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# Skillscapes



PERSPECTIVES  
ON PUBLIC  
POLICY AND  
SKILL  
DEVELOPMENT



Partner IIM  
IIM Kozhikode

# SKILLSCAPES

## AN MGNF NEWSLETTER

# INCLUSIVITY

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

An Inclusivity Policy is a policy that aims to achieve a certain level of social equity. It does not just focus on the economic aspect but also pays attention to other aspects such as education, employment and health. We can without a doubt state that inclusiveness is a vital feature of any contemporary society and that India has made considerable strides in recent years to promote inclusion. The Indian government has implemented various policies and initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity and ensuring that all citizens have equal opportunities to succeed. The Right to Education Act, for example, guarantees free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14. This strategy has aided in increasing access to education for children from low-income families and has played an important part in promoting inclusion in India. Another important initiative is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which guarantees 100 days of employment per year to rural households. This strategy has aided in the provision of a safety net for rural families, as well as in the reduction of poverty and promotion of inclusivity in rural communities. However, inclusion involves more than just government initiatives. It is also about creating a society that values diversity and promotes equality.

While much work remains to be done, India has made considerable progress in encouraging inclusion and establishing a more equal society. The government has made it mandatory for all businesses to adopt an Inclusivity Policy to hire people from disadvantaged communities. The policy also provides for people with disabilities and disabled people in India. In India, there are various organisations which focus on providing equal opportunities for everyone. These organizations provide various services including education, employment and health care for the marginalised sections of society. They also promote gender equality and women's empowerment through various initiatives such as skill development programmes and awareness campaigns, among others. However, the country has a large population that lives in poverty and illiteracy, making it difficult for them to reap the benefits of these policies.



When developing inclusive policies, it is essential to keep the following principles and concepts in mind:

- **Intersectionality:** Recognise that each individual has multiple identities (race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.) that intersect and impact their experiences of marginalisation and privilege.
- **Cultural Competence:** Recognise and respect cultural differences and varied perspectives. Be aware of any potential biases and preconceptions, and work to build policies that are welcoming to people of different cultures and backgrounds.
- **Accessibility:** Make sure that policies are accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities. This may include offering accessible media (such as braille or audio), accommodating assistive technology, and building accessible physical environments.
- **Equity:** Recognise that not every individual has equal access to resources and opportunities. Policies should strive to address this disparity while also promoting equity for all.
- **Participative and Collaborative Approach:** Involve stakeholders from various backgrounds in the policy creation process to ensure that all viewpoints are taken into account and that policies are devised with input from those who will be affected by them.
- **Accountability:** Set defined goals and procedures for assessing policy effectiveness, and hold individuals and organisations accountable for adopting and enforcing them.

This edition of Skillsapes focuses on articles that explore the various facets of inclusivity - ranging from persons with disabilities to the geographically isolated. Being public policy fellows, the cohorts were able to come up with articles that question the status quo of the policies that deal with inclusion.

The article from Jayant Ahuja is a fine example of the same, highlighting the unique problems that we, as Indians, often forget to notice, pointing towards the importance of tailored policymaking for the geographically isolated regions in India. Athul Muraleedharan, through his article, puts up a scalable and unique model for the inclusion of PwDs in traditional workspaces. Udayan Sanyal, along with guest author Adv. Siddi Vhora shares a legal perspective on the concept of the right to work. There are other enlightening articles from Javed Hussain, Kumud Mishra, Abdul Samad PC and Rahul Kashyap dealing with subjects such as a review of the National Skill Development and



Entrepreneurship Policy from an inclusionary perspective, the role of skill development in regional development and the impact of MGNF in increasing the inclusive skilling in the ecosystem.

The Newsletter, as always, shares the perspectives and opinions of the cohort as a collective. And this edition reflects the ideals and values that we hold together - a society that can provide equal opportunities to all people. The editorial team hopes that the projects and opinions shared here will reach the right audiences and get the visibility that they rightfully deserve. We thank all our readers for your valuable comments of encouragement and we also thank IIM-K for providing a platform for our perspectives.

Gowthamkumar R G  
Chief Editor

“ We will all profit from a more diverse, inclusive society, understanding, accommodating, even celebrating our differences, while pulling together for the common good.”

— Ruth Bader  
Ginsburg

## MEET THE TEAM



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### Disclaimer

The articles in this Newsletter have been prepared based on the experiences and interactions of the authors, gained during the course of the MGNF Programme. Necessary consultations have been made with experts in relevant fields to prepare these articles. Although considerable efforts have been taken to make sure that the articles in this publication have fair factual backing, we do not warrant that they are exhaustive or free from biases and errors. The opinions expressed in this publication are exclusively those of the authors and do not reflect the opinions or views of either IIM-K or other MGN Fellows.

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# RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD: A FACET OF RIGHT TO LIFE

## "An Analysis into the legal background of Right to Livelihood, Right to Work and Right to Employment"

Co-authored by Adv. Siddhi Vhora  
& Udayan Sanyal (Rajnandgaon)



The Constitution of India acts as the bedrock of India's administrative and legal system. The most fundamental of all rights - the right to life and personal liberty is secured by Article 21. It provides that -

***"No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law."***

The present article explores whether the Right to Livelihood is covered by Article 21. The Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) enlighten us on the right to livelihood. Article 39(a) provides that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that every citizen has the right to an adequate means of livelihood. Article 41 calls upon the state to secure right to work to the limits of its economic capacity and development. Article 42 and 43 goes ahead and covers areas such as just and humane conditions of work, living wage, maternity relief, etc.

However, it is important to understand that these directive principles are non-justiciable in nature i.e., they cannot be enforced against the state (the government) in a court of law for their non-compliance by the state. The constitution makers envisaged them to be fundamental in the governance of the country and hoped that these would act as a guiding stone in law-making. Many DPSP's have over the course of years become justiciable through different modes like legislations or decisions of constitutional courts interpreting them to be part of fundamental rights like the right to life (Article 21). Thus, the Right to Livelihood needs to be explored from this perspective, starting with the views expressed by the courts.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in Sant Ram, re (1960) rejected the idea of right to livelihood to be part of The Right to Life.<sup>[1]</sup> The court later in the famous Olga Telis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation case (Pavement dwellers' case) dealt with the issue in the context of the eviction of pavement dwellers, and held:

"No person can live without the means of living... If the right to livelihood is not treated as a part of the constitutional right to live, the easiest way of depriving a person of his right to life would be to deprive him of his means of livelihood to the point of abrogation. Such deprivation would not only denude the life of

[1] Mahendra Pal Singh, VN Shukla's Constitution of India, 12th Ed., Eastern Book Company, pg. 209.

its effective content and meaningfulness but it would make life impossible to live.”

It should also be noted that the right to employment as such has not been recognized by Article 21<sup>[2]</sup> as per the State of Karnataka v. Umadevi (3). The legislature has also done its part in enforcing the right to livelihood.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year<sup>[3]</sup> to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It also provides an unemployment allowance in case work is not provided within the stipulated time. This Act attempts to partially enforce the right to work. The limit on the number of days provided and its non-implementation in urban areas are the major limitations of this right. The right also focuses only on unskilled labour which is another limitation. The Right to Work may be extended in terms of duration and spread (urban areas) based on the economic capacity of the state and executive decision-making.

To conclude, it can be said that the right to livelihood has long been recognized by the Supreme Court as a fundamental right which should not be violated by the state without the procedure established by law. Whereas, the right to work on the other hand is in its developmental stage and is likely to expand in the future.



#### About the author-

Adv. Siddhi Vhora has wide research experience and has published her articles in different journals and also presented her research in India as well as abroad. Her fields of expertise include criminal law and constitutional law. She is presently enrolled with the Bar Council of Madhya Pradesh.



[2] Ibid

[3] Preamble, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.

# DO DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTUALLY DENT THE BARRIER?

An Insight into Kozhikode's PwD Employability Scenario and the District Administration's Intervention.

By Athul Muraleedharan  
Kozhikode



People with Disabilities (PwDs) have historically faced challenges in gaining employment. Several laws and acts mandate private and public organizations to ensure the participation of people with benchmark disabilities in their workforce. For instance, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 state that-



"Every appropriate Government shall appoint in every Government establishment not less than four per cent of the total number of vacancies for PwDs in the cadre strength." - Section 34

"The appropriate Government and the local authorities shall, within the limit of their economic capacity and development, provide incentives to employers in the private sector to ensure that at least five per cent of their workforce is composed of persons with benchmark disability." - Section 35

This article explores the employability scenario in the Kozhikode District of Kerala and evaluates the implementation of the provisions mentioned above in the Act. It also explains an intervention made by the District Administration to ameliorate the employability of PwDs. A total of 8189 live registrations exist in the five Employment Exchanges across the district, which can be interpreted as the population of PwDs seeking a job.

## Do these provisions increase PwD employment?

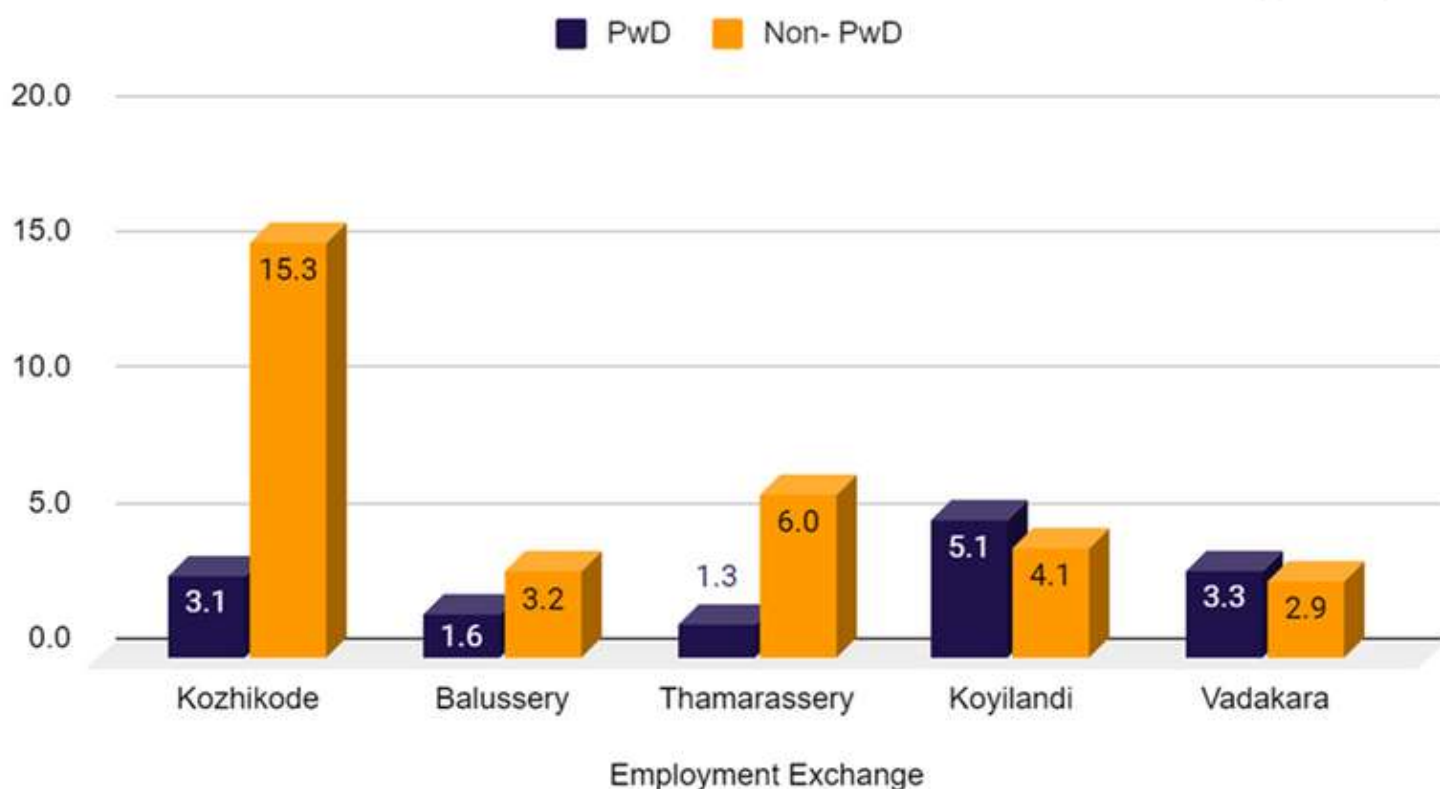
## POLICY BRIEF

The general practice at Employment Exchanges in Kerala, upon the listing of jobs, is to recommend 17 candidates per vacancy, given the availability of candidates with the necessary qualifications. 5 out of the 17 recommendations are reserved for PwD candidates, accounting for ~30% of the recommendations. The recommended candidates will be interviewed by the employers before recruitment. In the context of this process, the difference in the job conversion rate of these PwDs and

non-PwDs was analysed. In 2020-21, the Employment Exchanges in Kozhikode made 2734 PwD recommendations and 10,867 non-PwD recommendations for the vacancies opened. By taking into account the recommendations, 78 vacancies were filled with PwDs out of 2734 PwDs recommended which is just 2.9% of the PWD recommendations. On the other hand, 811 vacancies were filled with non-PwDs from 10867 recommendations, equivalent to 7.5% conversion. The gap is much more severe in the Employment Exchange of Kozhikode than in other Employment Exchanges, where the conversion rate is 3.1% and 15.3% for PwD and non-PwD, respectively. Besides this conversion rate, an inherent bias has been observed in the type of jobs for which PwD and non-PwD were recruited. This inherent bias arises from the employers' lack of confidence in assigning long-term responsibilities to the PwDs. The job conversion rate of PwD recommendations is lesser than the non-PwD for Permanent and Temporary (Contractual) jobs. However, for part-time jobs, the PwD conversion

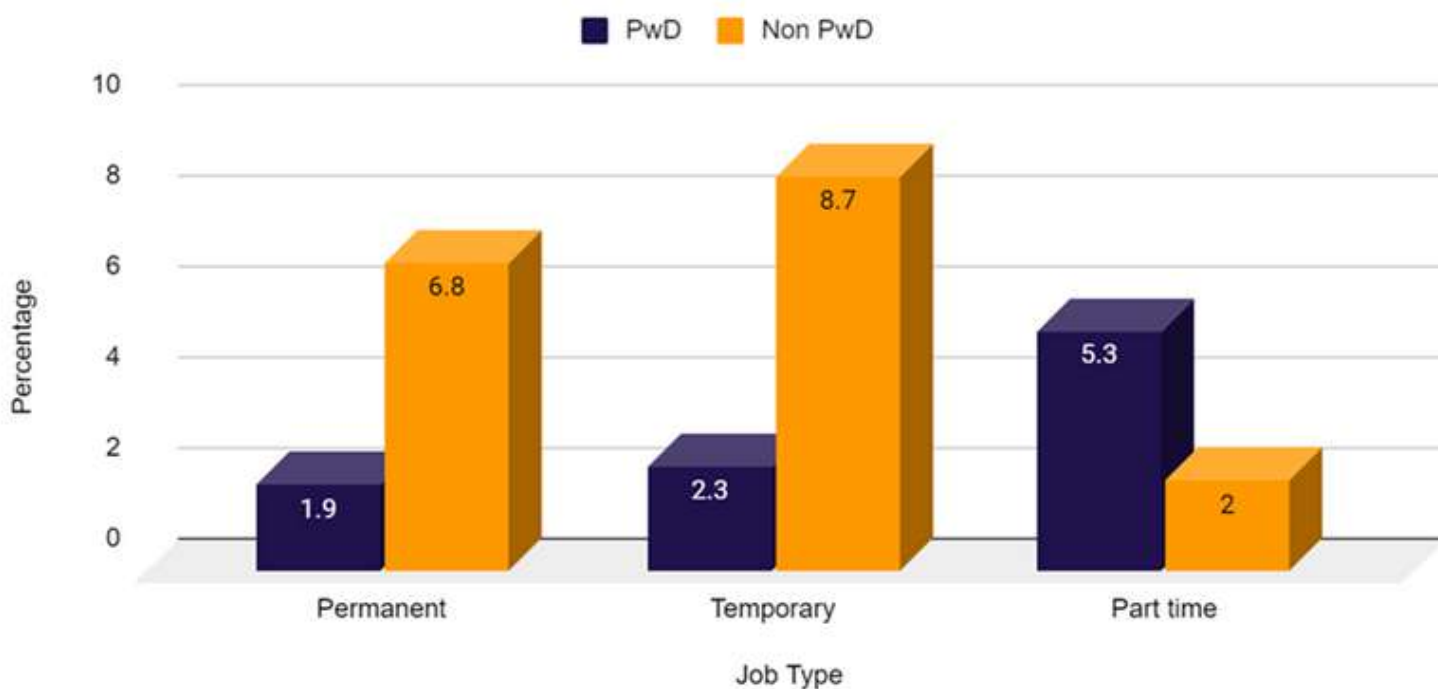
“78 vacancies were filled with PwDs out of 2734 PwDs recommended which is just 2.9% of the PWD recommendations. On the other hand, 811 vacancies were filled with non-PwDs from 10867 recommendations, equivalent to a 7.5% conversion.”

## Job Conversion Rate of PwD and non-PwD in Kozhikode (2021)



rate (5.3%) is higher than the non-PwD conversion rate (2%). This trend shows the increased prevalence of PwDs in Part-Time jobs where they are denied job security. These statistics suggest the lack of equal opportunity and job security faced by PwDs in the District. The root of the problem here is the negative prejudice of employers. PwDs are negatively discriminated against by some employers for several reasons. First, insufficient knowledge and comprehension to work effectively with PwDs can result in misconceptions and false beliefs about their capabilities and restrictions. Second, irrational fear about the expense of making physical adjustments or using assistive technology to meet

## Recruitment Conversion of PwD and Non PwD based on Job Type (2021)



the demands of PwDs in the workplace can demotivate them to hire PwDs. Third, some businesses believe that PwDs are less dependable or productive than other workers and may threaten their profits. Fourth, some employers may harbour unconscious prejudices towards PwDs stemming from societal stigmatization and pessimistic views regarding their worth and talents.

### Kozhikode's SAHAYI intervention

Kozhikode District Administration realised that efforts to educate employers and promote the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workplace could help address and overcome the negative attitudes and stereotypes. Besides that, creating an institutional mechanism to promote PwDs' access to the job market was also identified as necessary.

With this objective, a special cell titled 'SAHAYI' was established by the MGNF Kozhikode under the District Administration to boost the employability of PwDs in convergence with the Department of Employment and the Department of Social Justice. SAHAYI's interventions are guided by a policy-based holistic approach that attempts to enhance the employability of PwDs

in Kozhikode. Firstly, the promotion of disability-inclusive hiring policies. While the earlier-mentioned reservation quotas stipulated for the private and public partners in the RPwD Act exist on paper. It is essential to ensure that the quotas are fulfilled. The cell conducted two sensitisation sessions for public and private employers separately. In the session for private employers, office-bearers of trade and industry associations and prominent companies participated, the District Collector gave a presentation to educate the employers on the reservation quota in private firms and how the District Administration can assist the companies in accessing eligible PwD candidates and conducting their recruitment. In the session for government employers, partaken by MLAs and the heads of different departments, the officials were instructed to ensure the 4% quota and to strictly follow the Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act, 1959. When departments fail to comply with the act, the Employment Exchange cannot ensure equal opportunity for the PwDs in the recruitment process.

Secondly, improving accessibility for jobs to PwDs has been identified as vital. The cell performs the role of a linkage system to connect job seekers with private employers in the District.



By directly engaging with employers, the cell creates job openings exclusively for PwDs and helps map suitable candidates based on their skills, qualifications, and interests. The Special Employment Exchange, Kozhikode, helps filter the candidate profiles out of the 8000+ registrations. The linkage system, to be managed by the Interns of District Headquarters in the future, is expected to create numerous job openings for PwDs in Kozhikode. Currently, 69 vacancies have been opened across six firms for various profiles as an effort of the cell's engagement.

Thirdly, the cell focuses on maximising the awareness campaign for combating negative stereotypes and attitudes towards PwDs in the workplace and society as a whole. For instance, the District Administration came forward as a model employer by hiring eight PwDs in different departments as interns. The internship offers a

mutual learning experience for both the students and officials, where the former gain experience working in a government setting, and the latter learn how to accommodate differently-abled staff in their offices.

The District Administration's initiatives are only a drop in the ocean, and only a broader shift could achieve a scalable impact. Ensuring strict adherence to the RPwD Act, Employment Exchanges (CNV) Act, and similar legal mandates could be a starting point, making us a just and law-abiding society. Adopting disability-inclusive hiring policies by propagating the moral responsibility of all, could also go a long way, making us a diverse and inclusive society. However, the end goal is a perspective shift—where employers realise the importance of tapping into this large pool of talented individuals and benefiting from their unique skills and abilities. That's when we fully succeed as a society.

# BUILDING PROSPERITY

## Transformative Role of Skill

## Development Programs in Kasaragod

by **Abdul Samad P C**

Kasaragod



Kerala's northernmost district, Kasaragod, is well known for both its incredibly rich cultural past and its stunning natural surroundings. It has, like many other areas of the nation, encountered a variety of obstacles to inclusive growth and economic development. In reality, Kasaragod is frequently referred to as the state's least developed district. Lack of access to high-quality education and training opportunities is one of the major causes to these problems. In order to drive inclusive development in the area, skill development programmes are extremely important. Programs for skill development are intended to support people in acquiring the information, skills, and aptitude required to thrive in the contemporary economy. These courses concentrate on teaching skills in a variety of sectors/industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality, and information technology. People who receive assistance in acquiring these skills are better able to compete for employment in the industry sector, which can improve their income levels and general quality of life.

Over the years, Kasaragod district has institutionalized a variety of effective skill programmes. For instance, the district now has a number of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) which offer training in a variety of technical trades. Additionally, other programmes are being undertaken in this area by various government ministries. Take Kerala Academy for Skills Excellence KASE (SSDM), Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP), Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) and KUDUMBASHREE MISSION, for instance. These programmes have contributed to the creation of skilled workforce in various fields , including plumbing, welding, and electrical work.

A number of private organisations have also started skill development initiatives in the district in addition to these government-run programmes. One such programme is the All-Tech Pvt Ltd, which offers instruction in fields including IT, hospitality, and healthcare. People can get the skills they need to enter any profession and thrive in their desired vocations



through these programmes. The most intriguing aspect of all these programmes is that they run as per the demands of Mangalore's current labour market.

Did the pupils from the marginalised groups benefit from these training programmes? Since the beginning of my district immersion, this question has been on my mind, and I have been on this journey to find the answer to it. I have become aware of the fact that the impact of skill development programmes is huge. It has influenced a lot of lives in the area, especially the lives of marginalised communities. During a meeting with alumni of various skill development programmes, I encountered a woman named Prajitha (not her real name). She shared her story with me. Her past was hard, she was married to someone against her will and could not finish college. Subsequently she got divorced, experienced despair and even made an attempt at suicide. However, she was laughing when she informed me that she had failed in that endeavour as well. She eventually began attending to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) job, there she learned about Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY) and enrolled for it. She successfully completed her course in Hospitality and management and is now employed by the state's top hotel management company.

Despite the fact that these skill-development programmes have been successful, a number of issues still need to be resolved if inclusive growth in the region is to be accelerated. The need for extra financing and resources to support these programmes is one of the major necessity. Many of the existing programmes have a narrow scope and do not reach everyone who may be eligible/ benefit from them. It is crucial to make investments in new training facilities and resources that may provide access of these programmes to more people in order to solve this issue. Ensuring that these programmes are available to everyone, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status, presents another difficulty. Access to education and

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Access to education and training opportunities have been significantly hampered for women in particular, which has impeded their capacity to engage in the economy and attain financial independence.

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training opportunities have been significantly hampered for women in particular, which has impeded their capacity to engage in the economy and attain financial independence. Greater gender parity in educational and training programmes must be encouraged in order to overcome this problem, and women who want to work in non-traditional sectors must get specialised assistance.

To sum up, Skill Development initiatives have been crucial in fostering inclusive growth in the Kasaragod district. People have been able to gain the skills necessary to function in the contemporary economy through these programs, which have improved their income levels and general quality of life. To guarantee that these programmes are available to everyone and that they continue to promote inclusive growth in the district, a number of issues still need to be resolved. It is feasible to build on the success of these programmes and create a more prosperous and inclusive future for all Kasaragod inhabitants by investing in more resources and encouraging equitability and accessibility.

# BREAKING BARRIERS TO SPREAD EDUCATION ALONG THE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER



By Jayant Ahuja  
Noklak

Borders are not always meant to be barriers or to create the feeling of “Us and “Them” between communities living on either side of a divide. It can be more humane and can function without man-made barriers in many ways. Take the village of Dan for example. This tiny hamlet which separates India and Myanmar up the hills of eastern Nagaland’s Noklak district takes pride in the fact it can cater to the needs of the Khiumniangan Naga tribes from both sides of the border.

Surrounded by the majestic Saramati mountain of Nagaland on its west, this tiny sleepy hamlet adjoins another similar dwelling called Pangsha, which lies far away from the maddening crowd. This place has its own unique stories of how it houses students from both sides of the border under the same roof of a school and jointly engages in agricultural practices and organizing traditional festivals. Such bonding and bonhomie have their significance, especially given the fact that this is of one many sensitive international borders which India shares with Myanmar which has been prone to insurgency and armed conflicts in the recent past. In fact, an Assam Rifles outpost which is prominently located in the village stands testimony to the many encounters and insurgency-related incidents. The Burmese side of the border is known to have safe havens for different North East militant groups. Despite this, the Dan village had seen an uprising from locals when the Myanmar government made an abortive bit in 2016 to fence about three kilometers of the imaginary border that passes through these villages.

However, these challenges have not dampened the spirits of the local Naga tribes who inhabit the village. Their determination is reflected in their hard work and steadfast approach towards life, especially when it comes to educating their children and giving them a life with better education. For many of the young children, life has completely changed after entering the Mission Straightway School which is situated along the international border at the International Trade Centre (ITC).

Hang Ching who is a local from the village once said that children who attend the school “not only learn about different subjects but find new

friends from the different villages and from across the border, which is extremely important for their growth and the growth of the community."

Students from some villages in Myanmar also come to get formal education at the school. The resilience with which the people of Dan have managed to overcome the challenges and stand up as a community and as proud citizens of the country is perhaps best described by the bonds of community and culture that run deeper than the porous border that surrounds it. Dan has a rich culture and history of its own. The village has a population of 636 people, with 371 males and 265 females, as per the 2011 census. Despite its isolated location, the village is home to a diverse community with over 122 houses and is located 35 km from the sub-district headquarter of Noklak and 91 km from the district headquarters of Tuensang which serves as the nearest town for major economic activities.

### **The Mission Straightway School**

In a place where the spirit of determination runs strong, Dr Aotemtshi Longkumer, driven by his humble beginnings, founded 'The Mission Straightway School' in Dan Village in 2010. Aotemshi's inspiration is his mother who single-handedly fought all odds to raise her five children. This was the trigger to dedicate his life to education, as he went on to become the first Naga to hold a PhD in mathematics and later became a professor at Fazl Ali College in Mokokchung. The stormy journey and the undying passion for education led him to establish six education centres under the parent body, the Straightway Christian Mission Centre. Today, the Mission Straightway School at the ITC stands as a testament to his dedication, providing students with the means

to thrive with resources and the support they need. Aotemshi had a childhood similar to most children in the village, where good formal education was a luxury. These disadvantages which he experienced at an early age gave Aotemshi sufficient reason to make a difference. He started his village education venture with a project in Dan on March 18 2010, beginning with two pre-primary and first standard classes.

At the time, the village had no proper roads, electricity or mobile internet network, making it difficult for him to run the school. However, where intentions are pure and steadfast, there are no obstacles big enough to stop the march, which Aotemshi proved soon enough.

The belief in himself to be able to start formal school in one of the remotest parts of the country attracted as many as 61 students in the very first year of the school. Overcoming the challenges mostly owing to poor infrastructure and lack of resources, the level of education was scaled up to the 8th standard soon and in the process made a big difference in the lives of 305 students.

This year, the school is gearing up to begin the 9th and 10th standards which will cater to the needs of the students most of whom are not able to afford to go to schools in the district headquarters in Noklak or other nearby cities and towns. The school also has a sizeable library built book-by-book from various donations and today stands out as a great example of how education can cut across various barriers and physical borders - something which is exemplified by its motto 'Awake & Shine.'

### **Bridging borders through education**

The composition of the students in the school from both sides of the international

border makes the place even more exciting with life lessons for many of us who come with preconceived notions about boundaries and borders.

The continuing conflict and political situation in Myanmar have left students from many bordering villages and towns across Myanmar to cross over to Dan to continue their education. Although, an overwhelming 60% of students are from Noklak, around 40% are Myanmar National, from Burmese villages like Kingphen, and Hinaphu, to name a few. Most of the students are from Lahe, Leshi and Nanyun towns in the Naga Hills of the Sagaing Division on the northwest frontier of Myanmar.

Many schools on the Burmese side of the border are not functional or are run by a single teacher. Apart from the frequent violence, the Khimanuingan Nagas of the above-mentioned villages also face increasing apathy from the Burmese state towards their basic needs. In December 2021, the proprietor of Mission Straightway received a desperate call from the pastor and village leaders of Kingphu, a small borderland village near Dan. The pastor shared "the problem of their children being unschooled for nearly three years," recalls the management of the school. "All they do is roam in the forests and play with wooden wheels!" the pastor exclaimed.

They pleaded with the Centre to send some teachers to teach their children basic spoken English and education which prompted the village folk of Dan to collect wood, bamboo, and human resources to construct a learning center in Kingphu. On April 10, 2022, a learning center modelled in the form of a school was inaugurated, with 64 eager students. At the learning center, the children are separated into three different age groups, ranging from 3 to 13 years old, and taught by a

dedicated teacher. To ensure that the education received is comprehensive, teachers from the Mission Straightway School in Dan come to the learning center every Saturday to reinforce and strengthen their teaching.

## **Staying together to learn together**

Have you ever heard of children of 12, 13 or 14 living alone in a house so that they can attend school? In the village of Dan, around 70 students out of the 305 have their own tiny house where they cook, clean and study, while their parents live far away because of work. Such is the grit and passion of the people too in a land unknown to most. They want their children to be educated and join the "mainstream," where various career options are available.

The Dan school is situated a mere 10 meters from the border post. Fascinatingly, their playground lies half in India and half in Myanmar. Imnakum, a resident and mathematics teacher at the Mission Straightway school joked that "the goalkeeper of one team always defends the Burmese goalpost."

Although the school today stands on the soil of the border with great pride, the journey was not easy. In addition to staff shortages and lack of funds, there are several problems peculiar to the place and the location of the school presents its own unique set of challenges related to ongoing conflicts. At a time when there were no border posts of the Assam Rifles or the police, the school saw its first insurgency-related firing incident in 2013.

This caused fear among the children and the staff as they were uncertain whether they would ever return to school. Teachers like Imnakum took charge and personally went out to meet the parents to convince them that the students were not the targets. "It took great patience and perseverance in bringing the children back to the classroom," the teacher



recalled. The school has since then witnessed many such violent incidents, never affecting student attendance.

## Overcoming the struggles one step at a time

The community of Dan is faced with many challenges when it comes to education and health care. The insurgency-driven conflict was a major concern, however, the health infrastructure where the village's only dispensary does not have an attending doctor leaves the entire village without access to proper medical care.

The summer months bring a surge of viral fever cases, causing widespread absenteeism and school dropouts. And if that was not bad enough, the school faced its biggest obstacle yet in 2020 with the arrival of COVID-19. The global shift to online education left Dan stranded as the online mode of teaching was not possible due to poor internet connectivity. "Even uploading a document online in itself is a painstaking task here often involving an hour-long trip to Noklak town," said Imnakum. In fact, the first few conversations between the writer and Imnakum were about connectivity. "Sir, let me come near the kitchen wall; I get

the phone network only there", he said as we began to discuss the school and how it has evolved over time. The transition to teaching through online mode seemed beyond their imagination.

However, the school was able to adapt by implementing smaller batches of students, social distancing, and the use of hand sanitisers to help them sail through. It is an accepted truth that a calm sea seldom makes a skilful sailor. The unfettered courage shown in the face of all the difficulties is a testament to the power of education and has positively impacted society. This education revolution is a sign of hope for many. The case of Dan stands out as one of the best examples of such hope.

The age-old adage, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step" is timeless. It especially holds in the case of the dusty village of Dan to which the voyage is truly a thousand miles. The initial step was taken by Dr Aotemshi's owing to his unwavering dedication to the school, which connected the hamlet to a group of people who refused to let circumstances stand in the way of their pursuit of knowledge.

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

## From the Employer's perspective

Co-authored by Akshat Tyagi and Rahul Kashyap (West Delhi)

CASE  
STUDY



Mr. Akshat Tyagi is Head- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Keshav Suri Foundation, the CSR wing of The Lalit Group of Hotels.

In a society where discussions on sex and gender are dictated by heteronormativity, it is a challenge for someone who belongs to the non-mainstream community to navigate through life. At The LaLiT, we took a step back to stand up with people who are still struggling to be a part of the mainstream and started the #PureLove campaign, which welcomes people from all walks of life. This campaign started back in the year 2016 and it not only created awareness but is also continuously helping people get employable skills and job opportunities and enabling people to live their lives with dignity. From the very induction into the organization, there are sensitization sessions for team members to learn about diversity, equity & inclusion, and about sex, gender, and sexual orientation so that people get to recognize and understand the Queer community better. With regular sensitization sessions, inclusive medi-claim policies, inclusive language, inclusive washrooms, and accessible infrastructure, people feel recognized, valued, and get a sense of belongingness toward the organization. Through Kitty Su, the organization has given a safe space to over 1000 queer and drag artists to perform and

embrace their art and talent. The Lalit has been working with over 150 community-based organizations across the country to support people from marginalized groups at various intersections. We also offer scholarships to LGBTQIA+ candidates to pursue Diploma and Food Production & Bakery at The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group and have hosted LGBTQ+ Job Fairs, Leadership courses, skilling workshops, conferences, and seminars to build that trust and belongingness to ensure people feel safe and included.

We have skilled over 2000 people in the last 6 years from the LGBTQIA+ spectrum and provided jobs to over 500+ people in various departments which include both out and proud and closeted individuals. There are people in all the departments including security, housekeeping, F and B service, Front Office, Sales & Marketing, and Reservations. They are working in different roles in various departments. For the same, we even signed an MoU with District Administration West Delhi with the support of Rahul Kashyap, MGN Fellow, MSDE, GOI who acted as a bridge in facilitating the conversation and action for this association. Through this, we have been able to induct 3 transgender persons via this program who are now, post-completion of the course, successfully part of The LaLiT New Delhi. The Lalit via Kitty Su has also provided a platform to over 1000 queer artists and drag performers to express and present their art. We also work with diverse supply chains to ensure we support the communities at all levels.

It's important to ensure that people get those vibes from the time they are entering into the workplace to their time span within the organization. Rigorous sensitization at all levels in language which is easiest for everyone to understand, including the lowest common denominator, is very important and we at The Lalit are ensuring we do that. There's an immense focus on storytelling sessions wherein we bring experts, and community members to share their stories which gives them confidence and inspires and motivates the listeners. The inclusive policies again make them feel part of the organization as they feel represented in the policies that the company offers. Additionally, there is the PureLove ERG group that we have across all our hotels to ensure we do regular engagement activities and hear people out on a timely basis to ensure a safe and inclusive environment across the group.

We also have The Aditya Nanda Scholarship at The LaLiT Suri Hospitality School which provides access to education for the queer community, our free mental health services supported by a 6-day a week operational helpline number, Project "Prahari" which provides skill development to acid attack survivors, and Project "Apna Hira" which supports equal opportunities for the differently abled community. Whilst each of these projects is housed under the Keshav Suri Foundation, it is really The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group that has provided a platform for them to flourish. We have managed at The Lalit, through KSF, to make DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) a part of our DNA.

Through all of these initiatives, we are striving to create a better world where everyone is accepted sans bias or any judgment.

The LGBTQIA+ community in India faces significant challenges despite some positive developments in recent years. While same-sex relationships were decriminalized in



2018 when Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was struck down, discrimination, prejudice, and social stigma against LGBTQIA+ individuals persist.

One of the main challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in India is societal discrimination. Many face rejection from their families, bullying in schools, discrimination in workplaces, and even violence in public spaces. This discrimination often leads to mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

Access to healthcare and legal recognition also remains a challenge for the LGBTQIA+ community in India. Many face discrimination and bias when seeking healthcare services, including gender-affirming care. Legal recognition of gender identity, including recognition of transgender individuals, remains inconsistent across different states in India, which can lead to difficulties in obtaining identification documents and availing social welfare benefits.

Efforts to promote inclusivity and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals, including sensitization programs for police and healthcare providers, and awareness campaigns, have been initiated by some progressive state governments and civil society organizations. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving complete equality and acceptance for the



LGBTQIA+ community in India. While there have been positive developments in recent years, the LGBTQIA+ community in India still faces significant challenges in terms of stigma, discrimination and limited access to healthcare and legal recognition. It is crucial for society, including government, civil society organizations, and individuals, to work together to promote inclusivity, acceptance, and equal rights for LGBTQIA+ individuals in India. This includes advocating for legal reforms, raising awareness, promoting safe spaces, and fostering a culture of acceptance and respect for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.

To truly support the community, there needs to be a concerted effort by the government and society to address systemic discrimination and promote inclusion and acceptance. This could include initiatives such as creating more employment opportunities, promoting LGBTQIA+ representation in media, and expanding access to healthcare and education. By working towards a more inclusive and accepting society, India can pave the way for a better future for its LGBTQIA+ community.

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# THE **IMPACT** OF INCLUSION REMAINS UNCALCULATED IN SKILL POLICY

The 2009 policy of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship calls for a five-year review to align the policy framework with emerging national and international trends. This led to the successive National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2015. After a break of eight years, it is about time to re-evaluate the outcomes and revamp the policy in accordance to the aspiring needs of the country. Claiming the highest working age population and the lowest skilled workforce in the world, India has a responsibility to generate the skilled working age in years to come.

Throwing light on the current policy, the NSDC has 700+ short and long-term courses in association with the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) that run training programmes via Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK), fee-based trainings, technical intern training programmes, Industrial Training Institutes (ITI), online skilling and the state-owned schemes. These schemes provide free and paid vocational trainings to the age group of 14-45 in varied courses. Several State Skill Development Missions (SSDM) also arrange for the residential facilities of these trainees at the centre. Nevertheless, the outcome is unsatisfactory with regard to the ultimate purpose of employability linkage. There are multiple reasons to it, one of which seemingly is, INCLUSION.

## **Snag of the Target Section**

In most districts when mobilisation and counselling are carried out, it is done for a specific section/area that is easily approachable. This brings in trainees from



**By Kumud Mishra**  
Kabirdham

selective areas that might or might not need skilling but can visit the centre effortlessly. Meanwhile, precluding the genuine and needy population from the approach of the mobilisers, especially, people from far-off terrains, buffer zones (in case of LWE districts) and sections of people that are feared to be worked with.

## **The Vital Inclusions!**

**Native Tribes** - For the tribes who reside in their true habitat amidst the forests and hills, the sound of skill development has not reverberated their ears till date. A special act, called Special Central Assistance (SCA) and Scheduled Castes Sub Plan (SCSP) has been implemented for Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY) villages to bring them the benefit of the scheme. Through the influencers meet at Kabirdham, visit to Nanchua, Tilliyapani, and other tribal villages and during conversations, a plethora of traditional skills and rich culture of tribals have been identified. These skills need to be taught to the newer generation who have lost touch with the



Image Courtesy of Deepshikha Gupta

Bamboo and Wooden Craft, Tribal Jewellery, Tribal Music and Dance, Terracotta and Mask Making, Gond Paintings, Storytelling and many skills that will die out with the last generation. Today, for the sake of promotion when public representative and bureaucrats call out tribals, only a few old hands have the adroitness to perform and prepare the products. This is where inclusion is demanded in terms of regenerating these skills and supporting the lifestyle of our culturally rich tribes. Conducting workshops for these nearly extinct skills will not only promote the tribal culture but build strong economical background for the villagers.

**Sex Workers** – Seems like an indelicate term? Yet, they are the truly vulnerable section who can largely benefit from the notion of inclusion but are left apart from the



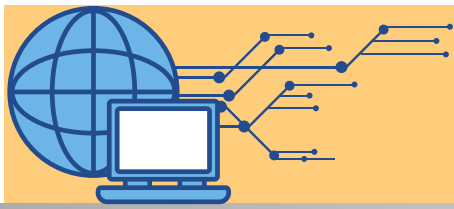
Image Courtesy of Deepshikha Gupta

concept of Skill Development. During my interactions with the female sex workers of Bodla, Kawardha and Lohara blocks of Kabirdham, it is sadly reflected how the females have a lack of knowledge on free learnings. Having informed them about the vocational trainings at specialized centres with residential facilities, it has sparked a hope among them for moving out of their forced or chosen livelihood. For the ones who are ambitious, learning a new skill equals to increased income which in turn inspires them to quit the profession that has helped them provide for their family for years disrespectfully. It is to their hopefulness that inclusion in such schemes will put them at a place where they can choose to work in different sectors that they call 'dignified.' Kabirdham is working on developing a cluster of FSWs in collaboration with a handloom and embroidery firm to strengthen their earning and uplift their living standards.

**LWE Affected Civilians** – A sensitive area that might require involvement of police and forces to spread the word on Skill Development. This is one of the ways to deviate the youth towards a better future. Most of the civilians from buffer zones are seen getting into the wrong track of naxalism, teaching them new skills will enable better livelihood for their families. For instance, two families of Naxal surrenders in Kabirdham district have been trained, the females in Sewing Machine Operator and the males in Assistant Electrician. Inclusion of such kinds should be mandated in the policy to reach the last leg.

In conclusion, these are some of the possible changes arising out of one context, i.e., Inclusion. However, the policy requires reframing to respond to the several issues being faced country wide.





# Naipunya Nagaram

## An Outlook into a firm step towards an Inclusive digital ecosystem

**By Javed Hussain**  
Ernakulam



Ms Latha (pseudonym) is an MGNREGA worker in her early sixties from Varapuzha panchayath in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. Though she uses a smartphone, she is not well acquainted with its numerous functionalities. She uses her mobile phone mainly to call her dear ones and get updates on MGNREGA work and Kudumbashree meetings in the WhatsApp groups. Even for that, she needs to completely rely on her grandchildren. When her grandchild showed her about the Naipunya Nagaram programme in a WhatsApp group and insisted she enrolls in it, she was quite hesitant and replied, "What do I study at this age?". But with the compulsion of her grandchild, she enrolled in the programme. After the 10-day training programme, when the Fellow visited the training centre to conduct a tracer study and a Focus Group Discussion, Latha was one of the many who inquired, "Will the government be providing any further booster classes to this programme?" as the 10-day training programme had given them only basic proficiency in digital literacy. This is not just the story of Latha, but of hundreds of senior citizens in Ernakulam who were the beneficiaries of Naipunya Nagaram in the Ernakulam district of Kerala.

Naipunya Nagaram is a Digital Literacy training for senior citizens under which beneficiaries are trained to operate smartphones, computers

and peripheral equipment. The programme intended to bring out the following outcomes.

- Helping senior citizens become self-sufficient in using the smartphone and the apps in it.
- Introduction to operating computer, understanding word processing, Malayalam typing,
- Introduction to the concepts of the internet, web browsers, E-mail etc.
- Facilitating all forward linkages to establish self-enterprise for the beneficiaries who require it (Like Digital Kiosks at the Ward/Panchayat level).



Image Courtesy of PRD, Ernakulam

Naipunya Nagram is a joint project of the District Planning Committee (DPC) with District Panchayath and 95 local bodies in Ernakulam. Fifty senior citizens from 95 local bodies in Ernakulam were beneficiaries of the project. A total of 4750 senior citizens are expected to be benefited from this project.

### The rationale of the project

As per the 2011 census, there are 7.4 million senior citizens (aged 60 years or above) in Kerala. Comprising 16.5% of the state's population, this is the highest proportion of senior citizens among states in India. By 2025, about 20% of our population would be elderly and the demand for the social security system would be enormous. It must also be noted that the proportion of the aged population who are living alone is much higher in large urban districts like Ernakulam.

With the world hurtling towards a digital era, it has become increasingly difficult for an aged population to navigate the complexities of technology. The digital transformation has made access to necessities like food, transport and paying bills challenging for senior citizens. This glaring gap was further widened during the covid -19 induced lockdown. Juxtaposing these two issues, it was identified that there is an immediate need to equip the growing elderly population in Ernakulam district with basic Digital Literacy. To address it, the District Planning Office (DPO) has put up a proposal

for the Naipunya Nagaram project before the District Planning Committee (DPC).

### Outcomes

- The Naipunya Nagaram programme brought basic awareness of digital space and digital accessories to senior citizens. The handholding in the form of digital literacy training made them skilled in its usage and made it beneficial for their digital inclusion.
- The Naipunya Nagaram programme enables the independent use of online space by senior citizens without the assistance of their grandchildren. They could now browse the internet, access government services, pay their bills, access the news, and entertainment, and shop online independently.
- Naipunya Nagaram programme taught senior citizens how to use e-mail, social media platforms, and video calling tools. This enables them to stay connected with family and friends, join online communities, and reduce feelings of isolation.
- The programme helps them to engage in cyberspace with a basic awareness of cyber security. It educates seniors about online safety measures, privacy settings, and how to identify and avoid scams and fraud. This empowers them to navigate the online world more securely and confidently.

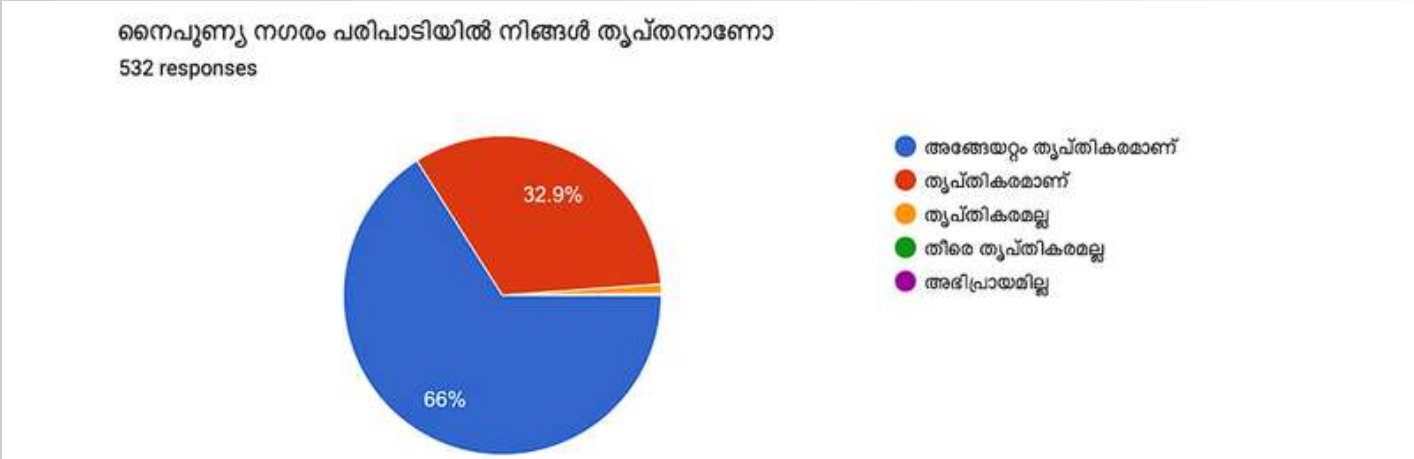
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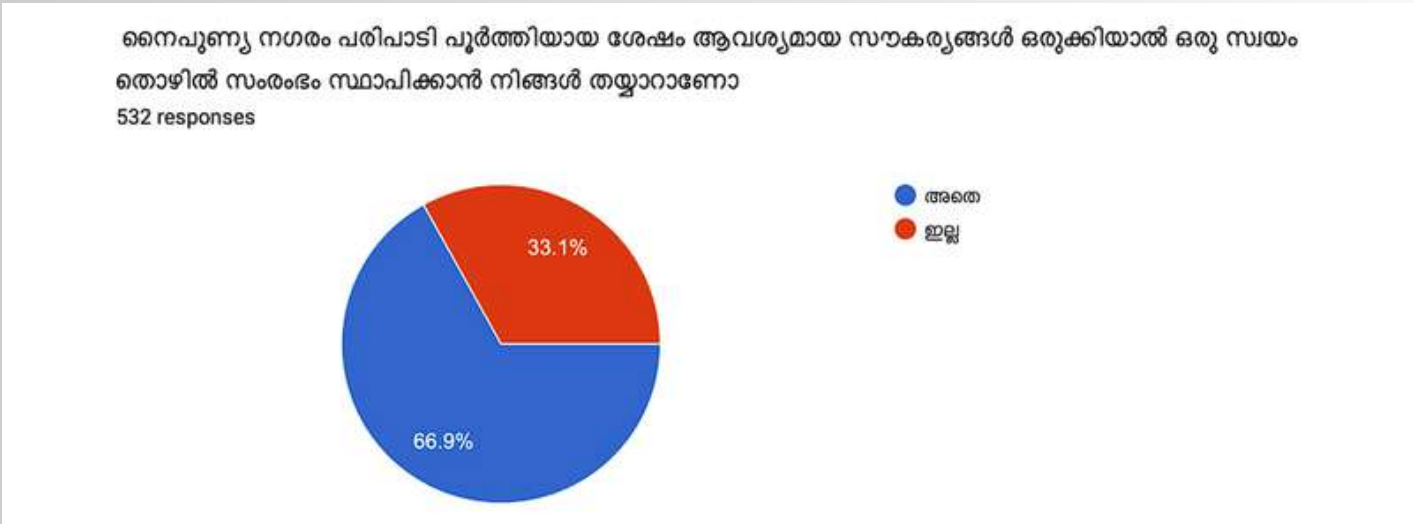
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As a part of monitoring and evaluation of the project, the MGN Fellow conducted a tracer study among the beneficiaries and the following are the major takeaways.

- In response to the question, 'Are you satisfied with the Naipunya Nagaram project?', an impressive 98.9% responded that they are satisfied with the project. Of 98.9%, 66 per cent are extremely satisfied with the project.



- 66.9% of the senior citizens who participated in the training polled that if all the facilities are provided, they are willing to set up a self-enterprise to earn a livelihood with the training they received from Naipunya Nagaram.



Way forward

Digital literacy training is just the first phase of the Naipunya Nagaram. The later three phases of the programme has been envisaged to address the challenges encountered during phase one and to ensure a livelihood out of the Naipunya Nagaram thereby ensuring economic inclusion. As phase 2, it was proposed to provide booster classes on Digital Literacy and training sessions on Cyber Hygiene and Awareness to the beneficiaries who had completed phase 1. Though phase 1 has given senior citizens a huge exposure to digital literacy by introducing computers and digital spaces, a 10-day programme is insufficient for them to master digital skills. So there needs to be additional hand holding until beneficiaries are proficient with computers and smartphones. Further, There is an urgent need to provide an additional module on Cyber Hygiene and Awareness for the beneficiaries. In an age of growing cybercrimes and fake news, it is imperative

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 3
<b>Phase Plan</b>	Digital Literacy Training	Booster Class in Digital Literacy	Digital devices to beneficiaries	Social and Economic Inclusion
<b>Funding Agency</b>	Jointly by Local Bodies and District Panchayat (DPC)	<b>CSR Funding</b>	District Panchayat (DPC)	<b>Industry and Campus Connect</b>
<b>Status</b>	Rs. 60 Lakhs approved and training completed in 28 local bodies	Pilot project completed in 3 local bodies with the funding from State Government.	Rs. 7 Lakhs approved and is in consultation with IT park for getting used digital devices	Ideation Phase

to equip the senior citizens with required skills to use the cyber space with adequate preparedness and caution.

When it comes to phase 3, the District Administration will aggregate used digital devices (which have utility value) from the IT companies and transfer it for repairs and refurbishments. The ready-to-use digital device will then be distributed to Naipunya Nagaram beneficiaries via local bodies (Gram Panchayat/Municipality). Once the utility is exhausted, devices will be collected from beneficiaries and channelise it to the Clean Kerala Company Limited, the formal e-waste management network in Kerala. The policy was formulated with the twin objectives of extending the life of e-waste through repair and refurbishment and facilitating the forward linkage for Naipunya Nagaram programme beneficiaries.

In the final phase, the beneficiaries will be connected to the industry and campuses to ensure economic and social inclusion respectively. The opportunity for senior citizens to interact with student volunteers from different college campuses will help address the problem of loneliness and thereby improve their emotional well being. Also

connecting senior citizens with IT firms, who are in need of basic IT proficiency jobs like data entry, annotation services could ensure livelihood for the senior citizens.

## Recommendation for scaling up

1. The success of Naipunya Nagaram is mainly attributed to the decentralised model of training, where the Training partner delivered training at the panchayat level.
2. More student volunteers and colleges can be integrated to the project and thus creating more opportunities for intergenerational interactions and augment the spirit of volunteerism.
3. Activity based learning is a proven successful model to increase the learning outcome, where the recipients are not passive listeners but active learners, thereby reducing the attrition rate in the batches.
4. Majority of the beneficiaries of digital literacy training programme will be from lower middle class backgrounds with elementary educational qualifications. So delivering classes in vernacular language would be desirable.



# Photo Gallery