



# **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR INNOVATION: ROLE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF IP FACILITATION CENTRES IN GUWAHATI**

**Bikash Kumar Baruah<sup>1</sup>, Prof. (Dr.) Sagar Onkarrao Manjare<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Commerce and Management

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Supervisor, Department of Commerce and Management

<sup>1,2</sup>Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya, India

[post2bikashbaruah@rediffmail.com](mailto:post2bikashbaruah@rediffmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [vc@mgu.edu.in](mailto:vc@mgu.edu.in)<sup>2</sup>

## **ABSTRACT :**

*This research investigates the efficacy and accessibility of Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres (IPFCs) within Guwahati's entrepreneurial ecosystem. As the commercial hub of Northeast India, Guwahati has seen a rise in MSMEs and startups, yet the translation of local innovation into protected intellectual assets remains disproportionately low. This study evaluates the role of IPFCs in bridging this gap through institutional support, technical guidance, and financial facilitation.*

*Using a qualitative-descriptive methodology, the paper analyzes the operational frameworks of centers such as the Patent Information Centre of ASTEC and MSME-DFO. Findings indicate that while IPFCs provide critical scaffolding for filings, an "accessibility gap" persists due to bureaucratic complexity, low awareness, and limited grassroots engagement. The study concludes that institutional impact is constrained by inadequate dissemination mechanisms, often leaving traditional MSMEs underserved. It recommends decentralized outreach and targeted digital literacy programs to foster an inclusive innovation culture. This research contributes to the discourse on innovation governance and regional entrepreneurship development in emerging economies, providing actionable insights for protecting the indigenous intellectual wealth of Assam.*

**Keywords:** *Intellectual Property Rights (IPR); Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres (IPFCs); Entrepreneurship Development; Innovation Ecosystem; Guwahati.*

## **I.Introduction:**

In the contemporary global economy, the paradigm of industrial competition has shifted from tangible assets and labor-intensive manufacturing toward a knowledge-driven model where Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) serve as the primary currency for growth. For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which constitute the socio-economic backbone of developing nations like India, IPR is no longer a luxury reserved for multinational corporations.



Instead, it has become a strategic necessity a vital tool for market differentiation, attracting investment, and ensuring long-term commercial sustainability. However, despite the robust national framework for intellectual property, a significant "protection gap" persists at the regional level, particularly in economically emerging zones like Northeast India.

India's MSME sector contributes approximately 30% to the country's GDP and nearly 50% of its exports. Recognizing that innovation is the lifeblood of these enterprises, the Government of India has launched several initiatives under the "National IPR Policy" to foster a culture of creativity. The primary challenge, however, remains the transition from "informal innovation" to "formal intellectual property." Small-scale entrepreneurs often possess unique traditional knowledge, innovative mechanical processes, or distinct branding, but they frequently lack the legal literacy or financial resources to navigate the complex pathways of patent, trademark, and industrial design registration.

To bridge this gap, the Ministry of MSME established Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres (IPFCs) across the country. These centers are designed to act as a "one-stop shop" for entrepreneurs, providing technical assistance for prior-art searches, legal guidance for filing applications, and facilitating financial reimbursements under various government schemes. The fundamental objective of these IPFCs is to decentralize IPR support, making the specialized knowledge of the Patent Office accessible to the grassroots innovator.

The state of Assam occupies a unique position in the Indian innovation landscape. As the "Gateway to the Northeast," Assam is home to an extraordinary variety of indigenous products ranging from Muga silk and aromatic rice to unique handicraft designs and a rapidly growing urban startup ecosystem. Within Assam, the Kamrup (Metro) district, centered around the city of Guwahati, serves as the commercial, educational, and technological hub. Guwahati serves as the hub for several premier institutions, including the Patent Information Centre of Assam Science Technology and Environment Council under Science and Technology Department, Govt. of Assam and the MSME Development & Facilitation Office under Ministry of MSME, Govt. of India. Despite this concentration of both industry and institutional support, the utilization of IPR services in Kamrup (Metro) remains disproportionately low. While the district produces a vast array of goods, the number of registered patents and trademarks by local MSMEs



does not reflect the actual level of innovation occurring on the ground. This suggests a systemic disconnect between the "supply" of institutional services and the "demand" or "uptake" by the entrepreneurial community.

The core problem addressed by this research is the perceived "inaccessibility" of Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres for the average MSME owner in Guwahati. Accessibility is a multi-dimensional concept; it is not merely the physical proximity of an office, but the ease of procedural navigation, the affordability of services, and the linguistic and technical clarity of the information provided.

Many entrepreneurs in Kamrup (Metro) perceive IPR as a bureaucratic hurdle rather than a business asset. There is a common misconception that patenting is a high-cost, time-consuming process that offers little protection against local market infringers. Furthermore, the "digital divide" poses a significant barrier. While the Indian Patent Office has moved toward a "Digital India" framework with online filing systems, many micro-entrepreneurs in traditional sectors lack the technical proficiency to manage these portals, making them dependent on expensive private consultants.

## **II. Objectives of the Study:**

Based on the detailed introduction provided, here are two focused and measurable research objectives for your study on the Kamrup (Metro) district:

- 1) To evaluate the operational efficacy of IPFCs in Guwahati by analyzing their current service delivery models, technical assistance programs, and the extent of their outreach to both urban startups and traditional MSME clusters.
- 2) To identify the socio-economic and procedural barriers that hinder MSMEs in Kamrup (Metro) from accessing IPR services, specifically focusing on awareness gaps, financial constraints, and the complexities of the digital filing process.

## **III. Review of Literature:**

The transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-driven economy has placed Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) at the center of industrial policy. This review



categorizes existing scholarship into three thematic areas: the importance of IPR for MSMEs, the role of institutional support mechanisms (IPFCs), and the regional innovation landscape of Northeast India.

### **IPR as a Strategic Asset for MSMEs**

The foundational literature on IPR emphasizes that for small-scale enterprises, intellectual property is not merely a legal protection but a survival mechanism. **Saha and Bhattacharya (2011)** argue that while large corporations use patents for market dominance, MSMEs use them to establish credibility and secure venture capital. However, their study across Indian industrial clusters found that MSMEs often suffer from "IP Short-sightedness," focusing on Trademarks for immediate brand recognition while ignoring Patents that could protect their core technological innovations.

Similarly, Tiwari and Bhowmick (2014) identified that in emerging economies, the "Cost-Benefit Paradox" prevents IPR adoption. Entrepreneurs often perceive the upfront cost of filing and legal fees as higher than the potential future revenue, a sentiment that is particularly strong in regions with weak enforcement records.

### **The Role of Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres (IPFCs)**

To bridge the gap between innovation and legal protection, the Government of India established IPFCs. Govind and Kumar (2018) evaluated the efficacy of these centers and noted that their success is directly proportional to their "procedural proximity" to the entrepreneur. They found that IPFCs located within industrial estates performed significantly better than those situated in academic universities, as the former offered "handholding" services rather than just theoretical workshops.

Madan (2012) highlighted that the primary value of an IPFC lies in its ability to provide "Prior-Art Searches" and "Financial Facilitation." Without these services, MSMEs are often misled by private consultants who charge exorbitant fees. However, Pushpangadan and Shiju (2017) critiqued the current IPFC model, suggesting that most centers are understaffed and lack the technical expertise required to handle complex patent specifications, leading to a high rate of application abandonment.



## **The Innovation Ecosystem of Northeast India and Guwahati**

Literature specific to Northeast India reveals a unique "innovation-protection" mismatch. Barua and Sarma (2019) pointed out that Guwahati, as the gateway to the region, has a vibrant MSME sector, but most innovations are "incremental" and "grassroots," which do not always fit into the rigid criteria of the Indian Patent Act. They suggest that the regional ecosystem is better suited for Geographical Indications (GI) and Industrial Designs than high-tech patents.

Deka (2021) conducted a focused study on the traditional knowledge of Assam, specifically Muga Silk and indigenous medicinal plants. Deka argued that while the Patent Information Centre (ASTECC) in Guwahati has been successful in GI registration, it has struggled to reach the "urban innovator" in the city's MSME clusters. This "last-mile delivery" of IPR services remains a significant gap in the literature regarding Guwahati's economic development.

### **Barriers: The Digital and Cultural Divide**

Recent scholarship has begun to focus on the impact of digital governance on IPR. Rao (2020) observed that the mandatory shift to online filing at the Indian Patent Office has inadvertently created a "digital gatekeeping" effect. For MSMEs in regions like Kamrup (Metro), where digital literacy among older business owners is varied, the institutional support of an IPFC is critical to ensure they are not excluded from the digital IP economy.

Furthermore, Bhardwaj et al. (2018) discussed the "Psychological Barrier," where entrepreneurs in regional clusters feel that the legal system is biased toward large firms. This skepticism creates a trust deficit between the innovator and the facilitating institution, a phenomenon that this current study seeks to explore within the specific socio-cultural context of Guwahati.

### **IV. Methodology:**

To maintain the academic rigor required for a study on Kamrup (Metro), the methodology is designed as a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with descriptive quantitative data. This allows for a comprehensive evaluation of both institutional performance and the lived experiences of MSME entrepreneurs.



The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, focusing specifically on the Kamrup (Metro) district of Assam. This district is selected as the purposive study area because it serves as the industrial and administrative nucleus of Northeast India, housing major clusters like Bamunimaidan and Kalapahar. By utilizing a case study approach, the research can delve deeply into the unique socio-economic fabric of Guwahati, where modern tech-based startups coexist with traditional MSME units. This design facilitates an exploration of the "protection gap" between existing intellectual property infrastructure and the actual adoption rates among local businesses.

A multi-modal data collection strategy is employed to ensure a holistic perspective. Primary data is gathered through semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires administered to two distinct groups: the administrators of Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres (such as ASTEC and NLUJAA) and a representative sample of MSME owners across the district. To complement these insights, secondary data is meticulously collected from annual reports of the Ministry of MSME, the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks (CGPDTM), and existing state-level industrial policies. This triangulation of data sources ensures that institutional claims of "accessibility" are cross-verified against the practical experiences of the entrepreneurial community.

Given the vast number of MSMEs in Kamrup (Metro), the study utilizes stratified random sampling to ensure representation from diverse sectors, including food processing, handlooms, and information technology. The population is divided into strata based on the size of the enterprise (Micro, Small, and Medium) and their level of technology orientation. Additionally, purposive sampling is used to select key informants from IPFCs and legal experts in Guwahati who possess specialized knowledge regarding the regional IP landscape. This dual sampling approach ensures that the findings are not skewed toward a single industry and capture the challenges faced by both grassroots artisans and urban innovators.

The analysis of the collected data is conducted using both thematic and statistical methods. Qualitative data from interviews are subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring barriers such as "procedural anxiety," "financial constraints," and "lack of institutional trust." Quantitative data from surveys specifically regarding awareness levels and the frequency of



IPFC visits are processed using basic statistical tools to identify correlations between business size and IPR engagement. Finally, the research synthesizes these findings to propose a strategic framework for enhancing IP accessibility, ensuring that the results are not just theoretical but provide actionable pathways for regional policy refinement.

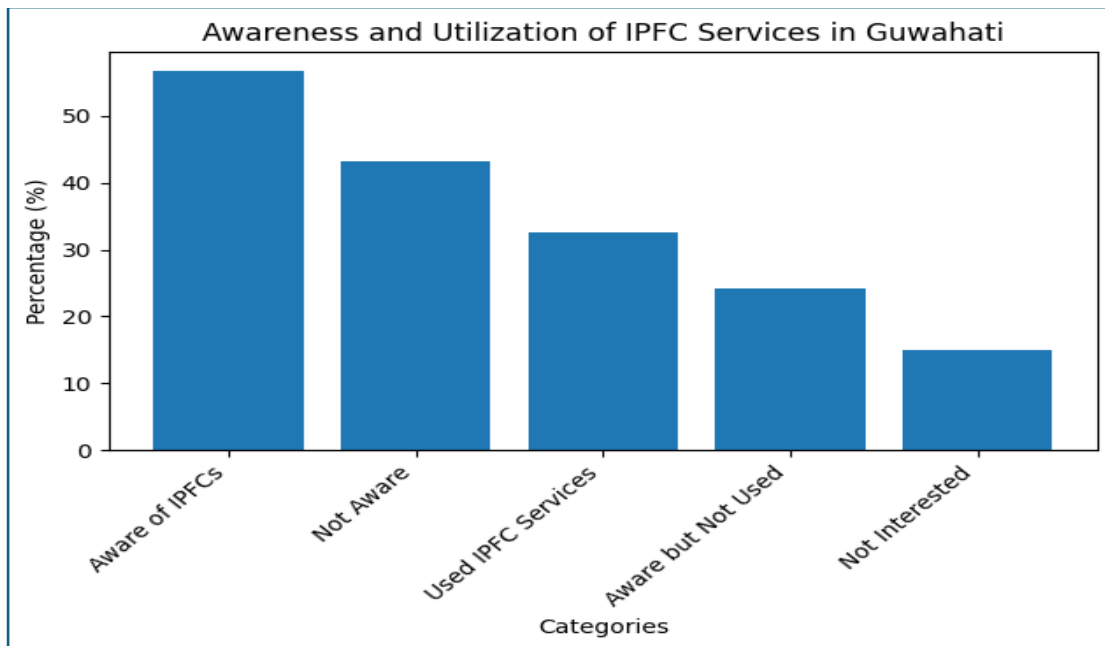
## **V. Results and Discussion:**

The present study investigates the role and accessibility of Intellectual Property Facilitation Centres (IPFCs) in Guwahati within the broader framework of regional innovation governance. The analysis is based on data collected from 120 entrepreneurs representing startups, MSMEs, and individual innovators operating in Guwahati. The results are organized around three major dimensions: awareness and utilization of IPFC services, types of services accessed, and barriers to accessibility. The findings are interpreted through both tabular data and graphical representations to provide a comprehensive understanding of institutional engagement patterns.

### **5.1 Awareness and Utilization of IPFC Services**

The first dimension of analysis focuses on the level of awareness and actual utilization of IPFC services among local entrepreneurs. As shown in Table 1 and represented graphically in Figure 1, 56.7% of respondents reported being aware of the existence and functions of IPFCs in Guwahati, while 43.3% indicated that they were not aware of such institutional support mechanisms. Although more than half of the surveyed entrepreneurs demonstrated awareness, the proportion of those who actually utilized IPFC services was significantly lower, at 32.5%.

The bar diagram visually illustrates a clear disparity between awareness and usage. The bar representing “Aware of IPFCs” is substantially higher than the “Used IPFC Services” category, indicating that awareness does not automatically translate into institutional engagement. Furthermore, 24.2% of respondents reported being aware of IPFCs but not using their services. This subgroup is particularly significant, as it represents entrepreneurs who have knowledge of institutional support but remain disengaged due to potential structural or perceptual barriers.



The presence of 15% respondents who indicated “Not Interested/No Need” suggests that a segment of the entrepreneurial population may not perceive intellectual property protection as relevant to their business models. This may be attributed to the dominance of small-scale service enterprises, informal sector activities, or businesses operating in sectors where innovation outputs are not patent-intensive.

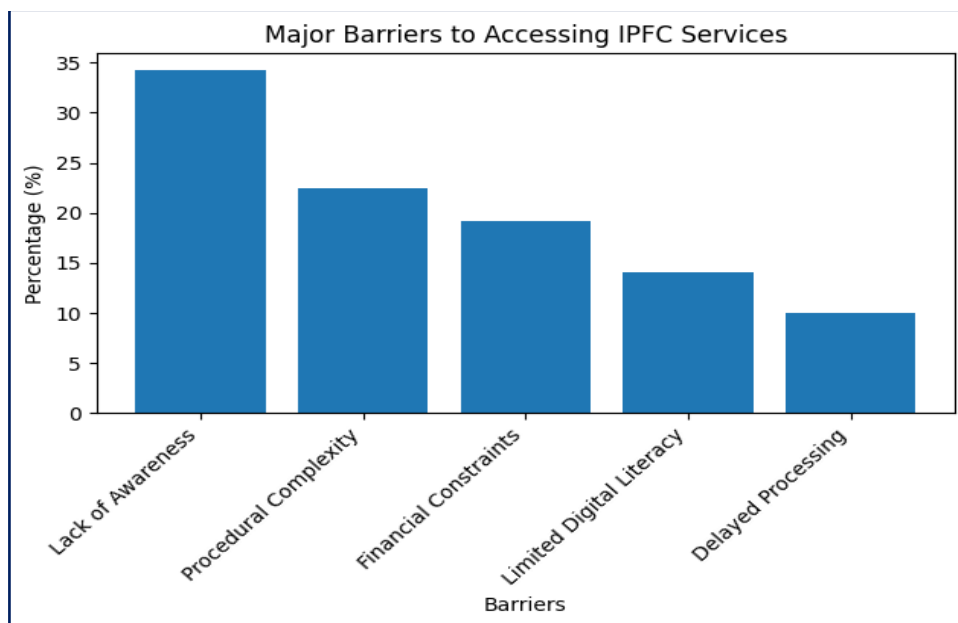
The results reveal a moderate level of awareness but relatively low practical utilization, reflecting a classic institutional implementation gap. In innovation governance literature, such gaps often arise when awareness campaigns are not sufficiently coupled with facilitation mechanisms that reduce procedural complexity and transaction costs. The graphical distribution also demonstrates that nearly half of the entrepreneurial community remains outside the formal IP ecosystem, thereby limiting the overall effectiveness of IPFCs as instruments of regional innovation support.

The data further suggests that IPFCs have partially succeeded in outreach initiatives but have not fully converted awareness into meaningful engagement. This finding highlights the need for targeted intervention strategies focusing on those who are aware but inactive, as they represent the most accessible group for improving institutional performance.



## 5.2 Types of IP Services Accessed

The second dimension examines the specific types of intellectual property services accessed by entrepreneurs who utilized IPFC support. As indicated in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 2, trademark registration constitutes the most frequently accessed service, accounting for 53.8% of total users. Patent filing assistance accounts for 23.1%, while copyright registration represents 12.8%. Participation in IP awareness workshops accounts for 10.3%.



The graphical representation clearly shows the dominance of trademark-related services, with the corresponding bar significantly higher than other categories. This pattern suggests that Guwahati’s entrepreneurial ecosystem is primarily brand-driven rather than technology-intensive. Trademarks are often associated with market identity, branding strategies, and commercial differentiation, which are central concerns for MSMEs and retail-based startups. The comparatively lower percentage of patent filing assistance indicates limited engagement in research and development (R&D)-oriented innovation activities.

The relatively modest proportion of copyright registrations suggests that creative industries, digital content creators, and cultural enterprises are either underrepresented in the sample or insufficiently integrated into IPFC networks. Additionally, the low participation in IP



workshops indicates that awareness programs may not be sufficiently attractive or accessible to entrepreneurs, despite their importance in capacity building.

The distribution pattern in Figure 2 underscores a structural characteristic of Guwahati's economy: the predominance of service-sector enterprises and small-scale manufacturing units that prioritize brand identity over technological invention. This observation aligns with broader trends in emerging regional economies where formal patenting activity remains limited due to lower R&D investment and innovation intensity.

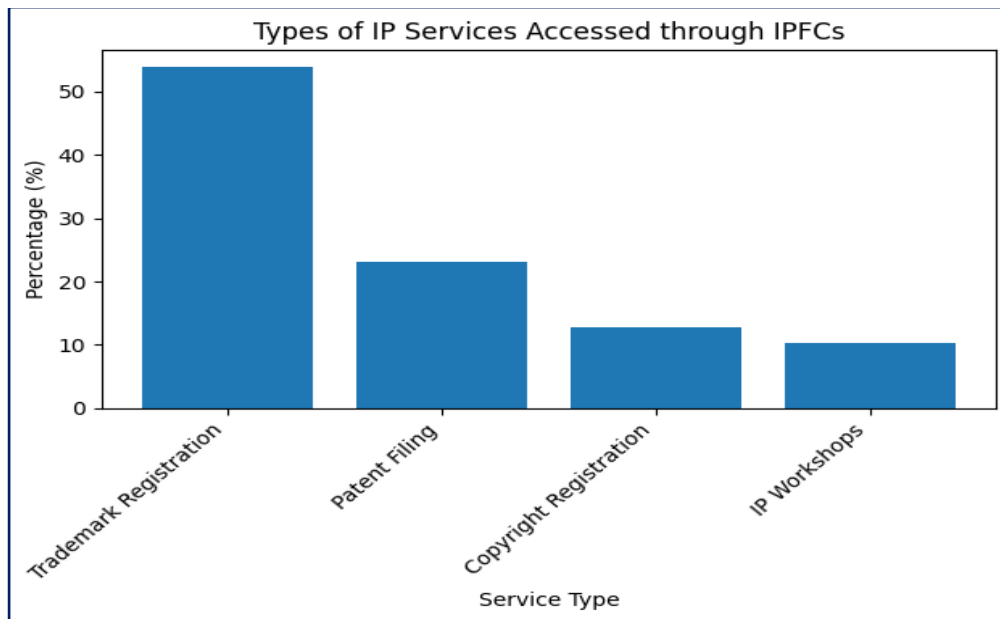
Furthermore, the disproportionate reliance on trademark services suggests that IPFCs may be perceived primarily as trademark facilitation agencies rather than comprehensive intellectual property advisory centers. This perception could restrict the scope of institutional engagement and limit the development of a diversified IP culture in the region.

The data therefore indicates that while IPFCs are contributing to formal brand protection, their impact on technological innovation and knowledge-based entrepreneurship remains comparatively constrained. This imbalance suggests the need for proactive patent awareness initiatives and collaboration with academic and research institutions to promote invention disclosures and technology transfer activities.

### **5.3 Barriers to Accessibility**

The third dimension of analysis explores the barriers preventing entrepreneurs from accessing IPFC services. Figure 3 identify five major barriers: lack of awareness (34.2%), procedural complexity (22.5%), financial constraints (19.2%), limited digital literacy (14.1%), and delayed processing (10%).

The graphical distribution clearly highlights "Lack of Awareness" as the most significant obstacle, represented by the tallest bar in Figure 3. Despite moderate overall awareness levels reported earlier, this result indicates that awareness remains unevenly distributed and insufficiently deep. Entrepreneurs may have superficial knowledge of IPFC existence but lack detailed understanding of procedures, benefits, and eligibility criteria.



Procedural complexity, accounting for 22.5%, emerges as the second most significant barrier. This reflects the perception that IP registration processes are bureaucratic, time-consuming, and documentation-intensive. Such perceptions may discourage small entrepreneurs who lack administrative capacity or legal expertise. Financial constraints, identified by 19.2% of respondents, highlight the economic limitations faced by micro and small enterprises. Even with government subsidies, the perceived cost of IP registration may deter engagement.

Limited digital literacy (14.1%) is particularly relevant in the context of digitized IP filing systems mandated by national authorities. Entrepreneurs lacking technical proficiency may find online filing systems intimidating, thereby increasing dependence on intermediaries. Delayed processing (10%) reflects concerns about institutional efficiency, though it is relatively less significant compared to awareness and procedural challenges.

The graphical representation demonstrates a declining trend from awareness-related barriers to operational concerns such as delayed processing. This pattern suggests that the primary challenge is not necessarily institutional inefficiency but rather informational and procedural accessibility.

Collectively, these findings indicate that accessibility barriers are multifaceted, combining informational deficits, administrative complexity, economic limitations, and



technological gaps. The interplay of these factors restricts the transformative potential of IPFCs within the local innovation ecosystem.

A coherent pattern is emerges when the three analytical dimensions are considered collectively. The awareness-utilization gap indicates moderate institutional visibility but limited engagement depth. The dominance of trademark services suggests commercially oriented entrepreneurial behaviour with limited technological innovation. The barrier analysis reveals structural and socio-economic constraints limiting institutional penetration.

The graphical representations reinforce the statistical patterns, visually demonstrating disparities between awareness and utilization, imbalance in service distribution, and concentration of barriers around informational deficits. The cumulative evidence suggests that IPFCs in Guwahati function effectively as support institutions but have not yet achieved optimal integration within the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The data also indicates a developmental trajectory: as awareness improves and procedural complexity is reduced, utilization rates may increase. Strengthening outreach programs, simplifying documentation processes, and enhancing digital training initiatives could significantly enhance institutional effectiveness.

## **V. Conclusion:**

The findings reveal that IPFCs have established a foundational presence within Guwahati's innovation landscape but require strategic strengthening to maximize impact. Bridging the awareness-utilization gap is critical. Entrepreneurs who are aware but inactive represent a key target group for intervention. Additionally, promoting patent literacy and R&D engagement could diversify IP activity beyond trademark dominance.

Addressing procedural complexity through simplified guidance manuals and digital assistance platforms may reduce perceived bureaucratic burdens. Financial support mechanisms, including clearer subsidy communication, could mitigate economic barriers. Finally, digital literacy workshops may empower entrepreneurs to independently navigate online filing systems.



Overall, the results indicate that IPFCs possess institutional relevance but face structural constraints limiting their accessibility and effectiveness. Strengthening institutional coordination, decentralizing outreach efforts, and enhancing grassroots engagement are necessary steps for transforming IPFCs into robust drivers of regional innovation and entrepreneurship development.

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