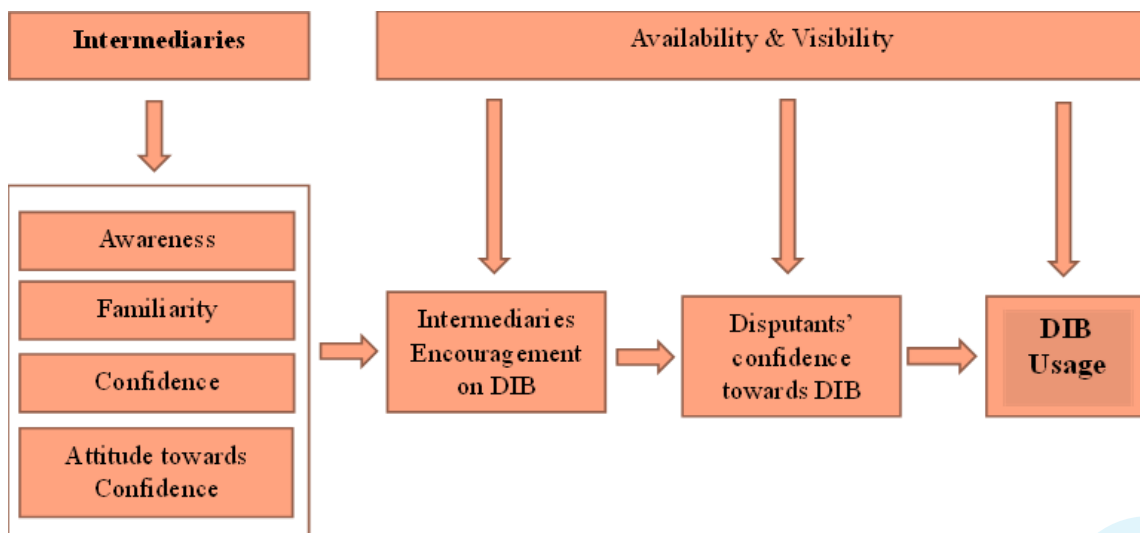
A5: Negative attitudes toward DIB and DIB processes will result in low or no usage of DIB.

1.3. STUDY FRAMEWORK

Accordingly, the study framework illustrates how various factors affect the usage of DIBs in Sri Lanka. The availability and visibility of DIB would encourage disputants to use DIB, and intermediaries would encourage its usage. The disputants usually reach Grama Niladari, Police Officers, religious leaders, community associations leaders, community-based organizations, Justices of the Peace, lawyers, etc. when they need a consultation about any dispute they face in their day-to-day life. Further, they would interact with experts like Mediation Board Chairpersons in the process of dispute mediation. With the launch of DIB, Mediation Training Officers, and Mediation Development Officers started playing a pivotal role in smoothening the dispute submission process and shaping disputants' engagement with the DIB system. Therefore, awareness, familiarity, confidence, and attitude towards confidence (Attitude towards confidence reflects how individuals perceive and value confidence in themselves and others, shaping their behaviour and interactions) of these stakeholders, defined as intermediaries in this study, would be motivated to encourage the disputants to use the DIB via building disputant confidence in DIB.

The framework below identifies the above-discussed factors that impact DIB usage: awareness, familiarity, confidence, and attitudes toward confidence. It also includes the involvement of the intermediaries in building disputants' confidence in the DIB system and achieving the aim of the DIB system's launch in the country (refer to Figure 1).

Figure 1: Study Framework



1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study was designed with three primary purposes per the above framework. These three objectives are.

1. To assess the usefulness and usage of the DIBs through an island-wide assessment.
2. To develop recommendations to increase the usage of DIBs among communities.
3. To develop recommendations to monitor the usage of DIBs effectively.

Therefore, this research was designed as an island-side study to comprehensively understand the above assumptions' influence on DIB usage and their usefulness in speeding up the dispute submission process under the first study purpose listed above. This objective seeks to gather insights into how frequently DIBs are used and the extent to which they meet community needs. Second, the study aimed to develop targeted recommendations to increase DIB usage among community members, identifying strategies to overcome barriers. Finally, the study sought to create recommendations for effectively monitoring DIB usage, ensuring its implementation and impact can be tracked over time, allowing for adjustments for improvements.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In achieving the above study objectives, this study aims to answer the research questions below:

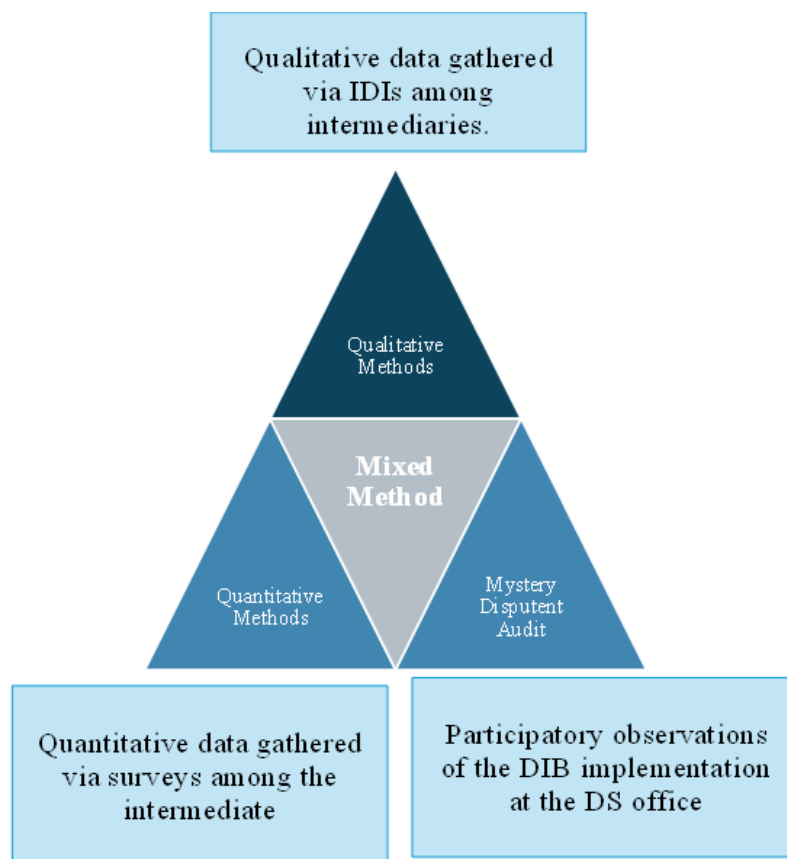
1. Is DIB available and visible for the disputants at DS Offices where it was launched?
2. To what extent are intermediaries aware of the DIB system?
3. To what extent are intermediaries familiar with the DIB system for dispute submission?
4. How confident are the intermediaries with the DIB system?
5. What are the attitudes of intermediaries about the DIB system?
6. To what extent do intermediaries encourage the usage of DIB for disputants as a dispute submission method?
7. Has the disputant's confidence in DIB usage been created so far?
8. What are the recommendations of intermediaries about the placement of the DIB to make the dispute submission process effective?
9. What are the other challenges and recommendations for improving the DIB system?
10. How can the performance of the DIB process be tracked and monitored?

CHAPTER 02: RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To achieve the study objectives, mixed research methods, including both qualitative and quantitative research methods, were used. Further, it was evident at the study design stage that the traditional interviews and surveys alone would not reveal some ground-level realities; hence, an additional observation tool was added to the study design, which is mystery disputant audits¹ that were conducted in all DS Offices where DIB was placed at the launch. This comprehensive study design is expected to reveal nuanced evidence about all the research questions discussed above. The methodological framework below depicts the key methods used in the study (refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2: Study Design



¹ Mystery disputant audits involve undercover participation to evaluate the DIB implementation at the DS office, allowing for authentic insights into processes, interactions, and potential inefficiencies.

2.2. TARGET GROUPS, SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE

2.2.1. TARGET GROUPS

Target groups were selected for their critical roles in mediation and dispute resolution, offering comprehensive insights into systemic dynamics that disputants' limited perspectives could not provide. Due to confidentiality concerns and challenges in sourcing disputants, intermediaries were used as proxies to understand disputants' low usage of DIBs, as they frequently interacted during the dispute submission process.

The following were the major target groups of the study:

1. Mediation Training Officers (MTOs)
2. Mediation Development Officers (MDOs)²
3. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)³
4. Mediation Board Chairpersons (Chairpersons)
5. Grama Niladari Officers (GNOs)
6. Police Officers
7. Religious Leaders
8. Lawyers
9. Justice of the Peace (JPs)
10. Community Association Leaders⁴

2.2.2. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sampling technique of the study relies on three major stages:

Stage one involved selecting the Divisional Secretarial Divisions (DSDs) where the study should be conducted. 329 DSDs were subjected to the DIB launch; hence, all 329 DSDs were considered as the sample framework of the survey. When DSDs were selected randomly, random selection was done within each district so that at least one DSD from each district would be represented in the study. Therefore, DSDs were selected based on Stratified Random Sampling. 60 DSDs were chosen for the sampling survey. Although randomly selected DSDs were considered for the surveys, all DSDs were considered for the Mystery

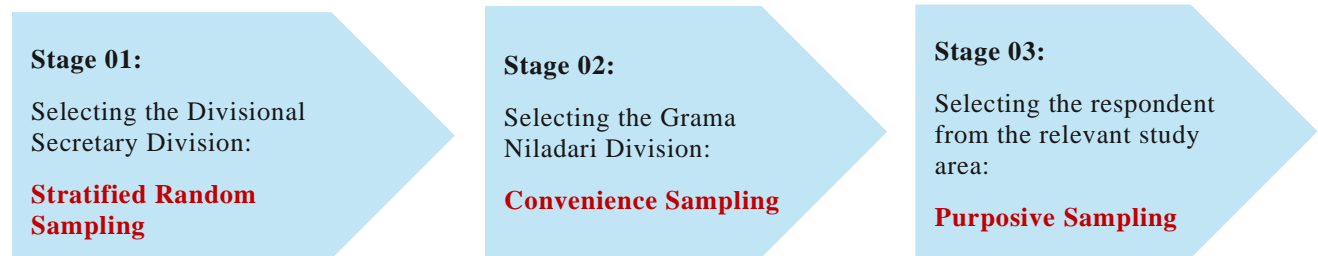
² Mediation Development Officers are attached to DS Offices, including Development Officers.

³ Community-based organizations working in LGBTQ+, women, youth, microfinance, and migration

⁴ Community Associations include Welfare Associations, Youth Associations, Women Associations, Rural Development Associations, Occupational Oriented Associations

Disputants Audits, as the key purpose of the audit was to assess the DIB's availability and visibility at DSDs. At stage two, Grama Niladri Divisions within the selected DSDs were chosen based on convenience sampling, where all types of intermediaries can be contacted for the survey. At the final sampling stage, pre-defined intermediaries listed under the target group above were recruited based on purposive sampling in the chosen Grama Niladri Division (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3: Sampling Technique



2.2.3. SAMPLE SIZE

Table 1: Sampling Size

Study Group	Research Method	Data collection tool	Sample
MTOs	Quantitative methods	CATI ⁵ Surveys	16
MDOs			163
Grama Niladri Officers		CAPI ⁶ Surveys	60
Police Officers			60
Religious Leaders			60
Lawyers			60
Justice of the Peace (JPs)			60
Community Association members			60
Community-Based Organization (CBOs)	Qualitative methods	IDIs	5
Chairpersons			10
Mystery Audits	Observations	Mystery Disputant Audits ⁷	329
Total Surveys, discussions and audits			883

⁵ CATI – Computer Aided telephonic Interviews - surveys that are conducted via telephone survey administration

⁶ CAPI – Computer Aided Personal Interviews - surveys that are conducted face-to-face survey administration

⁷ Mystery Disputant Audits – A randomly selected community member is trained to act as a disputant and go through the dispute submission process using DIB.

2.3. DATA ANALYZING TOOLS

This assessment uses SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to analyze quantitative survey data. SPSS enables researchers to perform various statistical analyses, including **descriptive statistics** (e.g., frequencies, means, and percentages) to summarize and describe the data. Further, correlations and cross-tabulation of data were performed to understand the connections between factors that impact the usage of DIB. **Content Analysis** is applied to qualitative data, particularly for responses to open-ended survey questions or interview transcripts. This method involves coding the data to identify keywords or concepts. By systematically categorizing the content, content analysis determines the frequency of viewpoints or topics, providing a structured way to interpret respondents' opinions and experiences. **Thematic Analysis** deeply explores qualitative data by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes). Unlike content analysis, which focuses on identifying specific elements, thematic analysis emphasizes understanding the meaning behind those elements and capturing the nuances of participants' perspectives.

These analysis methods provided a well-rounded approach to examining statistical patterns and in-depth perspectives on DIB usage across various stakeholder groups. This multi-method approach ensures the findings are comprehensively analyzed and validated before deriving conclusions and study implications.

2.4. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

The study encountered several challenges during its design and implementation, which impacted the research process. One significant challenge was sourcing a sample of disputants who had used the DIB system and those who had submitted disputes directly to Mediation Board Chairpersons. Due to confidentiality concerns, the research team could not directly survey disputants, so intermediaries were selected as proxies to gather insights on disputants' low usage of DIBs, assuming that disputants often interacted with these intermediaries during the dispute submission process. In addition to this challenge, the research team faced issues accessing contact details for some intermediaries, limiting the sample size among certain groups. For example, the study planned to survey all 329 Mediation Development Officers (MDOs) but only reached 163, although efforts were made to ensure district representation by covering at least one officer per district. Another hurdle was the unwillingness of some officers to participate in the survey, with some citing privacy concerns, which further restricted the sample size. These challenges in both sampling and data collection were key limitations in the study.

CHAPTER 03: FINDINGS

This study investigates the factors influencing the use of DIBs in Sri Lanka, offering a comprehensive analysis of their current implementation and societal reception. The research evaluates the extent of DIB usage across different regions and communities, assessing its effectiveness as a tool for resolving disputes. It explores whether DIBs are available where needed and examines their visibility in public spaces, such as community centers and government offices, where disputants are likely to encounter them. The study also focuses on accessibility, considering factors like physical access, language barriers, technological infrastructure, and the availability of support services like mediators. It looks at the strategic placement of DIBs in locations where disputants might seek help, and whether these boards are integrated with additional resources like legal assistance or alternative dispute resolution information. Another key aspect of the study is the awareness and attitudes toward DIBs among stakeholders, including the general public, local authorities, and community leaders. It gauges the level of trust and confidence in the system, investigating concerns about its fairness, reliability, and the potential for bias. The findings highlight both the strengths and challenges of the DIB system, identifying areas for improvement, such as increasing its visibility, educating stakeholders, and building public trust. Ultimately, the study aims to inform policy recommendations that could enhance dispute resolution practices, promote greater social harmony, and foster widespread acceptance of the DIB system in Sri Lanka.

3.1. USEFULNESS & USAGE OF THE DIB



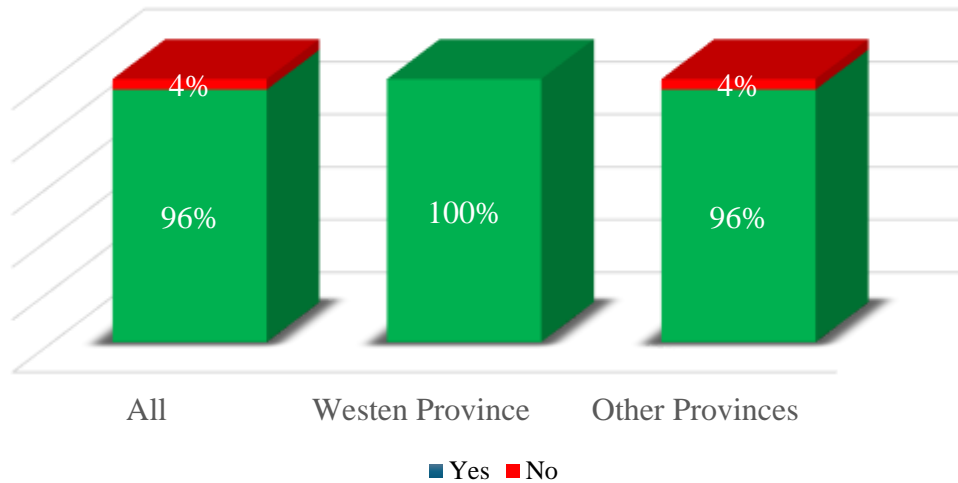
This section examines the DIB's utilization frequencies as a mechanism for community members to submit their disputes at the DS Offices. It will explore trends in usage across different provinces, highlighting variations in community engagement and identifying potential factors that influence DIB utilization. Further, this section will dive deep into stakeholders' perspectives on the usefulness and effectiveness of the DIB system in achieving its aims.

3.1.1. USAGE OF DIB

Of the 163 MDOs surveyed in this study, 157 (i.e., 96%) indicated that community members had contacted MDOs to seek guidance about submitting their disputes through the DS Office at least once. Although there is a slightly lower incident rate outside the Western Province of the community reaching DS Offices seeking guidance on dispute submission, the DS

Officers are being contacted by the community to inquire about dispute submission (refer to Figure 4).

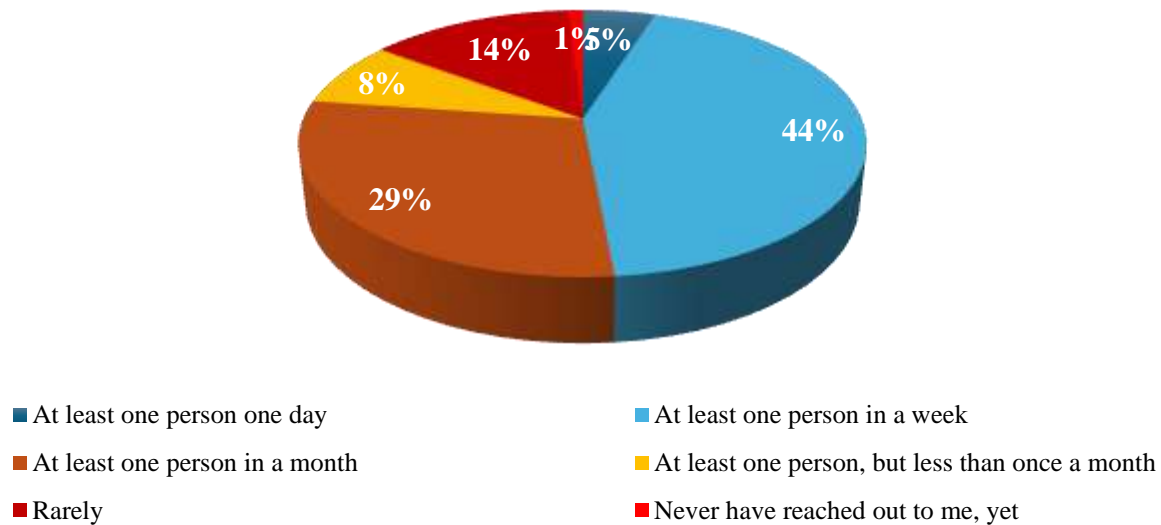
Figure 4: Community Engagement in the Dispute Submission Process through the DS Office⁸



Most (44%) of MDOs noted receiving inquiries at least once a week, and another 29 percent reported monthly interaction, reflecting a solid community reliance on DS Officers for guidance in dispute submission. Although 14 percent stated that community members rarely contact them, this may be due to limited awareness of the possibility of getting advice from the DS Office on dispute submission or adequate guidance within the community through other means like from the GNOs, Police Officer, etc. (refer to Figure 5). This data implies that most communities recognize DS Offices as a place to seek advice on the dispute submission process.

⁸ Question: Have you or any other Officers been reached out by any community member to submit their disputes through the DS Office as of your experience and observation?

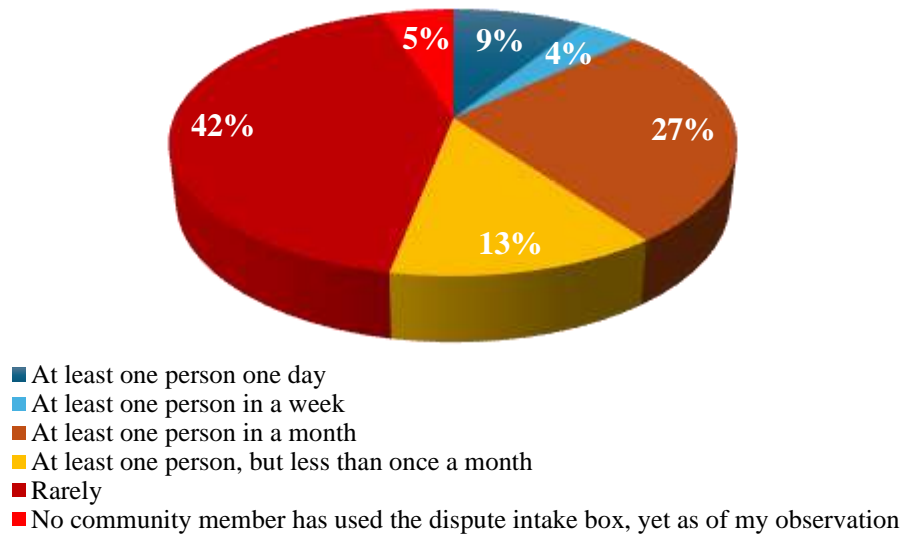
Figure 5: Frequency of community reaching DS Office to seek guidance on dispute submission⁹



The study findings revealed that using the DIB at DS Offices is generally infrequent. 09 percent of MDOs surveyed indicated that at least one community member submits a dispute daily, while only 04 percent specified weekly submissions. The most common frequency is monthly submissions, noting that disputes are filed at least once a month, according to 27 percent of MDOs. 13 percent of MDOs observed disputes submitted occasionally and less frequently than once a month. However, a significant portion, 42 percent, stated that disputes are submitted rarely, indicating that the DIB is only sometimes utilized (refer to Figure 6). This pattern of usage of DIB could be due to many reasons that will be discussed in below sections.

⁹ Question: Based on your observations, how frequently do community members reach out to you to get advice on submitting their disputes through the DS office?

Figure 6: Frequency of Community Dispute Submissions to the DIB¹⁰

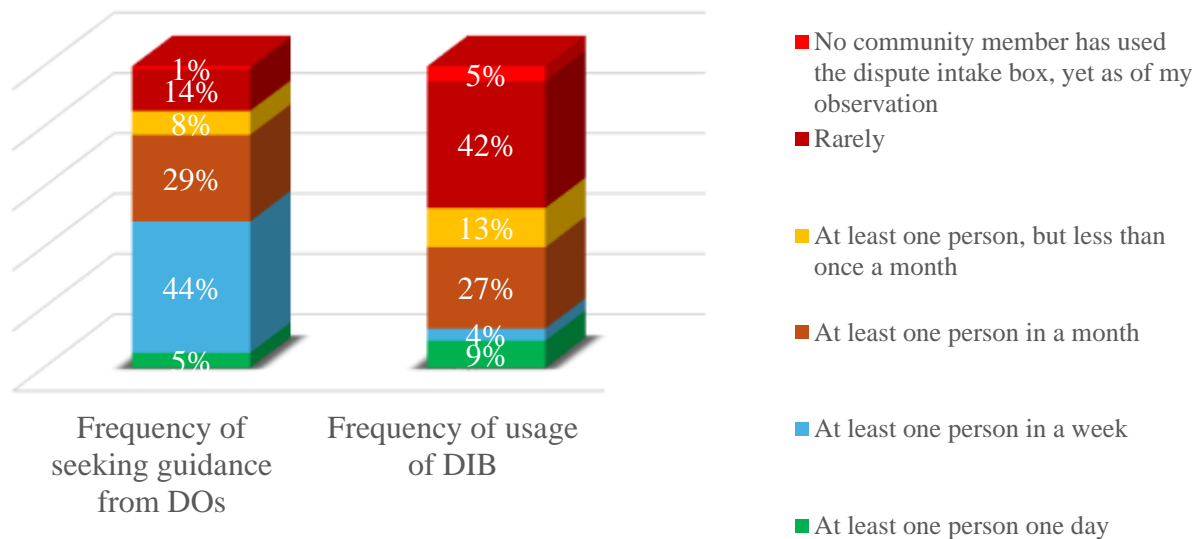


As depicted in

Figure 7, the analysis suggests that while community members frequently engage with MDOs for dispute submission guidance, the community underutilizes the DIB for dispute submission.

¹⁰ Question: Based on your observations, how frequently do community members submit their disputes to the Dispute Intake Box at your DS office?

Figure 7 : Comparison between Frequency of Community seeking MDOs' advice for dispute submission and DIB usage for Dispute Submissions



Chairperson interviews reveal that the usage of the DIB for filing complaints has been minimal across several districts in recent years. Chairpersons from Uva, North Western, Northern and Central provinces reported receiving few or no complaints via DIB, with some districts seeing no complaints for months. In contrast, the Chairperson from Western Province noted receiving some complaints through DIB, though others were submitted directly. This indicates a low adoption or effectiveness of DIB for dispute resolution in these areas.

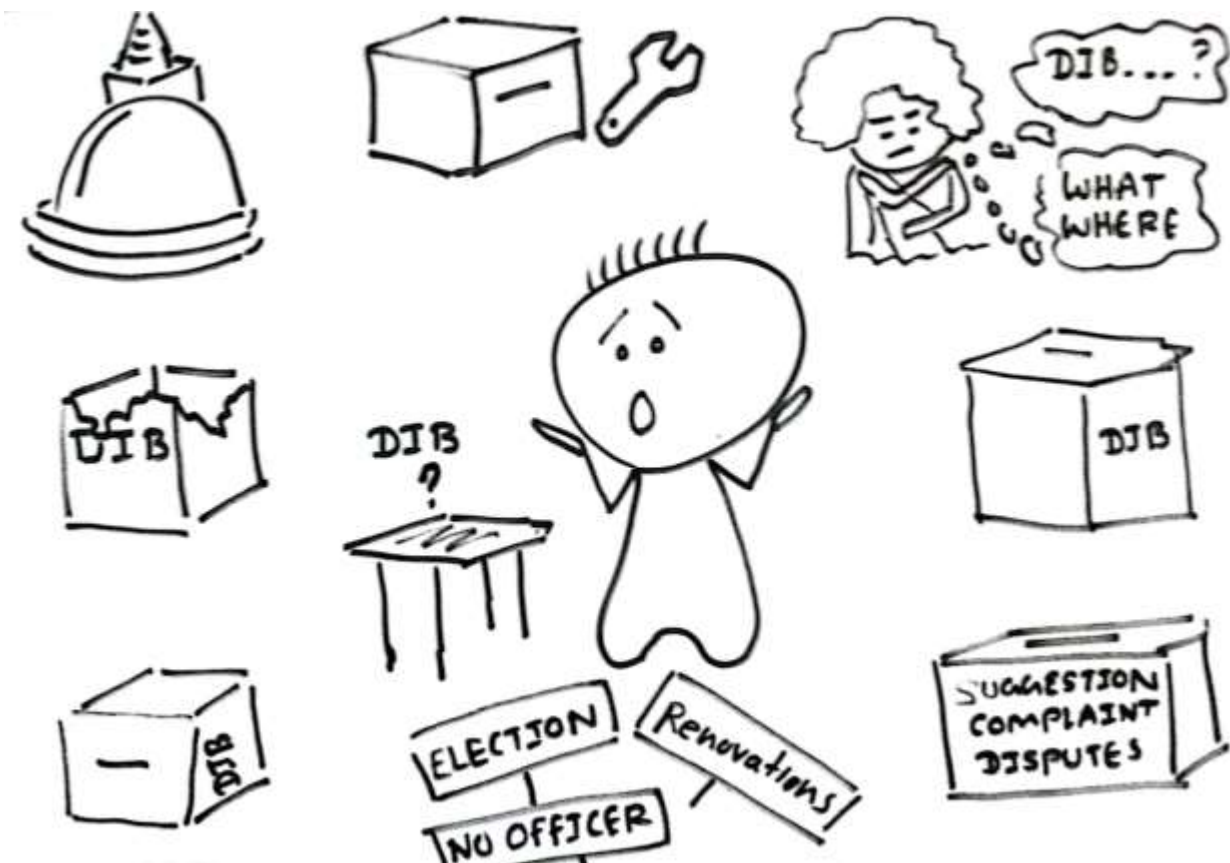
3.1.2. USEFULNESS OF THE DIBS

The DIB serves as a formal mechanism for reporting community disputes, aiming to provide a safe, confidential, and structured platform, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others in vulnerable situations. CBOs emphasize the DIB's importance in empowering these groups, offering an accessible alternative to traditional systems that may feel intimidating or unsafe. Several CBO representatives view it as a critical tool for fostering trust and ensuring grievances are addressed without stigma or retaliation.

However, Chairpersons, who are key stakeholders in the mediation process, highlight several challenges undermining the DIB's effectiveness. They point to a lack of promotion and community awareness as major barriers, leading to low utilization and limited trust in the system. Community scepticism stems from doubts about the transparency of the process,

Despite recognizing the DIB's potential to enhance dispute resolution by ensuring confidentiality, impartiality, and fairness, both CBOs and Chairpersons agree that significant efforts are needed to increase awareness, build trust, and ensure accountability. Transparency in handling complaints and visible results from reported disputes are critical to transforming the DIB into an effective and trusted community tool. Without these measures, the DIB risks being viewed as a token gesture rather than a functional solution.

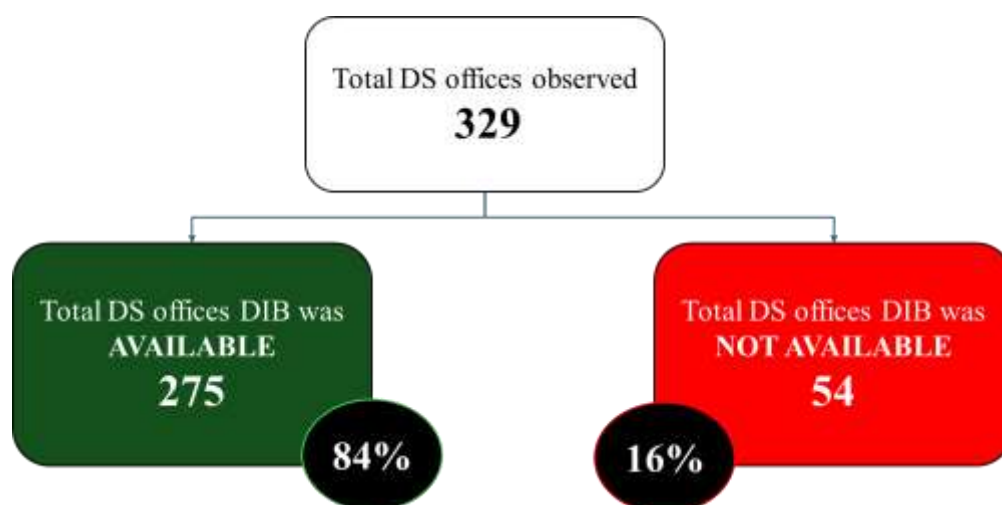
3.2. AVAILABILITY OF THE DIB AT THE DS OFFICES



Availability and visibility of the launched DIB in all 329 DS Offices are crucial for the aims of the launch to be successful. However, traditional surveys or interviews cannot accurately capture research availability and visibility. Therefore, this research deployed a non-conventional research method called Mystery Disputant Audits, in which a pool of people was trained to be disputants and visit the DS Offices to seek guidance and submit a dispute, where the disputant participates in the process of dispute submission via DS Office and observe the DIB and its functionality, involvement, and engagement of MDOs in the process to test whether launched investments are being harvested well at the ground level. Further, to validate the availability and non-availability of DIBs, re-check processes through a survey among relevant MDOs from relevant DS Offices were conducted. This chapter draws a conclusion on the availability and visibility of DIB based on findings from the observations and surveys among MDOs.

Of 329 DS Offices, 84 percent (275) had DIBs. 16 percent of all DS Offices did not have DIBs during the Mystery Audit period¹¹, that is 54 DS Offices across the country and 275 DS Offices had DIBs (refer to Figure 8)

Figure 8: DIB Availability Status in the Country



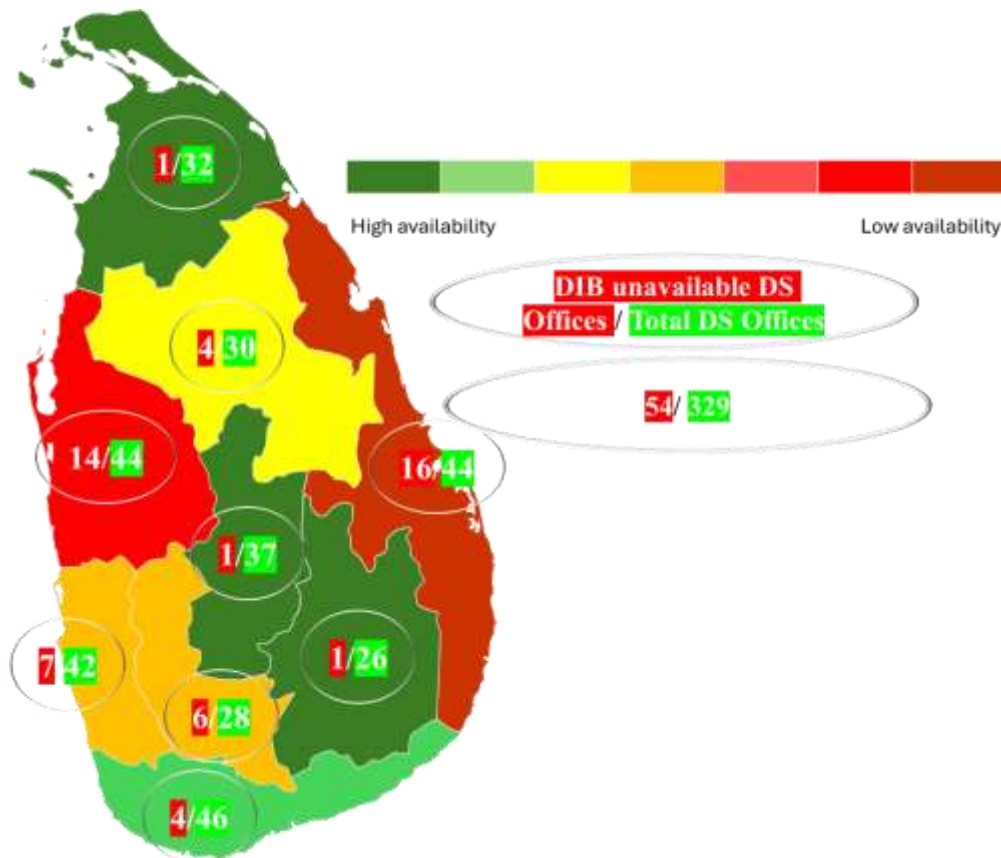
Overall, DIB availability is high across the country. While most of the DIBs were kept and maintained properly, the mystery auditor found that some of the available DIBs had not been appropriately kept, and maintained, observing some DIBs covered with dust, unlocked or

¹¹ The maximum number of Mystery Disputants Audits occurred from 10th October to 30th October 2024,

broken doors, corroded and rusted locks and lock holes, loose hinges, missing or faded labels, jammed or faulty locks, scratches on the box, etc.

According to the data presented in the map below, DIB unavailability was reported in some DS Offices in each province, and the maximum number of DS Offices where DIB was not found is in the Eastern and North Western Provinces, where the total number of DS Offices is also highest in the country. The 16 and 14 DS Offices in these provinces did not have the DIB, respectively. Most DS Offices in the Central, Uva, and Northern Provinces had DIBs except for one DIB missing in each province. 4 of 46 DS Offices in Southern, 4 of 30 DS Offices in North Central, 6 of 28 DS Offices in Sabaragamuwa, and 7 of 42 DS Offices in Western, DIB was not available to be observed by the mystery disputants who visited the relevant DS Offices for the audit (refer to Figure 9).

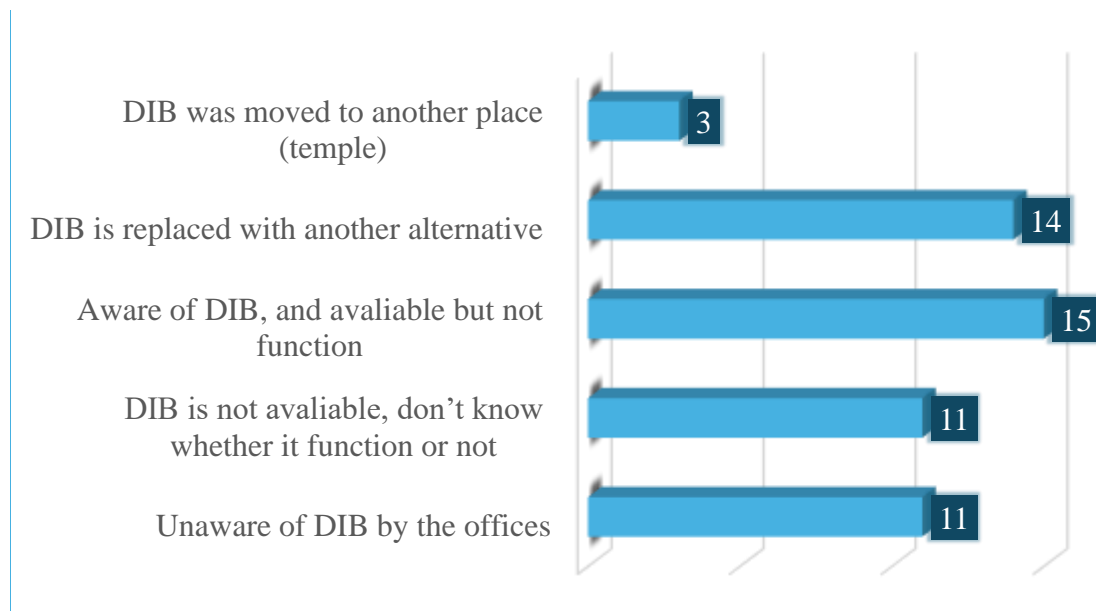
Figure 9: Number of DIB Unavailable DS Offices in each province in the country



There are many reasons for DIBs' unavailability. When it comes to DIBs missing DS Offices, there were the following cases, as presented in Figure 10.

- *'Officers are unaware of the DIB'* (11 cases of 54 DIB missing cases).
- *'DIB is unavailable, and no one knows where it is'* (11 cases of 54 DIB missing cases).
- *'Officers are aware, but DIB does not function'* (15 cases of 54 DIB missing cases).
- *'DIB is replaced with an alternative box'* (14 cases of 54 DIB missing cases).
- *'DIB is moved to a temple'* (3 cases of 54 DIB missing cases).

Figure 10: Missing cases by each observed reason



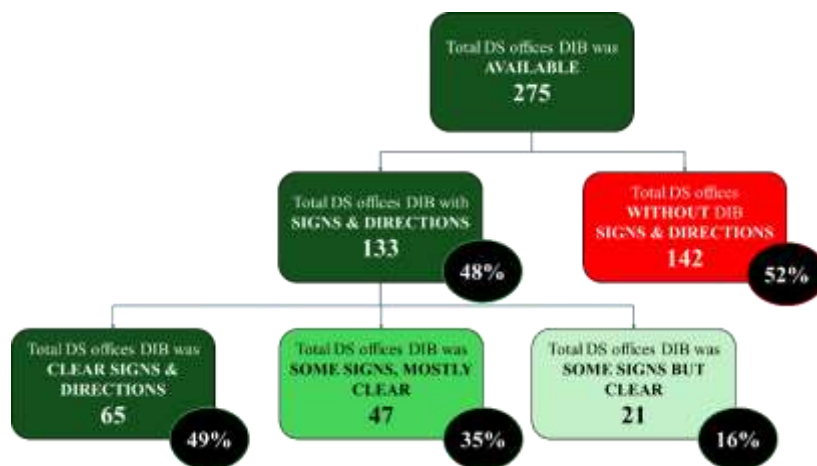
In the above cases, it is essential to investigate each type of case thoroughly to understand the incident further. The details of each of the above cases are listed below.

- Eleven cases where the Offices were unaware of the DIB:
 - *Many of the Officers in these DS Offices had recommended that the disputant hand over the complaint to the Officer.*
 - *In some cases, the Officers did not provide any solution for the dispute submission when the box was unavailable.*
- Eleven cases where the Offices were aware of the DIB, but didn't know whether it functioned or not
 - *Many just stated that it is not available*
 - *Some requested the mystery disputant to hand over the complaint to them.*
- Fifteen cases where the Offices were aware of the DIB, and available but did not function:

- *The Officer informed the mystery auditor that the DIB was unavailable but did not request to hand over the complaint.*
- *The DIB is unavailable and does not function as per the Officer (the reason was not mentioned); requested to hand over the complaint form or letter.*
- *Some boxes are damaged and kept aside.*
- *Some boxes are kept aside till the relevant Officer returns to Office after an extended leave (Maternity leave)*
- *The box is kept aside as the building is under renovation*
- *The DIB was sent for repair and went missing after that.*
- *The Officer said, “the DIB was removed due to election.”*
- *The DS Office has the forms and records, but DIB was unavailable.*
- *The Officer informed the disputant that the DIB does not function now.*
- **Fourteen cases where the DIB was replaced with an alternative:**
 - *The disputant was referred to the DS Office's general complaint and suggestion box.*
- **Four cases where the DIB was shifted to another place:**
 - *DIB had been shifted to the Temple in the village or the Temple where the Mediation Board Chairperson sits.*

3.3. AVAILABILITY OF CLEAR SIGNS OR DIRECTIONS TO THE DIB

Figure 11: Status of signs or directions to the DIBs



Sign & Directions are lacking

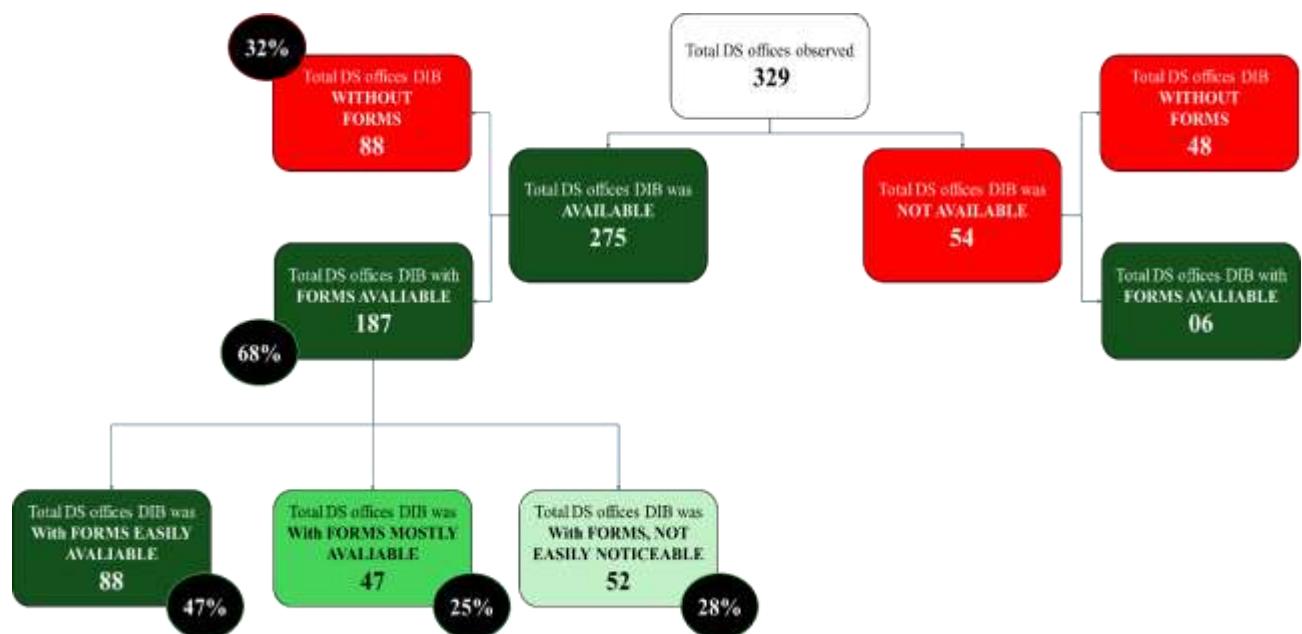
142 Offices where no signs or unclear directions were found in all districts in the country.

Most mystery auditors found signs and directions for DIB in 133 DS Offices (48% of DS Offices); 65 places had clear signs and directions, 47 DS Offices had some signs with clear directions, but 21 DS Offices had some signs, but not clear directions, as per the mystery auditor. On the other hand, 142 DS Offices did not have any signs or directions for the DIB, although DIBs are available, suggesting they implement more clear and visible signs or directions to guide disputants to use DIB (refer to Figure 11).

3.4. AVAILABILITY OF DISPUTE SUBMISSION FORMS

The data shows a significant issue with the availability and visibility of dispute intake forms, 88 DS Officers (32 percent) where DIB was available, forms were not available. 187 DS Officers had forms, from that in 135 DS Offices, the forms were accessible readily or with some efforts. 52 DS Offices need more effort to access the forms although they are available. These gaps highlight a significant requirement for attention to facilitate the accessibility of forms for disputants who are looking to file a dispute via DIB. Interestingly, forms were available in six DS Offices even though the DIB was unavailable.

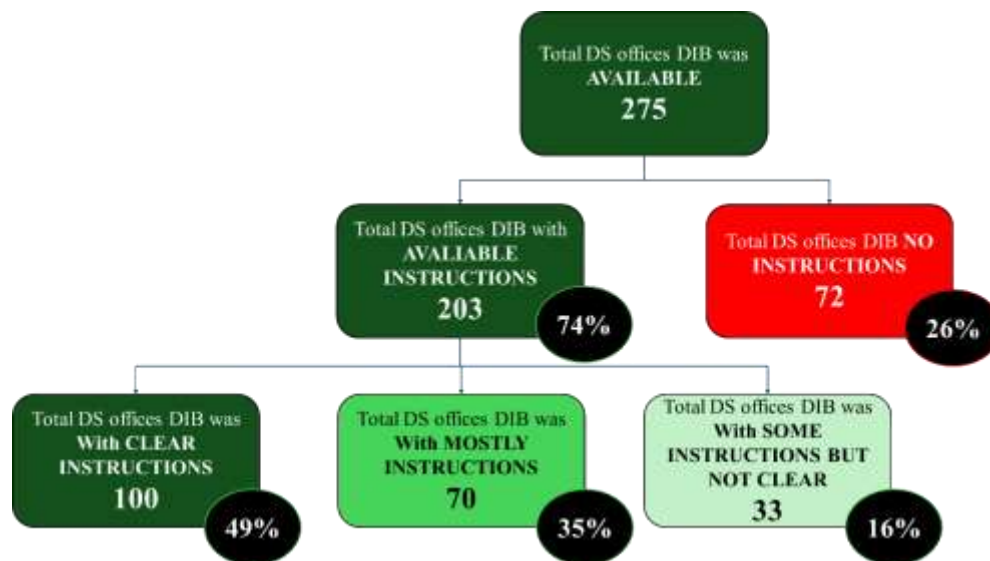
Figure 12: Availability status of forms near the DIB



3.5. AVAILABILITY OF INSTRUCTION ON USING DIB

Findings reveal mixed levels of clarity in the instructions provided to users. Out of the 275 DS Offices with DIBs, 203 had some instructions available with the DIB. 100 DS Offices had clear instructions on how to use the DIB. A further 70 DS Offices had given mostly clear instructions, while 33 DS Offices had instructions that were somewhat unclear or inadequate. However, 72 DS Offices observed that no instructions were available, suggesting a notable gap in communication regarding the proper use of the dispute intake system. These findings highlight the need for improved or more consistent guidance to ensure different disputants understand how to effectively utilize the DIB across all locations (refer to Figure 13).

Figure 13: Availability status of instructions on how to use DIB

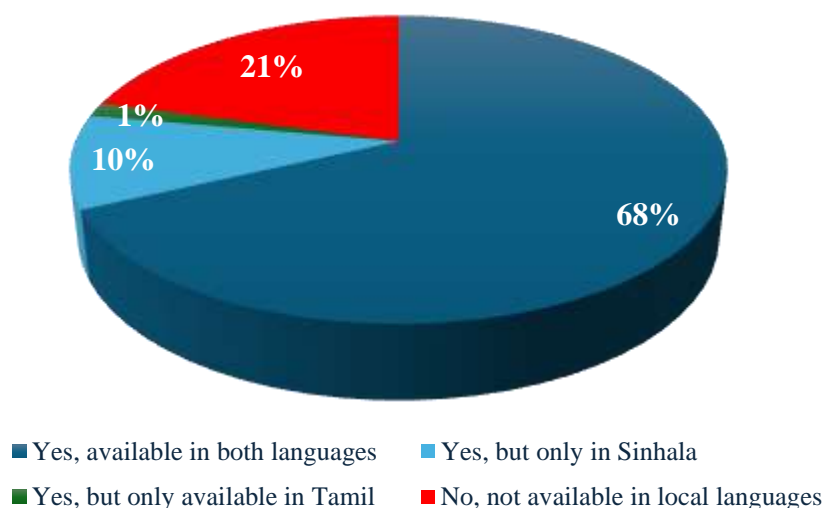


3.6. AVAILABILITY OF FORMS & INSTRUCTIONS IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

Findings regarding the availability of instructions for the DIB in both local languages (Sinhala and Tamil) reveal essential insights into accessibility. The majority, 68 percent of DS Offices, had provided forms and instructions in both languages, reflecting a solid effort to ensure the system was accessible to a diverse community. However, 10 percent of DS Offices found that forms and instructions were only available in Sinhala, which could pose challenges for Tamil-speaking individuals, especially in areas where Tamil-speaking communities are live. According to the mystery auditors' observations, one DS Office in the Northern did not have

instructions in Tamil language. A notable concern is that 21 percent (58 DS Offices) of the DS Offices reported having no instructions available in local languages at all, which is a concern found in all provinces at different levels, highlighting a significant gap in accessibility. This suggests the need for improvement in bilingual instruction across all regions to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their language preference, can effectively use the DIB. (refer to Figure 14).

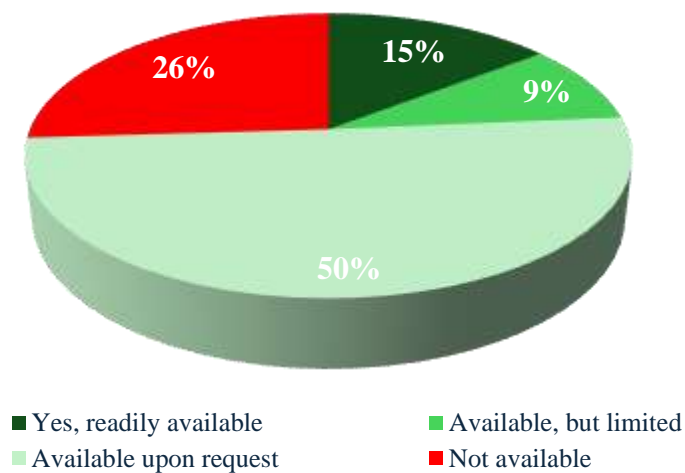
Figure 14: Availability of instructions for the DIB in both local languages



3.7. AVAILABILITY OF WRITING MATERIALS

The mystery auditors who visited DS Offices for observations largely found that pens and pencils can be accessed on request, but they are not kept near the DIB all the time. Of the total 275 DS Offices, around 137 DS Offices had writing materials only at request, and only 35 DS Offices (15% of DS Offices) had writing materials, pens, and pencils kept near the DIB at the time the disputant visited (refer to Figure 15).

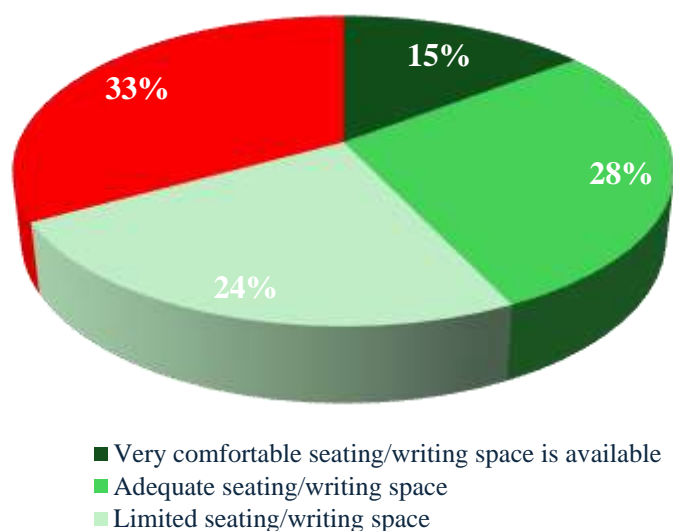
Figure 15: Availability of writing materials (pens, pencils)



3.8. AVAILABILITY OF SEATING OR WRITING SPACE

Only 15 percent of DS Offices reported that very comfortable seating or writing space was available, while 28 percent of places had adequate seating/writing space. In many DS Offices, 24 percent had limited seating or writing space, as per the mystery auditors' observations, and 33 percent reported no seating or writing space. This suggests that many locations lack basic provisions for disputants to comfortably write or wait near the DIB, potentially hindering the accessibility and efficiency of the dispute intake process (refer to Figure 16).

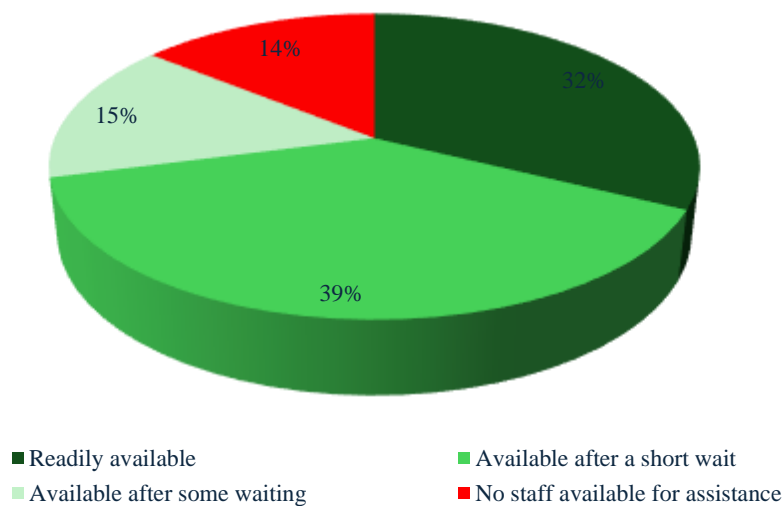
Figure 16: Availability of adequate seating or writing space near the DIB



3.9. AVAILABILITY OF A STAFF MEMBER TO ASSIST ON DIB

32 percent of the DS Offices reported that staff was readily available for inquiries. 39 percent of the places the mystery auditor visited had to wait until an Officer came. 15 percent of the place's auditors had to wait sometime to meet an Officer, whereas 14 percent of places a staff member was unavailable to contact (refer to Figure 17).

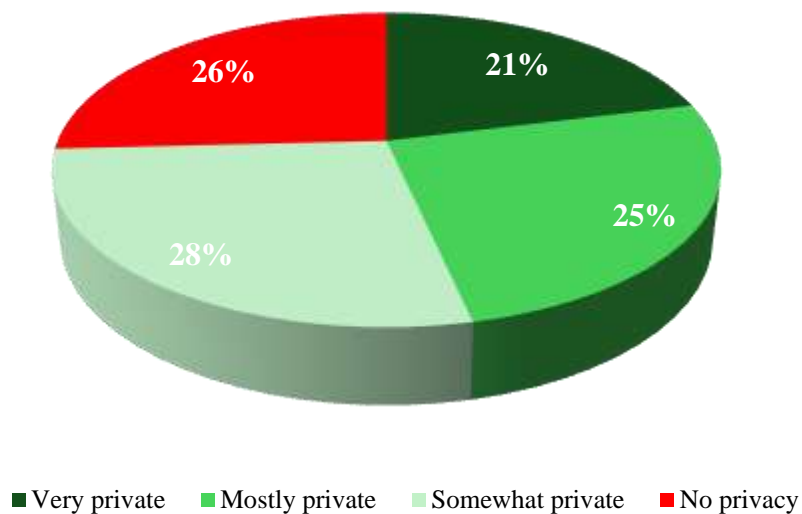
Figure 17: Availability of staff to assist with DIB



3.10. AVAILABILITY OF PRIVACY SPACE TO USE DIB

Privacy is a key expectation from the disputants when dispute submission is considered. During the mystery audit exercise of this study, auditors felt 46 percent of the DS Offices in the country had provided a high level of private environment for the disputant (refer to Figure 18). Many DS Offices in Uva, Northern, Eastern, and Western provinces had provided high privacy for disputants. In contrast, most DS Offices in North Central Province have provided a decent level of private environment.

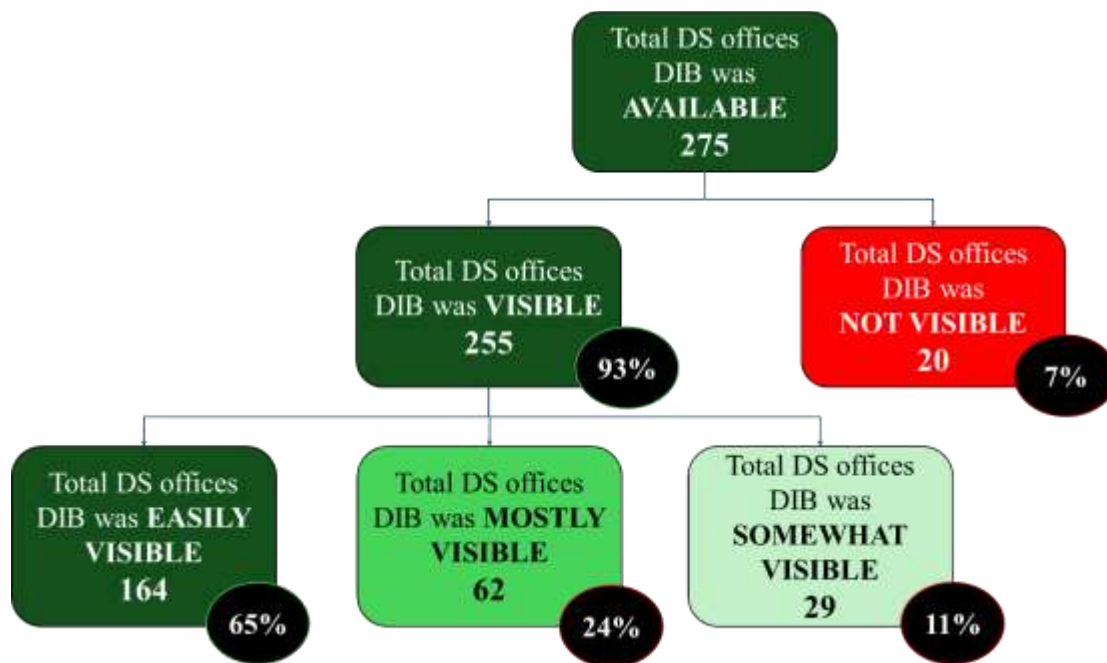
Figure 18: Availability of adequate privacy to use DIB



3.11. VISIBILITY OF DIB AT THE DS OFFICE

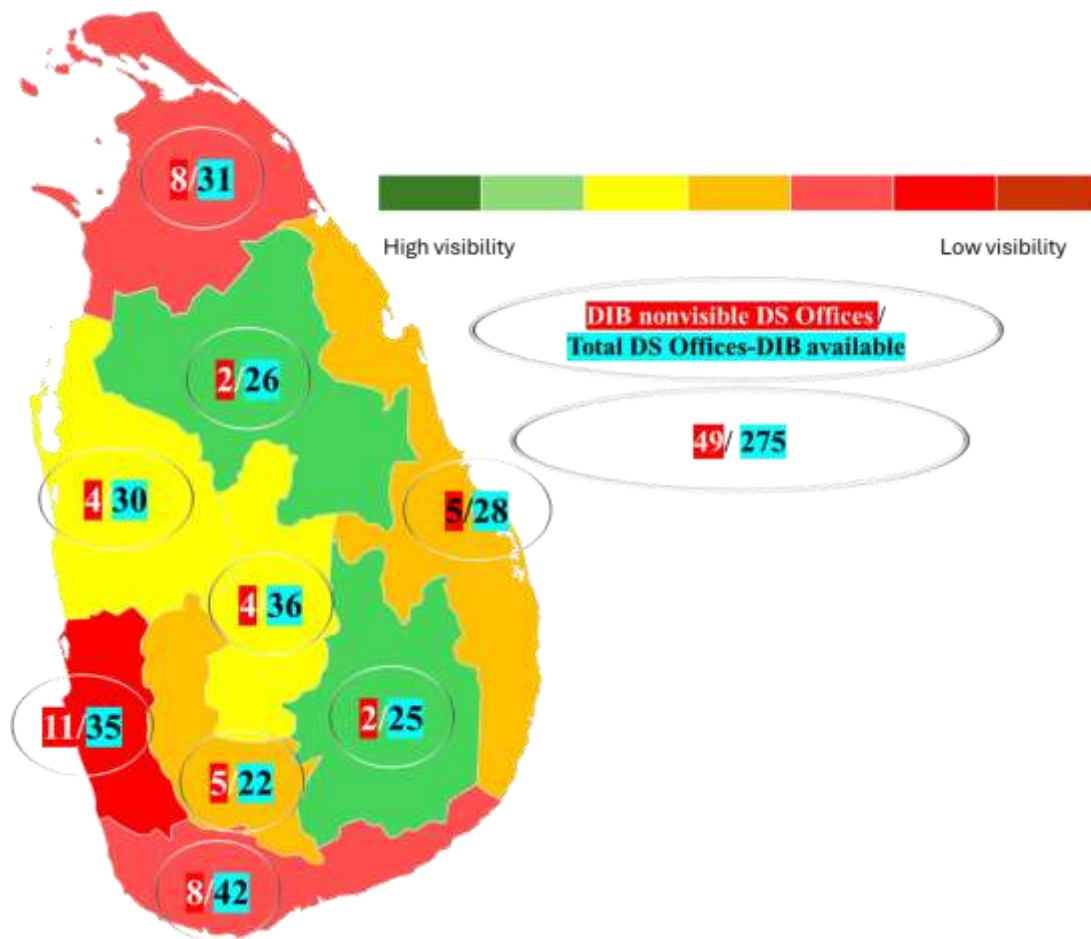
Among the 255 DS Offices, DIB was easily visible for the disputants in 164 DS Offices, mostly visible in 62 DS Offices, and somewhat visible in 29 DS Offices as per the evaluation of mystery auditors (refer to Figure 19). As the mystery auditors had been briefed and shown the DIB images at the training stage before the observations took place, they would have found it easier to see the DIB than a typical disputant walking to a DS Office to log a complaint. Nonetheless, even some trained mystery auditors could not easily spot the DIBs, which is concerning.

Figure 19: DIB visibility status in the Country



According to the above data, DIB is placed in visible places in many DS Offices in the country, but a few DS Offices would have to improve the visibility status of DIB to encourage disputants to use DIB. This is crucial, as it was earlier understood that there are Officers who are unaware of the existence of DIB. In that context, keeping the DIB visible would make it convenient for disputants to proceed with submission, irrespective of Officers' unawareness. When looking at the number of DS Offices where the mystery auditor found visible concerns (a total of 49, 10 being not visible at all and 29 being some visible cases), 11 of 35 DS Offices in the Western Province seem to have visibility concerns. Similarly, 8 DS Offices in the Southern and Northern Provinces found visibility issues. Other than that, cases of visibility concern were few in the rest of the provinces (refer to map in Figure 20).

Figure 20: Visibility of the DIB at DS Office – province-wise



When the lack of visibility of DIB was further investigated, it was concerning to observe that some of the DIB was placed under a table, below the eye level of a person; it was not kept on the desk provided for it to stand, it was kept in a fully covered area, behind a door, behind a banner, covered with another complaint box, kept with all other boxes making disputant confuse on which box is DIB, cannot identify as the DIB is not distinguished with signs, etc. (refer to Figure 21).

Figure 21: DIB placements impact visibility



Still, it was interesting that zero DS Offices with DIB visibility concerns were found in some districts. This means that all the DS Offices of these districts where DIB was available had kept DIB in a clear visible place for the disputants. Furthermore, except for one DS Office in North Central Province, and all other DS Offices in all these districts, DIB was available too, which is an interesting finding of significant cases with a high level of availability and visibility status of DIB.

3.12. ACCESSIBILITY OF DIB BY DISPUTANTS

The visibility issues described above would have impacted the disputants' ability to access the DIB. Sometimes, even if the DIB is visible, it is found to be placed in a place where an average disputant cannot reach it. For example, when the DIB is hung far above a wall or when it is

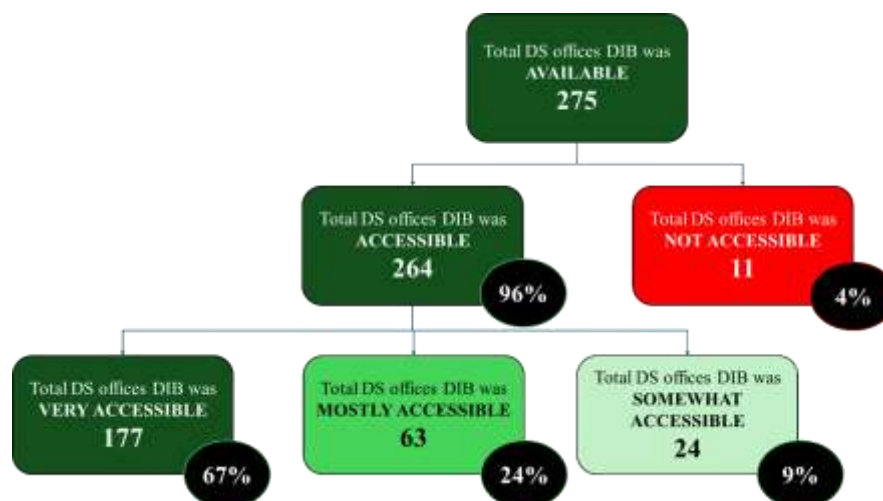
kept on a tall cupboard, where an average-height person finds it hard to reach. Further, as discussed above, when the DIBs are kept in hidden areas, it is evident that the disputants cannot easily reach the boxes. (Refer to Figure 22).

Figure 22: Cases where accessibility issues were found



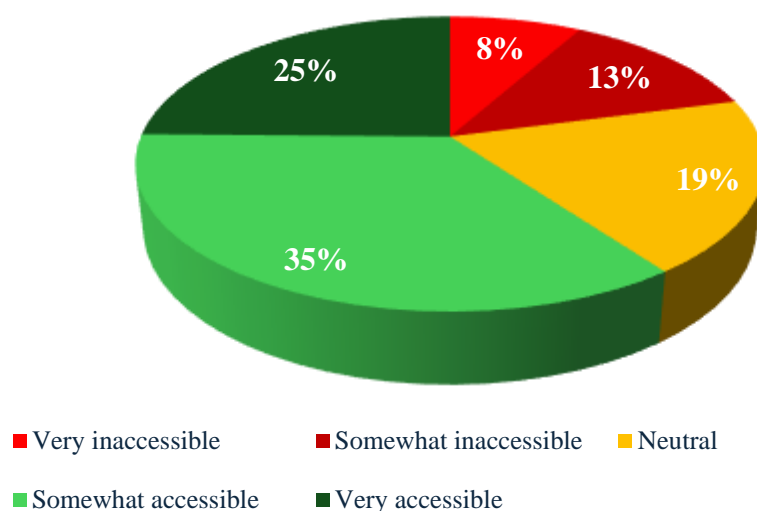
Due to cases like what was discussed above, in around 11 DS Offices, DIB was not accessible at all, and another 24 DS Offices had some difficulty in reaching the DIB accordingly the mystery auditors' observations. Still, 177 DS Offices where the DIB was present had ensured easy accessibility and the balance 63 DS Offices ensured DIB visibility with little difficulties as per the mystery auditors' evaluation due to the reasons discussed above (refer to Figure 23).

Figure 23: DIB is in an accessible area



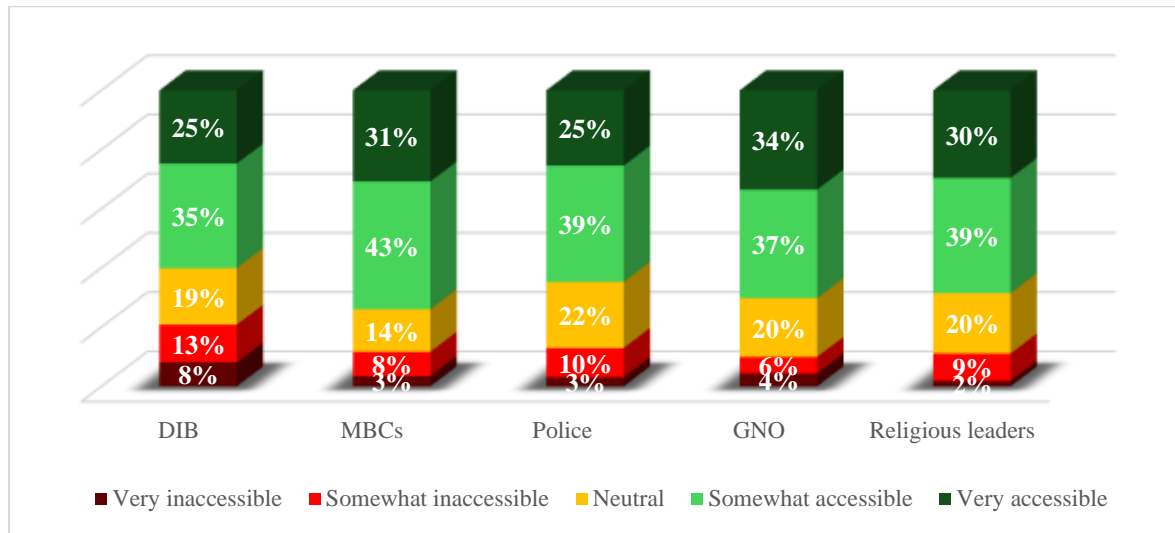
The intermediaries subjected to the survey, including GNOs, Religious leaders, Community association members, JPs, Police Officers, and Lawyers, had different views on the current placement of the DIB. 60 percent of them find the current locations of the DIBs accessible, with 25 percent rating it as "very accessible" and 35 percent as "somewhat accessible." However, 19 percent remain neutral, indicating limited awareness or a lack of strong opinion about accessibility. In comparison, 21 percent perceive that the DS Office is a place that is inaccessible to the community (refer to Figure 24).

Figure 24: Accessibility of DIB from intermediaries' perspective



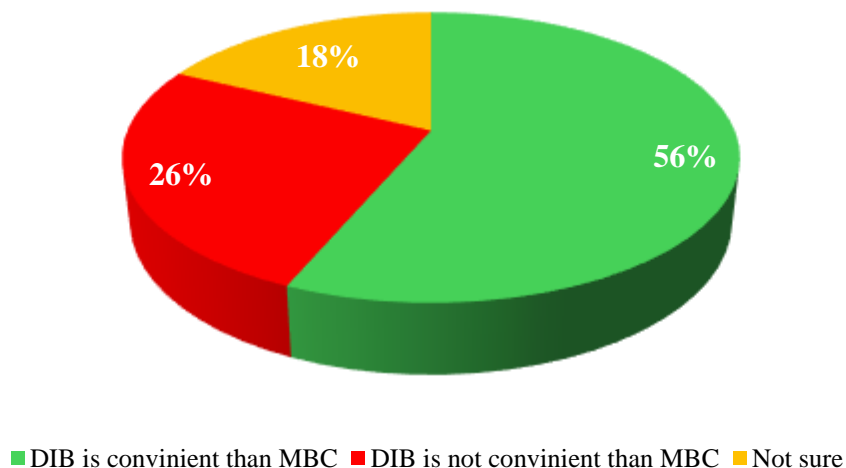
The perception of DIB's accessibility is less salient compared to other methods, like direct dispute submission to the Chairperson, submission to police, GNO, and religious leaders. There is slightly higher traction towards direct submission to the Chairperson, followed by GNO and religious leaders (refer to Figure 25).

Figure 25: Accessibility of DIB in comparison to other methods from intermediaries' perspective



When discussing DIB's challenges with the MDOs and community intermediaries, 25 percent of each group stated that one of the challenges of using DIB would be to access it due to its placement at the DS Office or placing DIB in the DS Office is ineffective. When MDOs were questioned about the convenience of the community's access to DIB compared to the direct submission route to the Chairperson, only 56 percent said DIB is more convenient than the Chairperson route. 26 percent said DIB is not convenient compared to Chairperson, and 18 percent are unsure of the difference (refer to Figure 26).

Figure 26: Convenience to access DIB compared to Chairperson from MDOs' perspective



However, many MTOs surveyed have stated that accessibility is one key advantage of the DIB, possibly due to the DS Office's accessibility to a larger area. In contracts, Chairpersons are very critical of the placement of the DIB due to many logistic and psychological reasons discussed in the section below.

3.13. PLACEMENT ISSUES OF THE DIB



DIB is located in 329 DS Offices in the country to provide accessibility to all communities. However, it is realized some gaps in the placement. Some of these gaps can be improved without changing the placement itself, but some gaps observed require changing the placement of the DIB. This section will elaborate on which route is feasible after considering all the aspects shared by all the groups of people covered in this study.

More critical concerns were raised by the Chairperson, highlighting a few factors hindering the community's accessibility of DIB. Chairpersons stated that the **cost involved reaching a DS Office** for an average disputant and visiting the DS Office to submit a dispute as an

additional burden to the community. This concern is noisy among Chairpersons more than other problems as the DS division is a large geography area for many Grama Niladari Divisions and villages, making it hard for many economically concerned communities to spend money to travel, unease involved in travelling, etc. as it was embedded in the voice of Chairpersons who participated discussions.

Chairpersons expressed significant concerns about the accessibility and effectiveness of the DIB due to its current placement in DS Offices. They highlighted logistical challenges, psychological discomfort, and the perceived irrelevance of the DS Office in the dispute resolution process as key barriers.

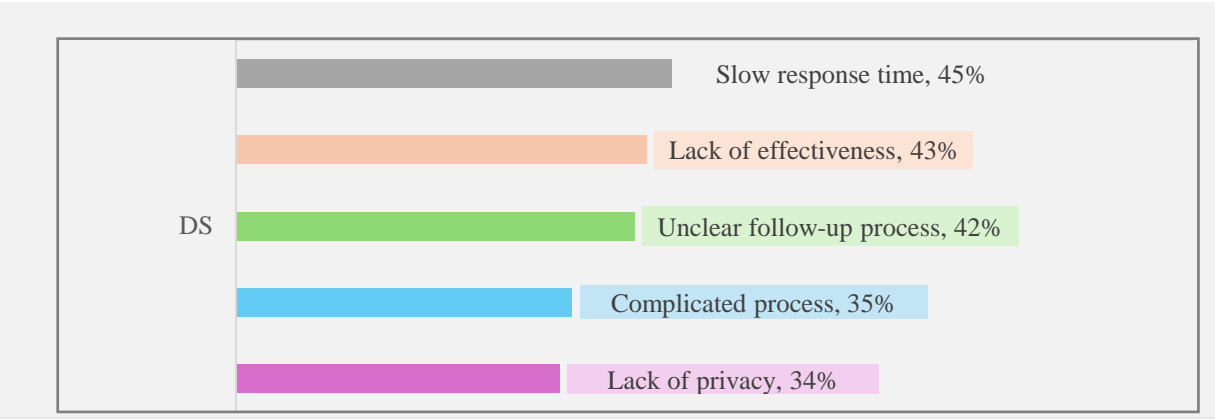
Firstly, logistical barriers were a recurring theme. Many disputants face significant difficulties travelling long distances to DS Offices, which often incurs both time and financial costs. For individuals in remote areas, the added burden of travel serves as a major deterrent to using the DIB. Chairpersons noted that the inconvenience of accessing the DS Office discourages community members from engaging with the system. As one Chairperson explained, *“The requirement to visit the DS Office is a major concern, especially with the added cost and inconvenience of travelling long distances.”* Psychological discomfort further compounds the issue. DS Offices are frequently perceived as intimidating, unfamiliar, or unfriendly environments for dispute submission. This perception creates a barrier for many individuals, who may feel uncomfortable navigating such spaces. Chairpersons emphasized that an unwelcoming office environment often dissuades people from submitting their disputes, as they lack confidence in the process. A Chairperson stated, *“The DS Office feels like an intimidating or unfamiliar place to seek submitting. This lack of comfort and familiarity can significantly hinder participation”* Additionally, Chairpersons questioned the relevance of the DS Office in the dispute resolution process, arguing that it might not be the most appropriate location for the DIB. They noted that DS Offices are not traditionally associated with dispute resolution, making it less likely for community members to consider them as a natural choice for submitting complaints. Furthermore, the visibility and accessibility of the DIB within these offices were raised as concerns, with Chairpersons suggesting that better placement and community integration are needed to improve usage.

A Chairperson remarked, *“The DIB’s location or visibility might not be ideal for people to notice or consider using it, so they opt for other routes to resolve issues.”*

In summary, logistical challenges, psychological discomfort, and the perceived irrelevance of the DS Office significantly hinder the effectiveness of the DIB as a dispute submission mechanism. Addressing these barriers will require efforts to improve accessibility, create more welcoming environments, and enhance the integration of the DIB into the dispute-resolution process. While Chairpersons highlighted more of the logistic and psychological barriers people may have in accessing DIB kept in the DS Office, the community intermediaries believe that the inefficiency of handling dispute submission processes at DS Offices would hinder the community's usage of the DIB. These inefficiencies are primarily caused by the slow response

time, lack of effectiveness, unclear follow-up process, complex process, and privacy concerns people may have when dealing with the DS Office (refer to Figure 27).

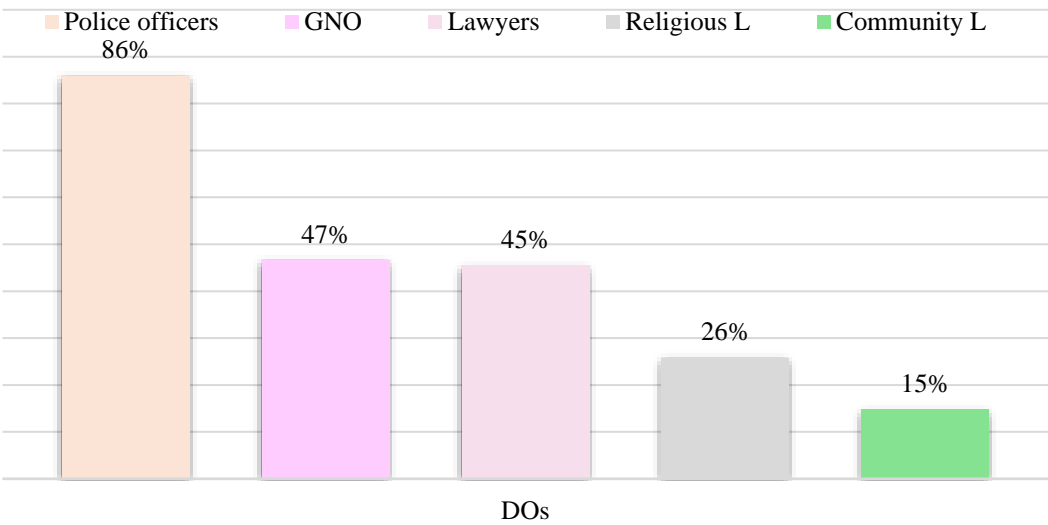
Figure 27: Key challenges disputant might encounter as DIB is kept in DS Office – from community intermediaries perceptive



3.14. ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENTS FOR THE DIB

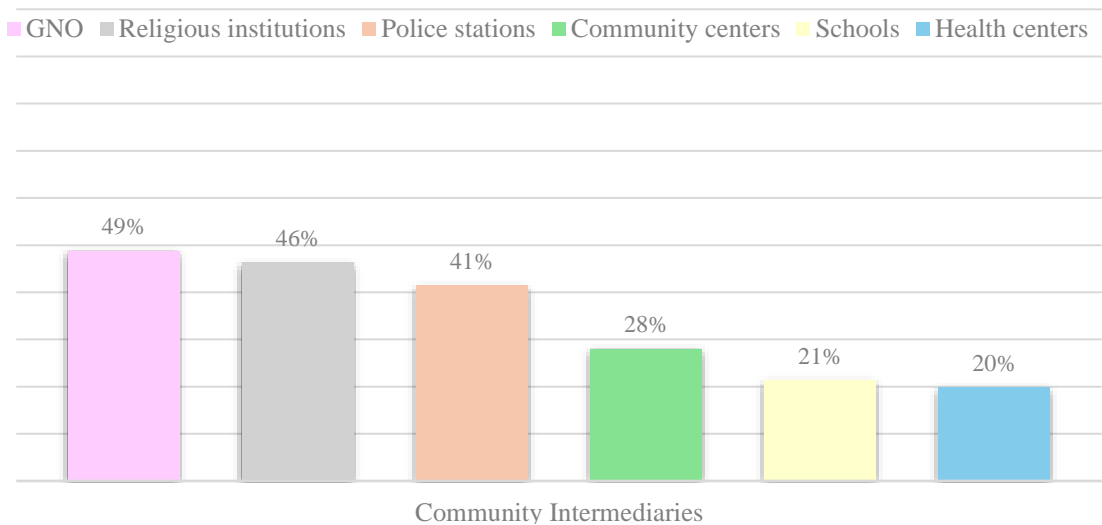
According to the MDOs, police stations, the GNOs, lawyers, religious institutions, and other community leaders are the places the community members contact to seek advice on the dispute submission process, usually other than the DS Office (refer to Figure 28).

Figure 28: Places/people community seek advice related to dispute submission



However, community intermediaries suggest that the best alternative places to keep the DIB are the Grama Niladari Office, religious institutions, and police stations, which are the most accessible places besides the DS Office (refer to Figure 29) in their view.

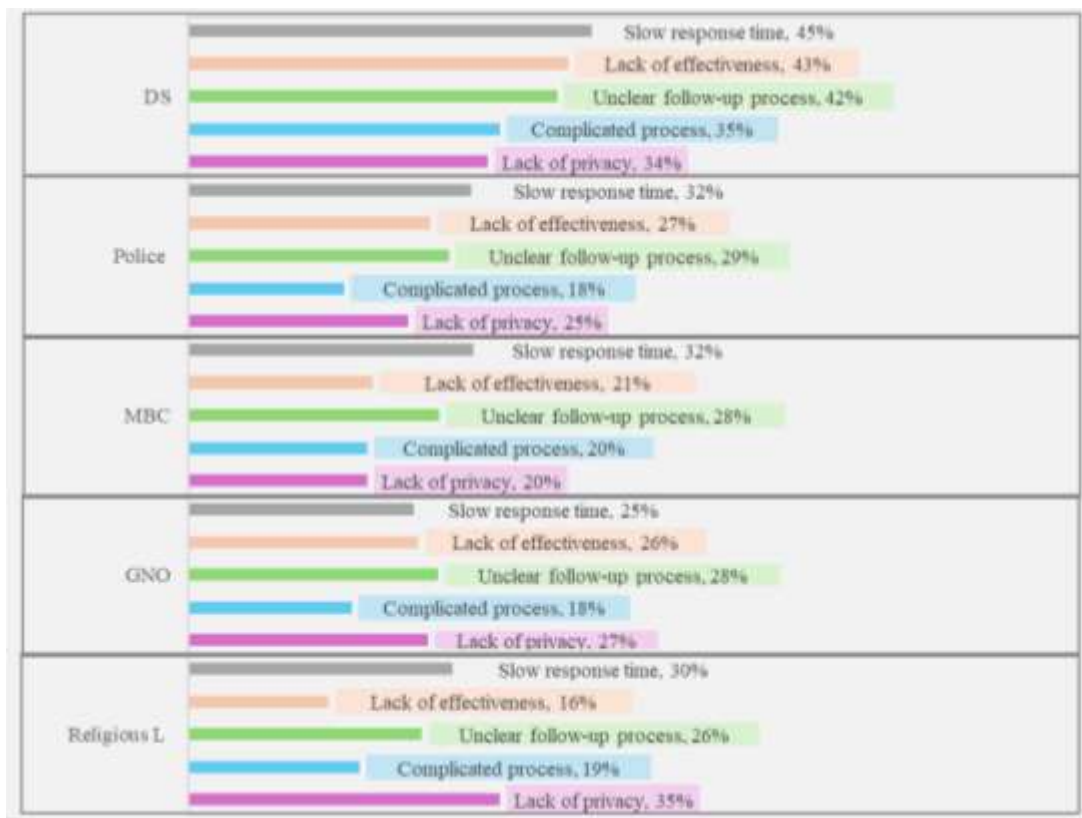
Figure 29: Alternative places to keep DIB according to the community intermediaries



Both Chairpersons and CBOs noted that people prefer direct methods of dispute submission, such as approaching local leaders, GNOs, the police, or mediation board Chairpersons, over using the DIB. This preference is particularly pronounced in remote areas, where face-to-face interactions are seen as more effective and reliable. Skepticism about the DIB's efficacy and a lack of familiarity with the system contribute to its limited usage, underscoring the need for improved trust, awareness, and alignment with community preferences.

However, this study also examined the specific limitations and challenges attached to each alternative place recommended above. It revealed that most people believe there are gaps in terms of response rate, effectiveness, unclear follow-up, complicated process, and lack of privacy in all these alternative places, including the Chairperson process, to different degrees. However, regarding privacy, the Chairperson seems to be the least concerned mechanism followed by police and GNOs. The least complicated process appears to be GNO and police for the community. Except in DS Offices, the follow-up process is expected to improve in all other places: Mediation Board, GNO, Police, and religious leaders. Religious leaders are the most effective, as perceived by the community intermediaries. GNO's performance is expected to be healthier on response time. This data indicates that the DS Office is slightly behind on efficient aspects of the dispute-handling process (refer to Figure 30).

Figure 30: Challenges of alternating places to DS Office



Other than what was shown in the data above, some community members may feel uncomfortable or even intimidated visiting a police station to report a dispute due to their association with law enforcement. There may also be concerns about privacy and fear of being associated with police-related matters, which could deter people from using the DIB if placed in the police station. Additionally, police stations are often busy and focused on handling immediate legal and security matters, which could limit regular DIB oversight. Culturally, in Sri Lanka, there can be social barriers to visiting police stations, mainly for females; hence, placing the DIB in police stations should be done based on further research data. Grama Niladari Offices could be a more suitable place to keep DIB. However, there are more than 14,022 GN divisions in the country, and hence, keeping it in DS Offices would require more significant investment and facilities. While temples are trusted community spaces, they may not be ideal for a DIB. Culturally, temples are places of worship, and people may hesitate to address personal or sensitive disputes in a religious setting. Furthermore, temples generally lack formal administrative staff who can monitor and maintain the DIB.

Therefore, despite suggesting different alternative places to keep DIB, it is essential to thoroughly evaluate each place from a community perspective before initiation, as specific limitations could also hinder the community from accessing DIB in each of these places.

3.15. AWARENESS & ATTITUDES ON DIB



This chapter examines the level of DIB awareness among stakeholders whose disputants would interact along the way through the dispute submitting process. This chapter will cover to what extent community representatives such as GNOs, religious leaders, community association members, JPs, Police Officers, lawyers, and CBOs are aware of the DIB and their attitude toward and recommendation of DIB. The awareness and attitude of MDOs working in DS Offices to service the community in dispute submission via DIB is crucial to facilitate disputants to go through the dispute submitting process seamlessly. Therefore, this chapter will elicit the story of MDOs' awareness and recommendation of DIB. Finally, Chairpersons are the final legally empowered and appointed people of the dispute submitting process at the community level. Therefore, the awareness and attitude of Chairpersons on the addition of DIB in promoting the dispute submission process will be discussed.

3.15.1. AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIB AMONG COMMUNITY INTERMEDIARIES

This survey included community intermediaries who typically would be contacted by the community to seek advice on dispute submitting, including GNOs, Religious leaders, Community association members, JPs, Police Officers, and lawyers. It revealed that only 21 percent know DIB as a method for reporting a dispute/submitting a dispute application at the community level. 89 percent of the majority mentioned that the police is a place where the community can submit their disputes, 59 percent stated Grama Niladari Officer, 44 percent were reminded of the Chairpersons, 23 percent stated of the religious leaders as to whom the disputes can be submitted to. While these are the most salient methods of dispute submission community representatives are aware of, they are aware of many more places, such as lawyers, JPs, Legal Aid Commission, etc. in order of higher to lower awareness levels (refer to Figure 31).

Among this segment of community stakeholders, DIB awareness is critical if they are to promote DIB and recommend it to the people who come to them seeking advice on dispute submitting. The above data shows that less than 1/4th of this segment knows DIB.

Hence, fixing awareness is essential. DIB awareness is checked at the province level to investigate the issue area. Accordingly, the country's least awareness of DIB was found in Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces, followed by Central, North Central, and Western provinces. DIB awareness is higher than the average in Northern, Uva, and North Western provinces (refer to Figure 32).

Figure 31: Awareness of Dispute submission methods for the community – among community representatives (intermediaries)¹²

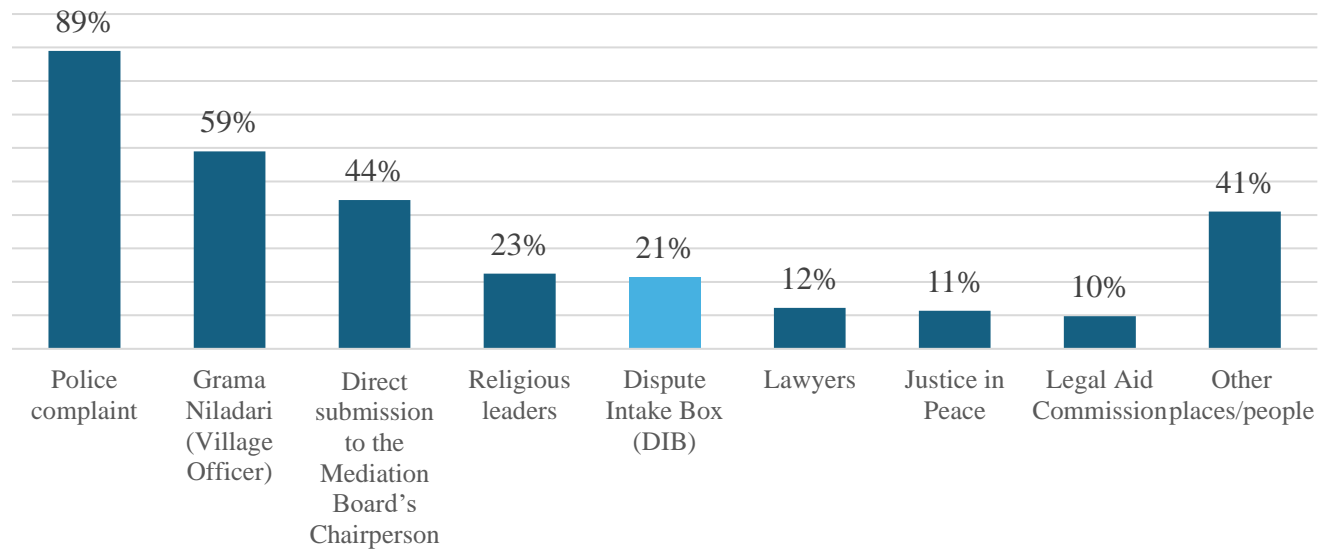
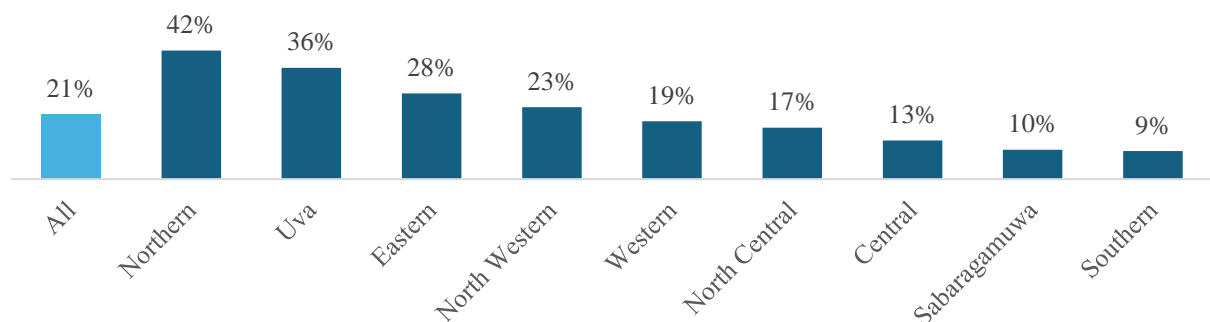


Figure 32: Awareness of DIB among community representatives by provinces

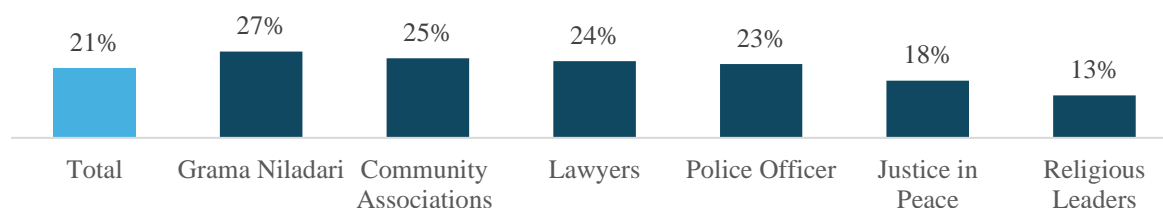


¹² Note: Dispute Intake Box (DIB) included who said DIB, and Hand over to the DS office/ Submit the dispute into a box specially kept in the DS office

Note: Other places/people include any other community leader/ Hotlines or helplines (e.g., Women's helpline, Child protection hotline, Human Rights Commission hotline)/ Traditional dispute submitting methods / NGOs or Civil Society Organizations/ family/ DS officer/friend/ PH/MOH/ Probation Officer/ Councilors/ Political leaders/ Debt relief boards etc.

Further, it was found that 19 percent of male community representatives and 29 percent of females were aware of DIB, indicating possible higher awareness among female community leaders. Further awareness was lower among the less experienced Officers. When considering different roles, DIB awareness was high among Grama Niladari Officers, community associations¹³ representatives, Lawyers, Police Officers, JPs, and religious leaders, respectively (refer to Figure 33).

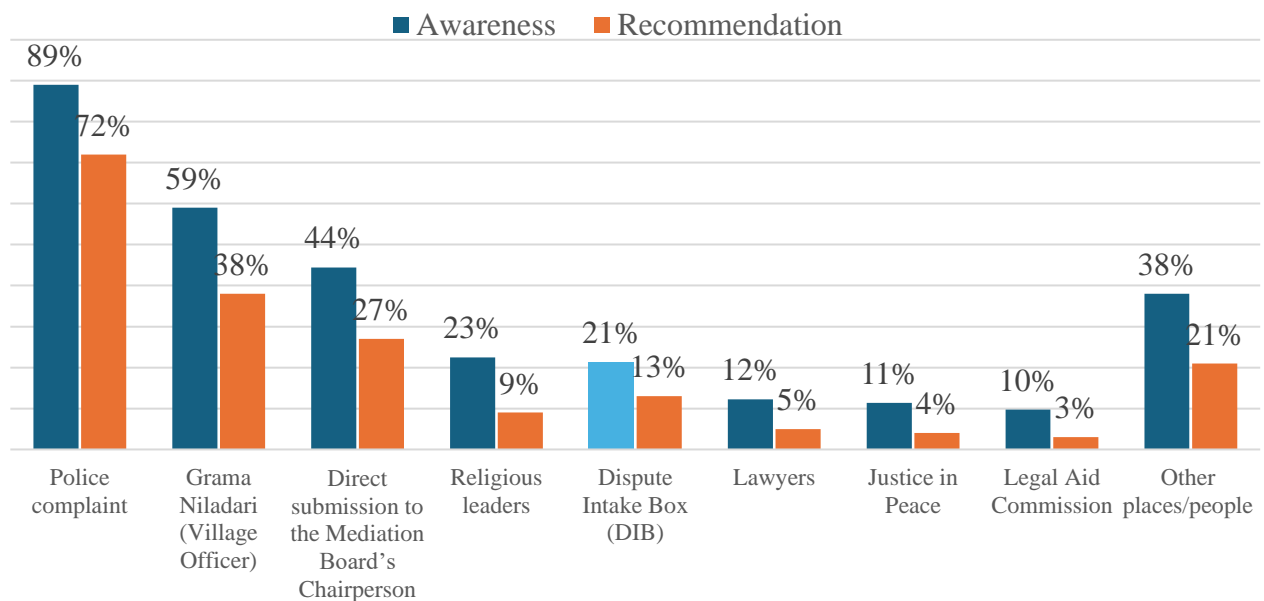
Figure 33: Awareness of DIB among community representatives by roles



While the awareness of DIB is considerably low among the community representatives who will be possibly contacted by a typical disputant in the process of dispute submitting efforts, their recommendation of DIB is further low as only 13 percent of this segment has mentioned that they DIB as one of the methods that they would recommend for the community who seek their advice. The most recommended methods and modes are police, GNOs, and Chairpersons, respectively (refer to Figure 34), highlighting that all those aware of DIB do not recommend it to the community due to different attitudes towards DIB.

¹³ Community Associations include Farmers Associations, Youth Associations, Women Associations, and Rural Development Associations

Figure 34: Awareness to recommendation of Dispute submission methods for the community – among community representatives (intermediaries)



If low awareness would drive low recommendations, DIB was introduced to these respondents at the survey to stimulate their recommendation if they know DIB well.

As depicted in above Figure 34, 21 percent recognized DIB as a method available in society to submit disputes. This means 79 percent of the intermediaries subjected to the survey did not know the existence of DIB. Therefore, the interviewer described what is DIB using a description card and an image of DIB. After having understood what DIB is 41 percent of them mentioned they would highly likely to recommend DIB whereas 22 percent also would like to recommend DIB as a method of dispute submission. However, 22 percent of respondents are still unsure whether they would direct the community to DIB, whereas 15 percent are sure they would not direct people to DIB. Interestingly, 73 percent of the lawyers said they would direct people to the DIB, which is a considerably higher affiliation towards DB by lawyers. 70 percent of GNOs would direct people to DIB if they sought their advice. Larger segments, like 46 percent of community association representatives, still were unsure of their views on DIB to recommend to the community.

As revealed by the study, a few objections hold their recommendation of DIB. The key ones are doubt about the effectiveness of resolving the disputes submitted via DIB, privacy concerns, lack of understanding of the process of submitting disputes and follow-up procedures, and potential for retaliation etc.

3.15.2. AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIB AMONG MDOs' AND MTOS'

163 MDOs of 329 were contacted in this study, and 51 percent have been involved in the launch of DIB. 24 percent have been trained in DIB use and promotion. Although many have not been involved in the launch or were not trained in using and promoting DIB, everyone was aware of DIB as expected. Their awareness of DIB is critical as the majority, 83 percent, have been contacted by some community members for dispute submitting-related advice in the past, as discussed above. Although all the MDOs surveyed knew of the DIB, 11 DS Offices were identified at the mystery audit, and the Officers did not know the existence of the DIB. This was mainly because many newly appointed MDOs serviced the community. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that most MDOs (except newly appointed ones) know the DIB launched in DS Offices. This is a crucial status in terms of the success of the DIB, as when the disputants arrive at the DS Office to inquire about dispute submission or submitting process, any DO available in the Office at that moment (whether trained or not, whether involved at the DIB launch or not, whether new or old) should be able to guide the community to use DIB seamlessly.

However, the study found that only 44 percent of MDOs stated that they would direct the community who reached out to them to submit the dispute via DIB. The majority, 71 percent, would direct the community to the relevant Chairperson. 13 percent mentioned that depending on the nature of the dispute, they would decide on their guidance for the community.

This data indicates that there are many occasions MDOs bypass the DIB, or, depending on the nature of the dispute, they have to bypass the DIB when directing the community in the dispute submission process. Therefore, although the community is driving toward the DS Office and DIB to submit their disputes, it does mean that all of them end up using DIB service due to different reasons; it could be either the relevant dispute needs to bypass DIB and directed to other methods or due to some other difficulties MDOs are having on DIB, communities are not directed to DIB. This is because of the unavailability of DIB and its inability to function; Officers are not very familiar with the DIB process, or they lack confidence in the process of promotion.

Further, although all MTOs were aware of DIB, there was a significant gap in their familiarity with it. The data shows that only five of sixteen MTOs faced the survey said DIB is the most familiar dispute submitting method, indicating that it is not a widely recognized or prioritized method of dispute submission in the minds of MTOs. This data reflects that the DIB is still not seen as a tool or resource in their dispute intake processes. However, most seem to promote and recommend DIB in their awareness-raising programs.

3.15.3. AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIB AMONG CHAIRPERSONS

Mediation Board Chairpersons, as key stakeholders in the community dispute submission process, view the DIB as a tool for streamlining and organizing dispute intake efficiently. While they are familiar with the DIB's purpose and function, a critical challenge impacting its underutilization is the community's lack of awareness about the system. Many community members either do not know about the DIB or are unclear on how to use it, resulting in low participation. Chairpersons also expressed concerns about the placement of the DIB in DS Offices, which they believe hinders its visibility and accessibility, further discouraging its use. Additionally, awareness of the DIB among intermediaries, such as GNOs, religious leaders, and community association members, remains low at 21 percent, suggesting negligible awareness at the grassroots level. This lack of awareness is identified as a significant bottleneck in promoting the DIB. While increasing awareness is seen as crucial, stakeholders question whether heightened familiarity among intermediaries and the community will translate into increased DIB usage. This uncertainty underscores the need for further investigation into how DIB's acceptance and functionality can be effectively promoted among all stakeholders.

3.16. FAMILIARITY WITH DIB

This section examines the level of familiarity with the DIB among MDOs, key community intermediaries involved in the dispute submission process. Familiarity with the DIB is essential to building community trust in its effectiveness. The survey found that while MTOs are generally aware of the DIB, many MDOs lack sufficient knowledge. Only 23 percent of MDOs had received training on the DIB, and the remaining 76 percent had not. This lack of training limits their ability to effectively guide the community in using the DIB. Among those who had been trained, 62 percent could direct people to use the DIB, while only 38 percent of untrained MDOs could offer the same guidance. The survey also highlighted significant regional disparities in DIB familiarity. In provinces such as North Western (88%), North Central (91%), and Sabaragamuwa (81%), the majority of MDOs had not received training, underscoring the widespread lack of knowledge. Despite MDOs' involvement in dispute-related tasks such as providing information and keeping records, their limited familiarity with the DIB hinders their ability to promote its use. Additionally, the community's inquiries to MDOs primarily focused on the dispute submission process, form-filling, and the time frame for resolutions. Many members still prefer submitting disputes directly to individuals rather than using the DIB, revealing a lack of trust or understanding of the system. MDOs use various methods to raise awareness, including community meetings, social media, and public announcements, but it's unclear if these methods reach vulnerable populations. The findings suggest a need for enhanced training for MDOs to

improve their familiarity with the DIB, thereby enabling them to better support the community and increase DIB usage.

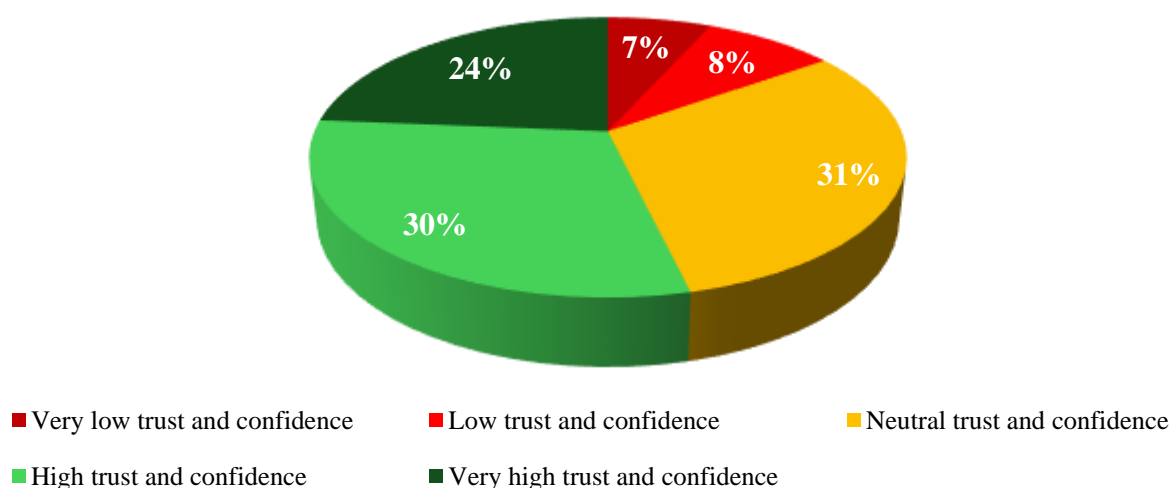
3.17. CONFIDENCE ON DIB



Many factors can shape confidence in a system. People's perception of its success and effectiveness will boost their confidence. The trust gained by a system will elevate people's confidence in it, encouraging them to start using it and recommend it to others. This section examines the level of trust and confidence in DIB gained so far and factors influencing trust in DIB, including perceptions of its effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, and the likelihood of timely dispute submitting.

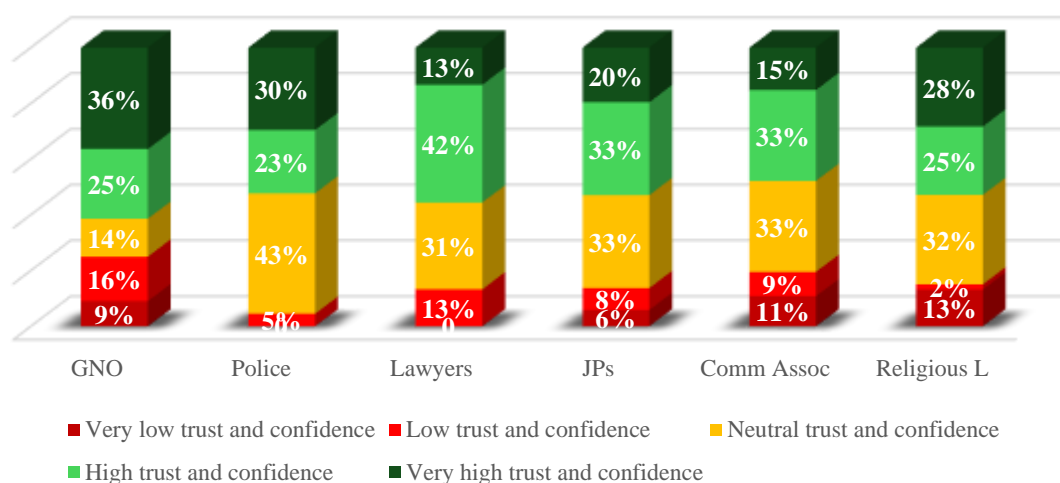
According to the survey with community intermediaries, trust and confidence in the system matter a lot for them to recommend and direct community members through the DIB path. Nearly half are confident of the DIB. 31 percent are undecided on their level of trust and confidence, whereas 15 percent stated that they have low or no trust in DIB (refer to Figure 35).

Figure 35: Level of confidence on DIB among community intermediaries



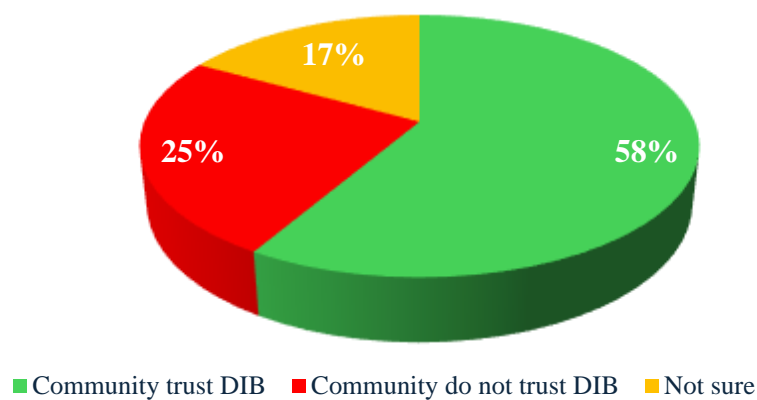
Further elaborating on this, different levels of community leaders in the society have varied levels of trust and confidence in DIB. It is concerning that 25 percent of the GNOs surveyed have stated they have low or no trust in DIB. Similarly, 20 percent of the community association leaders and 15 percent of religious leaders do not trust the DIB system. Most Police Officers have a high to medium level of trust in DIB, which is a great sign of the promotion of DIB by Police Officers (refer to Figure 36).

Figure 36: Level of confidence on DIB among community intermediaries – different groups



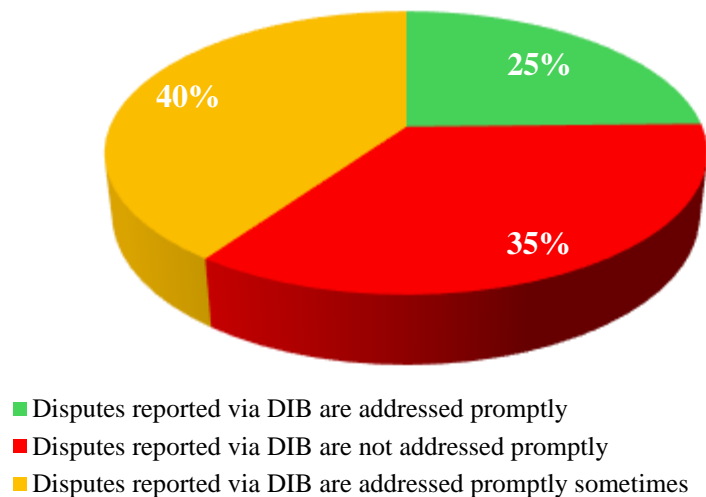
This suggests that confidence and trust in DIB among the community leaders contacted by the community for advice should be further enhanced to ensure that they would direct community members to DIB without any hesitation. Nearly half of them also believe that community members would trust the DIB because they trust the system. 25 percent stated that community members would not trust the system, while 17 percent were not sure of the community trust level of DIB (refer to Figure 37).

Figure 37: Level of confidence on DIB among community members from community intermediaries' perspective



Around 24 percent of MDOs mentioned that they had observed specific concerns from the community about the confidentiality of submitting their disputes to the DIB. As discussed above, this could be due to doubts about whether their (community members') disputes will go through the submitting path as urgently as possible and a lack of understanding of the dispute submitting process. Only 25 percent of the community leaders surveyed believe that disputes reported through DIB are addressed promptly, 35 percent said disputes are not addressed fast, and the balance, 40 percent, said that sometimes disputes reported via DIB might go through a fast submitting process (refer to Figure 38).

Figure 38: Community intermediaries' perception of the speed of addressing the disputes reported via DIB



These issues will lead to dissatisfaction among those who submit disputes. There is also a perceived lack of proper investigation or follow-up responses for the individuals who have submitted complaints, undermining trust in the system. It was revealed and mentioned above that 42 percent believe there is no transparent follow-up process for the disputes submitted via DIB.

Chairpersons have raised important concerns about the logistical and psychological barriers related to the DIB, which have undermined trust in the system. Issues such as the placement of the DIB, potential bias in case referrals to the mediation board, and a lack of transparency in the system were highlighted. Chairpersons emphasized that impartiality is essential to maintaining community trust, with any perceived bias damaging the integrity of the process. One Chairperson stated, *"Impartiality is the cornerstone of our work, and any perception of bias undermines the trust placed in us by the community."* Additionally, concerns about the confidentiality of sensitive information, especially in land disputes, were noted, with some leaders fearing that personal vendettas could interfere with the fair handling of cases. As one Chairperson explained, *"Confidentiality and professionalism must be upheld in every case; we cannot allow personal agendas to interfere with justice."* The general lack of awareness about the DIB also contributes to its underutilization and mistrust.

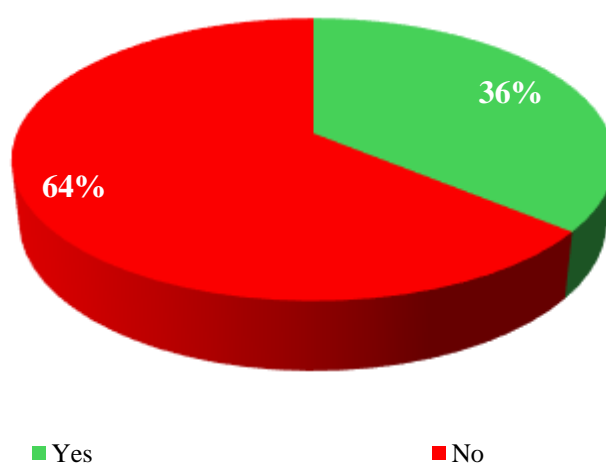
In contrast, CBOs have shown confidence in the DIB, seeing it as an effective tool for fostering transparency and trust within the community. CBOs recognize the DIB as a secure, confidential space where individuals can report issues without fear of retaliation. One CBO Representative noted, *"The DIB has given our community members a reliable, confidential space to report issues without fear of retaliation,"* which has encouraged more people to

come forward with concerns that were previously hidden. CBOs also praised the DIB for empowering marginalized groups by offering them a voice without fear of stigma. Despite these positive endorsements from CBOs, many community members remain sceptical about the DIB's effectiveness. Concerns about maintaining confidentiality persist, especially in rural communities where individuals fear their anonymity cannot be fully protected. This scepticism is compounded by past experiences where similar initiatives failed to deliver promised results. For the DIB to gain wider acceptance, CBOs and other stakeholders will need to address these doubts through clearer communication, stronger follow-up, and more transparent outcomes.

3.18. MONITORING ON DIB

Many factors can shape awareness and engagement with a system, which is critical for its success and sustainability. People's familiarity with the system's monitoring mechanisms can influence their willingness to use and recommend it to others. This section examines the level of awareness among community intermediaries and MDOs regarding the DIB monitoring system, along with their recommendations for its improvement and long-term functionality. According to the survey with community intermediaries, only 36 percent were aware of the DIB monitoring system, while 64 percent were unaware, indicating a significant gap in awareness and engagement with the system (refer to Figure 39).

Figure 39: Community intermediaries' overall awareness on the Monitoring system of the DIB

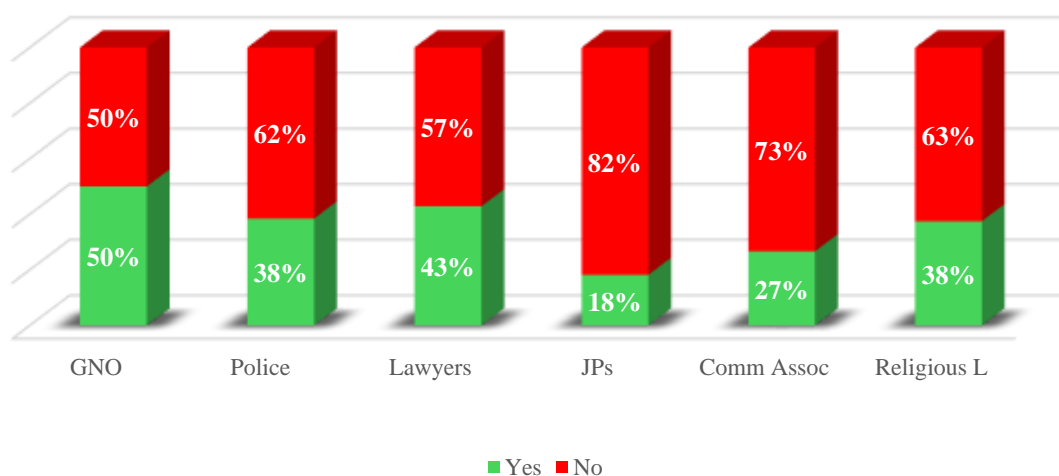


Among these respondents, 53 percent emphasized the importance of regular monitoring and evaluation as a key recommendation for enhancing the effectiveness, reliability, and

sustainability of the DIBs. This emphasizes the need for consistent oversight to build trust and confidence in the system.

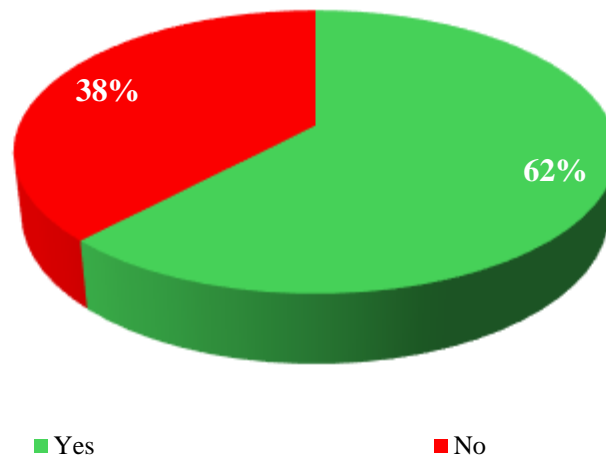
Figure 40 highlights the level of awareness of the DIB monitoring system among various community intermediary groups as very low. For instance, only 18 percent of JPs were aware of the monitoring system, whereas only 27 percent of Community Associations knew about the monitoring system. It was unfortunate to observe that 63 percent of religious leaders and 62 percent of Police Officers who participated in the survey had not heard of any monitoring system. Nonetheless, majority of GNOs were aware of the monitoring system of DIB which is an important observation.

Figure 40: Community intermediaries' awareness on the Monitoring system of the DIB



Interestingly, among the 163 MDOs surveyed, 62 percent were aware of the DIB monitoring system, while 38 percent were not (refer to Figure 41). Furthermore, 44 percent of MDOs highlighted regular monitoring and evaluation as critical for improving the system's functionality and ensuring its long-term success. This feedback reinforces the necessity of structured oversight mechanisms to address challenges and boost the overall effectiveness of the DIBs.

Figure 41: MDO awareness on the Monitoring system of the DIB



Effective monitoring is crucial for maintaining the credibility and reliability of the dispute intake system, ensuring that it functions as intended and remains trustworthy. Regular inspections are necessary to identify and address potential issues such as tampering, physical damage, or misuse of the DIB. Involving the community in monitoring, such as assigning local volunteers or trusted leaders, can enhance accountability and deter misuse. One CBO member emphasized the importance of community involvement, stating, *"Consistent checks and involving the community in monitoring efforts can help ensure the boxes are used as intended and build trust among users."* Technological solutions, such as online tracking systems, can further enhance monitoring by providing real-time data on submission patterns. These insights can help authorities address issues like underutilized boxes or areas that require further outreach, improving the overall system. Transparency in the monitoring process is essential to fostering trust; users must be informed about the status of their submissions and the resolution process. Independent oversight from neutral organizations or community boards can also ensure the system's impartiality, as noted by a Chairperson *"Having third-party oversight ensures that the system is impartial and prevents any misuse or politicization of the process."* Local authorities play a supportive role by addressing logistical issues, such as ensuring the timely collection of submissions and processing disputes promptly. Feedback loops, including providing users with updates on the resolution of their disputes, significantly enhance public confidence. As observed by a CBO member, *"When people see that their grievances are being taken seriously and handled transparently, they are more likely to trust and use the system."* Overall, effective monitoring is vital for maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the dispute intake process.

CHAPTER 04: CONCLUSIONS

The study has derived the following conclusions from all the surveys and discussions conducted among DIB implementers and intermediaries who could promote and guide the community to use DIB to fulfill their dispute submission needs. Some conclusions result from the study explicitly, while some are implicit based on the underlying meaning of data gathered from qualitative and quantitative discussions.

1. The DS Office is one of the most frequently visited places where the public, such as GNOs, police, and religious leaders, seek guidance related to dispute resolution-related information and advice.

2. The DIB placed in the DS Office has still not been used by many as frequently as possible due to many obstacles and gaps in the system. Among these gaps, DIB availability was a key one observed during this study.

- a. Although DIB is expected to be intact in all 329 DS Offices in the country, enabling all communities to submit their disputes in a safer place, it is currently unavailable in 54 DS Offices, causing complete disruption of its usage. While there is one unavailable case in each district, all DIBs were available in some districts.
- b. The main reasons for unavailability are Officers are unaware of DIB's existence, Officers are unaware of where the DIB is kept, Officers are aware of DIB, and it's not functioning, the original DIB is replaced with a general complaint or suggestion box, DIB is moved to the temple in the village.
- c. In some places, DIB is available but not found intact (poorly maintained), damaging the formality, reliability, and trust in the DIB system for dispute submission.
- d. Further, there are many DS Offices where the required forms, instructions, and writing materials were unavailable for the disputants to use. However, most available forms and instructions were in the relevant local language or languages as per the area, except for a few places.
- e. Nearly 30 percent of the DS Offices had issues providing seating facilities for disputants, and some places were without staff assistance, while many assisted well.
- f. There seems to be a lack of privacy for disputants in DS Offices.

3. DIB visibility and accessibility will provide a convenient background for dispute submission. However, there are places to improve the visibility and accessibility of DIB for disputants.

- a. Twenty-one DS Offices were found, where DIB is placed in hidden places where disputants cannot locate it for dispute submission. There were another 29 DS Offices, and the disputants had to try to find it during their visit. It was concerning to see that

some DS Offices had the DIB placed in hidden places, and the Officer was also very aware that the DIB is kept in such areas.

b. DIBs are kept where it is impossible to reach to submit the dispute. For example, some boxes are hung above the average height of a person or kept on top of tall file cupboards.

4. There are arguments on the placement of the DIB in the DS Office due to the many challenges attached to the DS Office. Many of those challenges are related to logical difficulties as it is considered a place for remote areas people cannot reach at the least expense. The second reason is the psychological barrier, as the public would feel intimidated to submit a dispute to the DS Office. Furthermore, the environment at the DS is not seen as a convenient place for dispute handling, so there is a risk of doubt about the end resolution of their disputes. However, findings further elaborated that similar challenges are perceived for other alternative places suggested to place the DIB, such as GNO, religious institutes, and police.

5. The community leaders' awareness and attitude toward recommending DIB for disputants are critically low. Chairpersons are concerned about recommending DIB because they doubt the placement and whether the basic requirements to handle disputes can be maintained in a DS Office. Moreover, MDOs also doubt that they should recommend DIB for disputants.

6. The key and crucial holding factor for promotion among all implementers, intermediaries, and disputants is the lack of familiarity with the process and confidence in the DIB system, which needs targeted strategies for relaunching DIB in the country.

7. The redesign of the DIB system, including adjustments to its color, shape, and placement at DS Offices, has been found to improve its visibility and accessibility for the public.

8. The development of visually aided instruction banners and the distribution of multilingual guidelines across key public spaces such as GN offices, hospitals, schools, and community centers has been identified as essential for enhancing the understanding of the DIB system. These concise and inclusive materials help ensure that all community members, particularly those with limited literacy or different linguistic backgrounds, can easily engage with and benefit from the DIB process.

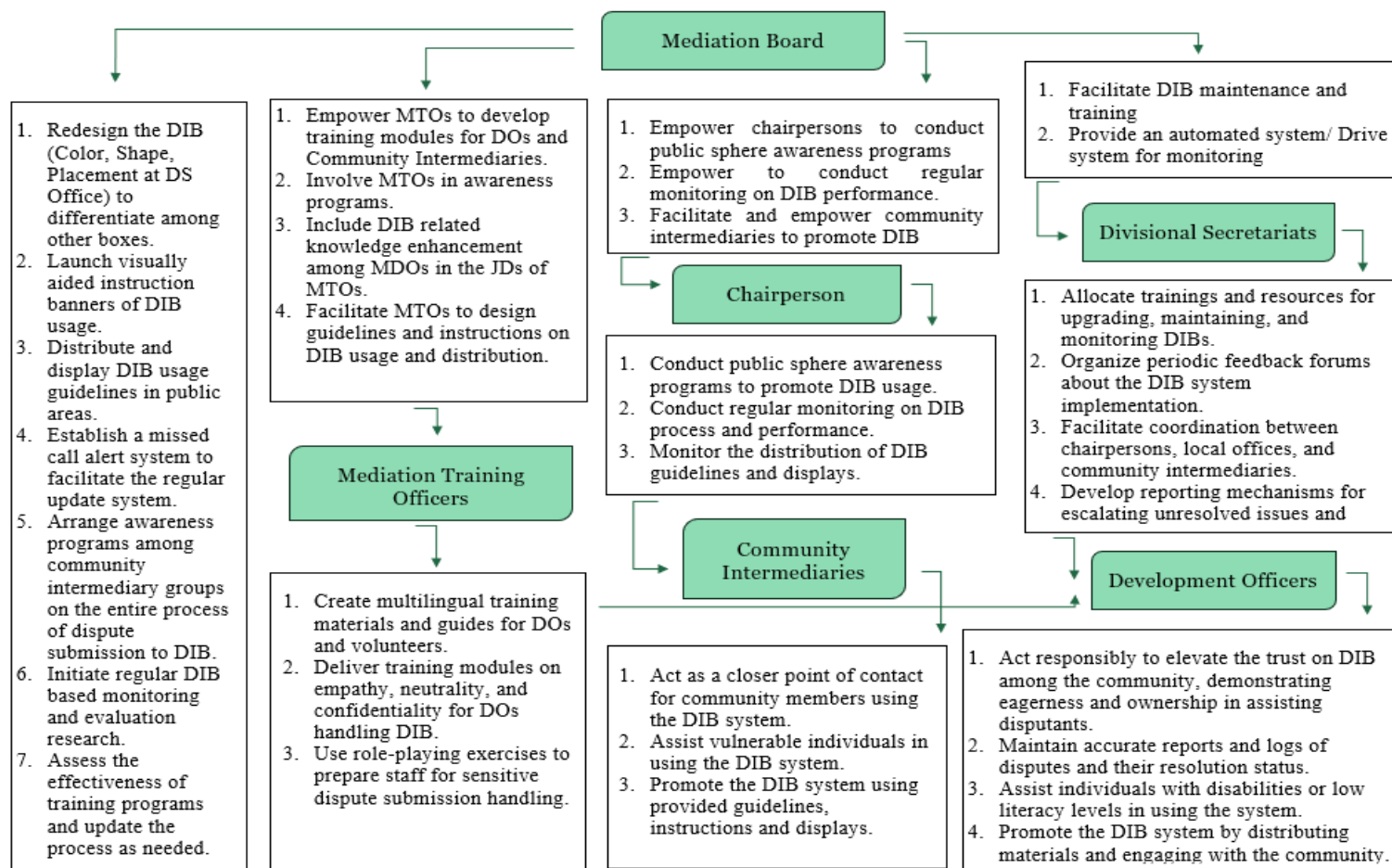
9. Further, the lack of a method or a mechanism to provide an update on the status of dispute resolution is a critical concern for all stakeholders. This means disputants should be given regular updates on the status of their dispute application in the dispute resolution process. Lack of such a mechanism has diluted the trust towards the DIB among public.

10. The study findings also showed that Officers at DS Offices should enhance their empathy and understanding of the need of disputants and be empowered to assist them when needed.

CHAPTER 05: RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for increase the usage of DIBs among communities and monitor the usage of DIBs effectively.

Figure 42: Recommendations Framework



Action plan in detail

Suggestions for Mediation Board Commission involvement in DIB promotion

- Redesign the DIB system by modifying its color, shape, and placement at DS Office to ensure better visibility and accessibility for the general public, particularly by collaborating with design experts and community representatives. This intervention is expected to elevate the trust among community on the DIB and DIB process. Further, redesigning of the box can differentiate the DIB from the other boxes placed at the DS Office.
- Launch visually aided instruction banners of DIB usage - Restructure existing guidelines and instruction banners to make them more concise, visually engaging, and user-friendly for community members, particularly those with limited literacy and ability. Further, to facilitate the illiterate or less capable people, design submission forms with pre-defined tick boxes for common complaint categories.
- Distribute comprehensive, multilingual guidelines about the DIB system to public areas like GN Offices, hospitals, schools, police and community centers to help the general public, schoolchildren, youth and healthcare visitors understand its use.
- Establish a ‘missed call alert system’ to empower the DIB monitoring process and provide quick response mechanisms for community members needing dispute resolution support.
- Arrange awareness programs among community intermediary groups on the entire process of dispute submission to DIB to facilitate educating disputants who seek community intermediary support on dispute resolution.
- Initiate regular DIB-based monitoring and evaluation research - Build partnerships with stakeholders such as local authorities, NGOs, and academic institutions to conduct regular DIB-based research to monitor and evaluation, ensuring continuous improvement and innovation in the process.
- Assess the effectiveness of training programs and update trainers and training curricula as needed.
- Empower MTOs to develop training modules for DOs and community intermediaries - Develop specialized training modules for Development Officers and Community Intermediaries to enhance their capacity to support the DIB process, using participatory and scenario-based learning techniques.
- Adjust the job description (JD) of MTOs to include the responsibility of knowledge enhancement among MDOs on DIB-related tasks.
- Provide necessary support for MTOs to update and restructure resources, guidelines, and instructions by collaborating with experts to ensure they align with the evolving needs of the DIB system and its users.
- Empower Chairpersons to conduct public sphere awareness programs to promote the importance of using DIB and its confidentiality. The Chairpersons have the opportunity to inform the community about their involvement in the DIB process to boost the trust.

- Empower the Chairpersons to conduct routine monitoring of the DIB process and placement, providing feedback to the Mediation Board and ensuring accountability.
- Provide resources for the development, placement, and maintenance of DIBs to the DS Offices, alongside adequate staff training, to ensure the system operates efficiently for community members.
- Develop an automated system/ drive system or similar digital platform to simplify the DIB monitoring process, allowing systematically track data and improve usage.

Accountability and responsibility of the MTOs in promoting DIB usage

- Create multilingual training materials and guides tailored for staff and volunteers, ensuring accessibility for diverse linguistic groups within the community.
- Deliver comprehensive training modules that focus on building skills in empathy, neutrality, and confidentiality to equip staff with the necessary tools for effective dispute resolution.
- Incorporate role-playing exercises and scenario-based learning in trainings to prepare staff for handling sensitive disputes with professionalism and tact.

The opportunities for Chairpersons' involvement in promoting DIB usage

- Conduct public sphere awareness programs by organizing community events, engaging local leaders, and using platforms like schools, places of worship, and public gatherings to educate the general public about the DIB system and its benefits.
- Conduct regular monitoring on the DIB process and placement by collaborating with Mediation Board members to assess accessibility, effectiveness, and usability, and provide actionable feedback for improvements.
- Monitor the distribution of guidelines and displays on DIB.

Opportunities for Divisional Secretariats involvement in driving DIB usage

- Allocate training and resources for upgrading, maintaining, and monitoring the effectiveness of DIBs at each DS Office.
- Organize periodic feedback forums involving community representatives to gather insights on the performance and accessibility of the DIB system.
- Facilitate coordination among the Chairperson, local Offices, and community leaders to ensure a unified approach to promoting and managing DIBs.
- Develop robust reporting mechanisms to escalate unresolved issues and suggestions to the Chairperson for timely action and system improvement.

Duties and responsibilities recommended for DOs

- Act as the first point of contact for community members by guiding them through the DIB system and addressing their initial queries. In order to establish trust and confidence on DIB, DOs should engage with disputants in more eagerness manner taking a genuine ownership of driving DIB usage.
- Maintain accurate reports and logs of disputes, including their resolution status, to ensure transparency and effective follow-up.
- Assist individuals with disabilities or low literacy levels by providing one-on-one support to ensure equitable access to the DIB system.
- Promote the DIB system by distributing awareness materials, engaging with the community during events, and highlighting success stories of dispute resolution.