

Social Entrepreneurship as A Pathway for Tribal Livelihood Enhancement: A Study from Nilambur, Kerala

Nisha S.¹, Dr. Binija George²

¹Research Scholar, ²Research Supervisor

^{1,2}Research & Pg Department Of Commerce, Marthoma College, Chungathara & Assistant Professor
Department Of Management Studies, Amal College Of Advanced Studies(Autonomous), Nilambur

Abstract

This Study Investigates The Impact Of Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives On The Livelihood Of Tribal Communities In Nilambur, Kerala. Through A Mixed-Methods Approach, The Study Evaluates How Models Such As The Nilambur Special Tribal Project (Nstp) Under Kudumbashree Have Contributed To Economic Empowerment, Skill Development, And Social Inclusion Among Tribal Populations. Based On Data Collected From 30 Tribal Households Using Interviews, Surveys, And Statistical Analysis, The Study Finds Significant Positive Changes In Income Generation, Self-Employment, And Socio-Economic Well-Being. While The Results Are Promising, The Study Also Identifies Several Challenges Such As Limited Financial Access, Cultural Resistance, And Infrastructural Barriers. Recommendations Are Provided For Policymakers And Development Practitioners To Enhance The Effectiveness And Sustainability Of Such Social Entrepreneurship Models.

Keywords: Tribals, Social Entrepreneurship, Livelihood, Kudumbashree, Nilambur

1. Introduction

India Is Home To One Of The World's Largest Tribal Populations, Comprising Approximately 8.6% Of The Total Population According To The 2011 Census. Despite Constitutional Safeguards And Policy Interventions, Tribal Communities Remain Among The Most Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups In The Country. They Often Experience Marginalization In The Form Of Poverty, Inadequate Access To Healthcare, Education, And Infrastructure, And Limited Employment Opportunities. One Such Region Where These Challenges Are Deeply Entrenched Is Nilambur, Located In The Malappuram District Of Kerala. Although Kerala Has Been Celebrated For Its Exemplary Social Indicators, Tribal Communities Within The State Still Lag Behind In Terms Of Development And Socio-Economic Mobility.

In Response To These Persistent Issues, Social Entrepreneurship Has Emerged As A Promising Mechanism For Addressing The Developmental Needs Of Marginalized Populations, Particularly In Tribal Areas. Social Entrepreneurship Refers To The Use Of Innovative, Sustainable, And Inclusive Business Models That Aim To Solve Social Problems While Ensuring Economic Viability. Unlike

Traditional Forms Of Charity Or Welfare, Social Enterprises Empower Communities By Fostering Self-Reliance, Skill Development, And Long-Term Livelihood Opportunities. In The Context Of Tribal Communities In Nilambur, Social Entrepreneurship Presents A Valuable Approach To Bridge The Gap Between Traditional Livelihoods And Modern Economic Systems.

The Nilambur Special Tribal Project (Nstp), An Initiative Under The Kudumbashree Mission, Is One Of The Notable Examples Of Such An Effort. Launched In 2018, Nstp Aims To Empower Tribal Women Through The Formation Of Self-Help Groups (Shgs), Skill Training Programs, And Entrepreneurship Development Initiatives. The Project Seeks To Provide A Platform For Income Generation, Financial Literacy, And Socio-Economic Inclusion By Tapping Into Local Resources And Indigenous Knowledge Systems. These Initiatives Are Not Merely Welfare Schemes; Rather, They Represent Structured Models Of Social Entrepreneurship That Enable Tribal Individuals, Especially Women, To Become Active Participants In The Region's Development.

This Study Seeks To Explore The Extent To Which These Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives Have Succeeded In Transforming The Livelihoods Of Tribal Communities In Nilambur. Specifically, The Study Examines The Economic Impact, Effectiveness Of Skill Development Programs, And The Socio-Cultural Challenges Faced During Implementation. Through A Combination Of Quantitative Surveys And Qualitative Interviews, This Research Aims To Provide A Comprehensive Understanding Of The Role Played By Social Entrepreneurship In Improving The Lives Of Marginalized Tribal Populations. The Findings Are Expected To Contribute To The Broader Discourse On Inclusive Development And Offer Actionable Recommendations For Scaling Similar Initiatives In Other Tribal Regions Of India.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework Of Social Entrepreneurship: Social Entrepreneurship Is Broadly Defined As The Use Of Entrepreneurial Principles To Solve Social, Cultural, Or Environmental Issues. Unlike Traditional Businesses That Prioritize Profits, Social Enterprises Seek To Create Social Value While Maintaining Economic Sustainability (Dees, 1998). According To Bornstein And Davis (2010), Social Entrepreneurs Are Individuals Who Develop Innovative Solutions To Society's Most Pressing Social Problems, Aiming For Systemic Change.

In The Indian Context, Social Entrepreneurship Is Increasingly Recognized For Its Ability To Address The Challenges Faced By Marginalized Groups. It Plays A Pivotal Role In Delivering Inclusive And Participatory Development (Sengupta & Sahay, 2017).

2.2 Social Entrepreneurship And Tribal Development: Tribal Communities Often Face Structural Barriers That Limit Their Access To Education, Employment, And Financial Services. Social Enterprises Have Emerged As Crucial Enablers In Bridging This Gap By Creating Employment Opportunities, Fostering Skill Development, And Enabling Market Access (Sharma, 2013). For Instance, Initiatives Such As The Wadi Project Supported By Nabard Have Shown That Sustainable Agricultural And Livelihood Development Can Uplift Tribal Populations (Tripathy, 2020).

Mair And Marti (2006) Emphasized The Importance Of Embedding Social Entrepreneurship In The Local Context, Particularly When Dealing With Tribal Communities. They Argue That Understanding The Socio-Cultural And Economic Background Is Critical For Designing Effective Interventions.

2.3 Education And Skill Development: One Of The Key Pathways Through Which Social Entrepreneurship Benefits Tribal Communities Is Through Education And Skill Enhancement. Heredia (1992) And Daripa (2017) Highlight That Skill-Based Education Can Break Cycles Of Poverty And Exclusion By Making Individuals Economically Self-Reliant. More Recently, Gupta And Sawhney (2023) Argued That Educational Innovations Such As Gamification And Localized Digital Learning Can Significantly Increase Engagement And Practical Skill Acquisition.

Nstp-Kudumbashree, In The Nilambur Region, Reflects This Trend By Integrating Livelihood- Based Training Into Its Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives. These Trainings Aim To Strengthen Traditional Skills Such As Handicrafts While Introducing New Competencies Like Financial Literacy And Eco-Tourism Management.

2.4 Government And Institutional Interventions: The Ministry Of Tribal Affairs Has Implemented Several Programs Targeting The Socio-Economic Development Of Scheduled Tribes. Key Among Them Are The Tribal Sub-Plan (Tsp) And The Special Central Assistance (Sca), Which Aim To Fund Livelihood Generation Programs (Thakur, 2009). Despite These Initiatives, Researchers Such As Gautam And Agrahari (2020) Argue That Inefficiencies And Lack Of Community Participation Often Undermine The Effectiveness Of Government Programs.

However, Community-Based Programs Such As Kudumbashree Have Gained Attention For Their Participatory, Decentralized Approach. According To Kurup And Hariharan (2021), Kudumbashree's Integration Of Tribal Women Into Decision-Making And Livelihood Activities Has Fostered Empowerment And Self-Reliance.

2.5 Case Studies And Field Experiences: Numerous Case Studies Offer Insight Into The Success Of Localized Social Entrepreneurship Models. Manoj (2020) Examined Community-Based Ecotourism In Kerala And Found It To Be An Effective Tool For Economic Development Among Tribal Populations, Especially When Linked With Existing Programs Like Kudumbashree. Likewise, Bandhu Et Al. (N.D.) Emphasized The Need For Climate-Resilient Livelihood Models That Align With Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

International Studies Also Provide Valuable Perspectives. For Example, Lampropoulos Et Al. (2022) Explored How Gamification And Augmented Reality Tools Can Improve Vocational Training, Making It More Relevant And Engaging For Tribal Youth.

2.6 Challenges In Implementation: Despite Its Potential, Social Entrepreneurship In Tribal Regions Faces Significant Hurdles. Mosse (2002) Highlighted Issues Such As Migration, Forced Displacement, And Socio-Political Resistance As Major Impediments. Mistri (2023) Underscored That Without Infrastructural Support And Cultural Sensitivity, Many Well-Intentioned Programs Fail To Achieve Long-

Term Success.

In The Nilambur Context, Challenges Include Limited Access To Financial Resources, Inadequate Infrastructure, And Resistance To Change Within Some Tribal Communities. These Issues Call For More Adaptable And Culturally Rooted Entrepreneurship Models.

2.7 Summary Of Key Insights: The Literature Converges On The Idea That Social Entrepreneurship, When Locally Tailored And Inclusively Implemented, Has Significant Potential To Transform The Socio-Economic Fabric Of Tribal Communities. Training, Participatory Governance, And Access To Finance Emerge As Key Factors For Success. This Review Provides A Strong Foundation For The Present Study, Which Investigates The Impact Of Nstp-Kudumbashree Initiatives In Nilambur.

3. Research Methodology

This Study Employs A Mixed-Methods Research Design That Integrates Both Qualitative And Quantitative Approaches To Examine The Impact Of Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives On The Livelihoods Of Tribal Communities In Nilambur. The Methodology Was Selected To Capture Statistical Insights As Well As Lived Experiences.

3.1 Sampling And Data Collection: A Purposive Sampling Method Was Used To Select 30 Respondents From Tribal Settlements Who Were Direct Beneficiaries Of The Nilambur Special Tribal Project (Nstp) Under Kudumbashree. The Respondents Included Tribal Women, Self-Help Group (Shg) Members, Community Leaders, And Local Entrepreneurs.

Primary Data Were Collected Using Structured Questionnaires Containing Both Closed And Open- Ended Questions Covering Income Changes, Skill Development, Program Participation, And Socio-Economic Changes. In Addition To The Survey, Qualitative Data Were Gathered Through In- Depth Interviews And Focus Group Discussions With Tribal Members, Kudumbashree Coordinators, And Local Officials To Explore Personal Narratives And Collective Insights.

3.2 Tools And Analysis: Quantitative Data Were Analyzed Using Descriptive Statistical Tools Such As Frequencies, Percentages, And Cross-Tabulations. These Tools Helped In Understanding The Patterns Of Participation And Benefit Distribution. Qualitative Data From Interviews Were Subjected To Thematic Analysis To Uncover Recurring Patterns, Stakeholder Perceptions, And Contextual Barriers.

3.3 Secondary Data: Secondary Data Were Gathered From Official Reports, Policy Documents, Academic Articles, And Kudumbashree Publications To Support And Contextualize Primary Data.

3.4 Duration And Limitations: The Fieldwork Was Conducted Over A Period Of Three Weeks. While The Study Provides Valuable Insights, It Is Limited By A Relatively Small Sample Size And A Localized Geographic Focus, Which May Affect The Generalizability Of The Findings To Other Tribal Regions.

4. Results And Discussion

The Analysis Of Data Collected Through Surveys And Interviews Reveals A Strong Impact Of The Nilambur Special Tribal Project (Nstp) Under Kudumbashree On The Livelihoods Of Tribal Communities In Nilambur. The Findings Are Organized Thematically Based On The Primary Objectives Of The Study.

4.1 Economic Empowerment: A Significant Portion Of The Respondents (54.84%) Associated The Financial Support Received Through Nstp With Livelihood Enhancement, While 41.94% Highlighted Improvements In Their Overall Socio-Economic Conditions. This Suggests That The Financial Interventions Under Nstp Are Addressing Both Immediate Income Needs And Long- Term Development Goals. Respondents Noted Improvements In Income Through Diversified Sources Such As Handicrafts, Organic Farming, And Eco-Tourism-Related Activities. The Availability Of Microfinance And Entrepreneurship Development Programs Has Enabled Them To Transition From Subsistence To Market-Based Activities. The Program Has Especially Empowered Women By Providing Them Access To Capital, Income-Generating Opportunities, And Group-Based Savings Structures. The Community-Based Approach Ensures Collective Accountability And Reduces Default Risk, Further Encouraging Participation.

Table 4.1. Financial Support By Nstp- Kudumbasree

Financial Support	Frequency	Percentage
For Improving Livelihood	17	54.84%
For Improving Socio Economic	13	41.94%
Total	30	100%

4.2 Skill Development And Training: An Overwhelming 93.55% Of Respondents Reported Receiving Livelihood-Relevant Training. Of These, Nearly Half Stated That They Received Training Across All Categories Offered By Nstp, Including Entrepreneurship Training, Skill Development, Ayalkootam (Neighborhood Group) Training, And Convergence Training. This Variety Ensures That Tribal Individuals Are Equipped With Both Soft And Technical Skills Necessary For Managing Enterprises And Enhancing Productivity.

Table 4.2. Received Any Training Beneficial For The Livelihood

Beneficial For Livelihood	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	29	93.55%
No	1	03.23%

Total	30	100%
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Training In Handicrafts, Animal Husbandry, And Eco-Tourism Align Closely With The Indigenous Knowledge Systems Of The Tribes, Making The Learning Process More Inclusive And Effective. The Integration Of Traditional Skills With Modern Entrepreneurial Techniques Has Increased Employability And Opened Avenues For Small-Scale Business Ventures.

4.3 Community Participation And Leadership: Participation In Kudumbashree Activities Was Widespread. About 58.06% Of Respondents Identified Themselves As Kudumbashree Members, While Others Served As Beneficiaries Or Community Leaders. This Indicates A Strong Presence Of Nstp-Kudumbashree Within Tribal Settlements, Creating Inclusive Governance Models That Foster Grassroots Leadership And Shared Ownership.

Table 4.3. Role Of Tribal Community In Nstp - Kudumbasree

Role Of Tribal Community	Frequency	Percentage
Kudumbasree Member	18	58.06%
Beneficiary Of Nstp Initiatives	6	19.35%
Community Leader	6	19.35%
Total	30	100%

Community Leadership, Especially Among Women, Has Been A Key Outcome. It Has Helped Build Trust And Facilitate Better Communication Between Implementing Agencies And Beneficiaries. This Participatory Approach Has Enhanced The Credibility Of Programs And Encouraged Broader Community Involvement.

4.4 Benefits And Perceived Effectiveness: Survey Data Revealed That 36.67% Of Respondents Accessed Microfinance Schemes, Followed By 30% Who Benefitted From Entrepreneurship Training, And 23.33% From Livelihood Support Programs. A Smaller But Significant Percentage (10%) Reported Benefits From Skill Development Programs. This Distribution Reflects A Broad Engagement With The Multi-Faceted Components Of The Initiative.

Table 4.4. Benefites From Nstp-Kudumbasree

Benefites	Frequency	Percentage
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Micro Finance Scheme	11	36.67%
Entrepreneurship Training	9	30%
Livelihood Support Programme	7	23.33%
Skill Development Programme	3	10%
Total	30	100%

In Terms Of Overall Effectiveness, 56.67% Rated Nstp-Kudumbashree As "Very Effective," While 43.33% Found It "Somewhat Effective." These Ratings Suggest A High Level Of Satisfaction Among Participants, Though Qualitative Insights Highlighted Areas Where Implementation Could Be Improved.

Table 4.5. Effectiveness Of Nstp- Kudumbasree

Effectiveness	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	17	56.67%
Some What Effective	13	43.33%
Total	30	100%

4.5 Improvements In Socio-Economic Status: A Compelling 93.1% Of Respondents Reported Improvements In Their Socio-Economic Status Following Participation In The Program. These Improvements Include Better Housing Conditions, Increased Savings, Educational Access For Children, And Improved Nutritional Intake. Such Changes Signify The Broader Development Impact Of Social Entrepreneurship Beyond Mere Income Generation.

Table 4.5. Improvement In Socio Economic Status

Socio Economic Status	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	93.1%
No	3	10%

Total	30	100%
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Respondents Also Noted An Increased Sense Of Self-Confidence And Social Inclusion, Particularly Among Women. Participation In Kudumbashree Has Elevated Their Roles Within Households And Communities, Promoting Gender Equity And Empowerment.

4.6 Challenges Identified Despite Its Many Benefits, The Initiative Faces Several Operational And Contextual Challenges:

- **Access To Financial Resources:** Many Respondents Reported Difficulties In Accessing Credit Beyond The Shg Framework. Banks And Formal Financial Institutions Often Require Collateral Or Complex Documentation, Creating Barriers For Tribal Entrepreneurs.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Poor Road Connectivity, Lack Of Transport Facilities, And Insufficient Digital Infrastructure Limit Access To Markets, Training Centers, And Government Services.
- **Cultural Resistance:** Traditional Belief Systems Sometimes Inhibit Participation In Modern Entrepreneurial Activities, Particularly Among Older Community Members.
- **Inadequate Follow-Up Support:** While Initial Training Is Provided, Many Respondents Expressed The Need For Ongoing Mentoring And Hand-Holding Support To Sustain Their Enterprises.

4.7 Comparative Reflections: Compared To Other Tribal Development Schemes In India, Nstp's Integration With Kudumbashree Provides A More Holistic And Community-Driven Model. Its Emphasis On Women-Led Groups, Skill Development, And Financial Inclusion Reflects Global Best Practices In Social Entrepreneurship. The Participatory Design Ensures That Interventions Are Locally Rooted, Thereby Increasing Their Effectiveness.

Furthermore, The Success Of Nstp In Nilambur Underscores The Importance Of Customizing Development Programs To Suit Local Socio-Cultural Contexts. Rather Than Imposing External Models, The Kudumbashree Approach Allows Tribal Voices To Shape Priorities And Implementation Methods.

4.8 Qualitative Perspectives From Respondents: Interviews With Tribal Women Revealed A Growing Sense Of Identity And Confidence. One Respondent Noted, "Before This Project, We Used To Depend On Seasonal Work And Forest Produce. Now, I Sell Handmade Products In Markets And Even Take Orders Online With Help From My Daughter." Such Narratives Underline The Transformative Power Of Inclusive Entrepreneurship.

Another Respondent Stated, "The Training Helped Me Manage My Finances And Start A Small Poultry Business. It Is Not Just About Money; Now People In My Community Seek My Advice." These Reflections Affirm That Economic Empowerment Has Direct Implications For Social And Psychological Well-Being.

4.9 Implications For Policy And Practice: The Findings Indicate That Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives Like Nstp-Kudumbashree Can Serve As Effective Models For Tribal Development When They Are Community-Led And Holistic. Policymakers Should Consider Scaling Such Initiatives, With Adequate Customization For Local Needs. Additional Support In The Form Of Market Linkages,

Infrastructure Development, And Financial Inclusion Mechanisms Is Necessary To Amplify Their Impact.

Development Practitioners Should Emphasize Continuous Engagement, Mentorship, And Monitoring To Ensure Long-Term Success. Collaborations With Educational Institutions And Private Sector Stakeholders Can Further Enrich The Ecosystem For Tribal Entrepreneurship.

In Summary, The Study Reveals That Social Entrepreneurship, When Strategically Designed And Inclusively Implemented, Holds Significant Promise For Transforming The Lives Of Marginalized Tribal Communities. The Case Of Nilambur Offers Valuable Lessons For Similar Interventions In Other Parts Of India And Beyond.

5. Conclusion

This Study Explored The Impact Of Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives, Particularly The Nilambur Special Tribal Project (Nstp) Under Kudumbashree, On The Livelihood Enhancement Of Tribal Communities In The Nilambur Region Of Kerala. Using A Mixed-Methods Approach, It Examined The Extent To Which These Initiatives Contributed To Economic Empowerment, Skill Development, Social Inclusion, And Community Participation Among Marginalized Tribal Populations.

The Findings Demonstrate A Notable Transformation In The Socio-Economic Status Of Tribal Families Engaged In The Nstp-Kudumbashree Program. Over 90% Of The Respondents Reported Positive Changes In Their Household Income, Living Conditions, And Access To Educational And Healthcare Facilities. The Structured Support Through Microfinance, Livelihood-Based Training, And Entrepreneurship Opportunities Has Helped Tribal Households Transition From Unstable, Subsistence-Based Livelihoods To More Secure And Market-Oriented Economic Activities.

One Of The Standout Aspects Of The Program Is Its Emphasis On Women's Empowerment. The Inclusion Of Tribal Women In Self-Help Groups And Their Active Participation In Entrepreneurship And Leadership Roles Has Fostered A Sense Of Agency, Financial Independence, And Community Leadership. Training Programs Tailored To Local Needs—Such As Handicrafts, Organic Farming, And Eco-Tourism—Have Helped Preserve Traditional Knowledge While Aligning With Modern Market Demands.

However, The Study Also Identified Significant Challenges That Need To Be Addressed For The Long-Term Sustainability Of Such Programs. These Include Limited Access To Institutional Credit, Inadequate Infrastructure, Cultural Resistance To Entrepreneurship, And Lack Of Sustained Mentorship. Addressing These Issues Through Policy Reform, Improved Outreach, And Capacity Building Will Be Essential To Scale The Impact Of Such Initiatives.

In Conclusion, Social Entrepreneurship Has Emerged As A Powerful Tool For Tribal Development, Particularly When Implemented Through Participatory And Community-Driven Models Like Kudumbashree. The Nilambur Experience Illustrates How A Well-Designed And Context-Sensitive Approach Can Enhance Livelihoods, Empower Communities, And Contribute To Inclusive And

Sustainable Rural Development. Policymakers And Development Practitioners Should Take Note Of These Lessons To Replicate And Adapt Such Models Across Other Tribal And Marginalized Regions In India And Beyond.

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