

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED IN THE ICT ERA: EVIDENCE FROM THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY OF KERALA IN DIGITAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In the State of Kerala in India, the active role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in diverse social service activities could prove beneficial to the overall development of the society in an equitable, balanced and sustainable manner. This is because of the fact CSOs focus on the poor and marginalised segments including women and seek to bring them all into the mainstream of the society; and vast majority of the members of CSOs are poor women engaged in various economic activities including running of own micro enterprises. As part of their vital role in women empowerment, rural development and equitable development of the society, CSOs play a cardinal role as facilitators for the education, training and skill development of the differently abled segments of the society, to bring them into the mainstream and equip them to earn their livelihood. This paper looks into the role of CSOs in mainstreaming the differently abled by giving them special education, training, skill development, ICT-based training etc. As CSOs enable Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) using the immense potential of ICT for the same, this study delves into a typical CSO (viz. KSSS) in Kerala, the emerging 'Knowledge Society' in India, when 'Digital India' is the policy initiative at the national level in India.

Keywords: Differently Abled, CSO, Special Education, Skill Development, Empowerment, CBR, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

Kerala State in India has a remarkable record of many achievements in human development index (HDI) as well as other indices of development of human capital. Kerala's indices relating to various socio-economic indicators, like, such as literacy rate, infant mortality rate (IMR), public healthcare services, longevity, standard of living, etc. are quite high and some of these are comparable with even the developed nations of the world. Many of these achievements are due to the functioning of dynamic Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) like 'Kudumbashree'—the CSO controlled by the Govt. of Kerala (GOK) and many private ones.

As a prominent CSO controlled by the Church, Kottayam Social Service Society (KSSS) has a track record of many decades. Its activities include, empowering the differently abled people including providing them with special education, training and skill development to enable them to earn their livelihood and to be a part of the mainstream society.

Relevance and Significance of the Study

Various social service activities facilitated by the CSOs like KSSS especially micro

enterprises, including those run by the differently abled members of such CSOs ensure socio-economic empowerment of the poor and the marginalised, including women and the differently abled. An empirical (field-based) study done by Manoj (2008) [9], “Potential of micro enterprises in women empowerment: A critical study of micro enterprises run by women under the Kudumbashree Programme in Kerala” has examined in detail about the micro enterprises (MEs) run by women members of Kudumbashree (GOK) and has observed that such enterprises of women have great potential for the empowerment of its members. Women running such MEs enable their own empowerment, socio-economic, familial and even political. Similarly, Duryodhan Nahak (2008) [3] has pointed out that CSOs play a key role in the empowerment of the disabled people and that the earlier individual model (medical model) of empowering the disability has given way to the social model of empowering the disabled. As against finding a causal relationship between an individual’s bodily impairment and his disability, a social model that looks into the individual within his group, the disability the group faces (like, oppression of social and economic structure) is relevant. So, disability is in the socio-structural barriers that cause disadvantage and exclude people with impairments. Besides GOK-promoted Kudumbashree, other CSOs are active in Kerala and these are mostly controlled by religious or community organisations, like KSSS. CSOs are growingly becoming influential in the development of nations as they give the basic services to people (UNRISD, 2000)[19]. The primary function of a CSO is active participation in the financial inclusion process by facilitating microfinance kind of financial support to CSO members, mostly women. Better financial status of women means higher familial empowerment and better say in familial decision making. In Kerala, microfinance linked to CSOs has proven to be an effective tool for banking the unbanked. Even mobile phones can be tools for financial inclusion, as empirically tested in Philippines (Pickens, 2009)[14]. Tiwari et al. (2012) [16] have noted the vital need role of ICT in rehabilitation of the disabled. As Kerala has very high ICT/Mobile phone penetration, and is the State in India with “the greatest technology access” UNESCO & UNICEF (2021) [17] ICT can expedite the inclusive economic growth in Kerala.

In any country economic development becomes fruitful if and only if it is balanced and equitable. Only then any development could be holistic and sustainable in the long term. In Kerala, the commendable performance track-record of Kudumbashree, the CSO sponsored by the GOK, is widely recognised and is acclaimed worldwide. Kudumbashree and also other CSOs (Kottayam Social Service Society, or KSSS, a church-controlled CSO) are actively working in Kerala and are engaged in economic and other social service activities. They aid balanced and equitable economic growth of Kerala. They support financial empowerment of the poor by facilitating financial assistance to them from the formal sector, start their own economic activities, and ensure regular business income. Financial inclusion through microfinance or such other means is accelerated by CSOs. It is widely recognised that CSOs can effectively help the poor and the marginalised, including the women, to fulfil their basic necessities of life, even when the Government fails to do that. For example, in the case of Mumbai’s urban poor, CSOs could successfully help them as they didn’t have their initial resources to start own business. (Sudha Mohan, 2002) [15]. The Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) under Kudumbashree, and SHGs or CSOs under the Christian church-controlled service organisation Kottayam Social Service Society (KSSS) are active in central Kerala. This paper reviews Kudumbashree activities in general and focuses more on CSOs of KSSS.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study of the activities of ‘Kudumbashree’ under Govt. of Kerala among the disabled, including women and children, and empowering them through education and training;
2. To study in detail the CSOs under Kottayam Social Service Society (KSSS), their role in empowering the disabled, through special education, skill development and training;
3. To suggest strategies for the effective rehabilitation of the disabled by CSOs, including ICT-based methods, so as to ensure equitable and sustainable socio-economic growth.

Methodology and Data Sources

This paper is a descriptive-analytical study, based mainly on secondary data drawn from authentic sources, like, the reports of UN organisations (UNRISD, UNESCO & UNICEF), international bank ADB and its associates, publications of ‘Kudumbashree’ – under the Govt. of Kerala (GOK), other GOK publications like the Economic Review for various years (till Feb. 2021), reports of RBI, NABARD and NHB, publications of the Govt. of India (GOI) like Economic Survey (till Feb. 2021), and Annual Activity Reports of KSSS – the CSO that is under focused study in this paper. Publications for 10 years (2011-2020) have been used for data collection, and common statistical tools are used for the data analysis and interpretation.

Literature Review

United Nations (2016) Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2000) [19] in its paper Civil Society Organizations and Service Provision has pointed out the vital role that CSOs play by providing the basic services to the needy people and are becoming growingly influential actors in the society. The role of CSOs in providing basic services and their focus on the poor, and various aspects of their services, like, quality, efficiency, and sustainability are covered in detail in the analysis and lastly the critical issues faced by CSOs are discussed. In their paper Keerthan & Manoj (2009) [4] have noted the vital role of MGNREGS in enabling the financial and social empowerment of women workers through MGNREGS jobs. Sudha Mohan (2002) [15] in her study, ‘Role and Relevance of Civil Society Organisations’ has studied in detail regarding CSOs by focusing on CSOs working among the urban poor in Mumbai who lacked initial resources. She has noted that CSOs can help them to empower themselves. Duryodhan Nahak (2008) [3] in his paper “*Role of Civil Society in the Empowerment of the Disabled*” in Mainstream has sought to point out the vital need for a social model for the holistic empowerment of the disabled or differently abled as a group within the society as a whole i.e. by following a ‘social model’ for their overall development rather than taking them all from a ‘medical treatment’ or ‘individual issue’ perspective.

A paper on housing microfinance (HMF) by Manoj (2012a) [7], “*Learning from Cross-country Experiences in Housing Finance: a Microfinance Approach*” in Journal of Global Economy, has pointed out the crucial significance of encouraging the microfinance route for providing financial assistance to the poor for their housing needs of the poor and underprivileged groups considering many successful global HMF experiences. The author in his edited book viz. Manoj (2012b) [8], Emerging Technologies and Financing Models for Affordable Housing in India, published by Directorate of Public Relations and Publications of CUSAT, Kerala has discussed diverse financing models (like, housing microfinance) as well as emerging technologies (like, straw bale construction) that can help the poor households, both rural and urban poor, to fulfil their dream of ‘own homes’ in an affordable manner in the existing banking, financial and regulatory framework in India.

Pickens (2009) [14] has noted that advances in ICT which are readily adopted by the general

public including the poor (eg. Mobile phones) can be used for ensuring ‘banking for the unbanked’. As the use of mobile phones grow exponentially and every citizen including the poor is using it, then this ICT-based device could be used for banking the unbanked, according to his empirical study in Philippines. Afield study on micro enterprises (MEs), Manoj (2015a) [9], “*Potential of micro enterprises in women empowerment: A critical study of micro enterprises run by women under the Kudumbashree Programme in Kerala*” has studied about the micro enterprises (MEs) run by Kudumbashree women and has noted the vast potential of MEs for women empowerment. Tiwari et al. (2012) [16] have noted the vital role of ICT in the rehabilitation of the disabled, especially those with multiple disabilities. In a study by Manoj (2015b) [10], “*Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Effective Implementation of MGNREGA in India: An Analysis*” in International Research Journal of Finance and Economics, the author has discussed the role of ICT for effective, efficient and transparent way of implementing MGNREGA in India. A study by Manoj (2016) [11], “*Relevance of E-Banking Services in Rural Area—An Empirical Investigation*” in Journal of Management and Science, has noted that E-banking services can positively contribute towards the empowerment of rural customers and that more E-Banking and ICT-based services be provided in rural areas. Asian Development Bank (ADB)(2015)[1] in its report, Gender Mainstreaming Case Study India: Kerala Sustainable Urban Development Project, has made a study on a Kerala-based urban development project viz. Sustainable Urban Development Project and has noted that women’s participation in the project has enriched their self-esteem and nurtured their leadership qualities.

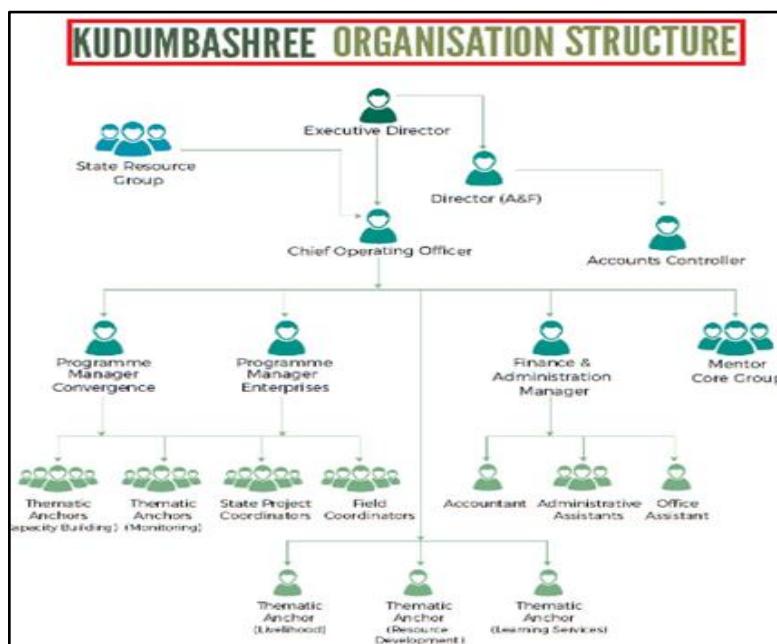
A study by Arun & Kamath (2015) [2] ‘Financial inclusion: Policies and practices’ in IIMB Management Review has discussed the regional and global policies and practices in financial inclusion – the development tool and also a key policy priority of most Governments of the world. Hanmer & Dahan (2015) [30] have noted (World Bank series) ‘Identification for Development: Its Potential for Empowering Women and Girls’ that lack of official identification (ID) disproportionately affects women and girls and that latest technologies can empower women by providing them their identity and ensuring they get their rightful dues. In a study on housing micro finance (HMF), Manoj (2015c) [12], “*Socio-Economic Impact of Housing Microfinance: Findings of a Field based Study in Kerala, India*” in International Research Journal of Finance and Economics, the author has pointed out the high potential of HMF to empower the poor ensuring them shelter – a basic pre-requisite for a healthy living, raising livelihood, improving socio-economic status and be productive always. The same author, as a continuation of this study, Manoj, P. K. (2015) [13] “*Deterrents to the Housing Microfinance: Evidence from a Study of the Bankers to ‘Bhavanashree’ in Kerala, India*”, International Research Journal of Finance and Economics, has identified the major factors that deter the growth of HMF in Kerala as the lack of awareness regarding the terms of loan, expectation of ‘writing off’ of loans etc. Based on the findings remedial strategies have been suggested by the author. A study on E-CRM by Dr. Vasantha S, Dr. Manoj, P. K., & Jacob Joju (2015)[20], “*E-CRM: A Perspective of Urban & Rural Banks in Kerala*”, International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research, has compared the ICT-based CRM (or, E-CRM) services in respect of rural and urban customers in Kerala. Both types are interested in such services due to their convenience and extra features, but the authors have mooted for separate strategies to lure both the groups Joju et al. (2015).

A study by Vidya Viswanath, & Manoj, P. K. (2015) [21], “*Socio-Economic Conditions of Migrant Labourers - An Empirical Study in Kerala*”, Indian Journal of Applied Research, has studied the socio-economic conditions, the savings and investment behaviour and modes of remitting money to their families etc. in respect of migrant construction workers in Kerala, and noted significantly higher extra earnings in Kerala vis-à-vis earnings in their home states. A study

by Lauer & Lyman (2015) [6], 'Digital Financial Inclusion: Implications for Customers, Regulators, Supervisors, and Standard-Setting Bodies' has noted that digital financial inclusion could prove to be a game changer for unserved and under-served people from low-income households and the small enterprises. UNESCO& UNICEF (2021)[17] in their India Case Study has noted the great accolades of Kerala State in India, in education, health and in ICT integration also by pointing out 'Kerala has the greatest technology access' Joju et al. (2017).

Kudumbashree and the Empowerment of the Disabled or Differently Abled

'Kudumbashree', the poverty alleviation project promoted by the Govt. of Kerala (GOK), aims to attain some broad goals like women empowerment by means of the working of women's collectives and also local economic development by way of close integration with local government institutions. This programme uses self-help as the strategy for poverty alleviation and women empowerment in Kerala. Figure 1 shows its organization structure.



**FIGURE 1
ORGANISATION STRUCTURE OF KUDUMBASHREE IN KERALA, KERALA**

Given the mission of Kudumbashree, it has four major objectives: (i) Empowerment of women through community based organizations (CBO) (ii) Thrift and credit operations and informal banking, (iii) Decision making by the poor, and (iv) Micro enterprises and income generation activities. The organization structure of Kudumbashree is given in Figure I and its activities and their coverage at various levels are depicted in Figure 2.

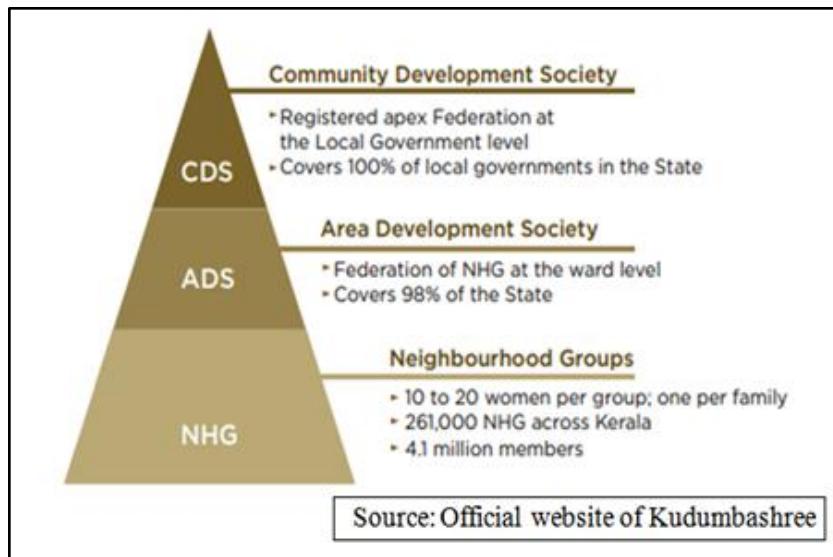


FIGURE 2
STRUCTURE OF KUDUMBASHREE AND COVERAGE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

A Neighborhood Group (NHG) is the lowest (first) tier in the Kudumbashree structure. It consists of, (i) Community Health Volunteer, (ii) Income Generation Activities (IGA) Volunteer, (iii) Infrastructure Volunteer, (iv) Secretary, and (v) President. An Area Development Society (ADS) refers to second tier of Kudumbashree's Three-Tier structure. ADS monitors the working of different NHGs under it, and is managed by a 7-member leadership. The ADSs under Kudumbashree in turn are monitored by the Community Development Society (CDS)—the top tier of its 'Three-Tier' structure. So, Kudumbashree consists of a federated system of community organisations. The first tier (NHGs) is made up of 10-20 families which often include the poor and non-poor, and is federated at the Ward level. Through election of office-bearers once in 3 years, the second-tier (ADSs) is federated at the City or Village level, above which is the third tier (CDS). So, Kudumbashree's three-tier system, largely consists of self-regulatory bodies at various levels. Kudumbashree takes shape when these bodies get institutionalized as an individual and distinct entity. As a Govt. sponsored programme Kudumbashree is the implementing agency for many Governmental schemes under Govt. of Kerala (GOK) and Govt. of India (GOI) eg. MGNREGS Figure 3.

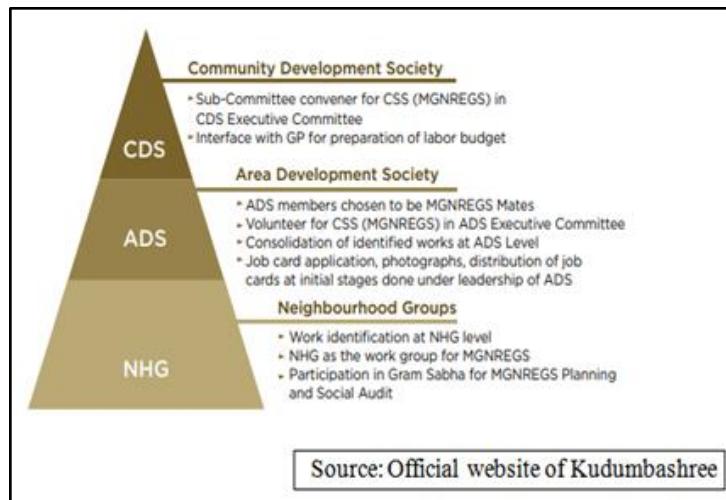


FIGURE 3
KUDUMBASHREE - MGNREGS LINKAGE

Many studies have pointed out the positive association of MGNREGA participation (which is implemented by Kudumbashree in Kerala) and socio-economic empowerment of women, like the study by Manoj (2015) [5]. Regarding disability, it arises when a loss or diminution in a physical or psychological function leads to partial or total inability to perform any bodily or mental functions in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Within the sort of disabilities, mental challenges are supposed to be the serious problems that affect any family economically and emotionally. Kudumbashree initiated its Disability Mainstreaming Program called 'BUDS' in 2004.

Within the policy framework of inclusive and integrated education mentally challenged children increasingly started to enroll in government schools. This has provided such children an opportunity for schooling in an inclusive setting where they can study upto 18 years' age. But, there was no institution to take care of them after they attain 18 years' age, particularly in rural areas. This created another issue for the respective families. The Kudumbashree NHGs started demanding day care and training for such mentally challenged adult individuals in their respective localities. Various Panchayats in Kerala too demanded such initiatives. It was in the above context that Kudumbashree turned up with the proposal for BRC (Buds Rehabilitation Centre) which the Govt. of Kerala (GOK) approved. Thus, Kudumbashree decided to focus on above 18 (post-school) age group. The GOK accordingly approved this novel model of Kudumbashree. In 2015, BRC was formed. BRC focuses on the rehabilitation, training and day care of the disabled in Kerala, mostly the mentally challenged persons Table 1.

Table 1
BUDS INSTITUTIONS UNDER KUDUMBASHREE (AS OF AUGUST 2020)

District in Kerala (Name)	BUDS Institutions-Details			Age (Years) Profile		Total (All ages)
	BUDS	BRCs	Total	Above 18	Upto18	
Kasaragod	9	3	12	203	166	369
Kannur	17	7	24	378	268	646
Wayanad	6	5	11	34	85	119
Kozhikode	25	12	37	347	437	784
Malappuram	15	24	39	287	395	682
Palakkad	7	19	26	67	92	159

Thrissur	5	17	12	100	45	145
Ernakulam	22	14	36	600	200	800
Idukki	1	1	2	31	15	46
Kottayam	1	1	2	10	15	25
Alappuzha	9	11	20	217	177	394
Pathanamthitta	2	5	7	5	30	35
Kollam	13	15	28	138	267	405
Thiruvananthapuram	8	29	37	151	102	253
	140	153	293	2568	2294	4862

Source: Compiled from, *Official sources of Kudumbashree*, Data as of Aug. 2020.

It may be noted that, as a Govt-controlled (GOK) CSO Kudumbashree has been doing commendable activities in empowering the women and other marginalised segments of the society; and upholding the cause of equitable and balanced regional economic development.

Role of Csos Under Ksss in Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment

As in the case of Kudumbashree, a Government-controlled (GOK) organization, in respect of the Church-controlled KSSS too, various CSOs under KSSS are engaged in diverse kinds of activities that ensure the financial (economic) and familial, social and political empowerment of its members. The profile of the members of CSOs under KSSS is shown in Table II. It is noted that majority of the members of CSOs under KSSS women and include widows too Table 2.

Table 2 CSOS UNDER KSSS – COMPLETE DETAILS AS OF 31.03.2019				
Group	SHGs (Nos)	APL	BPL	Total (APL and BPL)
Women SHG	2370	25369	26149	51516
Farmers	76	947	1201	2248
Men	69	698	812	1590
Senior Citizens	172	1436	2287	3723
Smart	81	712	1098	1810
Navomi (Widows)	78	736	1175	1911
CBR for differently-abled	102	929	1562	2491
Youth	16	240	281	521
Total	2964	31067	34565	65810

Source: KSSS - Annual Activity Report, 2018-19, p.12.

It may be noted that in respect of supporting the cause of the disabled and the differently abled people, their specialised education, training and skill development etc. KSSS has been in the forefront through its CSOs. As of 31.03.2019, there are as high as 102 SHGs engaged in Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) for the differently abled under KSSS (Table II). These CSOs (CBR-for differently abled)undertake diverse kinds of activities for the benefit of the disabled or differently abled. The Village Development Committees (VDCs) are the apex bodies at the village level. Among KSSS-VDCs Kidangoor and Edackal have been allotted the highest and the second highest amounts while Uzhavoor has been granted the lowest in FY 2018-19. VDCs monitor and coordinate different socio-economic activities in the respective regions Table 3.

Table 3 AMOUNTS DISTRIBUTED IN 2018-2019 TO VDCS OF KSSS		
Sl. No.	Name of the Regions under KSSS	Amount (Rs)
01	Uzhavoor	6,54,700
02	Highrange	18,17,220
03	Malankara	16,89,150
04	Kaduthuruthy	10,15,711
05	Kidangoor	23,25,780
06	Kaipuzha	14,45,420
07	Edackat	21,16,419
08	Chunkom	9,98,618

Source: *KSSS - Annual Activity Report, 2018-19*, p.13.

KSS plays a catalytic role on facilitating the rural communities to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty. This is possible by extending the needy members of KSSS financial aid. This is made possible by collecting a fixed sum from all members, and then distributing it to the needy members of KSSS as loans for starting some income generating units Table 4.

Table 4 AMOUNTS DISTRIBUTED IN 2018-2019 BY KSSS UNDER ITS GNP		
Sl. No.	Name of the Regions under KSSS	Amount (Rs)
01	Uzhavoor	17,82,918
02	Highrange	10,16,178
03	Malankara	16,83,000
04	Kaduthuruthy	18,49,576
05	Kidangoor	18,30,711
06	Kaipuzha	8,97,411
07	Edackat	19,95,419
08	Chunkom	16,69,711

Source: *KSSS - Annual Activity Report, 2018-19*, p.17.

Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) activities of KSSS is designed as a special tool within community development for the purpose of rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and social integration of people having disabilities. CBR activities of KSSS are undertaken using the combined efforts of the disabled people themselves, the families and communities of such people, and also the allied services (health, educational, vocational, etc). In 2021, KSSS has completed 23 years of remarkable services in the rehabilitation of the differently abled, along with an array of other social service activities. The funds required for various CBR activities, like, special education, training, skill development, provision of assistive devices etc. are raised by KSSS from different sources. In the year 2018-19, a total of Rs. 112,80,362-00 has been raised. Details are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
DETAILS OF THE FUNDS RAISED BY KSSS FOR ITS CBR

Programme	Amount (Rs)
Panchayath Scholarship	30,00,000
Jeevakarunya Nidhi medical assistance-Disabled children-Archdiocesan fund	4,21,000
Aswasakiranam Scheme promoted by Kerala Social Security Mission	19,80,000

Snehaipooram Scheme	68,500
Chief Minister Fund	2,81,560
Pension	7,58,000
Block Resource Fund	6,32,222
MLA Fund	6,39,000
Panchayath Housing Scheme	3,02,225
Panchayath Two-Pit Latrine Scheme	86,844
Panchayath House Maintenance Scheme	8,85,201
Income from Exhibitions	1,14,400
Income from Paper Bag Making Scheme	2,25,410
Income from Screen Printing Unit	1,85,200
Income from Book Binding Unit	4,25,000
Local Donations from various clubs and individuals	5,05,800
Marriage Assistance	2,50,000
Assistive Devices	7,20,000
Total	1,12,80,362

Source: KSSS - *Annual Activity Report, 2018-19*, p.26.

The diverse kinds of CBR activities of KSSS undertaken by KSSS include organisation of, as well as and participation in National level Seminars, Conferences, Capacity Building Programmes for effectively imparting education, skill development training and rehabilitation for the differently abled children and adults, including the women and the elderly people Table 6.

Table 6 SEMINARS AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR STRENGTHENING CBR BY KSSS IN 2018-2019				
Capacity-building Trainings		National Seminars to upgrade the skills of professionals		
Parents	292	Seminar	Place	No. of Staff
SSA Teachers	48	Regional Training on Deaf-blindness	Spastin, Chennai Regional Centre	3 Staff and 4 Parents
SSA Admin. Officials	12	National Training on Capacity Building	Ahmedabad	Project Co-ordinator and 2 Staff
Anganawadi/ASHA/ANM	99			
Special Educators	31	National Training for care givers	Ahmedabad	Two Parents
Paramedical Staff	38			
Government Officers	24	National Training for adult deaf-blind people	Goa	Two Adults and 1 Staff
NGO Staff	128			
Total	672			

Source: Adapted from, KSSS - *Annual Activity Report, 2018-19*, p.32

Table VI shows the details of the various Capacity Building Training (CBT) courses and National Seminars which have strengthened the CBR activities of the CSOs under KSSS in the year 2018-19 alone. Not less than 672 CBT programmes and four National Seminars have been organised for the purpose of making the CBR activities more effective and ensuring the active involvement of all the relevant stakeholders, like, parents of the respective disadvantaged children, their SSA (Sarva Shikha Abhiyan, Govt. of India) teachers and administrators, special educators, paramedical staff, Govt. officers and NGO Staff. (Table VI).

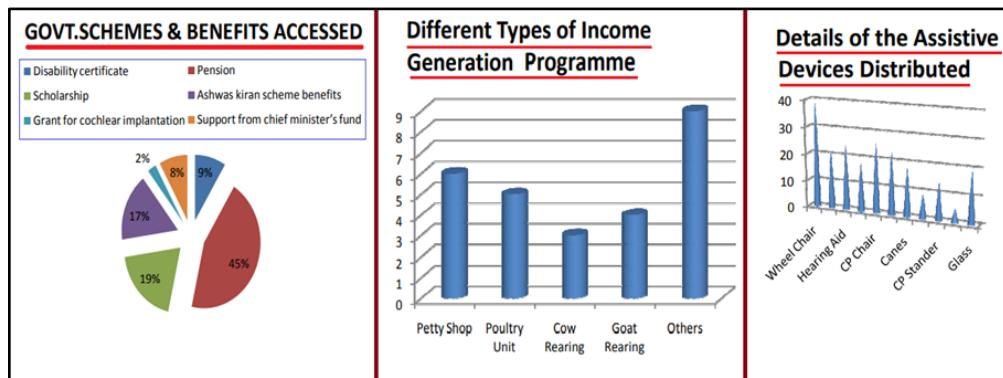
The vast array of CBR activities undertaken by KSSS are targeted at ‘making all the disabled into differently abled’ by imparting the right kind of specialised education, training, skill development (including ICT-based skills) and providing assistive devices (like, wheel chairs). The exact combination of the education, training and other services depend on the kind of disability and it varies from individual to individual. These programmes include the ‘Deaf-blind’ programmes being implemented by KSSS in collaboration with Sense International and Azim

Premji Philanthropic Initiatives, and since 2018-19 the coverage of Deaf-blind programme has been extended to Kannur and Kasaragod districts of Kerala. KSSS seeks to identify children with deaf-blindness and providing them the remedial treatments. To inspire those with disabilities, KSSS organises 'Hellen Keller's Day' every year. Table VII shows the list of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) activities of KSSS in 2018-19 Table 7.

Table 7 CBR ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY KSSS IN 2018-2019 – DETAILS		
Awareness Generation	Awareness camps	39
Preventive and curative measures	Immunization	63
	Medical Camps	28
	Medical Support	235
	Referrals for Medical Consultation	147
	Surgeries performed	53
	Aids and appliances	143
	Speech therapy	478
	Physiotherapy	2413
	Counseling	122
	Pensions	417
Access to government schemes / facilities	Railway / Bus passes	434
	ID Cards	467
	Medical Certificates	179
	MGNREGA Job card	99
	Home Based Training	214
Education of children	Inclusive Primary Education	49
	Special Secondary Education	37
	University	26
	Inclusive Secondary Education	41
	Special Primary Education	23
	Integrated Secondary Education	35
	Vocational Courses	58
Vocational training/ employment	Income Generation Programmes	143
	Self-Employment	101
	Employment	73
	Skill trainings	59
	Formation of SHGs	29
Organization of groups	Formation of Village Level Federations	27
	Training program: Office bearers of CBR Groups	9
Capacity building of persons with disabilities and their families	Training of PWDs	12
	Trainings of Parents of PWDs	14
	Inclusion of differently-abled children in Regular school	78
Advocacy	Barrier-free environment in Panchayath	2
	Inclusion of deafblindness in disability sector	16
	Implementation of Special Gramasabha	19
	Inclusion of differently-abled in BPL list	142
	Drinking-water facility for differently-abled	36
	Legal Protection	12
	Networking with NGOs	36
Networking	Networking with Government Departments	47
	Training Programme: Coordinator	10
Capacity building of organisation staff	Training Programme: CBR Workers	17

Source: KSSS - Annual Activity Report, 2018-19, p.27.

Along with organising various CBT programmes and Seminars, the CSOs under KSSS could facilitate the gradual grooming up of the disadvantaged children into matured adults who are capable of engaging in some specialised vocation or career, as per their individual strengths and their own livelihood. Thus, the specialised education imparted to the children, followed by training for their skill development and rehabilitation equips them to start some economic activity or income generating units, including micro enterprises (MEs). Besides, assistive devices are provided to these differently abled people. Figure 4.



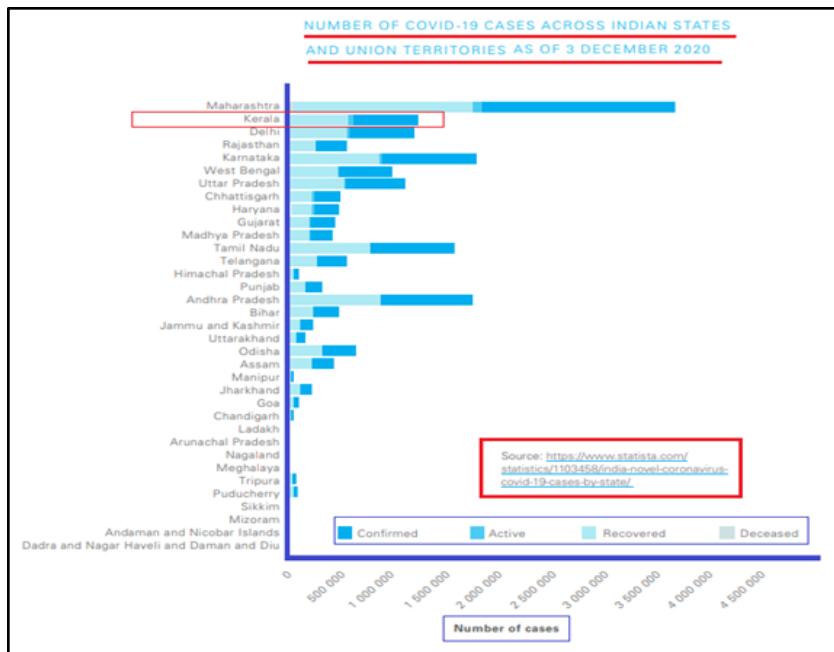
Source: Adapted from, *KSSS - Annual Activity Report, 2018-19*, p.32.

FIGURE 4
ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF CBR BY KSSS IN 2018-2019.

Thus, special education, training for rehabilitation, and assistive devices (such as Wheel chairs, CP Chairs, CP Standers, Canes, Hearing Aids, Spectacles, etc.) help these differently abled children to groom up as adults having specialised skills who are capable of running their own income generating units or MEs. Such economic activities being initiated by the differently abled people include running of petty shops, poultry units, cow rearing, goat rearing etc. Thus, the disabled children are groomed into differently abled entrepreneurs Puthukkeril & Manoj (2015).

ICT Integration for Meaningful Education and Training of the Differently Abled

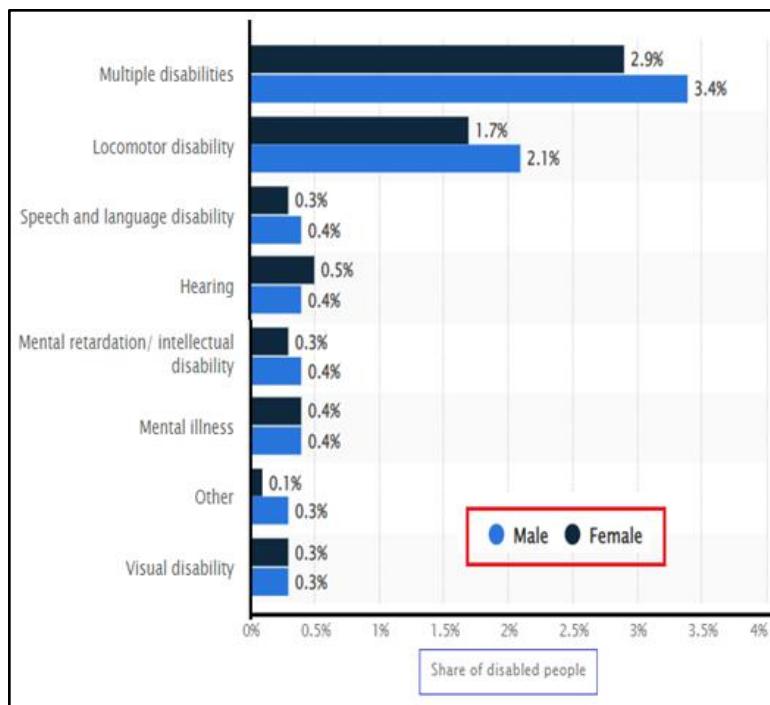
Recent global studies by UN organisations UNESCO and UNICEF have underlined the clear peculiarity of Kerala as the State with the “greatest technological access”. (Figure V). This could make this State more equipped to provide online education, and fight against Covid-19 too, even during the ongoing days of top Covid-19 infections and deaths worldwide, including India. Naturally, ICT has been accorded top priority by Kerala and many IT parks have been set up throughout the State through which the State is earning huge foreign exchange earnings (FEE) and also providing employment to lakhs of people. The top IT / ICT infrastructure of Kerala should be properly leveraged for promotion of education and training to the masses, including the differently abled, the poor and such disadvantaged groups Figure 5.



Source: UNESCO & UNICEF (2021), *India Case Study – Effects and Response to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in India*, Oct., p. 24. [17].

FIGURE 5 SIGNIFICANT ACCOLADES OF KERALA STATE IN ICT-INTEGRATED HEALTH AND EDUCATION.

In fact, the UN agencies, UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021 [17] have pointed out the commendable achievements in the education sector, and have pointed out that the State could focus on distribution of text books and also creation of WhatsApp groups for children; even while fighting against Covid-29 remarkably well in the whole of India. In fact, in a State like Kerala in India which has the “greatest technological access” and commendable use of such topmost ICT resources for online education, e-health etc. (UNESCO&UNICEF, 2021)[17], better ICT-integration seems imminent in rehabilitation of the disabled. This is because of the fact that ICT can be meaningfully integrated for rehabilitation of the disabled or differently abled ones, as services of experts from diverse fields are required Tiwari et al. (2012) [16], and this is particularly relevant in a State like Kerala where those with multiple disabilities constitute form the largest group among the disabled (NSSO, 2018 & Statistica) Figure 6.



Sources: Govt. of India Statistics, NSSO-2018. & M/s. Statistica.

**FIGURE 6
COMPOSITION OF THE DISABLED IN KERALA STATE IN 2018. (NSSO STATISTICS).**

Major Findings of the Study

In view of the foregoing analysis, it is seen that CSOs in Kerala, whether promoted by Govt. (like, Kudumbashree, under GOK) or promoted by Private bodies (like, KSSS under Christian Church) have been doing appreciably well in speeding up the pace of financial inclusion, women empowerment and rural development; thus enabling equitable and sustainable economic growth. They have performed notably well in rehabilitation of the disabled too.

CSOs could turn the disabled into differently abled who can earn their own livelihood; by way of providing them specialised education and training, imparting relevant skills according to their individual strengths, and also providing them assistive devices as well as arranging some occupation befitting their individual skills. Given Kerala's excellent ICT infrastructure vis-à-vis other States in India and the successful track record of using such resources in online education, public health, it seems that better ICT integration needs to be done by the CSOs in Kerala in their education, skill development and rehabilitation of the disabled persons, right from school level children to specially skilled adults.

Suggestions for the Better Education and Training of the Disabled in Kerala

- Better ICT integration at all levels, right from providing them specialised education to imparting relevant skills, therapeutic treatments (especially in respect of those with multiple disabilities where experts from diverse fields are required). ICT enables the use of the latest assistive technologies, pooling in resources (expertise) of specialists from diverse disciplines and hence providing integrative and holistic treatments to the disabled, or differently abled. ICT enhances their quality of life and productivity.
- As part of the 'Digital Kerala' mission or 'Knowledge Society of Kerala' or such other suitable initiatives, separate allocation needs to be provided for the cause of specialised education, training and skill

development of the differently abled in Kerala. The Govt. of Kerala should pay keen attention to the needs of this disadvantaged group of the society and strive to bring them into the mainstream and better ICT infrastructure of the State should be meaningfully used for this cause too.

- CSOs should encourage the differently abled to start their own income generating units or micro enterprises (MEs) in the field of ICT or ICT-enabled services. Besides, they should be given education and training accordingly also. The peculiar situation of Kerala gives enough inspiration and impetus for the CSOs for better ICT integration.

Concluding Remarks

In view of the appreciable performance of CSOs in Kerala, and the significantly higher ICT infrastructure of the State vis-s-vis other States in India, enhanced ICT integration at all levels of the specialised education and training of the disabled and differently abled can be noted to be imperative rather than an option in the peculiar situation of Kerala. Besides the higher order ICT infrastructure (high internet and Mobile phone penetration, high share of technical manpower, and highest literacy rates), policy of the Govt. of Kerala of promoting the State as a ‘Knowledge Society’ through ‘Digital Kerala’ mission too is conducive for ICT integration.

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