KERALA TOPS IN SDG INDEX FOR THE FOURTH TIME

KERALA CALLING

SEPTEMBER 01, 2024_VOL_44_No.11

₹ 12

Light after Flood

As schools reopen, Wayanad finds new energy,
carried by the quiet strength of its people.
Their resilience shines through in every step toward rebuilding.

Photo Credit: **UNSPLASH**

Rebuilding with Resilience and Hope

As we move into September, we find ourselves at a crossroads where hope, resilience, and progress define the spirit of our state. This month, alongside the celebration of Onam, we reflect on the remarkable recovery of a community that has risen stronger in the wake of disaster. The landslide that devastated Wayanad in July left a lasting impact, but the response from the people has been truly extraordinary.

Displaced families have found shelter in temporary homes, while schools have reopened, welcoming back children to classrooms—a powerful symbol of returning normalcy. The coordinated efforts of the government, the dedication of volunteers, and the unity of communities have underscored the essence of Kerala's strength: unity in adversity.

As we celebrate Onam, it is this sense of unity and compassion that takes centre stage. Our state's unwavering commitment to sustainable development also deserves recognition. Year after year, Kerala has led the way in areas like healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and inclusive growth. This progress is not merely the result of policy, but of the collective will of its people, working together to build a better future.

Onam is a time for celebration and reflection. It reminds us to honor our traditions while keeping an eye on the future. As we rejoice, let us also remember the importance of rebuilding, ensuring that prosperity and inclusion reach every corner of our state.

Wishing all a joyful and prosperous Onam. May the values of resilience, compassion, and inclusivity continue to guide us forward.

T.V. SUBHASH IAS
EDITOR

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SDGs
Sustainable Development Goals

Schools Reopen with Renewed Hope

Following the devastating landslide, Meppadi's community has rallied to rebuild. The re-admission ceremony marked a key moment of recovery for local children.

Classrooms were swiftly prepared for 607 displaced students from Mundakkai and Chooralmala. Balloons, toys, and study kits welcomed them back. Among the returning students were 61 from Mundakkai GLP School and 546 from Vellarmala GVHSS, now continuing their education in Meppadi.

Led by the Meppadi Grama Panchayat, APJ Hall and Meppadi Government Higher Secondary School opened their doors to the children. The swift action has become a symbol of resilience, reflecting the community's commitment to securing a brighter future for its youth.

Resilient and Sustainable Rebuilding

Pinarayi Vijayan
Chief Minister

The disaster in Wayanad has caused extensive loss of life, property, and livelihoods, scarring an entire region. At this juncture the State Government and the entire society of Kerala stand in solidarity with Wayanad. Our commitment to the rehabilitation of the affected and the rebuilding of the region is not merely a response to the disaster but a demonstration of our duty and care for our community, upholding the noble values of humanism.

At the outset, the Government of Kerala extends its heartfelt gratitude to the rescue teams, armed forces, volunteers, and countless individuals and organisations who had come forward to assist in the rescue, recovery and relief efforts. Their dedication and tireless work have been instrumental in saving lives, providing comfort, and bringing hope to the affected. It is because of their selfless actions that we have been able to begin the process of rehabilitation and rebuilding in record time.

Within just weeks of the disaster, we have been able to provide temporary rehabilitation for all affected families. A total of 795 families, comprising 2,569 individuals, were accommodated in temporary camps. Rental houses and government facilities in Vythiri taluk have been made available to ensure transitory accommodation for them.

Financial assistance has been given to those who returned to their relatives' homes, with 543 families receiving aid through self-certification. A monthly rent of ₹6,000 is being provided to them and those in rented accommodation. "Back to Home" kits which included essential household items were distributed to 583 families.

In the initial phase, immediate financial aid of ₹10,000 was provided to 821 affected families. A sum of Rs. 8 lakh each has been distributed to 93 families who lost their loved ones, sourced from the State Disaster Response Fund (Rs. 4 lakhs), Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund (Rs. 2 lakhs), and the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (Rs. 2 lakhs). Up to Rs. 1,00,000 (Rs. 50,000 each from CMDRF and PMNRF) has been granted to those with serious injuries. Rs. 10,000 was sanctioned for the funeral ceremonies of 173 families.

Emergency aid was provided to 1,259 families at a rate of Rs. 300 per day for each person. Two persons per family are eligible for the aid, ensuring that a family could get up to Rs. 10,000 per month.

The draft list of missing persons was first published as an initial step to find them. This draft list was published based on documents such as ration cards, ID cards, voters' lists, various passbooks, and educational records. Within six days of the disaster, a draft list of 131 individuals was released. Information was extracted from this list, and the details of those identified were removed before publishing the second list, which included 120 individuals.

As part of the effort to locate missing persons, DNA testing was conducted on the recovered bodies and body parts. A total of 427 samples from bodies and recovered body parts were subjected to DNA analysis. It was found that the DNA of 21 bodies and 59 body parts matched 42 individuals. The current list of missing persons now has 72 names. This list is compiled and updated by the District Police Superintendent.

To help families recover from the impact of the disaster, the services of over 350 social and mental health counsellors and psychiatrists were ensured. A total of 2,000 individual psycho-social counselling sessions, 21 psychiatric pharmacotherapy sessions, and group counselling sessions for 401 people were conducted. This comprehensive mental health support aims to help the affected

individuals to regain their stability and confidence.

Rehabilitation efforts will not be limited to Wayanad alone; but will also be extended to those affected in Vilangad, Kozhikode district. Priority in the rehabilitation process will be given to those who have lost their homes. The rehabilitation package will include livelihood support; focus on employment opportunities and training programmes for women to engage in occupations of their choice. Small business owners currently operating in makeshift buildings will also receive support to resume their economic activities.

Looking towards long-term solutions, the State Government is committed to build single-storey houses with an area of 1,000 square feet. These houses will have strong foundations to support additional floors. This approach will ensure that families have secure and future ready homes, reflecting the State Government's commitment to sustainable rebuilding. These houses will be constructed uniformly, with assured quality and all necessary public facilities arranged at the rehabilitation sites.

The State Government places great importance on education and the future of our youngsters affected by the disaster. A school entry festival is scheduled on September 2nd, and experts will evaluate whether existing schools in disaster-affected areas can be reconstructed and retained. Necessary educational facilities will also be arranged at the rehabilitation sites to ensure uninterrupted learning for all the affected students.

The Government Lower Primary School, located amidst the tea plantations of Mundakkai, and Vellarmala High School, previously situated along the riverbank in Chooralmala, no longer exist. However, these two public schools are being revived without changing their names. They are being reopened a little further away in Meppadi. New classrooms were set up swiftly, so that the students' education is not hindered.

Understanding the financial challenges faced by the victims, the Government of Kerala convened the State-Level Bankers' Committee to explore measures for financial relief, including the possibility of writing off debts. Although the final decision rests with the banks, consultations will be held with the Reserve Bank and the

Union Ministry of Finance to ensure comprehensive support. Stern action will be taken against private money lenders trying to recollect their loans, during these troubled times. A special financial package has been requested from the Union Government to aid the rehabilitation and rebuilding efforts.

Efforts are underway to strengthen the state's disaster preparedness and response capabilities. While cyclone warnings are effectively communicated, there is a need for improved alert systems for events like landslides. Assistance from National Nodal Agencies has been sought to enhance warning systems, and Kerala's Climate Change Research Institution is expected to receive additional support from the Union Government Agencies to bolster its capabilities.

Aiming to rebuild with resilience to future disasters, the State Government is focussing on long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation. This comprehensive plan involves rebuilding infrastructure, restoring agricultural lands, and supporting the economic revival of the region. Recognising the crucial role of farmers in the local economy, the rehabilitation package will include facilities to help them continue their agricultural activities. Efforts will be coordinated to involve individuals and organisations willing to sponsor rehabilitation initiatives, ensuring a collaborative and effective approach to recovery.

In these challenging times, it is important to remember the power of unity and hope. The release of the song "Onnay Neridam, Kanalay Thunayay Keralame Poroo," sung by K. J. Yesudas, serves to inspire and uplift the spirits of the affected. This song symbolises the resilience and courage of the people of Kerala, encouraging everyone to face adversity together, supporting each other.

The Government of Kerala remains unwavering in its commitment to those affected by this terrible natural disaster. Every effort will be made to ensure their well-being. The state will continue to work tirelessly to restore normalcy, rebuild lives, and provide hope for a brighter future. The survivors can be assured that the State Government is with them every step of the way, and together, we will overcome and emerge stronger.

Setting New Standards in Rehabilitation

Kerala's proactive approach to disaster rehabilitation in Wayanad is paving the way for a resilient future

K. Rajan
Revenue Minister

Rehabilitation for those affected by the devastating landslides last month in Chooralmala, Mundakai, Punchari Mattam, and other areas of Meppadi Panchayat in Wayanad is an urgent priority for Kerala. Over the past few years, Kerala has been increasingly impacted by natural disasters due to climate change, significantly affecting people's lives and socio-economic conditions. The widespread destruction of homes, agricultural lands, and livelihoods has been substantial.

The government's timely intervention, supported by the community, is providing hope for rebuilding lives and restoring dreams in Wayanad. After the disaster, 983 individuals were sheltered in 17 camps, with 794 directly affected by the landslides. The main goal was to quickly arrange temporary accommodation for them by August 30. Under the Cabinet Sub-Committee's leadership, rescue missions and relief efforts coordinated the relocation of individuals from camps to rental houses. While government quarters and nearby rentals were arranged, many affected people preferred staying close to their previous residences due to concerns about children's education, jobs, and separation from family and friends, prompting efforts to provide temporary housing as close as possible to their original homes.

The rent for temporary houses was set at INR 6,000 in the first phase, which would also be provided to those moving to stay with relatives. Though there was concern about how long the rent assistance would be provided, the response that it would continue until permanent housing is completed satisfied most people. The temporary rehabilitation aimed to be completed by August 30 was achieved by the night of August 24, moving nearly 800 affected individuals from camps within a month. This quick relocation is a significant achievement, considering the history of prolonged camps for similar disasters.

When 17 camps were initially set up, special officers were assigned to each camp, and a Deputy Collector was appointed for overall management. As the camps were dissolved and temporary rehabilitation began, a help desk was established at the Collectorate with the phone number 04936-203450 to address ongoing issues of those in temporary residences. Assistant Collector Gautham Raj was specifically tasked with examining the issues of those under temporary housing. Officials from the Economics and Statistics Department were also assigned to personally call and ensure that all necessary assistance was provided to those in need.

All those moving from camps to relative's houses or rental houses were provided with Back Home Kits, necessary furniture, household items, cleaning materials, and food kits. Provisions were made for the

comfort of those in hospitals, ensuring they had suitable accommodations when they returned. An emergency assistance of INR 10,000 per family was provided to all affected individuals, including those who stayed in the camps. Financial aid from various sources such as SDRF, CMDRF, and PMNRF is being provided to the families of the deceased.

The government has initiated a plan to provide employment assistance in the form of INR 300 per person for two members of each affected family. Although, under the KSDMA Act, this assistance is limited to one month, the state government has already requested NDMA and the central government for permission to extend it to three months. A significant concern for those who lost everything was how to return to normalcy. In a major relief, Kerala Bank has decided to waive off all debts of the affected individuals in the disaster-hit area. A special SLBC meeting chaired by the Chief Minister announced a moratorium on loans for the affected. The government has also raised the demand with banks to write off the loans.

Special camps were set up to replace lost official documents, and relevant papers were distributed to affected individuals. Students from Vellarmala School were relocated to GHSS Meppadi, while those from Mundakai LP School were accommodated at LPS Meppadi, with classes starting this week and an admission festival scheduled for September 2. An August 23 meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary gathered feedback from affected individuals and stakeholders to ensure effective rehabilitation. A geoscience study led by Dr. John Muthaiya, as recommended by the Landslide Advisory Committee, is assessing the safety of continued habitation in the village. The results will determine if those whose homes were not completely destroyed can remain in the area, guiding their inclusion in the permanent rehabilitation plan.

The township initiative led by the Chief Minister has been well-received, with the Revenue Department identifying locations to build single-storey houses of 1,000 square feet for those who lost their homes, designed for future expansion. Priority will be given to the most affected, with additional phases planned for others as agreed in a recent all-party meeting. Beyond housing, the government will focus on providing livelihood opportunities, including training for women to start businesses. Political parties and voluntary organizations are committed to supporting these efforts, aiming not just to rebuild homes but to fully restore the lives of those affected, making Kerala a model for comprehensive rehabilitation.

Reviving Dreams Brick by Brick

Ramesh Kumar Vellamunda

Mundakkai and Chooralmala, two villages in Wayanad, now stand as symbols of devastation and resilience. A landslide, the worst in Kerala's history, swept away homes and lives in one terrible night. Over 500 souls were lost. The efforts so far have been strong, but rebuilding will take all of us, not just in the coming weeks, but in the months and years ahead. The survivors, holding on to hope, are rebuilding, brick by brick. This is their story of loss, survival, and the long road to healing.

Mundakkai and Chooralmala. Two villages in Wayanad, now forever tied to unimaginable loss. They aren't just names on a map anymore—they are the epicentres of grief and resilience. The disaster that struck ripped through lives, homes, and futures in the blink of an eye. Now, the shattered community is left to focus on one thing: survival.

Under rain-soaked mountains, all that remains are gaping red scars, where homes once stood and dreams once thrived. A massive landslide wiped out everything in its path. Over 500 lives lost. Families uprooted. Roads, bridges, schools—all gone. Entire villages obliterated as if they never existed.

The rain has stopped. The sun shines again. But for Aneesh, standing where his home once stood, it might as well be the darkest night. His house, his three children, his livelihood—all gone in a blink. Today, Aneesh and his wife live in a government shelter, a temporary reprieve from the storm of grief. And then, there is the six-year-old girl, too young to know she's alone. She's lost her parents, her siblings, her world. She lives now with distant relatives, unaware of the depth of her loss.

Fifty-two families bear the weight of this disaster. Seventeen families alone lost 62 members. Of these, 36 were children. Seventeen remain missing. Mundakkai and Chooralmala have become places of mourning, their landscapes marked by unspeakable tragedy.

The once-bustling Mundakkai market? Gone. Streams that once gently flowed now rage with the memory of destruction. Bodies were found as far as 40 kilometers away, carried by the merciless waters. The community, now orphaned, faces a new reality: over 555 homes destroyed, more than 2,300 lives forever altered. Tourism, the lifeblood of many, has withered in the wake of the catastrophe.

The Night That Changed Everything

They were simple people. Farmers, tea plantation workers, drivers, laborers. People who built their lives brick by brick. But that night, under a relentless downpour, the earth gave way. Schools—symbols of progress—buried under mud and boulders. Even the newly constructed Chooralmala Higher Secondary School, a beacon of hope, now lies unusable. More than 600 students are left with an uncertain future.

Rehousing the Village

Sainaba remembers it like yesterday. The sound of the rain, the house shaking, the mad rush to higher ground. In moments, her home—her

lifetime of work—was gone. She now lives in one of the 888 temporary camps set up by the government, a place where survival is the only option.

With over 888 such camps in 18 local areas, the government is trying to offer some semblance of normalcy. Displaced families receive a monthly rent allowance of Rs 6,000, but the road to permanent housing feels like a distant dream.

The Revival of Education

Yet, in the midst of this sorrow, there is a glimmer of hope. Schools have reopened, offering a small slice of normalcy. At Meppadi, 607 children were welcomed back to their new temporary classrooms. Balloons, toys, school kits—little tokens of joy in a time of grief. The children of Mundakkai and Vellarmala, though scattered, have resumed their studies in makeshift classrooms. They sing together, they laugh, they move forward.

For the 61 students of Mundakkai LP School and the 546 from Vellarmala GVHSS, education continues. Their schools are now classrooms in community halls. But in this shared space, there is healing. The older students hold the hands of the younger ones, guiding them through a new journey.

Despite the immense loss, 607 children from the devastated villages have returned to school. Makeshift classrooms now stand in community halls, where young survivors learn, laugh, and heal together. Education has become their anchor, a lifeline to a future that still holds promise

A New Journey

Three KSRTC buses transported these children to their new temporary school. A ride through tea estates marked with memories of loss, but also a journey toward new beginnings. They sang folk songs, hands clasped in solidarity. They are children, but also survivors.

In the Meppadi Community Hall, the youngest of them, from LKG to fourth grade, have found a new school. The teachers, many of whom lost family, work tirelessly to create a safe space for their students. The older ones are accommodated at Meppadi Government Higher Secondary School, where they continue to learn, despite the shadows of the past.

Learning to Move Forward

Education is more than just lessons in books—it's hope. A lifeline for these children to cling to. Government officials, including the Education Minister, have assured these children they are not forgotten. Cultural performances marked the first day of their return, a sign of resilience in the face of tragedy.

A Race Against Time

In just four weeks, the government established temporary shelters and schools for the displaced. The children, many of whom have lost everything, now have a place to learn and grow again. Temporary classrooms, IT labs, staff rooms, kitchens—all set up in record time. Textbooks, uniforms, and essentials have been provided.

Yet, the grief remains. Of the 36 children who perished, 17 are still missing. Their absence lingers like an open wound, a reminder of the lives cut short.

But the survivors? They endure. The children, their families, and the community press forward. They carry the weight of the past, but they are not broken. With each step, they rebuild. With each lesson, they heal. They have lost everything—but they are determined to rise again

The Loss Runs Deep...

Yet, They're Determined to Rebuild.

Staff Reporter

After the floods and landslides in Wayanad, four families share stories of loss, survival, and the strength to rebuild—thanks to timely government intervention.

Punchirimattom, Chooralmala and Mundakai were once serene villages where families lived simply, working the land and supporting one another. But when the monsoon rains of 2024 came, the villages were ravaged by floods and landslides, leaving homes destroyed and lives in disarray. In the aftermath, the government stepped in swiftly, providing shelter, financial aid, and medical support to the survivors. Among them, four families recount their stories—tales of profound loss, survival, and the journey toward rebuilding. Their resilience is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the critical role of

the government in helping communities recover.

Thanka's Journey Through Grief

Thanka's life was forever changed on the night the landslide hit. A widow with two sons, she relied on their small plot of land for survival. When the disaster struck, her elder son, Sujish, was injured while escaping the floodwaters. Her younger son, Subish, was tragically swept away, never to be found.

While no assistance can fill the emotional void left by Subish's absence, the state government's intervention has been crucial. Financial aid and temporary shelter allowed Sujish to recover and provided Thanka with the means to rebuild her life. The government's role in aiding survivors like Thanka has been indispensable in helping them find a way forward, even amid such immense grief.

Prasanna's Struggle to Rebuild

Prasanna's family worked hard for years, building a modest home in Punchirimattom, only to see it washed away by the flood. Her family now resides in government-provided temporary housing in Munderi. Although the emotional toll of the disaster remains heavy, Prasanna acknowledges the vital role of the state in their recovery.

"The government gave us shelter and safety," she says, grateful for the support in this difficult time. Despite their losses, the aid provided has offered a sense of security and hope for the future.

Starting Over from Nothing

Mujeeb and his wife Asya lost not just their home but their entire livelihood. Fleeing from their house in Chooralmala with their seven children, they left behind everything they owned. The government immediately stepped in, providing them with rented accommodation and financial aid to help them start anew.

Mujeeb recognises that rebuilding from nothing is a daunting task, but the support from the authorities

has made the journey less overwhelming. "The government's help is what keeps us going," Mujeeb says. He remains optimistic about the future, knowing that the ongoing support will be their foundation as they move forward.

Pramesh's New Reality

Pramesh and his family worked in the Mundakkai estate for years, their lives revolving around the land. When the floods struck, their home and livelihood were swept away. Today, they share government-provided temporary housing with seven other families, including Mujeeb's.

While adjusting to a new way of life far from the fields they once knew has been challenging, Pramesh is grateful for the state's quick response. "Without the government's help, we wouldn't have a place to stay," he says. The continued support offers hope, and he is confident that, with time, they will rebuild.

Government Support Gives Them Hope

For the families of Punchirimattom—Thanka, Prasanna, Mujeeb, and Pramesh—survival would have been unimaginable without the critical interventions from the state government. From temporary housing to financial aid and medical care, the government's comprehensive support has been a lifeline in their time of need.

While the emotional scars of the disaster remain, the government's unwavering assistance provides these families with hope. The path to recovery may be long but the essential aid they receive offers stability and reassurance giving them the strength to rebuild their lives with confidence that brighter days lie ahead

Harsham Brings New Hope to Rebuild Puthumala

Staff Reporter

After a devastating landslide in Puthumala claimed 17 lives and destroyed over a hundred homes, the government's swift action through the Harsham rehabilitation project in Poothakkolli has brought new hope, providing affected families with homes and a chance to rebuild their lives.

August 8, 2019—a day that forever changed the village of Puthumala in Meppadi Grama Panchayat, Wayanad. A devastating landslide claimed 17 lives and destroyed 103 homes, wiping out hectares of farmland. Yet, from the ruins of this tragedy, a remarkable story of survival and renewal has emerged. Today, those who survived the disaster are finding new hope and contentment in Harsham, a purpose-built community in Poothakkolli.

Puthumala was once a picturesque village, surrounded by lush green hills. But on that fateful day, heavy rains unleashed a nightmare, washing away lives and livelihoods. In just one night, Puthumala was transformed into a scene of destruction. Mud and debris cascaded down, turning the once-serene landscape into a grim reminder of nature's power. Yet, amidst the devastation, the government launched a rapid and compassionate response, providing a lifeline to the affected community.

The search for survivors extended for weeks, utilizing modern equipment and dedicated personnel. Twelve bodies were recovered, while families were swiftly relocated to relief camps. Here, they were provided with essential needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Even those who had been evacuated before the disaster received support, demonstrating the government's commitment to caring for every individual. Amid the sorrow of losing loved ones, the survivors found a measure of comfort in the government's swift and compassionate response. This support became a beacon of hope, helping Puthumala rise from its wounds.

Hands of Care and Compassion

The primary mission was to identify and assist the victims—those who had lost loved ones, homes, or land. The government quickly disbursed emergency financial aid of Rs. 10,000 to the affected individuals, ensuring immediate relief. A comprehensive list of all disaster victims was meticulously prepared, with local representatives, social workers, religious institution representatives, and organization members contributing to the effort. A total of 103 houses and farmland were destroyed in the landslide. The next step was to transition the displaced

individuals from relief camps to temporary housing. Rental homes were arranged for 53 families, with the Meppadi Grama Panchayat providing Rs. 3,000 per month for each household for up to six months. Meanwhile, the government allocated Rs. 10 lakh per family for rehabilitation. It was from here that the people of Puthumala began to rebuild their lives.

New Homes and New Beginnings

Finding a suitable location for the rehabilitation of Puthumala was a top priority for the district administration. They sought a place close to Puthumala, yet safe from future calamities. Soon, they found land where all the displaced could be accommodated together. The Mathrubhumi Charitable Trust played a crucial role in expediting the rehabilitation process by purchasing and donating seven acres of land, worth around two crore rupees, to the government. This land in Poothakkolli became the new home for the survivors. Plots were scientifically allocated, and with the support of the government and volunteers, houses began to rise from the ground. Fifty-three families were each allotted seven cents of land in this nurturing community. The construction of these homes was carried out in phases, ensuring that all necessary amenities—such as housing, electricity, and drinking water—were provided. For the 50 families who did not receive houses, the government allocated Rs. 10 lakh each for their rehabilitation. Support from voluntary organizations also reached these families, ensuring that no one was left behind.

A Model of Successful Rehabilitation

The rehabilitation in Poothakkolli stands as a testament to resilience and community spirit. The collaboration between the government and volunteers turned the dream of rehabilitation into a reality. This effort was not just about rebuilding homes but also about nurturing the unbounded love and care for fellow human beings. Today,

Puthumala is a shining example of successful rehabilitation, serving as a model for future efforts, such as those planned for Mundakkai Chooralmala. The government aims to replicate this model, with plans to find another site near Chooralmala for rehabilitation. Kerala, which witnessed one of its largest natural disasters, now also witnesses the swiftest recovery. For the residents of Mundakkai Chooralmala, living in scattered locations will be challenging, and the government's goal is to bring them together in a township, much like Poothakkolli.

A Life of Contentment in Harsham

"We are content in Harsham, the seven-acre land among the tea plantations of Poothakkolli. We can never forget the disaster. We had lost everything. But we survived. Today, everything we need is here in Harsham," says Kallingal Alavi, a 72-year-old survivor relocated from Puthumala. "When the landslide came, we lost everything. Not just me, but my neighbors as well. We were once living just a call away from each other. That rainy night remains the last memory of Puthumala. We are fortunate to have gotten our lives back. Initially, our families were together in a relief camp. The government provided food and everything. There was a lot of uncertainty about where we would go. For six months, we got a temporary house with rent. The rent was Rs. 3,000 per month, fully provided by the Meppadi Grama Panchayat. The then-president, Sahad, gave all support for this. Soon, we were allocated land in Poothakkolli, not far from Puthumala. In the seven acres donated by Mathrubhumi, houses were built for us. The government provided Rs. 4 lakh per house, with the remaining amount contributed by voluntary organizations, making Harsham a reality here. We, the people of Puthumala, have risen from the disaster and are living a new life here today."

Kerala reigns in SDG index again

Dr. Jiju P. Alex
Member, Kerala State Planning Board

Kerala's success in accomplishing Sustainable Development Goals for the fourth time in a row is greatly reassuring, since the unique efforts by the state to address each of the goals have been proven effective. Further, this accomplishment demonstrates how public action and redistributive policies shape up an equitable and welfare society. It also vindicates Kerala's resolve to continue with planned development to accomplish specific development targets.

The decision to carry on with five-year plans, while the national government and many states decided to do away with long-term development planning, has been effective as the indices of achievement in many sectors testify. The process of identifying development gaps and formulating development proposals through consultation with a wide spectrum of stakeholders is paying off well in many ways. The success of Kerala also underscores the need to have people's participation while forging development strategies. With a strong local government network at the grassroots, implementation of decisions to address key development concerns faced by the people has become easier.

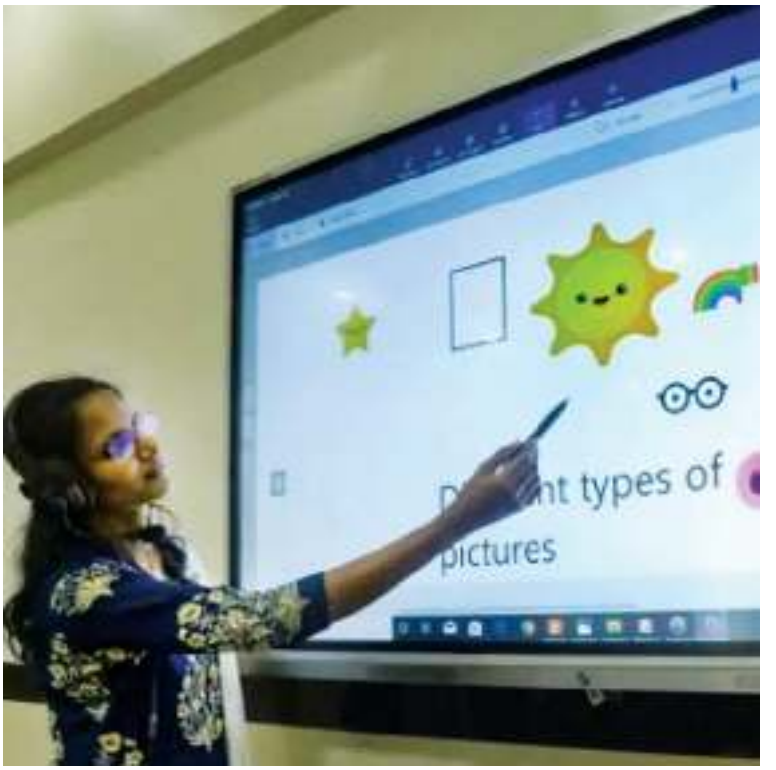
On that account, the accomplishments regarding SDGs also affirm the significance of decentralised planning adopted by the state a quarter of a century ago.

Mainstreaming SDGs in Kerala's Development

Mainstreaming SDGs in Kerala's development has not been difficult, as these goals had been the focus of the state's development initiatives that began decades ago, mainly by progressive governments. Right from land reforms to democratic decentralization, Kerala had attempted social changes that would make a long-term impact on the governance systems and, thereby, the welfare of the people. Development of Kerala's society has been the cumulative effect of these historic efforts.

Occasional setbacks in continuing these efforts notwithstanding, the overall impact of these interventions has significantly been positive. However, it is the recent emphasis on comprehensive development of the state that foregrounds inclusion and equity, with a commitment to 'leave no one behind,' which has greatly contributed to the higher scores attained by Kerala. This assurance of equitable distribution of resources, combined with the efforts to promote economic growth, has resulted in several innovative measures to address people's most pressing development challenges.

In this regard, the state had started various missions with the goals defined in the international framework of SDGs, as an extension of earlier interventions. Meanwhile,



there had also been wider discussions on the second-generation challenges of Kerala's growth model, which called for interventions in sustainable production, urbanization, natural resource management, and people's socioeconomic well-being, including health and education. All these concerns are reflected in Kerala's commitment to expand the scope of the SDGs to the grassroots level, by including these targets into the long- and short-term plans of the state as well as local governments.

Achievements in Accomplishing SDGs

Kerala retained its top ranking in the SDG India Index published by the NITI Aayog with a score of 79 points, sharing the first rank in the 2023-24 edition with Uttarakhand. In 2020-21, Kerala had grabbed 75 points, enhancing 5 points from the score in 2019-20. This year, the state stood first in 'zero hunger,' and quality education, second in climate action, and third in both gender equality and 'industry, innovation, and infrastructure.' It also got adjudged as one of the 16 'achiever' states in ensuring affordable and clean energy.

There are also certain sectors in which the state has not fared as expected. However, a comparison of indices reveals that Kerala can catch up with any other state in the immediate future if the current efforts are pursued carefully and persistently. The NITI Aayog's indices capture the achievement of the states in different dimensions of a development goal, with separate sub-indices for each dimension.

The SDG India Index is used to measure the progress of states and union territories towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The index uses 113 indicators that are aligned with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) and National Indicator Framework (NIF). For each of the 17 SDGs, the index calculates goal-wise scores for each state and UT and then generates an overall composite score for each state and UT. The scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating

greater progress towards the targets.

A closer look at Kerala's scores reveals that out of the 17 sustainable development goals, which are reflected in almost every development intervention in the state, we have been rated as a front-runner for all of them except responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and life below water (SDG 14). As previously noted, Kerala not only ranks first overall but also tops three SDGs: zero hunger (SDG 2), quality education (SDG 4), and inexpensive and clean energy (SDG 7).

Interestingly, even when Kerala is not the top scorer in certain goals, there are components inside these individual goals in which Kerala has attained a level of accomplishment that even the top achiever of that goal would struggle to match anytime soon. The scores also reveal the strength of Kerala in crucial development sectors. For instance, in accomplishing no poverty (SDG 1), Kerala ranks seventh with 81 marks. Tamil Nadu, with 92 marks, tops the list.

The most decisive component within this goal is the head count ratio as per the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) or the percentage of people suffering from multidimensional poverty. In Kerala, MPI is 0.55 per cent, much better than the global target of 1.2 per cent. In Tamil Nadu, the topper in this category, the MPI is 2.2, which is significantly higher than the global target. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have indices of 33.7, 22.93, and 20.63, respectively, which are significantly higher than Kerala. The state has also done well in housing, with only 0.3 per cent of the population owning kachcha dwellings, a clear result of efforts to provide housing for the underprivileged through the exclusive LIFE initiative.

Similarly, Kerala ranks sixth in terms of good health and well-being (SDG 3), scoring 80 points. Gujarat is at the top of this list, with 90 points. However, Kerala leads Gujarat in most of the sub-indicators that make up this goal, particularly maternal mortality, HIV incidence, and health worker density.

Quite unexpectedly, the state's high number of suicides and accidents has pushed it down the ladder. This raises the question as

to whether Kerala's high crime reporting, which is a commendable achievement, had a detrimental impact on this score. In the case of reduced inequalities (SDG 10), though the Gini coefficient which measures income inequality is as low as 0.1 – the lowest in the country – Kerala is ranked 11. This low ranking conceals the reality that the state has achieved greater equality than any other state.

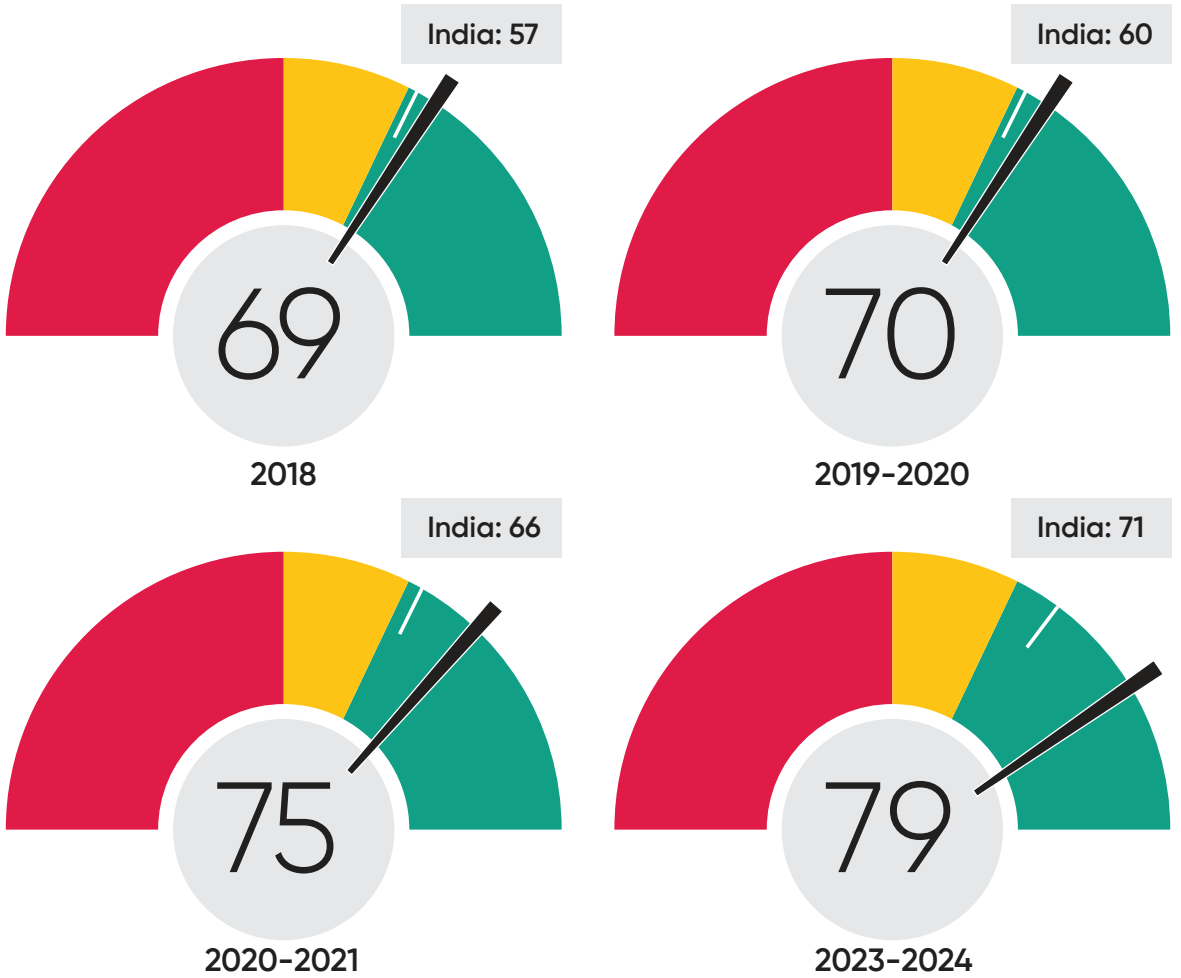
And what has truly minimized this accomplishment? Kerala was ranked low due to the highest incidence of crime against the SC and ST population. This raises suspicions yet again, as seen in the case of suicides and accidents. One may doubt that the efficacy of crime reporting has downplayed our true achievements. This shows a skewed judgement of the real picture, which is influenced by reports that the evaluators depend on, without considering the accuracy of the data.

Issues in Sustaining the Achievements and the Way Forward

Despite Kerala's success, some areas need improvement. The government has already initiated efforts to address slow progress. Strengthening the Waste-Free Kerala campaign could improve scores on responsible consumption and production. Similarly, reforms in higher education aim to boost innovation and industry linkages. The Nava Kerala Karma Padhati aligns with goals on the environment, housing, and well-being. State programmemes will be mapped against SDGs to ensure focused interventions.

Local government projects aligned with SDGs will further accelerate the localization process. Kerala is also working to identify gaps and shortcomings, with a focus on closely monitoring indicators and data sources.

Sustaining Kerala's achievements will require careful programme monitoring and better orientation of development departments on SDG goals. Continuous improvement and strategy are needed to maintain Kerala's top position, avoid complacency, and ensure continued success.



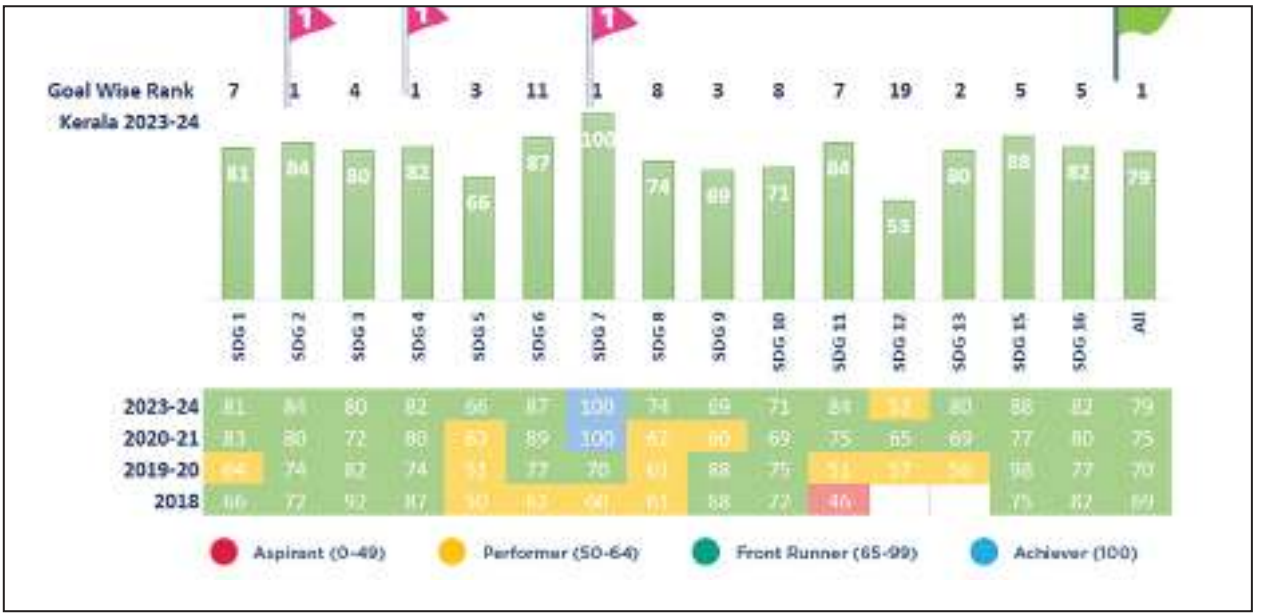
A Continued Success Story

P.K. Kuriakose
Research Officer, Programme Implementation Evaluation and Monitoring Department

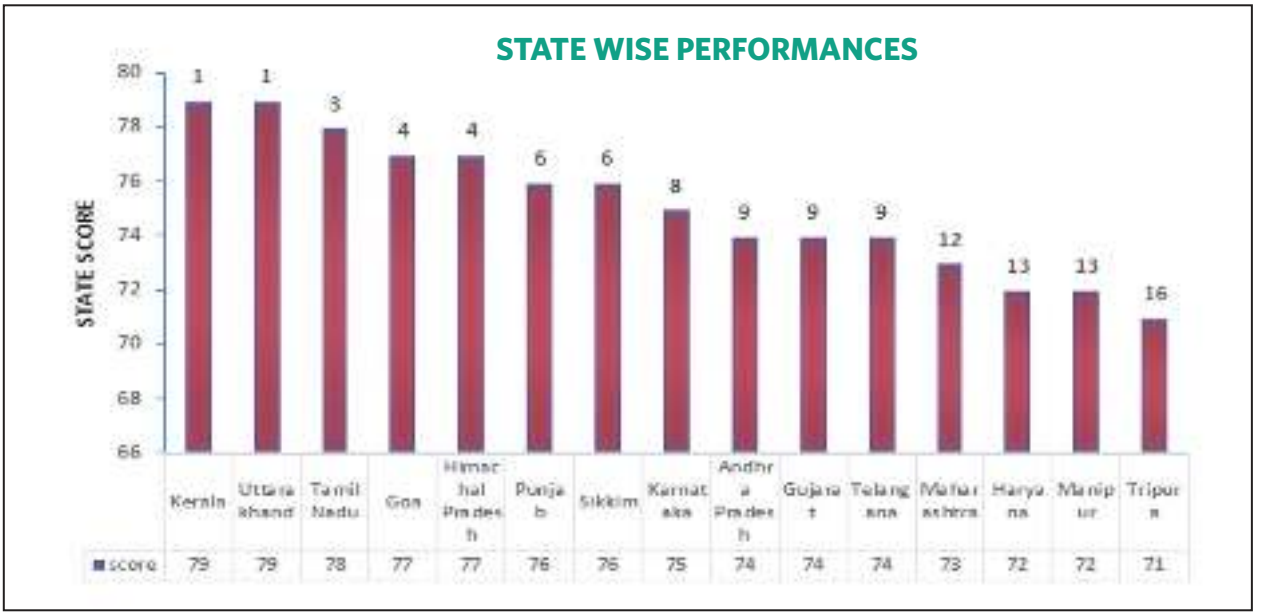
Kerala's commitment to sustainable development shines brightly as it secures the highest score in the SDG India Index for the fourth consecutive year. By championing innovative policies and inclusive growth, Kerala has become a global example of how to achieve social progress and environmental balance.

Kerala secured 79 points out of 100, marking the fourth consecutive time it topped the SDG India Index. The state excelled in Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Quality Education (SDG 4),

Kerala's Performance in SDG Ranking from the BaseYear to 2023-24



Source: SDG India Index 2023-24 released by NITI Aayog on 12th July,2024



Source: SDG India Index 2023-24 released by NITI Aayog on 12th July,2024

and Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7). Key initiatives like Kudumbashree have strengthened food security and empowered women, while Jal Jeevan Mission ensures sustainable water management. Kerala's focus on inclusive communities and strong labour rights continues to uplift marginalised groups and foster equitable growth.

How Kerala Stays on Top

- **Poverty Alleviation: Multifaceted strategies, including employment schemes and public distribution systems, reduce poverty and economic disparity.**
- **Healthcare Excellence: Focused care programs and disease control efforts, coupled with strong maternal and infant health, secure Kerala's lead in health outcomes.**
- **Women's Economic Empowerment: Kudumbashree helps empower women, making significant strides in poverty eradication.**
- **Inclusive Communities: Policies ensure inclusivity through social welfare programs, while coastal and land management efforts keep the state's ecosystems sustainable.**

Data for Sustainable Development

Sreekumar B.
Director, Economic & Statistics Department

Data shapes our everyday lives and is essential for building a sustainable future. This article explores how India, particularly Kerala, uses data to achieve the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the crucial role of information in planning for progress that benefits all

In an era of digital governance, data plays a dominant role. We cannot think of a day without data. From home to harnessing the growth of a territorial area, data provides us with a foundation for effective planning. As the American polymath Benjamin Franklin said, "Failing to plan is planning to fail," planning is the cornerstone of development, be it personal or provincial.

The importance of planning in a democratic setup was emphasized by none other than Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In his words, "Planning is not only compatible with democracy, but essential for its very survival." This implies that data is highly essential for planning. Development in a geographical area is conceived through planning. Thus, data helps us plan for development. The tagline of the National Statistics Office (NSO), "Data for Development," underlines the crucial role of data in the development of India.

Development, per se, should be directed towards sustainability. By sustainability, we mean that the Earth's resources shall be utilized optimally so that it will also be possible to share them with future generations. This brings us to Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda set by the United Nations in 2015. The 2030 Agenda proposed 17 Goals and 169 targets. All 193 United Nations member countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. India, being one of the member countries, is committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The precursor to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which started in 2000 and aimed at achieving 8 Goals by 2015. The SDGs are holistic, inclusive, and cover all dimensions of development – Social, Economic, and Environmental.

In order to achieve the 17 Goals through the specified targets, periodic monitoring of progress is required. To capture progress toward achieving these targets and, thereby, the Goals, we need monitorable indicators. By 'monitorable,' we mean that the indicator should have reliable data to measure progress. Therefore, data is imperative to capture the progress of the SDGs. For the purpose of monitoring SDGs globally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the global driver for achieving the 2030 Agenda, has devised the Global Indicator Framework (GIF). Along the lines of the GIF, each country has to frame its own National Indicator Framework (NIF).

The approach to development should be 'bottom-up.' Hence, the constituents of a nation or a country must facilitate development from the bottom to the top with vigor. In the SDG context in India, each State has to create its own State Indicator Framework (SIF) to monitor the progress of SDGs in the State. Likewise, in the decentralized governance setup, a Local Indicator Framework (LIF) at appropriate levels may be devised.

NITI Aayog is the nodal agency responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the country. The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is the

agency responsible for developing the NIF and providing data for the indicators in it. MoSPI periodically revises the NIF, based on the availability of data for the constructed indicators. Since 2019, MoSPI has been releasing the NIF on National Statistics Day every year, i.e., on 29th June, the birthday of Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis, the father of Indian statistics. Based on the data available for the indicators in the NIF, MoSPI has been publishing Progress Reports for each version of the NIF. Through these Progress Reports, MoSPI has been constantly monitoring the progress of SDG implementation in the country. Being the nodal agency for SDG implementation in the country, NITI Aayog needs to periodically capture the progress of States/UTs in this regard. For this, the SDG India Index is constructed based on Priority Indicators. Priority Indicators are those indicators that can be used as a yardstick for measuring the progress of States/UTs, i.e., those with data available for almost all the States/UTs. The basket of Priority Indicators consists of those from the NIF, modified NIF indicators, and newly constructed ones. The SDG India Index is constructed using the methodology proposed by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). So far, NITI Aayog has released four editions of the SDG India Index, and in all the editions, Kerala has come first with composite scores of 69, 70, 75, and 79.

In Kerala, the Programme Implementation Evaluation & Monitoring Department (PIE&MD), formerly the Planning & Economic Affairs (CPMU) Department, at the Government Secretariat, is the nodal agency for the implementation and monitoring of SDG progress in the State, similar to NITI Aayog at the national level. The State has established a robust institutional framework for implementing and monitoring SDGs. All stakeholders are considered in this institutional framework. There are Strategic, Capacity Building & Localizing, Media, and Data Partners. Among these, the Department of Economics & Statistics (DES) is the Data Partner. The mandate of the DES is to provide data for the indicators in the Indicator Frameworks at the appropriate levels – National, State, District, and Local. The State already has a State Indicator Framework (SIF), which needs to be revised based on data availability. We are also in

the process of developing a District Indicator Framework (DIF). As the Localizing Partner, the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) has developed a Local Indicator Framework with data inputs from the DES. KILA has also developed a dashboard for this purpose. PIE&MD has brought out Status Reports, similar to the Progress Reports published by MoSPI, on the availability of data in the NIF with data from all sources, including the DES. PIE&MD has already developed a prototype dashboard for SDGs with the help of Digital University Kerala (DUK). Once it goes live, the DES will ensure the flow of data to the dashboard. An SDG Cell has also been formed at the Directorate of Economics & Statistics to cater to the data needs of the SDGs. The DES is closely working with PIE&MD to provide data support.

NITI Aayog has proposed 9 themes for the localization of SDGs. To materialize this localization in the country, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has developed the Panchayat Development Index (PDI). As the Localizing Partner in SDG implementation in the State, KILA has been spearheading PDI activities with data support from DES.

Since there is much to consider and discuss regarding the availability of data for the indicators in the Indicator Frameworks, issues related to data reporting, the status of each indicator, and the grey areas to be addressed, DES, as the Data Partner, will take care of all these aspects and bring them to the attention of PIE&MD and all stakeholders in the SDG framework. As the SDG slogan "To leave no one behind" states, it must be ensured that nobody is left out when discussing development. A governance system should be democratic, decentralized, and data-driven.

To conclude, we may recall the quote, "Data! Data! he cried impatiently, I can't make bricks without clay," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, in his book The Adventure of the Copper Beeches.

The Backbone of Kerala's SDG Success

Dr. Joy Elamon
Former Director General
Kerala Institute of Local Administration

Kerala's commitment to universal health coverage and inclusive policies has positioned it as a leader in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all ages.

As the world rallies to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Kerala's success story in healthcare is a standout example. SDG 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages, perfectly mirrors Kerala's approach to development. The state's remarkable advancements in healthcare are a direct result of its commitment to comprehensive, inclusive strategies that address both immediate health needs and long-term well-being.

Kerala's dedication to health as a cornerstone of its development strategy has shaped its identity. Since the state's inception, Kerala has pursued a holistic vision of health that goes beyond merely preventing diseases. By embedding health considerations into every facet of governance and community life, Kerala has created a system where its citizens are equipped to lead fulfilling, productive lives. This multi-sectoral approach aligns seamlessly with the targets of SDG 3, demonstrating that with the right focus and political commitment, achieving universal health coverage is not just possible but practical.

SDG 3 focuses on several key health targets, including:

- **Maternal and Child Health:** Reduce global maternal mortality, end preventable deaths of new-borns and children under 5, and improve health care access.
- **Communicable Diseases:** End the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases, and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases.
- **Non-Communicable Diseases:** Reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and well-being.
- **Substance Abuse:** Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.
- **Universal Health Coverage:** Achieve universal health coverage, including access to quality essential health-care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines.
- **Pollution and Contamination:** Substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals, air, water, and soil pollution and contamination.

Good health is essential to sustainable development and the Agenda 2030 reflects the complexity and interconnectedness

of the two. It takes into account widening economic and social inequalities, rapid urbanization, threats to the climate and the environment, the continuing burden of HIV and other infectious diseases, and emerging challenges such as non-communicable diseases. It calls for a renewed focus on mental health issues as well. Universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable medicines are integral to this goal. Kerala's success is based on the fact that all its policies and actions cater to all these.

In the case of the Niti Aayog reports of 2020-2021 and the 2023-2024 the comparison score table is given below

Targets	Indicators	Score 20-21	Score 23-24
3.1	Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 1,00,000 Live births)	43	19
3.2	Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	10	8
3.b	Percentage of Children in the age group 9-11 Months fully immunized	92	85.4
3.3	Total case notification rate of Tuberculosis Per 1,00,000 population	75	97.45
3.3	HIV Incidence per 1,000 Uninfected population	0.02	0.01
3.4	Suicide rate (per 1,00,000 population)	24.3	28.5
3.6	Death rate due to road traffic accidents (per 1,00,000 population)	12.42	12.1
3.7	Percentage of institutional deliveries out of the total deliveries reported	99.9	99.85
3.8	Monthly per capita out-of-pocket expenditure on health as a share of Monthly Per capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE)	17.00	17.00
3.c	Total physicians, Nursesand midwives per 10,000 population	115	144.03
	Index score	72	80

How does Kerala achieve these is the question always asked. Rome was not built in a day! Since the formation of the state and its first government under the Chief Ministership of the late E.M.S.Namboodirippad, Kerala followed a development path which was inclusive and touched upon various social sectors like health and education. The success of such an approach is dependent on various other factors – social, cultural, political, economic and many others. The much-acclaimed land reforms of Kerala and subsequent total literacy programme and People's Plan Campaign paved the way for better access to health, education and finally a successful and democratic local government system. In all these cases, the focus was on inclusiveness and universal coverage. All of them contributed to the health sector achivements of the state which fundamentally is based on access to better and quality health care and awareness.

A Model for Universal Health Coverage: Kerala's multi-sectoral approach integrates health into governance and daily life, showcasing a successful path to universal health coverage and sustainable development

Now, when we look towards achieving the Goal 3 - "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages", we find that the policy and actions which the state has been taking all thorugh these years have all contributed to the better position of the state with regard to the Goal 3. In fact, the state is on par with many other developed countries with regard to the various conventional health indicators. Its approach and programmes were on universal health coverage. It has developed a robust healthcare system focusing on primary health care, maternal and child health and many other innovative health programmes. It has also developed health care infrastructure and facilities at the secondary and tertiary levels so that the new challenges are met with. In each of these cases too, it was inclusive and universal coverage approach = exactly what SDG motto speaks of – Leave No One Behind!

As per the latest Niti Aayog report, Kerala has shown impeccable performance in the health sector in the past year which resulted in bagging the first position in the goal with an index score of 80. The state has come up with various health related action plans which meticulously address all kinds of health-related problems in the state.

It is essential to recognize that achieving the SDGs requires the collective effort of governments including the local governments. It is not only of a particular sector or department but also of many other departments and players. The state government had considered all these to develop its programmes to create better healthy state.

When the government under the leadership of Pinarayi Vijayan came into power, its first initiative was to move towards a new Kerala –

Nava Keralam. As part of it, four missions were formed of which one was Aardram focusing on health. The idea was that the state has achived a lot in health sector, but we need to move forward. There could be gaps, limitations as well as second generation health issues which need to be addressed. Moreover, the state has gone into epidemiological and demographic transitions. For example, the state has a much larger aged population. While the state had conquered the conventional communicable diseases and related 'poverty borne' diseases, it also faces the issue of non-communciable diseases including degenerative diseases. There are also the emerging communicable diseases.

Kerala's Comprehensive Health Approach: Discover how Kerala's inclusive health strategies are setting new benchmarks in achieving the United Nations' SDG 3, focusing on healthy lives and well-being for all ages.

Addressing all these require a different approach, institutional framework and infrastructure. Aardram focussed on all these aspects. It touched all levels of health care system at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It also developed pathways where proximate determinants of health were also addressed like housing (LIFE mission), anti-poverty drive (Extreme Poverty Eradication Programme), waste management and making Kerala green (Haritha Keralam). It brought together various players in the sector and the local governments in the state played a major role as health is a transferred subject too. The results are there to be seen across the state with a lot of examples and models. The COVID-19 is a best case scenario of how Aardram's approach was so futuristic as the state could manage the pandemic efficiently and effectively. As the story goes, the state has gone beyond merely achieving SDGs.

As is evident from the table above, from 2020-21 to 2024, the state has improved its status in various indicators, thus taking the index score from 72 to 80. In fact, this has definitely contributed to the state's overall status in SDGs with the Rank 1. The state has been in this place for the last four occasions. It was in the difficult times of the pandemic and the massive floods that we achieved these.

Even while the state had to tackle the new problems created by the pandemic and the floods, it continued to move forward by rebuilding Kerala. It is not only about bringing back what we lost, but rebuilding to a new Kerala through a futuristic outlook. However, it is also to be noted that we need to move forward. There are areas where we need to improve. That is where the state, through its Navakeralam Karma Paddahthi II action plans will be contributing. The state is not waiting for 2030, but is striving to achieve the goals even before the Agenda 2030 comes to a close.

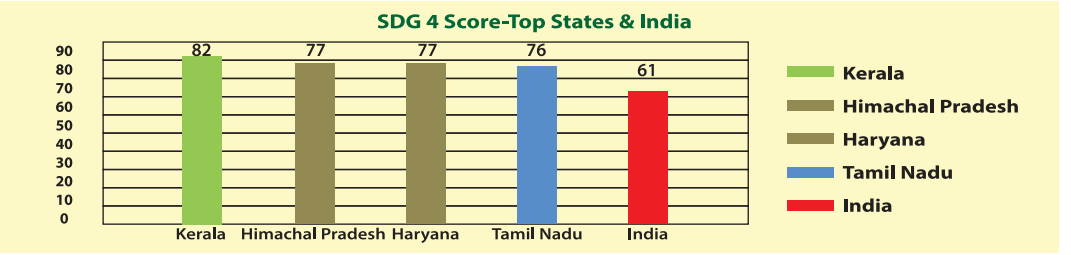
Progress Powered by Education and Equality

Dr. Arun Shyamnath
Deputy Director, Kerala State Planning Board

Kerala's remarkable rise to the top of India's SDG rankings in quality education and gender equality is a reflection of the state's transformative approach, driven by proactive governance and vibrant public participation. By topping the ranking in SDG 4 for 'quality education' and securing third place in SDG 5 for 'gender equality,' Kerala has showcased a development model rooted in strong public action and leadership from a proactive state government.

The overarching aim of SDG 4 'quality education' is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It has 10 targets. The SDG India Index for SDG4 has 12 indicators capturing 6 of these targets. Kerala is the top-ranking state with a score of 82. States Haryana and Himachal Pradesh share the second rank with score of 77. Tamil Nadu is placed third with a score of 76. The score for India as a whole is 61. It is clear that Kerala's performance is way better than the performance of states following it and the performance of the country as a whole. Kerala's score in SDG 4 has also increased from 80 in SDG India Index 2020-21 to 82 in 2023-24, which means the state has made considerable progress over the reference period. It is heartening to note that

since the last index, Kerala has improved its scores in 8 out of the 12 indicators. The score under only one indicator namely 'Class 8 students achieving minimum proficiency level in language and Maths (%)' has fallen, which has to be addressed. It has also achieved the target in 3 out of the 12 indicators.

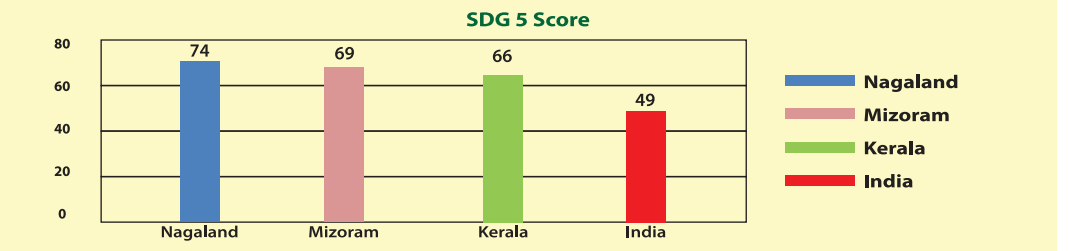


SDG 4 Indicator-wise performance 23-24 (Kerala, Top states & India)

Sl No	Area	Target	Kerala	Himachal Pradesh	Haryana	Tamil Nadu	India
1	Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (ANER) in (%) elementary education (class 1-8)	100	100	100	97.7	99.5	96.5
2	Average annual dropout rate at secondary level (class 9-10)	7.67	5.5	1.5	5.9	4.5	12.6
3	Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher secondary (class 11-12) (%)	100	85	94.1	75.5	81.5	57.6
4	Percentage of students in grade VIII achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in terms of nationally defined learning outcomes to be attained by the pupils at the end of the grade	100	77	79.5	87	67	77.23
5	Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in) higher education (18-23 years	50	41.3	43.1	33.3	47	28.4
6	Percentage of persons with disability (15 years and above) who have completed at least secondary education	100	24.3	25.6	25.1	19.1	19.3
7	Gender Parity Index (GPI) for higher education (18-23 years)	1	1.44	1.33	1.22	1.01	1.01
8	Percentage of persons 15 years and above who are literate	100	94.8	86.5	80.6	83.9	76.7
9	Percentage of schools with access to basic infrastructure (electricity and drinking water-both)	100	99.51	98.64	99.04	100	88.65
10	Percentage of schools with computers	100	98.3	40.5	93.2	78.4	47.5
11	Percentage of trained teachers at secondary level (class 9-10)	100	96.6	97.1	95.7	99.9	92.2
12	Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) at secondary level (class 9-10)	30	15	6	12	13	18

The overarching aim of SDG 5 'gender equality' is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It has 9 targets. The SDG India Index for SDG 5 has 9 indicators capturing 7 of these targets. Kerala is ranked third with a score of 66. The State of Nagaland occupies the top rank with a score of 74. Mizoram is ranked second with a score of 69. The score for India as a whole is 49. It needs to be noted that only 4 out of the 28 states are in the 'front runner category', calling out the requirement for more steps in this direction. Kerala's score under SDG 5 has increased from 63 in SDG India Index 2020-21 to 66 in 2023-24, showing progress over the reference period. However, its rank has fallen from second rank to third rank. There are drastic changes in the scores and ranks of states over the last 2 reports which require closer analysis. It needs

to be explored why Kerala's scores have fallen in 3 out of the 9 indicators namely Average salary received, Women in managerial positions and; Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods. However, Kerala has achieved the target in 2 out of the 9 indicators.



SDG 5 - Indicator-wise - Top states & India							
Sl No	Area / Indicator	Area / Indicator	Target	Nagaland	Mizoram	Kerala	India
1	Sex ratio at birth	1	950	945	969	951	929
2	Ratio of female to male average wage/salary earnings received among regular wage/salaried employees	2	1	0.74	0.79	0.8	0.76
3	Percentage of ever married women aged 18-49 years who have ever experienced spousal violence (physical/sexual)	3	0	6.5	10.3	9.8	29.2
4	Ratio of female to male Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (15-59 years)	4	1	0.81	0.67	0.53	0.48
5	Proportion of women in managerial positions including women in board of directors in listed companies (per 1000 persons)	5	245	285.71	-	166.67	210.24
6	Percentage of currently married women aged 15-49 years who have their demand for family planning satisfied by any modern method	6	100	68.2	61.4	72.2	74.1
7	Percentage of female operated operational land holdings	7	50	9.85	11.78	22.98	13.96
8	Percentage of women (aged 15-49 years) who own a mobile phone that they themselves use	8	80.63	82.5	82.3	86.6	53.9
9	Percentage of currently married women (aged 15-49 years) who usually participate in three household decisions	9	100	99.2	98.8	94.1	88.7

Understanding Reasons for performance

The SDG India Index 2023-24 measures state status based on a limited set of targets and indicators for each Goal. So, these do not necessarily give a comprehensive picture of sectors or status. Kerala's progress in many of these goals including education and gender, go much beyond what is captured by the indicators. Active public participation with lead role from State Government is the single most important factor for success.

The 'Public Education Rejuvenation Mission', (Education Mission), has resulted in massive expansion of school infrastructure, improvement in the quality of infrastructure, and improvement in teaching and learning in the Government and Aided schools. The Government has spent close to Rs 5,000 crore over the past 7 years on infrastructure upgradation. About 980 schools were allotted funds ranging from Rs 1 cr to 5 cr from KIIFB for infrastructure development. This has led to the massive shift of students from unaided to government and aided schools between 2016-17 and 2020-21. The total number of new students who

sought admission in government and aided schools for period is 8,91,046.

According to the Kerala Development Report 2021, the total public investment in school education, Kerala, 2016-17 to 2020-21, is Rs 74,426.35 crore (including plan and non-plan expenses by General Education, Technical Education, and Sports and Youth Affairs departments). In addition, the SC Development Department, the ST Development Department and Fisheries Department also spend considerable amount of money on education.

Kerala's achievements in Education have been one of the prime drivers of its achievements in the sphere of Gender Equality. The Government of Kerala has implemented initiatives aimed at empowering women economically, socially, and politically to ensure holistic development for women. The Gender Budget allocation which was 11.4 per cent of total State Plan outlay in 2017-18 has almost doubled within a span of 8 years, to reach 21.35 in 2024-25.

The growth of Kudumbashree movement and creation of the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) are significant achievements. The government's focus on women's security and a zero-tolerance approach to violence are part of a new strategy. Women elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala now constitute 54 per cent, of all elected representatives whereas the reservation is 50 per cent. Providing credit, skill development, facilitation, entrepreneurship and self-employment development, and work-from /near home are some of the areas receiving greater attention during the recent years.

"The Kerala government has nearly doubled the Gender Budget allocation from 11.4% in 2017-18 to 21.35% in 2024-25, focusing on empowering women economically, socially, and politically.

Way forward

National and other state governments are increasingly prioritising investments in quality education and gender equality, and are fast catching up with Kerala. It is time for Kerala to set higher goals and charter new paths for others to follow. Kerala has to achieve targets set for each of the indicators under the SDG goals, and get the 'Achiever' status. At the all India level, the SDG India Index has to be expanded to include representative indicators for all targets under SDG Goals. Kerala has to establish itself as an outstanding location for higher learning and research. Kerala Government has identified and is working towards addressing issues in gender equality. Kerala has a pro-active State Government and a history of strong public action. Under such circumstances, quality education and gender equality emerge as areas that are expected to reach new heights in the immediate future.

A Story of Resilience, Innovation, and Vision

Dr. Sasikumar P. KAS
PIEM Department

Kerala's journey towards sustainable economic development is a tale of resilience, innovation, and vision. As the state continues to balance progress with preservation, it is setting a standard that other regions can aspire to. Whether you are drawn by its natural beauty, vibrant culture, or innovative spirit, Kerala embodies the promise of a sustainable and prosperous future.

Kerala is proving that economic growth and environmental sustainability can coexist harmoniously. With a Gross State Product (GSP) of ₹9.78 lakh crore (US$131.98 billion) for 2020-2021, Kerala stands as the ninth-largest economy in India. What sets Kerala apart is not just its economic size but also its quality of life. The state's per capita GSP is ₹257,711 (US$3,100), significantly higher than the national average, making it one of the wealthiest states in terms of individual income.

Despite accounting for only 2.8% of India's population and occupying just 1.2% of its land area, Kerala contributes more than 4% to the country's GDP. In 2022-2023, the service sector dominated Kerala's economy, contributing 62.62% to the Gross State Value Added (GSVA), followed by industry and agriculture. Kerala shines brightly in various development indices: it has the lowest Multidimensional Poverty Index (0.002) according to NITI Aayog's 2023 report and has topped the SDG India Index for four consecutive years. The state is also a leader in skills, energy, and health, ranking third in the India Skills Report 2023, second in NITI Aayog's 'States Energy and Climate Index' for 2022, and first in the State Health Index for 2019-2020.

Kerala's Strategy for Sustainable Growth

Kerala's success is no accident; it's a result of careful planning and innovative strategies. The Nava Kerala Karma Padhathi (NKKP) is the state's blueprint for a resilient and sustainable future. This plan addresses the challenges posed by climate change and natural disasters, focusing on rebuilding Kerala's economy and infrastructure. The state has faced its share of adversities—devastating floods, Cyclone Ockhi, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Nipah virus outbreak. Yet, Kerala has turned these challenges into opportunities for growth and improvement.

NKKP identifies 22 priority sectors to drive sustainable development, including Aerospace and Defence, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Breakthrough Technologies, Tourism, Electric Vehicles, Recycling, Waste Management, and Renewable Energy. These sectors are not just about economic growth; they are about building a future that is safe, prosperous, and environmentally sound.

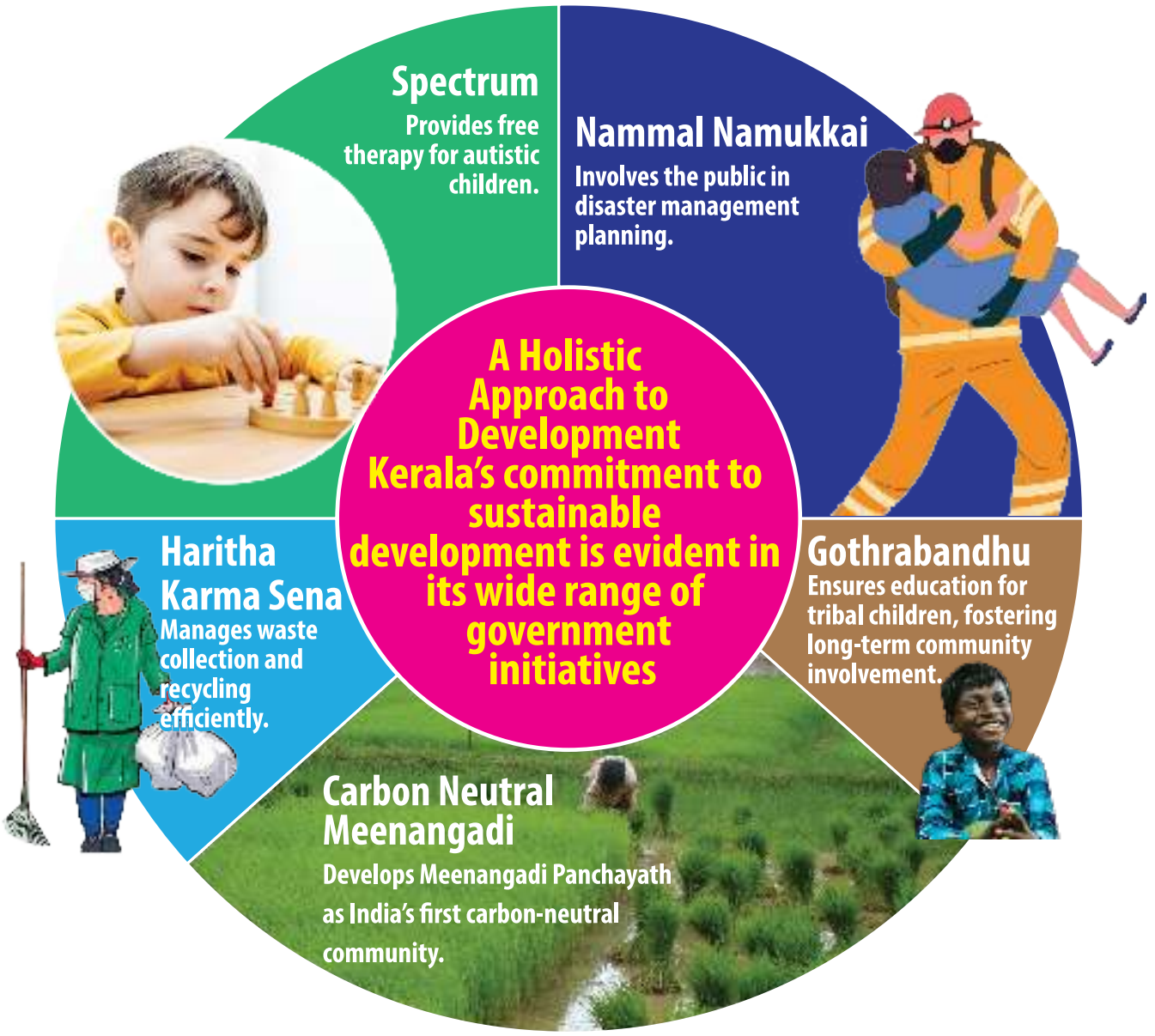
Tourism: A Model of Sustainable Growth

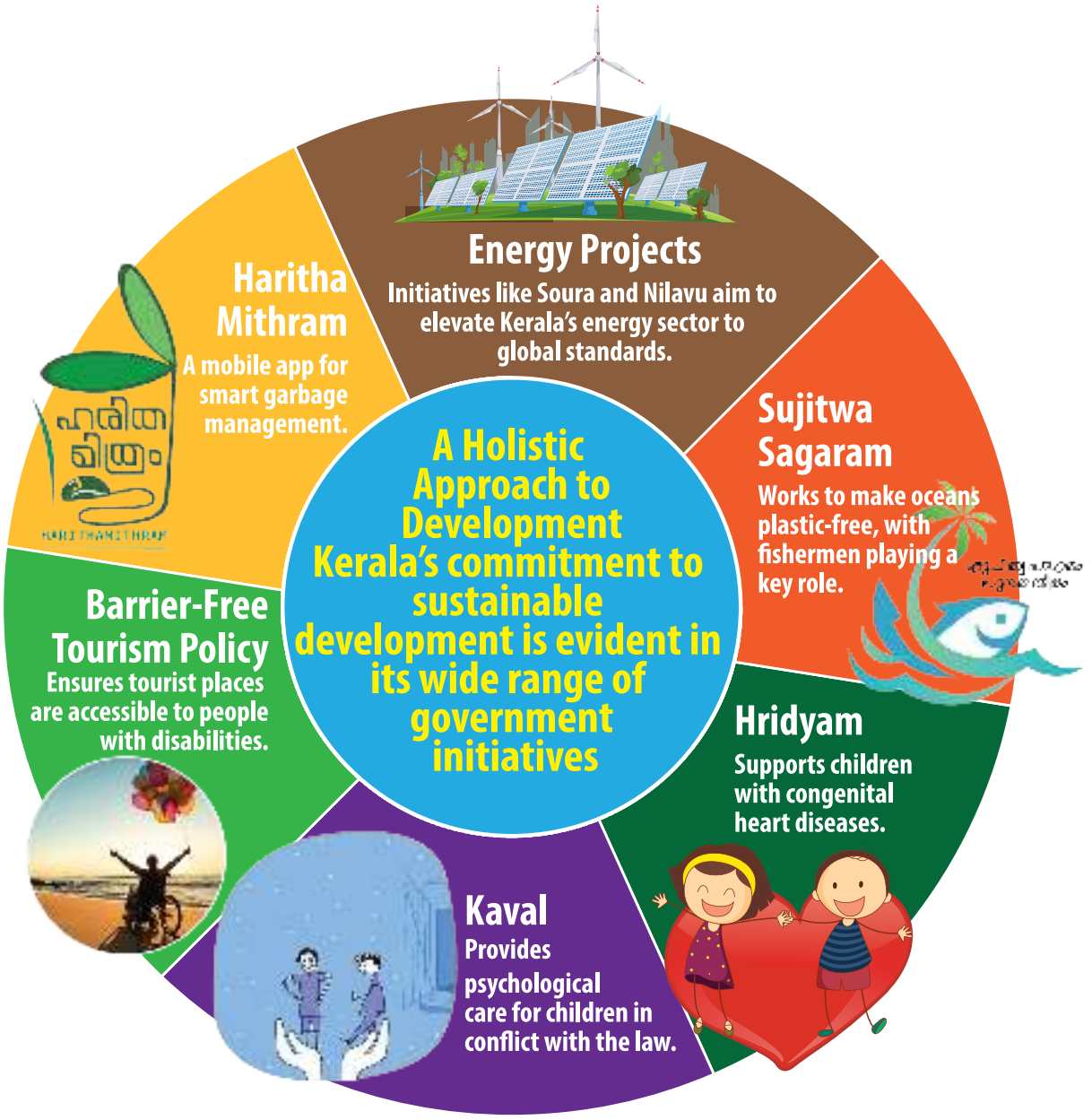
Often called "God's Own Country," Kerala is famous for its stunning landscapes, serene backwaters, and rich cultural heritage. The state has capitalized on its natural beauty to become a top destination for global tourists. In 2018, a BBC Travel survey named Kerala the most preferred tourist destination among international travelers.

Kerala's tourism success is not just about attracting visitors; it's about ensuring that tourism benefits the environment and local communities. The Responsible Tourism Kerala initiative promotes sustainable practices, turning tourism into a tool for local development. Projects in Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady, and Wayanad focus on community living, eco-friendly practices, and cultural preservation. Kumarakom, in particular, has set a benchmark, earning recognition from the Government of India for its sustainable tourism model.

Building a Future-Ready State

Kerala is not just looking to preserve what it has; it's also building for the future. The Knowledge Economy Mission (KKEM) aims to transform Kerala into a knowledge society, creating opportunities for educated individuals and fostering a culture of innovation. Managed by the Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council





(K-DISC), the mission aims to generate 2 million jobs over five years, promoting social and economic growth. By focusing on healthcare, housing, and financial support, KKEM ensures that knowledge workers have a secure and fulfilling place in Kerala's economy.

Innovation and Sustainability Go Hand in Hand

Kerala's Industrial Policy-2023 is all about sustainability and innovation. The state is committed to fostering entrepreneurship, developing future-ready infrastructure, and promoting a supportive business environment. Key initiatives include the K-Swift platform, which streamlines business processes, and the K-Phone initiative, which aims to provide high-speed internet access to every household. These efforts are about making Kerala a leading start-up destination, attracting investment, and driving economic growth.

The Kerala Innovation Fund supports collaboration among innovators, technologists, and the public, creating a vibrant ecosystem for developing new ideas. In 2023, Kerala's IT sector reported impressive growth, with exports reaching ₹85,540 crore and creating 62,000 new jobs. The state is also embracing emerging technologies like AI, Blockchain, and IoT, setting the stage for a tech-driven future.

A Blueprint for the Future

Kerala's approach to sustainable development is a model for the world. With a focus on human development, environmental sustainability, and inclusivity, Kerala demonstrates that growth does not have to come at the expense of the environment. Through comprehensive policies and innovative strategies, Kerala is building a future that balances progress with conservation, ensuring prosperity for generations to come.

Kerala's Commitment to Climate Action

S. Abhilash
CUSAT

Kerala's commitment to climate action is highlighted through various initiatives that align with sustainable development goals, aiming for a resilient and equitable future.

Climate change and sustainable development goals are deeply intertwined challenges that must be urgently addressed to ensure a stable and secure future for coming generations. While governments recognize the importance of these issues, more robust efforts are needed to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Climate change significantly impacts goals related to well-being, such as poverty eradication, food security, energy, water availability, and health. It exacerbates health risks by affecting disease transmission, reducing access to clean water, and decreasing agricultural productivity, which can lead to malnutrition and loss of livelihoods.

Although the links between climate change, climate action, and sustainable development are widely acknowledged, structured investigations at the level of specific SDG Targets remain limited. Climate change also undermines justice and equality, disproportionately affecting the poorest and exacerbating inequality. Additionally, climate-induced disasters drive displacement and mass migrations, increasing the vulnerability of local and indigenous people. These impacts underscore the urgent need to understand how climate action can support or hinder progress across all SDGs.

Effective climate action can reinforce efforts to build prosperous, equal, and peaceful societies, providing a foundation for strong institutions and aligning with goals related to poverty reduction, welfare, and job creation. The long-term goals of climate action focus on mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while short-term goals emphasize adaptation to build resilience in infrastructure, public health, the economy, and natural resources.

Integrating climate action with sustainability plans involve comprehensive ecosystem restoration, job creation, urban-rural planning, community development, housing, infrastructure, agriculture, fisheries, and water resource management. Such a holistic approach is essential to ensuring that climate action supports sustainable development, ultimately creating a more resilient and equitable world.

Climate action requires integrating methodologies across natural sciences, engineering, and social sciences to grasp complex social-ecological dynamics and develop well-rounded solutions. Understanding climate change's impacts on all sustainable development domains is essential for raising awareness and planning effective adaptation programs.

Knowledge co-production, involving stakeholder participation, is vital for harnessing science for sustainable development and adapting to climate change. The localization of SDG indicators and targets to regional and local contexts

necessitates stakeholder engagement, making partnerships crucial for mitigating trade-offs between SDGs.

Kerala, leading in several SDG indicators related to social welfare, still has opportunities to improve its performance in environmental and economic sustainability. To achieve SDG 13 by 2030 and support the state's broader development objectives, climate action plans must be integrated into local planning across sectors like land use, transportation, housing, agriculture, and public health.

Given Kerala's high vulnerability to climate change—due to factors like rising temperatures, sea level rise, and extreme weather—the state must enhance its adaptive capacity. This includes building resilience in sensitive sectors, such as subsistence farming and coastal populations.

Aligning with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the Paris Agreement, Kerala's climate actions should focus on mitigation and adaptation through synergies with the SDGs. Efforts should also prioritize water security, energy efficiency, gender equity, public participation, and inclusion of traditional knowledge.

Collective efforts in people-centric early warning systems

A significant barrier to effective planning is the limited information on climate risks across short, medium, and long-term time scales. Establishing a robust network of weather stations and enhancing collaboration with the National Weather Service and academic institutions will improve climate forecasting, early warning systems, and resilience among vulnerable communities like rural farmers and artisanal fisheries.

As human-induced climate change intensifies extreme weather, the need for early warning systems is more urgent than ever. These systems are essential, not just for saving lives, but also for reducing economic losses, offering a nearly tenfold return on investment. Despite their effectiveness, major gaps persist, particularly in small island developing states and least developed countries.

The Early Warnings for All initiative, aligned with the 2030 global agenda, the Sendai Framework, and the Paris Agreement, aims to address these gaps by enhancing collaboration across sectors to deliver comprehensive, people-centric early warning systems. Kerala is the first state in India to implement LSGD level disaster management and climate action tools to address the local climate change challenges.

Periodic evaluation of the Fund's performance, accountability, and grievance mechanisms is crucial to maintaining its legitimacy and support, ensuring it effectively serves states and communities on the frontlines of climate impacts.

Several Success Stories from Kerala

Kerala is pioneering environmental sustainability in India, aiming to

achieve carbon neutrality despite its geographical challenges. With strengths in education, healthcare, and human development, the state faces challenges in meeting SDG goals related to climate action (SDG 13), and ecosystem protection (SDGs 14 and 15).

Initiatives like the "Haritha Keralam" mission demonstrate Kerala's commitment to these goals, focusing on energy, transportation, agriculture, and ecosystem conservation. However, urgent, transformative actions are needed.

Policy decisions on climate change are typically made at the national level, but sub-national governments, such as Kerala's, are better positioned to address local needs in the fight against climate change. Kerala's power sector, responsible for 80% of its emissions, has seen significant growth in recent decades. To decarbonise, the state launched the 'Urja Kerala Mission' in 2017, focusing on increasing renewable energy, reducing transmission and distribution losses, and improving energy efficiency. Notably, Kerala has installed over 150 MW of rooftop solar under its flagship "Soura" program.

"Kerala is pioneering environmental sustainability in India, aiming to achieve carbon neutrality despite its geographical challenges."

The "Pachathuruth" initiative, part of the Haritha Keralam Mission, aims to increase green cover by planting indigenous trees on unused land, creating "green islets" to sequester carbon and protect natural habitats. This project, supported by local self-government bodies, environmental organizations, and educational institutions, also includes the protection and expansion of sacred groves and mangroves.

The initiative involves labour from employment guarantee schemes, with plans to develop sacred groves as part of the Veda Haritham project. Kerala's broader climate strategy includes; increasing tree planting, installing biogas plants, managing waste at the source, producing food locally with less carbon footprint, and transitioning to renewable energy and electric vehicles, all aimed at achieving carbon neutrality or net-zero targets.

The Kerala State Climate Change Adaptation Mission (KSCCAM) will coordinate climate initiatives to help Kerala achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, aligning economic development with long-term goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The "Jalajeevan" initiative, addressing water scarcity in rural areas and aligned with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), has shown significant success. It has reduced reliance on erratic water sources, improved public health by reducing waterborne diseases, and enhanced drought management. Its focus on community participation and sustainable practices makes Jalajeevan a replicable model for other regions facing similar challenges.

Kerala's journey toward carbon neutrality faces financial challenges, needing substantial funding and support from international organizations like the World Bank.

The energy sector is Kerala's largest GHG emitter, with 75% of its power imported and largely fossil-fuel-based, resulting in 19.9 million tonnes of CO2 emissions annually (Source: EIA PC hub). The transportation sector also contributes significantly to emissions due to high fossil fuel use. To mitigate climate impacts and reduce GHG emissions, Kerala's agriculture must adopt sustainable and organic practices as much as possible without affecting the food security and yield reduction, aligning with global efforts to lower methane and nitrous oxide emissions from farming activities.

Kerala's carbon neutrality strategy includes developing renewable energy by funding solar and other sources, enhancing energy efficiency through sustainable building solutions, waste management, and efficient transport systems. The state promotes electric vehicles through subsidies and infrastructure support. The Climate Change Action Plan outlines reducing energy use, boosting efficiency, and promoting renewables. Kerala aims for zero waste with segregation and reuse techniques, and strengthens green infrastructure with parks, conservation areas, and urban gardens. Additionally, increasing urban tree cover and adopting sustainable farming methods are key initiatives in this drive.

The 'Haritha Keralam' mission demonstrates Kerala's dedication to energy, transportation, agriculture, and ecosystem conservation, emphasizing the state's proactive approach to climate action.

Cross-cutting efforts and way forward:

Kerala has implemented various climate action policies and programs focused on resilience, such as water and sanitation, solar energy use, and sustainable agriculture, aligned with national and international agendas like the SDGs and IPCC. Recognizing that climate change disproportionately impacts women and marginalized communities, Kerala's action plan prioritizes integrating their needs with climate finance. Climate resilience efforts span agriculture, health, food security, energy, and water sectors, promoting environmentally friendly practices.

Addressing climate change in Kerala requires coordinated efforts across public, private, and societal sectors, with a strong emphasis on social equity to prevent disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged populations. The transition to a low-carbon economy presents growth and employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Immediate climate action is essential to protect both the environment and the well-being of society.

Leaving No One Behind

Dr. Manju S. Nair
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Abhirami A.
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Kerala embodies the principle of Leaving No One Behind through decentralized governance and initiatives like Kudumbashree and NKKP. By addressing local needs in poverty, healthcare, and education, the state ensures inclusive development for all.

When the United Nations announced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda, it set an ambitious and inclusive roadmap for nations worldwide. With 17 goals covering various aspects of social, economic, and environmental development, these goals encourage countries to engage in healthy competition to build sustainable societies. Learning from the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs adopt a bottom-up approach, emphasizing the importance of localization. This approach enables subnational governments to tailor policies according to local needs, making them pivotal in achieving these global targets.

To measure progress, India established the SDG India Index, ranking its states and union territories based on their performance. Kerala has consistently topped this index across all four editions, demonstrating its leadership in sustainable development.

The Promise of Leaving No One Behind

At the heart of the SDGs is the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB). This principle underscores the need for development that benefits every segment of society. It calls for eradicating poverty, ending discrimination, reducing inequalities, and addressing vulnerabilities that hinder people's potential.

Implementing LNOB is a challenging task that requires identifying vulnerable populations, addressing their specific needs, monitoring progress, and ensuring accountability. Effective implementation hinges on the close interaction of governance structures with local communities, making decentralized governance crucial for achieving the SDGs. Kerala's top ranking in the SDG India Index is a testament to its success in applying the LNOB principle through decentralized governance.

Kerala's Legacy of Inclusive Policies

Since its formation in 1956, Kerala has been a beacon of inclusive policies, gaining international recognition for its social sector achievements. The state has long recognized the power of decentralization, ensuring that all segments of society participate in local governance. This commitment is rooted in Kerala's pre-constitutional Panchayati Raj system and solidified by the 1994 amendment of the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.

Kerala's three-tier local government system—comprising Grama Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and District Panchayats—has been instrumental in driving the state's unique social and human development. For over three decades, these institutions have facilitated the LNOB principle, focusing on rural development and implementing

schemes aimed at economic development and social justice.

Grama Panchayats: The Pillars of Local Development

As the lowest tier of Kerala's decentralized governance, Grama Panchayats play a crucial role in promoting the LNOB principle. They focus on mandatory civic duties, basic infrastructure, and implementing schemes tailored to local needs. Their activities align closely with various SDGs. For instance, initiatives in land use optimization, group farming, and targeted services for marginalized communities aim to reduce overall inequality.

Grama Panchayats also oversee primary healthcare facilities, manage water schemes, and promote renewable energy sources like biogas. These actions improve access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. Additionally, they support the development of local industries, manage educational institutions, and promote literacy, contributing to poverty and hunger eradication.

To ensure that development plans are inclusive, Grama Panchayats use tools like the Grama Panchayat Development Plans. These iterative processes bridge policy gaps and ensure that community needs shape the development agenda. Moreover, Kerala's approach to resource mobilization—leveraging funds from various levels of government and private entities—demonstrates its commitment to sustaining the LNOB agenda.

"Kerala's Grama Panchayats play a key role in sustainable development, directly addressing local needs in areas like healthcare, education, and poverty reduction."

Harnessing Social Capital for Sustainable Development

Kerala's success in achieving the SDGs also stems from its effective use of social capital. The state has mobilized community participation through initiatives like Kudumbashree Self-Help Groups, which empower women; the ASHA network for community-based healthcare; and Karshikakarmasenas, which enhance agricultural practices. These groups not only identify local needs but also ensure the sustained

implementation of solutions, reinforcing the LNOB principle.

Navakeralam Karma Padhathi: A Vision for Inclusive Development

Launched in 2016, the Navakeralam Karma Padhathi (NKP) embodies Kerala's commitment to inclusive development. Now in its second phase, NKP integrates SDG principles into a comprehensive plan for a new Kerala. Key initiatives under NKP include:

- **Aardram Mission:** Improving healthcare services, from primary health centers to medical colleges.
- **Vidyakiranam Mission:** Enhancing education through technology and curriculum reforms, ensuring equal access for all.
- **LIFE Mission:** Providing housing and livelihood opportunities to the disadvantaged, improving their quality of life.
- **Haritha Keralam Mission:** Focusing on eco-friendly development through water conservation, waste management, and disaster resilience.

These missions are integrated with various projects to ensure that development reaches every corner of the state, leaving no one behind.

"Initiatives like Kudumbashree and the Aardram Mission are vital to Kerala's success, empowering communities and ensuring no one is left behind."

A Model for the World

Kerala's approach to sustainable development is widely recognized as a replicable model for global policymakers. The state's commitment to inclusive planning, strong local governance, community engagement, and resource allocation has solidified its position as a leader in sustainable development. Over the past nine years, Kerala has shown that true localization—tailoring international goals to local contexts—can drive significant progress, making it a shining example for the rest of the world.

By focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable and ensuring that every voice is heard, Kerala has not only upheld the LNOB principle but has also set a benchmark for others to follow. As we move closer to 2030, Kerala's journey offers valuable lessons on building a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable world. ■

A Game Changer in Maternal Care

Joby Baby
Registered Nurse, Kuwait

The 'Ammakkoru Koottu' initiative by the Kerala Government, introduced at SAT Hospital, enhances maternal care by allowing a companion of choice during labour, contributing to improved outcomes and reduced anxiety.

Ammakkoru Koottu:

The Kerala Government's 'Ammakkoru Koottu' initiative, recently implemented at SAT Hospital, marks a significant advancement in maternal care. By allowing a companion of choice to be present during labour, this program not only enhances the childbirth experience but also reduces anxiety and improves outcomes for both mother and child.

Labour can be an overwhelming and daunting experience, particularly for first-time mothers. The physical sensations range from discomfort to severe pain, and the emotional toll can be equally challenging. Recognizing these challenges, 'Ammakkoru Koottu' was designed to provide women in labour with the emotional support and privacy they need. The initiative fosters a supportive environment, building trust and communication between the expectant mother, her family, and the hospital staff. This collaborative approach not only eases the birthing process but also ensures that the medical care provided is well-understood and

tailored to the patient's needs.

Benefits

Women should be encouraged to have a companion of her choice present during labour and birth. Some women like to have their husband or partner; others prefer a close family relative, friend, or a traditional birth attendant (TBA). Experiences from different settings have shown that the best person to have as a childbirth companion is often an older woman from the community, someone who has had children herself. However, encouraging the partner to be more involved with the birth, where it is acceptable, may also be beneficial for the whole family. Birth is an emotional experience and for some people (especially the partner) having more active involvement can make the whole process particularly special.

Reducing anxiety: Pregnant women could decide at the time of admission to the hospital itself, whether their mother, sister, or any other relative should be beside her in labour. The presence of a close relative at this time would reduce anxiety of the pregnant woman and her other relatives waiting outside the labour room. Classes were given both to the pregnant woman and her kin on what to do at various stages without getting nervous.

Gives confidence and reduces chances of c-sections: Expecting women who go through labour are less stressed when they have a birthing partner who remains by their side throughout the process. Their partners play a significant role in encouraging them and reassuring them about managing labour. When women know they have a loved one who they completely trust and share a good rapport with, right there, next to them in the delivery room, they get the much-needed confidence to go through childbirth. Research shows that the presence and involvement of a birthing partner can reduce the chances of interventions like c-sections and the need for epidural.

Positively impacts cognitive development of baby: Studies have shown that the presence of the father (as a birthing partner) and their engagement during pregnancy and childbirth is associated with improved cognitive development and socio-emotional development of children. When fathers participate in the birthing process and initiate skin to skin contact with their infants, they tend to develop a strong connection with their children. Keep in mind that the birthing partner is someone who can not only withstand pressure but can also guide through the process, despite the pain experienced. The partners should attend an antenatal class to learn how to give the mother a back rub or help her with squats or breathing techniques to ease the pain and process of giving birth.

Defining Merit

In a year that has seen Malayalam cinema shine brighter than ever, the Kerala State Film Awards 2023 spotlight the industry's unparalleled artistry and compelling storytelling.

A. Chandrasekhar
Film Critic

When we compare Malayalam cinema with films from other Indian languages, its distinctiveness becomes evident through its commitment to storytelling, artistic depth, and cultural authenticity. The Kerala State Film Awards 2023 have once again showcased these qualities, highlighting the industry's unique ability to blend profound narratives with technical mastery. This year's awards celebrate the vibrant talent and creativity that set Malayalam cinema apart on the national stage.

The prestigious Best Film award went to "Kaathal-The Core," a deeply moving film that explores the struggles and triumphs of a gay couple. Produced by Mammootty Company and directed by Jeo Baby, this film stands out for its sensitive portrayal of marginalised voices, earning both critical acclaim and audience appreciation. Sudhi Kozhikode's powerful performance also earned him a Special Jury Award, further emphasizing the film's emotional resonance. Recognized for Best Story, "Kaathal-The Core" daringly ventures into uncharted territory, reflecting Malayalam cinema's courage to address challenging and relevant social issues.

Blessy won the Best Director award for his visionary work in "Aadujeevitham," which masterfully brings Bennyamin's celebrated novel to the screen with a fresh perspective. This film is not merely an adaptation but a profound visual interpretation, earning it the Best Adapted Screenplay award. "Aadujeevitham" dominated the technical categories, winning accolades for Best Cinematography by Sunil K, whose work vividly captures the vast and desolate desert landscape. The film also received awards for Best Sound Mixing (Resul Pookutty and Sharat Mohan), Best Processing Lab/Colourist (Vaishal and Shiva Ganesh), and Best Makeup Artiste (Renjith Ambadi). The film's success is further marked by a Special Jury Award for KR Gokul, whose performance as the protagonist's friend adds depth to this epic narrative.

This year's awards recognized two of Malayalam cinema's most esteemed actors. Prithviraj's portrayal of Najeeb in "Aadujeevitham" is a masterclass in acting,

capturing the physical and psychological challenges of a man lost in the Gulf's unforgiving deserts. His performance is hailed as one of the finest in Malayalam cinema, marking a career high for the actor. Equally compelling is Urvashi's role as Leelamma in "Ullozhukku," where she portrays a mother's inner conflict with nuance and sensitivity. Her performance, alongside Parvathy Thiruvoth, earned her the Best Actor Female award, highlighting her extraordinary range and depth as an actor.

Fazil Razak made a strong directorial debut with "Thadavu," earning the Best Debutant Director award for his insightful portrayal of a Malayali Anganwadi teacher. Bina R Chandran, a theatre professional, shared the Best Actor Female award for her compelling performance in the film. In "Pookkaalam," Vijayaraghavan delivered a touching performance as an elderly grandfather, earning him the Best Supporting Actor award, a testament to his enduring talent. Sreeshma Chandran was recognized as Best Supporting Actor Female for her role in "Pombalai Orumai," demonstrating the depth of talent in Malayalam cinema.

Rohit M.G Krishnan, in his directorial debut, won the Best Original Screenplay award for "Irattai," a gripping tale of twin policemen brothers. The film's recognition as the Second-Best Movie is a significant achievement for a debut director, highlighting the strength of Malayalam cinema's storytelling.

This year's awards celebrate the vibrant talent and creativity that set Malayalam cinema apart on the national stage."

Thennal Abhilash was awarded Best Child Artiste for her role in "Shesham Mikeil Fathima," where she portrayed the transformation of a young girl into a successful commentator. Avirth Menon received recognition for his pivotal role in "Pachuvum Adbudhavilakkum," showcasing the importance of strong child actors in bringing stories to life.

The technical prowess of Malayalam cinema was evident with awards like Best Film Editor for Sandeep Prathap's work on "Little Miss Rawther." "Ullozhukku" saw Jayadevan Chakkadath and Anil Radhakrishnan share the Best Sound Design award, while Shameer Ahmmed won Best Sync Sound for "O Baby." Femina Jabbar was recognised for her costume design in "O Baby," and Mohandas won Best Production Designer for "2018," which realistically recreated the scenes of a devastating deluge. The film also received the Best VFX award, highlighting the exceptional work of Andrew D Cruz and Vishak Babu. Best Dance Choreographer went to Jishnu for "Sulekha Manzil," demonstrating the diverse talents in the industry.

In the music department, Ann Amy won Best Playback Singer Female for her song "Thinkal Poovil" in "Pachuvum Adbudha Vilakkum." The legendary Vidyadharan Master was honoured as Best Singer Male for his soulful renditions in "Jananam 1947" and "Pranayam Thodarunnu." Matthews Pulikkal's score for "Kaathal – The Core" won Best Background Music, while Justin Varghese received the Best Songs award for "Chaver." Harish Mohanan's lyrics for "Chenthaamara Poovil" in "Chaver" also earned recognition.

"Aadujeevitham" dominated the technical categories, winning accolades for Best Cinematography, Best Sound Mixing, Best Processing Lab/Colourist, and Best Makeup Artiste."

Roshan Mathew received the Best Dubbing Artist Male award for his performances in "Valatty" and "Ullozhukku," while Sumangala was recognised as Best Dubbing Artiste Female for her work in "Jananam 1947" and "Pranayam Thodarunnu." Special Jury Prizes were awarded to films like the dystopian "Gaganachari" and "Ennennum," which explores transgender issues, directed by Shalini Ushadevi. Veteran actor Krishnan was also honoured for his role in "Jaivam."

The awards for contributions to cinema literature honoured the late Kishore Kumar, whose book "Mazhavilkanniloode Malayala Cinema" offers a critical study of queer representation in Malayalam films. Rakesh M. R's insightful article "Desheeyathaye Azhichedukkunna Cinema" received the Best Article on Cinema award, reflecting the industry's commitment to thoughtful and critical engagement.

Sreejesh Hangs Up His Gloves in Glory

P.R. Sreejesh, the backbone of Indian hockey's resurgence, steps away from the game with two consecutive Olympic bronze medals. His retirement marks the end of an era, leaving behind a legacy as one of the greatest goalkeepers in the sport's history.

Sanil P. Thomas
Sports Journalist

Heading into the Paris Olympics, the Indian hockey team was ranked seventh, and expectations for a podium finish were tempered. Yet, defying the odds, India clinched consecutive Olympic medals, replicating the bronze they had captured three years earlier in Tokyo. This achievement marked the first instance since 1972 that India secured medals in back-to-back Olympic Games—a historic feat dating back to when the sport was played on natural grass. The transition to synthetic turf had long eclipsed India's dominance, but now, for the second time running, the nation stood proudly on the Olympic stage. P.R. Sreejesh, whose name is now immortalized in Indian hockey lore as the "Great Wall of Indian Hockey," was pivotal in this resurgence.

Just as he had in Tokyo, Sreejesh was a fortress in Paris, executing remarkable saves that kept India in contention for glory. His swansong came on a high note, as he had announced his retirement ahead of the Games. Throughout his illustrious career, Sreejesh played 336 matches in Indian colours, spanning four Olympics and as many World Cups. His contributions were vital in securing bronze at both the 2020 and 2024 Olympics, gold at the 2014 and 2022 Asian Games, silver at the 2014 and 2022 Commonwealth Games, and the 2023 Asian Champions Trophy. As he transitions into coaching, he will now take charge of the junior national squad.

Sreejesh joins Shiney Wilson as the only Keralites to have competed in four Olympic Games. The 36-year-old's journey began when he entered the Indian hockey camp in 2002. More than two decades later, Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey hailed him as the "God of Indian hockey." In a fitting tribute, Hockey India announced the retirement of his No. 16 jersey from the senior men's team. "We will retain it in the juniors so that he can create many more Sreejeshes," said Bhola Nath Singh,

In an emotional tribute, Hockey India retired Sreejesh's iconic No. 16 jersey from the senior team, marking the end of an era for Indian hockey. As he steps into a new role as the junior team coach, Sreejesh leaves behind a legacy that will continue to inspire future generations of players.

Hockey India's Secretary General.

At a poignant ceremony in New Delhi, the entire Indian team and support staff donned No. 16 jerseys to honour Sreejesh. The event saw former players come together to celebrate his legacy. As former captain Sardar Singh remarked, Sreejesh's ever-alert presence between the posts inspired more than one generation of hockey stars.

Sreejesh's heroics have been crucial to India's success in countless matches. The bronze medals from Tokyo and Paris are testaments to his indomitable presence in the goal. Born on May 8, 1988, in Kizhakkambalam, Ernakulam, to P.R. Raveendran and Usha Kumari of Parattu House, Sreejesh initially trained as a sprinter, later shifting to long jump and volleyball. At the age of 12, he joined G.V. Raja Sports School in Thiruvananthapuram, where hockey coach S. Jayakumar honed his skills as a goalkeeper—the rest is history. Sreejesh's wife, Dr. Anishya, also has an athletic background, and the couple shares two children, Anusree and SreeAnsh.

Sreejesh broke into the junior national team in 2004 and made his senior debut in 2006 at the South Asian Games in Colombo. His rise to prominence was cemented after being named the best goalkeeper at the 2008 Junior Asia Cup. At the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon, his stellar performance in the final against Pakistan, including two saved penalty strokes, secured India the gold. His confidence was unshakeable as he assured his teammates, "If you guys take the game to a shootout, I'll get you the gold."

On July 13, 2016, Sreejesh succeeded Sardar Singh as captain, leading India to the quarterfinals of the Rio Olympics. His leadership helped the team secure a bronze at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, and he served as captain for over two years.

August 5, 2021, stands as a momentous day in Sreejesh's career. His crucial role in India's victory over Germany to claim bronze at the Tokyo Olympics will forever be etched in Indian hockey history. Finally, on August 8, 2024, Sreejesh once again shone with a stellar performance against Spain at the Yves du Manoir Stadium in Paris, clinching another bronze and concluding his illustrious playing career.

As head coach of the junior Indian team, Sreejesh's first challenge will be the Sultan of Johor Cup, scheduled from October 19 to 26. Yet, true to his ambitious nature, Sreejesh is eyeing a future role with the senior team, stating, "Why just be a mentor? I could be the coach." Harendra Singh, the coach who first brought Sreejesh into the national setup, has already endorsed him as the ideal candidate to lead the senior side. Sreejesh's new dream is to bring home an Olympic medal as a coach.

With Sreejesh's retirement, the question arises: who will carry Kerala's legacy forward in Indian hockey? Ever the optimist, Sreejesh believes the future is bright: "Four years is quite a long period. We cannot rule out possibilities. There is one from Kerala in the junior camp right now. I met him once." He likely refers to Muhammad Kaif, currently training in Kollam.

Looking beyond hockey, Sreejesh remains hopeful for Kerala's prospects in individual sports. He encourages the next generation of athletes, regardless of their discipline, to aim for greatness, just as he did. Sardar Singh remembers how Sreejesh set his sights high: "When we started, we were ranked 17-18 in the world, but even then, his target was for India to be number one."

Though the God of Modern Indian Hockey has stepped away from the pitch, Sreejesh's legend will continue to inspire the generations that follow.

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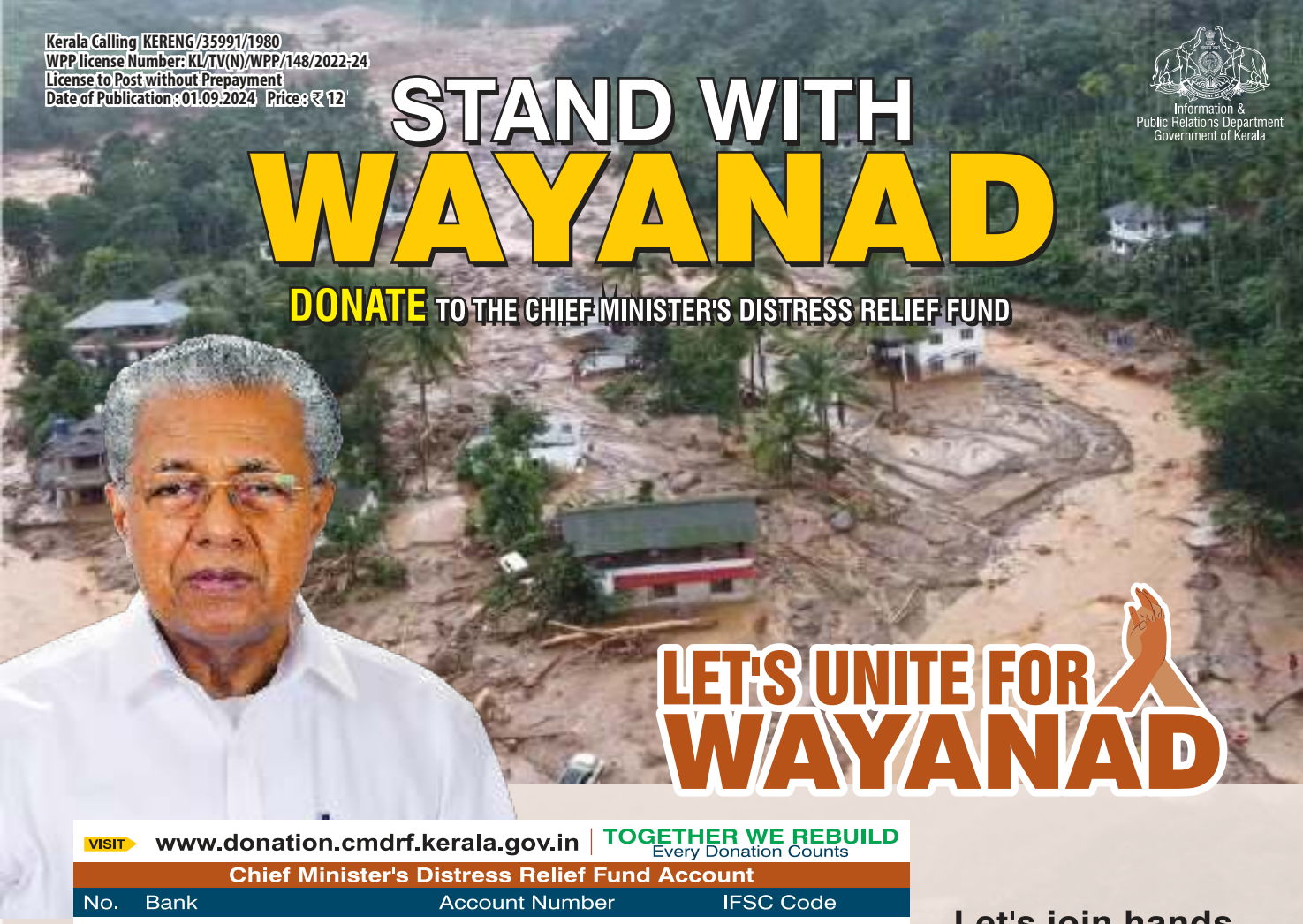

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2.	South Indian Bank	**0721053000003020**	SIBL0000721
3.	Federal Bank	**10210100422271**	FDRL0001021
4.	HDFC Bank Ltd	**50100350210557**	HDFC0002485
5.	ICICI Bank	**626201089884**	ICIC0006262
6.	CSB Bank Ltd	**00 9603981212190001**	CSBK0000096
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18.	Bank Of India	**853810110007599**	BKID0008538
19.	Punjab National Bank	**3301000104118534**	PUNB0330100
20.	Kerala Bank	**110110801000339**	KSBK0000101
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22.	UCO Bank	**02880110077641**	UCBA0000288
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Information & Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala

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