

## **Localization of sustainable development goals: A study of multidimensional poverty and rural development in Kerala**

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### **Abstract**

*The present study attempts to understand the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the purview of rural development and multidimensional poverty in Kerala. The study is based on secondary data. Results indicate that Grama Panchayats have a highly significant role in the development of rural areas by providing the basic amenities to the village people through enabling them to get rid of multidimensional poverty and attain the particular target of SDG 1.2. Even though Kerala made a remarkable progress in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in all India, some indicators of MPI such as maternal health and child & adolescent mortality rate showed an increasing trend across the latest two rounds of National Family Health Survey (NFHS). Therefore, a well-designed and properly executed rural development programmes in panchayats helps to address multidimensional poverty and there by achieving SDGs. For achieving the aim of attaining the target SDG 1.2, grama panchayats need to take innovative action plan in association with integrated rural development.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); National Family Health Survey (NFHS); Multidimensional Poverty; Local governance; Nutritional deprivation.

## Introduction

Global Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that around 964 million rural population across 111 countries are still living in multidimensional poverty, almost 25 per cent of the Indian population is found to be multi-dimensionally poor, and around 33 per cent are in rural areas. As per the given index, India ranks 62nd position among 107 countries (Gaur, 2020). No poverty' is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that could be attained at the grassroot level (Ministry of Panchayat Raj, 2021). Sustainable Development Goals are furthermore localized today and the panchayats are given more responsibility to achieve those goals in rural areas. Like in all countries, the covid19 pandemic had pushed back the pace and progress on the SDGs in India (Ministry of Panchayat raj, 2021). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are taken through the different themes which can be realised through the local self-governments. Poverty free and enhanced livelihood village is one of such themes that the local governments need to play an active role for attaining the targeted aim. Panchayats are very close to the people and they can easily identify the development needs of people. Therefore, the eradication of poverty and enhanced livelihood village is the sole responsibility of local self-governments. Rural development can be possible through the improvement of living conditions of the rural poor. It is a strategy of improving the social and economic life of rural poor as its main objective is to reduce poverty (Banakar, 2018). Local self-governments are working as an instrument machinery for implementing the development programmes of the State (Modi, Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Development, 2019). Poverty free and enhanced livelihood village is one of the nine thematic approaches of 17 SDGs adopted by ministry of panchayat raj. The Ministry of panchayat raj had initiated the people's campaign as "Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas" being launched in all states from 2021 to 2022 for ensuring people's participation and preparing the grama panchayat development plan (Economic Review, 2021-22). Basically, decentralization is the process of transferring the power and authority from the high level of governments to the lower level of governments. The decentralisation came in to effect with the passage of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments which made a significant breakthrough in our political system in the form of fund and power devolution. The decentralized governance mainly intends to provide the basic amenities of the common man to attain rural development. Transformative development in rural India is possible only through "Sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas" for which grama panchayat prepare a plan with the participation of

stakeholders and local resources. Panchayats have been authorized institutions to plan for the development of villages. The path of development should be line with the certain targets in Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, Localisation of SDGs is made possible through grama panchayats through different themes. Poverty free and livelihood enhanced village is one such a theme which could be realised with the active mechanism of local governance system (Ministry of Panchayat raj, 2021). However, it is tedious task to identify the marginalised section of society and deprived households and implement the poverty eradication programmes on the basis of their priority and needs. Grama sabha is the fulcrum of the decentralized governance system in which common people can be involved in the decision-making process of local self-government. Rural development is highly connected with the development of the common people especially the people living below the poverty line. All developmental activities done at the local level benefit the rural population and rural areas. Therefore, the researcher intends to study the localisation of sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in association with the rural development and multidimensional poverty.

## **2. Literature review**

Multidimensional poverty is one of the major barriers in attaining the SDGs which can be clearly addressed with effective local governance system. Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by UNDP and oxford human development initiative, is the most widely used tool for measuring the poverty in its multidimensional aspects rather than income and expenditure method. It is an international measure of acute multidimensional poverty covering over 100 developing countries. This is the most innovative tool for evaluating the households and individuals as well in terms of different dimensions of poverty. Each indicator of multidimensional poverty index is connected to the SDGs. SDG Target 1.2 is the particular mission to reduce the poverty in all its forms by at least half by 2030. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be attained only through comprehensive rural development for which Local Self Governments (LSGs) are responsible for ensuring rural development (Sarkar, 2021; Ramya, 2014). As the grama panchayats are very close to the people, they are more responsible for the needs of local people and so allocate resources accordingly (Jothiramalingam, 2020). Panchayat are the basic unit of local governance system which is duly responsible for rural development (Dhananjay, 2017). The coordination between two departments such as rural development and panchayat raj need to be more strengthened in such a way that several programmes focusing on the rural development gets implemented in a

time bound manner. Effective implementation of these programmes has to be ensured within the framework of rural development. Strategies and interventions by each panchayat for implementing these programmes are widely different in terms of functions and functionaries. Grama panchayats are the constitutional body to prepare the development plan in rural areas with a comprehensive plan of utilising the local resources and various flagship programmes like MGNREGS (Ministry of panchayat raj, Ministry of Rural Development, 2019). Creation of income as well as purchasing power along with ensuring the livelihood security among the rural people is the essential part of rural development. Ministry of rural development is implementing several schemes in our economy for rural development and grama panchayats take the cognizance of these schemes (Ministry of panchayat raj, Ministry of Rural Development, 2019). For achieving the aim of rural development, grama panchayats need to associate with various departments concerned for developing the integrated strategy of utilising the locally available resources through different flagship programmes like MGNREGS. In the panel data analysis of different states in India for the years from 2006 to 2021, rural household coverage under MGNREGS in Kerala is 27.2% (Turangi, 2022). Employment generation through centrally funded programmes like MGNREGS is a clear indication of income generation in village areas so as to reduce the poverty in those areas. Local governments are playing a very critical role in the transformation of SDGs from its global vision in to local reality. 'No poverty' is one of the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that could be attained at the grassroot level (Localization of SDGs in PRI, Report of Expert Group, Volume 1, 2021). Hence the eradication of poverty and enhanced livelihood village is the sole responsibility of local self-governments. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are taken through the different themes which can be realised through the local self-governments. Poverty free and enhanced livelihood village is one of such themes that the local governments need to play an active role for attaining the targeted aim. For attaining the theme, each panchayats need to formulate the grama panchayat development plan and execute the functions accordingly. Panchayats are very close to the people and they can easily identify the development needs of people. Improved living conditions and quality of life of the rural poor helps to obtain SDGs (Adamowicz, 2020; Singhal, 2016). However, majority of them are suffering from different types of deprivations like educational deprivations, health deprivations and deprivations in standard of living (Chathukulam, 2021; Chandran, 2020; Alkire, 2018). The decentralized governance mainly intends to provide the basic amenities of a common man thereby achieving rural development. Rural development is

highly connected with the development of the common people and it is imperative for the improvement of quality of life and standard of living of the people living in sparsely populated rural areas (Economic Review, 2021-2022). Recently Kerala government launched comprehensive programmes to eradicate extreme poverty with the help of local self-governments. State wide survey was conducted to identify the extremely poor families with an intention of poverty eradication. It is observed that around 81% of extremely poor are living in village areas which reflects the intensity of rural poverty (Economic review,2022). As per the survey, Malappuram district stands the highest with the 8553 poor families which accounts for the 13.4% of the total poor families in the State. Leaving no one behind is the special emphasis of the SDGs and the MPI was constructed in line with SDGs. Global MPI offer a reference point for multiple actors seeking to identify and redress the situation of those being left behind in multiple SDGs (Jahan, 2018). Reducing global poverty at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty is one of the key goals of SDG. The MPI value of India has been declined from 24.85% in 2015-16 to 14.96% in 2019-21. This significant decline of multidimensional poverty is a major contribution towards the achievement of SDGs. Similarly, the intensity of poverty has also been reduced from 47.14% to 44.39% during the period 2015-16 to 2019-21. MPI as a policy tool which can be used by the policy makers to make modifications in their strategies on the basis of intensity of deprivations to attain the SDG target 2030. The indicators in MPI are also connected with different SDG goals.

### **3. Methods**

The study is mainly based on secondary data and the fundamental information is given from the ministry of panchayat raj, Grama Panchayat Development Plan, Ministry of rural development, MPI progress review 2023, latest rounds of National Family Health Surveys and latest Economic reviews. District wise analysis of multidimensional poverty has been done on the basis of latest two rounds of NFHS.

### **4. Results**

Some of the SDGs are connected with the indicators of multidimensional poverty and as per the report, some important facts of multidimensional poverty in relation with SDGs in Kerala are given here. Most importantly, households having improved source of water belongs to SDG 6 which is recorded as only 57% in 2019. Similarly, electrification of households and

usage of clean cooking fuel is related with the SDG 7, of which household electrified is 100% but at the same time, household using clean cooking fuel is only 58.9%. The following Table shows the censored head count ratio in MPI indicators on the basis of National Family Health Survey in the latest two rounds held in 2015-16 and 2019-20.

**Table 1.** Global MPI : Details of indicators and dimensions

Dimensions of poverty	Indicator	Deprived if..	SDG Area	Weight
Health	Nutrition	Any person under 70 years of age for whom there is nutritional information is undernourished	SDG 2	1/6
	Child mortality	A child under 18 has died in the household in the five-year period preceding the survey	SDG 3	1/6
Education	Years of schooling	No eligible household member has completed six years of schooling	SDG 4	1/6
	School attendance	Any school-aged child is not attending school up to the age at which he/she would complete class 8	SDG 4	1/6
Living standards	Cooking fuel	A household cooks using solid fuel, such as dung, agricultural crop, shrubs, wood, charcoal, or coal	SDG 7	1/18
	Sanitation	The household has unimproved or no sanitation facility or it is improved but shared with other households	SDG 6	1/18
	Drinking water	The household's source of drinking water is not safe or safe drinking water is a 30-minute or longer walk from home, roundtrip	SDG 6	1/18
	Electricity	The household has no electricity	SDG 7	1/18
	Housing	The household has inadequate housing materials in any of the three components: floor, roof, or walls	SDG 11	1/18
	Assets	The household does not own more than one of these assets: radio, TV, telephone, computer, animal cart, bicycle, motorbike, or refrigerator, and does not own a car or truck	SDG 1	1/18

*Source: Author's own compilation based on secondary data*

**Table 2.** Status of multidimensional poverty based on two rounds of NFHS (censored headcount ratio) (%)

		India		Kerala	
		NFHS 4	NFHS 5	NFHS 4	NFHS 5
1	Nutrition	19.79	11.90	0.56	0.45
2	Child & Adolescent mortality	1.87	1.18	0	0.01
3	Maternal Health	14.64	9.35	0.15	0.20
4	Years of schooling	10.67	6.63	0.18	0.17
5	School attendance	5.22	3.63	0.22	0.06
6	Cooking fuel	23.03	12.30	0.58	0.43
7	Sanitation	21.2	9.25	0.30	0.09
8	Drinking water	5.05	2.23	0.13	0.11
9	Electricity	8.28	1.84	0.20	0.12
10	Housing	20.48	12.07	0.40	0.38
11	Assets	8.84	4.72	0.32	0.28
12	Bank Account	5.36	1.09	0.17	0.14

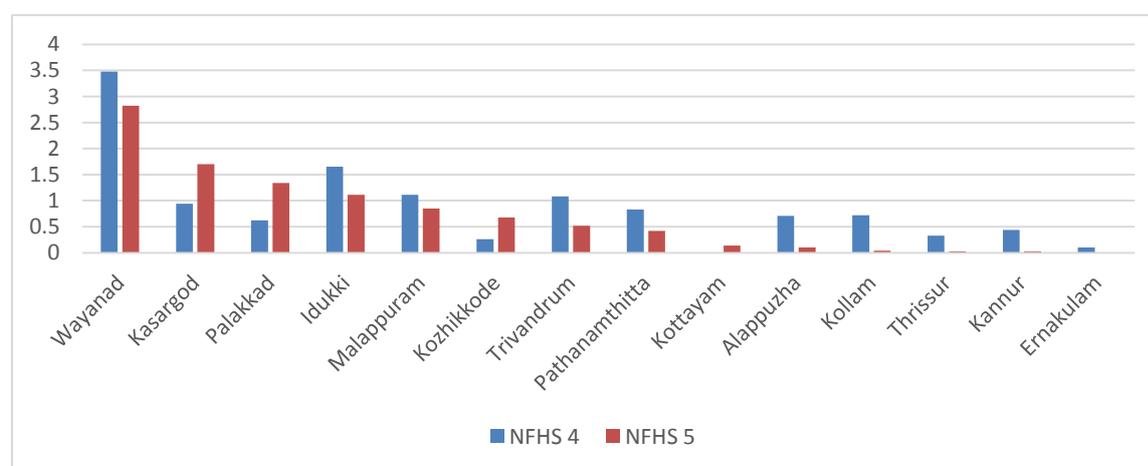
*Source: MPI, Progress review 2023*

From the Table 2, it is seen that compared to all India, Kerala shows the lowest deprivations in all indicators of MPI. It is also noted that there a significant decline in the different deprivations of multi-dimensional poverty in Kerala. However, in the case of child adolescent mortality and maternal health, deprivation has been increased in Kerala while it was declined in all India. This indicates the poor performance of Kerala to address the issues of child and adolescent mortality. This would adversely affect the path of attaining SDG3 as it is connected with child mortality. Another observed fact is nutritional deprivation which stands the highest deprivation indicator of multidimensional poverty in Kerala being recorded as 0.56% and 0.45% in 2015-16 and 2019-20 respectively, but in all India, it is cooking fuel which contributes around 12.30% in 2019-20. Hence the grass root level intervention is very much required to address the issue of nutritional deprivation in Kerala to attain the SDG 2. Percentage of population who are multidimensionally poor in each district is given in the Table 3.

**Table 3.** District wise distribution of multidimensional poverty in Kerala (%)

Year	NFHS 4	NFHS 5	Relative change
Wayanad	3.48	2.82	-18.9655
Kasargod	0.94	1.70	80.85106
Palakkad	0.62	1.34	116.129
Idukki	1.65	1.11	-32.7273
Malappuram	1.11	0.85	-23.4234
Kozhikkode	0.26	0.68	161.5385
Trivandrum	1.08	0.52	-51.8519
Pathanamthitta	0.83	0.42	-49.3976
Kottayam	0	0.14	
Alappuzha	0.71	0.10	-85.9155
Kollam	0.72	0.04	-94.4444
Thrissur	0.33	0.03	-90.9091
Kannur	0.44	0.03	-93.1818
Ernakulam	0.10	0	-100

Source: MPI, Progress review 2023

**Fig.1** District wise distribution of multidimensional poverty in Kerala

From the district wise analysis of multidimensional poverty in two different rounds of National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4 & NFHS 5), it is clear that the percentage of multidimensionally poor population has been declined in the districts except some districts such as Kasargod, Palakkad, Kozhikkode, and Kottayam. Among these districts, Kozhikkode district shows the highest increase being recorded as 161% followed by Palakkad and Kasargod, being 116% and 81% respectively. Another observed fact is that Kottayam had zero multidimensional poverty in the 4th round of NFHS 2015-16, but it became increased to

0.14% in the 5th round of NFHS 2019-20. Ernakulam became zero multidimensional poverty district as per 5th round of NFHS.

#### **4.1 Role of grama panchayats in addressing multidimensional poverty and rural development**

As the 70% of total population in India lives in rural areas, grass root level functioning is required for attaining the SDGs. In local governance system, grama panchayats as a lowest tier of panchayat raj institutions which are supposed to act as a catalyst for the rural development. Social and economic development of rural population is the major objective of panchayat raj system. In villages, the grama panchayats have a wider role in the redressal of poverty in different dimensions of education, health and standard of living. Grama panchayat is the basic unit of decentralised system of local governance and the development plan of each grama panchayat is formulated by considering the basic needs of people in the particular locality. In a decentralised democratic society like Kerala, local governance plays a pivotal role in the development of rural area and boosting the standard of living of poor people in village areas. The main aim of rural development is to break the vicious circle of poverty through ensuring better standard of living of the rural poor. Panchayats implements several development programmes through centrally sponsored schemes with an aim of achieving rural development and eradication of poverty in rural areas. The department of Rural development is implementing several schemes in association with the grama panchayat for the amelioration of rural population. The main aim of these programmes is to reduce the poverty as well as creating employment opportunities in the rural areas, thereby improving the wellbeing of rural population. The major schemes include Livelihood Projects, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Pradhanmantri Awas Yojana-Gramin, Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana and District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) are sponsored by ministry of rural development. The coordination between two departments such as rural development and panchayat raj need to be more strengthened in such a way that several programmes focusing on the rural development gets implemented in a time bound manner. Effective implementation of these programmes has to be ensured within the framework of rural development. Strategies and interventions by each panchayat for implementing these programmes are widely different in terms of functions and functionaries.

## 5. Discussion

From the study, it is seen that panchayats have a significant role in the development of rural areas by providing the basic amenities to the village people and enable them to get rid of multidimensional poverty and attain the particular target of SDG 1.2. Even though Kerala made a remarkable progress in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in all India, some indicators of MPI such as maternal health and child & adolescent mortality rate showed an increasing trend across the two rounds of NFHS (NFHS 4&5). Another observed fact is that nutritional deprivation is the highest contributing indicator leading to the multidimensional poverty in Kerala. As these deprivations like nutrition and child mortality are linked with SDG 2 & SDG 3, utmost care should be taken to address those issues in all villages.

## 6. Conclusion

From the district wise analysis of multidimensional poverty in two different rounds of National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4 & NFHS 5), it is clear that the multidimensional poverty has been declined in the districts except some districts such as Kasargod, Palakkad, Kozhikkode, and Kottayam. At this juncture, it is very important to study as to why the multidimensional poverty increased in these districts. Well-designed and properly executed rural development programmes at grass root level is the only way out to address the problem of multidimensional poverty and achieve sustainable development goals. Hence the detailed decomposition analysis of multidimensional poverty with the help of primary data from these districts is the future scope of study and it would be helpful for policy formulation.

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