

Accelerating Sustainable Development Through Extreme Poverty Eradication: Effort of Kerala

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Abstract

The study explores the significant strides made by the Indian state of Kerala in accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the successful eradication of extreme poverty. By examining Kerala's unique socio-economic initiatives, inclusive policies, and community-driven development projects, we highlight the state's effective strategies in addressing poverty and fostering sustainable development. Insights from Kerala's experience offer valuable lessons for global efforts aimed at achieving the SDGs and provide a nuanced understanding of the intersection between poverty eradication and sustainable development. This exploration underscores Kerala's emphasis on equitable access to education and healthcare, key components in breaking the cycle of poverty.

Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals are a set of global goals established by the United Nations to address a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges. They were adopted in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs are designed to be a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030.

The SDGs comprise a set of 17 targets set by the United Nations General Assembly with a view to end all forms of poverty, fight inequality, and tackle climate change by 2030. It includes interrelated goals in the areas of poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanization, environment, and social justice etc.

These goals are interconnected and address a broad spectrum of global challenges to promote a more equitable and sustainable world. Achieving these goals requires the collaboration and commitment of governments,

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businesses, civil society, and individuals worldwide. The progress towards the SDGs is tracked and monitored regularly to ensure that they are met by 2030. It is particularly important how the SDGs are perceived, accepted, and evaluated by people worldwide. According to SDG Report, 2023 ranked India 112 out of 166 countries with country score of 63.4.

Kerala ranked top among the states in all indices of development including SDGs. SDG India Index, 2020-21 ranked Kerala first in the country with overall score 75, and whereas the corresponding national score was 66. Consecutively, over last three years (2018, 2019, and 2020), SDG Index, ranked Kerala top among the states. Many of the SDGs adopted by India have already been achieved by Kerala. Goal wise performance has also placed Kerala a frontrunner among the states. State wise performance ranked Kerala second among the states in first goal 'No poverty', with 83 score. Tamil Nadu ranked top among with 86 score and the corresponding score at the national level was 60. Kerala ranked first among the states with 80 score in second goal, 'No Hunger', and the corresponding national score is 47.

Considering the first two sustained development goals Kerala takes more responsible initiative even though have high position in India. Poverty is the most pronounced feature of underdevelopment. Inadequate consumption of essential items along with poor sanitation, illness, inaccessibility to opportunities etc. accompanies the low standard of living in underdeveloped countries. India, with its diverse culture, geography, and economy, is a nation that houses both affluence and poverty. According to world bank nearly 10% of the world population lives in extreme poverty as of 2020. India holds a curtail place in the fight against poverty as the country is home to the largest number of poor people in the world. As of 2011 figures, India was holding 30% of world poor people. Nearly 21% of Indian population lived under the poverty line. According to the 'Millennium development Goals; India country report 2015', the number of people below the poverty line is estimated to be 20.7 at the end of 2015. This means that India will be having nearly 226 million poor people under extreme poverty in the total 766 million global poor. After the pandemic stage our situation pushed down on the behalf of world situation. The economic disparity is evident when we examine the poverty rates across its various states and union territories. While some regions have made significant strides in poverty alleviation, others continue to grapple with high poverty rates. India is a developing country that suffers from severe disparity in wealth and development. While certain regions profit from the bloom of industrial and economic development, there are some States that struggle because of the lack of education, social infrastructure, or resources to alleviate the challenges of poverty. Kerala state has consistently been ranked on top in multiple indicators of social development such as literacy, healthcare, education, and

standard of living. Kerala emerged as the least poor state in the country for a consecutive second time with 0.55 per cent in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released by Niti Aayog.

The significant reduction in poverty in both rural and urban areas of Kerala can be attributed to a series of radical policy decisions that have been implemented over the past four decades. Land reforms, universal and compulsory school education, democratic decentralization process, and healthcare initiatives have played a crucial role in uplifting the marginalized sections of society. Extensive social security schemes and a robust public distribution system (PDS) have provided a safety net for vulnerable populations, ensuring access to basic necessities. The social security pension system in Kerala provides assistance to approximately 65 lakh people, playing a crucial role in alleviating hunger and addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities. Women empowerment programmes like Kudumbashree have empowered women and improved their socio-economic status. These collective interventions, as per official statistics, have led to a sharp and fast decline in the absolute poverty ratio, showcasing the remarkable success of Kerala's comprehensive approach to poverty eradication. According to official statistics, the absolute poverty rate was 59.79 per cent in 1973-74, which was worse than the national average of 54.88 per cent. But over a period of 40 years, Kerala has reduced absolute poverty to 11 per cent (2011-12) whereas the national average was 29.5 per cent. In 2021, based on the multidimensional poverty index formulated by the "Niti Ayog," Kerala emerged as the state with the lowest poverty rate. Only 0.71 percent of the population in Kerala falls under the category of poverty. The lack of four essential factors, namely food, secure housing, basic income, and good health, forms the basis for determining extreme poverty. Similarly, Kerala has been regularly placed at the top regarding the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) too. Even though Kerala is leading in all fields, Kerala is devising new projects for sustainable development.

Kerala Effort

Kerala has been regularly placed at the top regarding the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). However, Kerala takes special initiative to reduce extreme poverty. The Kerala State has embarked on a groundbreaking mission to alleviate extreme poverty. Absolute poverty was defined in terms of key parameters like debilitating health conditions, disability, old age, lack of entitlement and material possessions like land and shelter, lack of livelihoods etc. The status of impoverishment of marginalized sections of the society like SC and ST were assessed with broader criteria like remoteness of dwelling places, low education status, malnutrition, lack of amenities like drinking water, electricity etc. The method of identification of the extreme poor had been a difficult task as targeting had to be precise, without the risk of missing out eligible households. It is done through

meticulous surveys, targeted strategies, and comprehensive plans and actions taken through local self-governments Kerala is setting an inspiring example for sustainable development and offering hope for a brighter future for its impoverished population. The Extreme Poverty Identification Process (EPIP) was launched by Kerala government to identify and uplift families and individuals suffering from extreme poverty. Extreme Poverty Alleviation is a critical programme that places paramount importance on addressing extreme poverty and taken proactive measures to ensure plan to be success. Department Local Self-Government were collected detailed information and conducted a meticulous analysis of the survey data. The survey, which commenced in July 2021, was completed in January 2022. Through this survey, the government was able to identify the extremely poor population and devise micro-level plans to assist them effectively. Efforts were made to discover the impoverished individuals, provide necessary aid, and offer services according to their needs. Meticulous data collection and fieldwork were conducted, resulting in a list of 64,006 families and 103,099 individuals officially identified as living in extreme poverty. This journey, known as the 'Extreme Poverty Identification Process,' serves as the inaugural step toward fulfilling the state's vision and supporting the country's Sustainable Development Goals. It is an embodiment of hope, resilience, and the unwavering belief that extreme poverty can be eradicated.

District wise split up of category-wise number of extreme poor in the State shows that the largest number of impoverished families, 8,553, was found in Malappuram district, while the lowest number, 1,071, was found in Kottayam district. No impoverished individuals have been found in the panchayats of Kumaramputhur in Alappuzha district and Kallar in Kasaragod district. The highest number of Scheduled Caste (SC) impoverished families are in Trivandrum (1881) followed by Palakkad (1588) and Malappuram (1310). The highest number of Scheduled Tribe (ST) impoverished families are in Wayanad (1028) followed by Malappuram (358) and Kasaragod (300).

Category wise distribution of households shows that among all the families, 5% come under the scheduled tribe category (i.e., 3021 households), while 20% fall under the scheduled caste category (i.e., 12673 households), and 75% belong to the general category (i.e., 47907 households). There are 2,737 families residing in coastal areas.

In the list of extreme poverty, 35% of the families are experiencing difficulty without any income sources. 24% suffer from severe health problems due to lack of access to healthcare. 21% of people face food scarcity. 15% of individuals do not have suitable housing. Only 3% belong to the category of extremely vulnerable groups.

Government expected that the identified homes and individuals will be lifted out of extreme poverty by 2026. Each local authority developed an extreme poverty sub-plan for this purpose. role of Kudumbashree is assist, implement and monitoring of the subplan. The services to be provided to extremely poor households on an urgent basis are grouped under the immediate care plan. They also include services that can be provided readily by various development agencies. This may include entitlements like Adhaar card, ration card, health insurance, food, health care etc. Similarly, services or facilities that can be provided within three months to two years are included under the intermediate plan.

Providing basic facilities, educational assistance, travelling assistance, rehabilitating people living in streets to care homes, continuous medical help, connecting the identified households and individuals to various welfare schemes etc. are included under this category.

Local governments would produce long-term comprehensive plans in circumstances when neither immediate nor intermediate plans were possible, and interventions would take longer to implement. These projects will be scrutinized as per existing guidelines and approved and implemented by the District Planning Committee.

This historic mission of eradicating extreme poverty has been made possible by the robust system of democratic decentralization in Kerala, which enables the local bodies to intervene proactively at the grassroots level. Kerala can expect to have reached an important milestone in its enviable journey towards equitable and sustainable development if the micro-plans for reducing severe poverty are properly implemented.

It would be made the first state to fully fulfill two of the most important sustainable development goals: ‘no poverty’ and ‘zero hunger’ through decades of efficient and persistent actions.

Policy Suggestions

- Proper convergence among various governmental departments, and between private and NGOs to create synergies in poverty alleviation efforts.
- Design and implement targeted social welfare programs to support vulnerable populations.
- Ensure affordable, accessible free healthcare facilities reducing the financial burden on families due to medical needs.
- Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the impact of poverty eradication programs, ensuring they are effective, and data driven adjustments when required.

- Promote community-based development initiatives that involve local communities in decision making processes, ensuring the extreme poor's needs and aspirations are addressed effectively.
- Establish food security programs which should include subsidized or free food distribution system to ensure that extreme poor have access to nutritious meal.

Conclusion

Poverty is a serious challenge that developing countries are facing today and requires focused and sustained action to significantly reduce it, break the cycle of poverty, and improve the standards of living. The prevalence of a highest number of extreme poor individuals in Malappuram district underscores the urgency for targeted interventions to address poverty and promote sustainable development. Analyzing the root causes, such as economic disparities and lack of access to resources, can guide tailored strategies. By focusing on Malappuram as a case study, policymakers and stakeholders can gain valuable insights into formulating effective measures that directly impact and uplift the lives of those facing extreme poverty in the region.

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