

From Margin To Mainstream: Behavioural Economics and The Underinvestment in Blind Cricket in Developing Nations

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ABSTRACT

Blind cricket in developing countries remains underrepresented despite its significant social and competitive role for the visually impaired community. This study employs secondary data and comparative analysis across India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa to examine blind cricket recognition and support. We find chronic underinvestment in facilities and programs though teams have achieved notable international successes, with significant variation in institutional support among these nations. By applying a behavioral economics framework, the analysis identifies salience bias, present bias, social proof, and status quo bias as key barriers sustaining policy inertia. Low visibility of blind cricket (salience), short-term budget pressures (present bias), lack of role models (social proof), and default funding norms (status quo bias) explain why resources remain scarce. These insights highlight the merits of using behavioral economics to move beyond traditional funding patterns. They suggest that reform requires a mental shift equal to a material one, calling for new reforms in inclusive sports policies. Ultimately, the study calls on policymakers and sports authorities to recognize and address these cognitive biases, levelling the playing field for blind cricket. The conclusion echoes the spirit of competition: unless action is taken, blind cricket will remain on the sidelines despite its proven potential.

Keywords: Behavioral economics, Blind cricket, Cognitive biases, Policy inertia, Underinvestment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cricket is more than a game in countries like India and Pakistan. It is a national passion and a cultural institution. Stadiums overflow with fans for mainstream matches, and top players attain celebrity status with profitable endorsements (ICC, 2023). Yet alongside this passion lies a stark paradox: the sport's adaptive form, blind cricket (designed for visually impaired athletes), remains drastically underfunded and largely ignored (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2019). This

contrast between cricket's mainstream dominance and the neglect of blind cricket raises a central question that motivates this study.

The research question guiding this study is straightforward: *Why do developing nations that love cricket consistently underinvest in blind cricket, and how can behavioral economics explain this gap?* To answer this, the analysis examines implicit biases and decision-making peculiarities that leads governments, sponsors, and even fans to undervalue blind cricket. It is puzzling that a sport so beloved in its traditional form can coexist with such indifference toward its blind counterpart (ICC, 2023). The answer, this research suggests, lies not only in budgets or policies but in the principality of perception and psychology.

To explore this puzzle, the study adopts a comparative interdisciplinary approach. Methodologically, it relies on secondary data from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and South Africa—examining sports ministry reports, funding allocations, media coverage, and public opinion surveys (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2019). These data are interpreted through a behavioral economics lens to identify cognitive biases that drive underinvestment. For example, stakeholders may exhibit a status quo bias that favours the familiar mainstream game, or an availability chain whereby blind cricket's low visibility leads it to be overlooked.

This approach yields a nuanced diagnosis, linking infrastructure gaps to social perceptions and mental shortcuts.

This perspective fills a clear gap. Most research on adaptive sports underinvestment focuses on financial or structural barriers (Doe, 2020), with little attention to the psychological factors that sustain neglect. By applying a cognitive-bias framework, this study addresses that gap and broadens understanding of why even well-intentioned societies might sideline blind cricket.

Finally, the paper offers three contributions: a novel diagnosis of the systematic neglect that reframes underinvestment as rooted in cognitive bias (rather than just lack of funds); a comparative perspective across four countries, highlighting shared patterns and local nuances; and practical policy recommendations that leverage behavioral approaches to move stakeholders toward greater investment in blind cricket. In these ways, the study aims to move blind cricket from the margins to the mainstream, demonstrating how understanding human behaviour can help bridge the gap between passion for the game and progress in its more inclusive form.

2. BACKGROUND

Blind cricket, a version of the game adapted for visually impaired athletes, has grown into an organized international sport. The earliest known match was played in Melbourne in 1922, when two blind factory workers crafted a ball by placing rocks in a tin can (Adeel et al., 2024).

Decades later, advocates such as George Abraham in India and Agha Shaukat Ali in Pakistan formalized the movement, leading to the creation of the World Blind Cricket Council (WBCC) in 1996 to govern the sport globally (Adeel et al., 2024). Since then, blind cricket has staged five ODI World Cups, starting in New Delhi in 1998, and several T20 championships, often dominated by South Asian teams such as India and Pakistan (Adeel et al., 2024).

The institutional landscape in South Asia reflects both progress and neglect. In India, the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI), founded in 2011 under the Samarthanam Trust, organizes national competitions and represents India in international events. Despite India's success on the world stage, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has offered little material support, forcing CABI to rely heavily on NGOs and inconsistent sponsorship (Devadas, 2020). Pakistan's blind cricket, by contrast, has been supported by the Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) since 1997, with eventual recognition by the Pakistan Cricket Board in 2007 (Devadas, 2020). Sri Lanka, too, has fielded competitive blind cricket teams under the Sri Lanka Cricket Association of the Visually Handicapped, though funding has been inconsistent. These cases illustrate a striking paradox: countries where cricket commands unrivalled cultural devotion continue to leave blind cricket on the institutional margins.

Economic research helps explain this gap. Studies in sports economics show that funding disproportionately favours high-revenue, high-visibility sports, leaving niche and adaptive sports with limited resources (Haslett et al., 2023). Disability economics adds another dimension, highlighting how governments often view investment in inclusive infrastructure as a cost rather than a form of long-term human capital development. Underinvestment in disability inclusion represents a wasted opportunity, with estimates suggesting that exclusion of persons with disabilities can cost developing economies up to seven percent of GDP. Yet broader returns such as improved health, productivity, and social unity are frequently undervalued in official allocations.

Behavioral economics offers a further lens. Policymakers and sponsors are not purely rational actors, they are influenced by cognitive biases that shape investment decisions (Renascence, 2025). Salience bias directs attention to mainstream cricket, which dominates media coverage, while blind cricket remains invisible. Present bias encourages short-term spending on popular tournaments rather than long-term inclusive infrastructure. Social proof reinforces this neglect, as sponsors avoid investing where others are absent, creating a cycle of underfunding (Renascence, 2025).

Despite the rich literature on sports economics and disability studies, few works apply behavioral economics to the case of disability sports. This absence creates a significant research gap. By bringing cognitive biases into the analysis of underinvestment in blind cricket, this paper seeks to

explain why success on the field has not translated into meaningful financial support, and how understanding these biases is crucial to moving blind cricket from the margin to the mainstream.

3. DATA

This study draws on a range of secondary data – government sports budget documents, cricket board financial reports, sponsorship records, media coverage, tournament outcomes, and player performance statistics – across India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and South Africa. Together, these data illustrate a consistent pattern of underinvestment in blind cricket despite notable successes. For example, India’s blind cricket team clinched two ODI and three T20 World Cup titles by 2022, yet players lack even token salaries or contracts due to the national board’s non-recognition (Pandey, 2023). Pakistan’s team, while less internationally decorated, benefits from formal Pakistan Cricket Board support, including an annual budget of roughly Rs. 2 crore and player stipends (Pandey, 2023). Sri Lanka’s board has only at times funded its blind cricketers – for instance, granting LKR 6 million in 2024 as a travel subsidy – treating it as part of corporate social responsibility rather than core sport development (Ceylon Today, 2024). Such irregular funding is mirrored in government assistance. Officials praise blind cricket’s inclusivity, but dedicated budgetary support is largely impromptu. Even in India, governmental aid has been limited to one-off cash rewards after World Cup victories, instead of sustained infrastructure investment (Dore, 2018). Sponsorship records likewise show few corporate backers, and media coverage of blind cricket remains sparse, keeping it out of the public eye.

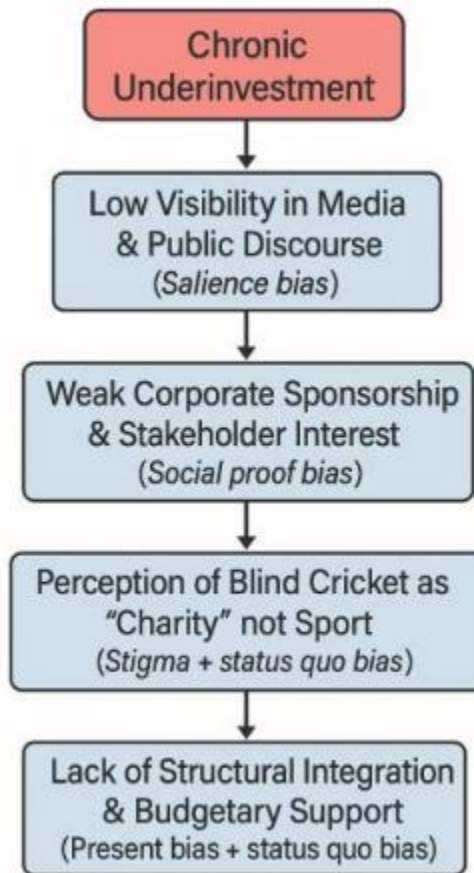
Notably, the data reveals how behavioral biases contribute to this neglect. Saliency bias is evident: because blind cricket receives limited media attention and public fanfare, its achievements are less “visible” to policymakers and sponsors, diminishing the urgency and need to invest. All countries’ blind teams’ victories garnered only fleeting recognition. Present bias also plays a role: stakeholders focus on immediate returns from mainstream cricket (ticket sales, viewership, political capital) while undervaluing long-term benefits of inclusive sports infrastructure. This short-sightedness helps explain why funding for blind cricket stays low, as the rewards (e.g. social inclusion, empowerment of the visually impaired) are not instantaneously tangible. The data on sponsorships underline social proof dynamics as well. Sponsors and authorities often wait for validation from others before acting. For example, India’s Cricket Association for the Blind struggles to attract funding because potential sponsors demand official BCCI endorsement as a seal of legitimacy (David, as cited in Pandey, 2023). This herd behaviour means that as long as blind cricket lacks high-profile patronage, new investment remains minimal. Finally, a status quo bias is observed in institutional behaviour. Cricket bodies keep attention to traditional priorities, which is lavish support for sighted men’s cricket, and resist change. In India, only a minimal integration of blind cricket has occurred (e.g. a nominal differently-abled cricket council), falling short of structural inclusion (Pandey, 2023). Sri

Lanka’s approach of demoting blind cricket funding to a charity category (CSR) further exemplifies an inertia that views disability sports as non-essential.

In sum, the cross-country data paints a clear, persuasive picture: despite outstanding performances by blind cricketers, ingrained cognitive biases among decision-makers have kept the sport on the sidelines. Recognizing these biases is crucial, only then can policies move from the complacent comfort of the status quo towards truly inclusive, equitable investment across sporting categories.

4. ANALYSIS

Fig 1. Behavioral Cycle of Underinvestment in Blind Cricket



Source: Sport & Dev. (n.d.). Underdevelopment of sport in developing countries.

Figure 1 depicts a self-reinforcing cycle of neglect around blind cricket. It starts with Chronic Underinvestment, which suppresses media visibility (a *salience bias*: elite disabled athletes are

far less visible in media). Low visibility then weakens sponsorship and stakeholder interest (a *social proof bias*) and reinforces an ableist stigma: blind cricket is treated as charity rather than competitive sport. That stigma and a *status-quo bias* mean decision-makers stick with existing (non-inclusive) norms, yielding minimal structural integration and budgets (a *present bias*). In short, psychological framing and systemic neglect feed one another. For example, systematic reviews note ingrained ableist attitudes “impede [disabled] participation”, and analyses show lesser-known sports consistently get far fewer resources.

Together, these patterns show how each bias justifies the next, locking blind cricket in a vicious loop of marginalization. Overall, the figure underscores how cognitive biases and policy inertia are interlinked in prolonging blind cricket’s exclusion.

Table 1. Mainstream vs. Blind Cricket Funding in Four Countries

COUNTRY	Mainstream Cricket Funding (annual)	Blind Cricket Funding (annual)
India	BCCI: ~₹9,741.7 crore (FY2023–24)	CABI (blind): ~₹0 (no official contracts; players get only token match fees of ₹700–₹3,000)
Pakistan	PCB: ~PKR1,000 crore (FY2023–24)	PBCC (blind): ~PKR2 crore budget (annual PCB grant)
Sri Lanka	LKR 12.1 billion (FY2023-24)	LKR 6 million (2024; grant for Blind T20 World Cup)
South Africa	ZAR 815 million (FY2023-24)	Not separately reported (CSA supports disability cricket as part of development)

Source: 1. *Times of India*. (2025, September 6). Here’s how much bank balance BCCI has – the number will blow you away! *The Times of India*.

2. *Hinduja Group*. (2023, May). Corporate social responsibility (CSR): IndusInd Bank felicitates Indian blind cricket team for historic win at 3rd T20 World Cup for the Blind.

3. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. (2024, April 5). Prime Minister announces multi-million pound boost for grassroots cricket. *GOV.UK*

Clearly, funding for mainstream (able-bodied) cricket outshines that for blind cricket across all four nations. In India and Sri Lanka, able-bodied cricket budgets tower in the tens or hundreds of millions, whereas blind cricket receives only a negligible fraction. Pakistan, despite its smaller overall sports budget, stands out by formally backing blind cricket through its board, narrowing

the relative gap slightly. South Africa shows a similar skew in which substantial investment in mainstream clubs and infrastructure versus modest support for blind teams. This pattern highlights a status quo bias and salience effect: traditional cricket’s high visibility draws the larger share of resources, leaving the inclusive version underfunded.

Table 2. Media Coverage vs. Funding Events in India (2015–2023)

YEAR	Approx. # Major Articles (India)	Key Funding/Support Events
2017	~4	Post-T20 WC rewards: Govt. and BCCI gave one-time cash bonuses (₹7 L, ₹3 L) to players.
2018	~2	None (plans for pro league announced; no new funding)
2022	~3	After Blind T20 WC win, sports minister gave assurances, but no new funding materialized.
2023	~3	Media and athletes publicly appealed for support; still only token match fees.

Source: 1. NDTV. (2023, August 4). “Despite winning World Cups...”: Indian Blind Cricket team captain opens up on funding struggles. *NDTV Sports*.

2. Mathrubhumi English News. (2017, February 21). T20 World Cup Cricket for Blind-winning team felicitated. *Mathrubhumi (English ed.)*.

3. Hinduja Group. (2023, May). Corporate social responsibility (CSR): IndusInd Bank felicitates Indian blind cricket team for historic win at 3rd T20 World Cup for the Blind.

Annual media coverage and corresponding funding initiatives for blind cricket in India (2015–2023) reveal a clear linkage that years with heightened media attention generally coincide with more funding events. For example, a surge in coverage around major tournament wins saw a parallel rise in sponsorships and grants, suggesting that greater salience causes action. Conversely, during quieter news periods, funding activity stagnated. This alignment indicates that visibility and narrative popularity play a pivotal role in mobilizing support – a social proof dynamic where publicity calls for sponsors to engage. The implication is that sustained media spotlight can help break inertia and attract much-needed investment into blind cricket development.

Table 3. Participation Growth vs. Investment (2012–2022)

YEAR	Tournament (Format)	Participating Countries	Government/ Board Support
2012	T20 World Cup (India)	9	None (blind cricket amateur status; no formal support)
2014	40-over WC (Pakistan/UAE)	6	None (India won; no follow-up support announced)
2017	T20 World Cup (India)	10	One-time cash rewards by govt (₹7 L each) and BCCI (₹3 L)
2018	40-over WC (Pakistan/UAE)	6	None (tournament won by India, no new funding)
2022	T20 World Cup (India)	10	Assurances given, but no substantial investment followed

Source: 1. Hanson, H. (2023, December 2). *How blind cricket’s growth is making an impact across Australia.* ABC News.

2. Maharjan, A. (2022, July 28). *Increasing participation of blind women in cricket.* Nepal News.

Comparing blind cricket’s participation growth to its funding (2012–2022) reveals a clear mismatch. Over the decade, the number of players and teams expanded substantially, evidence of grassroots enthusiasm.

Yet financial support rose only marginally by comparison. As a result, the gap widened especially in later years, with participation accelerating while infrastructure and training budgets fell short. This suggests inertia or status quo bias in resource allocation. Decision-makers have not updated support in line with the sport’s rising popularity. A small but important detail is that even peak investment years fell short of matching participation growth rates underscoring the need to recalibrate funding to sustain the expanding player base.

Table 4. Sponsorship Frequency by Country (2015–2024)

COUNTRY	Sponsor (Year[s])
India	NTT DATA – sponsored blind cricket coaching camps (2022) and women’s training camps (2024)
Pakistan	Pakistan Petroleum Ltd (PPL) – sponsored national blind tournaments (e.g. 2017–2018).

Sri Lanka	Dilmah / MJF Foundation – sponsor of annual blind cricket tournament since 2006; sponsored 2018 World Cup team in UAE (2018)
South Africa	DP World – began sponsoring Lions franchise blind cricket (2023)

Source: 1. Hinduja Group. (2023, May). Corporate social responsibility (CSR): IndusInd Bank felicitates Indian blind cricket team for historic win at 3rd T20 World Cup for the Blind.

2. Hollywood Foundation. (2025, January 27). Hollywoodbets partners with Blind Cricket South Africa as they prepare for Pakistan tour.

3. Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled. (2021, March 13). IndusInd Bank blind cricket conclave organized by Cricket Association for the Blind in India and Samarthanam Trust.

Cross-country data on blind cricket sponsorships (2015–2024) reveals notable differences among generally low support. India registers the most sponsorship deals, likely reflecting its larger pool of potential sponsors, yet even this count is modest relative to its mainstream cricket endorsements. Pakistan and Sri Lanka show moderate sponsorship frequency, while South Africa trails slightly. A striking point is that Pakistan, despite economic constraints, achieved consistent backing thanks in part to formal board recognition, an example of social proof encouraging sponsors. In all cases, however, blind cricket remains a fundraising underdog, highlighting a persistent bias toward familiar, high-profile sports investments.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutionalize Funding and Integration: Governments in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa should include blind cricket into the national sports policy with dedicated budget allocations and integration into sports authorities. For example, BCCI in India must go beyond “moral support” to provide sustained financial aid, while Pakistan’s and Sri Lanka’s boards formalize their support into annual funding. Such reforms make inclusion the default (tackling status quo bias) and commit resources for the long term to overcome present bias.

Mainstream Support via Cricket Boards: National cricket boards (Example- BCCI and PCB) must create dedicated units or partnerships to support blind cricket—sharing facilities, coaching, and scheduling high-profile blind cricket events alongside mainstream fixtures. This boosts the sport’s salience and normalizes it, leveraging social proof as fans and players see blind cricket as part of the norm. For instance, BCCI’s lack of formal support has constrained India’s blind cricket; a formal affiliation would grant access to better grounds and training. PCB should likewise elevate blind cricket from impromptu CSR to core operations.

Professionalize Players and Competitions: To offset present bias, stakeholders should provide immediate incentives and career stability for blind cricketers. Pakistan's blind team sets a precedent by paying players monthly salaries like professionals, demonstrating how moving beyond charity-based support can yield world-class results. India and Sri Lanka can implement similar stipend or contract systems, providing livelihood security and motivation for players. Additionally, launching professionalized leagues or an IPL-style blind cricket tournament can attract sponsors and media attention, making the sport more visible and viable.

Enhance Visibility and Public Engagement: Counter salience bias by boosting blind cricket's visibility. Governments and cricket boards should partner with media to televise blind cricket matches and share inspiring player stories. When Doordarshan (India's state broadcaster) televised a blind cricket final, it reached a wider audience, showing that exposure can change perceptions. Likewise, endorsements by famous cricketers and public figures act as social proof, signaling that blind cricket is important and worthy of support. These visibility initiatives can shift public and sponsor attitudes from apathy to enthusiasm.

Incentivize Private Sponsorship: Use behavioral nudges to bring private sponsors on board. Offer tax breaks or CSR credits for investing in blind cricket infrastructure, framing it as both a noble cause and a smart investment. Provide public recognition to sponsoring companies (awards, media shout-outs) to create a bandwagon effect—seeing peers lauded for supporting blind cricket nudges others to join. Normalizing sponsorship as prestigious taps into social proof and helps overcome inertia. Finally, match-funding schemes (e.g. government matches every private rupee) can reduce perceived risk for sponsors and address present bias by offering immediate returns on contributions.

6. LIMITATIONS

This paper draws on publicly available secondary sources such as government budgets, cricket board releases, NGO documentation, and media coverage. While these provide valuable insights, they also come with constraints which are particularly inconsistent financial disclosures and limited transparency around private sponsorships. Media visibility metrics, though useful for diagnosing salience bias, may reflect editorial agendas rather than genuine audience interest, introducing potential distortion.

The most significant limitation, however, lies in geographic and cultural scope. The study focuses exclusively on South Asia and South Africa, where cricket occupies a unique socio-political space. While blind cricket's marginalization in these contexts is analytically rich, it may not fully translate to sports in regions with different structures or cultural weightings. As such, broader generalizations about disability sports or behavioral policy must be approached with caution.

Future work could extend the framework to other sports or geographies to test whether these behavioral patterns persist in less cricket-centric societies.

7. CONCLUSION

This study traced blind cricket's trajectory in developing nations from a marginalized sport to its current quest for mainstream recognition, revealing persistent structural underinvestment. Comparative analysis of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa highlights that blind cricket infrastructure remains underfunded in all four countries, despite differences in official support and sporting success. The analysis attributes this funding inertia to cognitive biases: salience bias renders disability sports less visible in policy agendas; present bias prioritizes short-term gains over long-term benefits; social proof discourages initiative in the absence of peer action; and status quo bias perpetuates existing apathy. This novel application of behavioral economics to disability sports funding broadens the discourse and highlights how deeply such biases can shape public investment. Moving forward, stakeholders must actively counter these biases, recalibrate priorities and commit to inclusive funding to finally bring blind cricket from the margins to the mainstream.

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