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Integrating SDGs to village development plan through the provision of infrastructure: The case of best village panchayat in Kerala, South India

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Abstract: With the declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the importance of localisation principles and, consequently, the local-level institutions in implementing development policies came to the forefront. India adopted a thematic approach by condensing the seventeen goals into nine themes, to be worked upon by the local administrative units, furthering that each Village Panchayat (constitutionally known as Grama Panchayats) should select a theme in a plan year and strive towards attaining it. For the South Indian state of Kerala, with its good trajectory of decentralised governance, this localisation process of SDGs was rather smooth. In this article, we discuss the case of the best-performing Grama Panchayat (GP) in Kerala, which has identified ‘Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure’ as the development theme. Through qualitative research methodology, we examine how the Panchayat included projects specific to this theme in the development plans and how the implementation helped produce effects on multidimensional aspects of SDGs using the SDG Impact Assessment Tool. The case studies of different infrastructure-based projects endorse that with proper planning and implementation of such projects, the lowest tier of administration can significantly contribute to the improvement of development goals. We have delineated full fund utilisation through convergence schemes, community participation, and strong monitoring mechanisms as the factors leading the selected Panchayat to be the champion of the cause. The accomplishment exhibited by the Panchayat by integrating SDGs into the Village Development Plan through the projects on the theme of self-sufficient infrastructure can be well emulated by other local bodies across the world.

Keywords: sustainable development; decentralisation; grama panchayat; self-sufficient infrastructure; community participation

1. Introduction

The World Commission on Environment and Development defines Sustainable Development as ‘development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (United Nations, 1987). The adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the UN Summit in September 2015 proved to be a landmark event in the history of the world (Gore, 2015; Halisçelik and Soytaş, 2019; Katila et al., 2019). The seventeen SDGs with 169 targets cover all the development aspects around the globe that require immediate action to transform the world by the year 2030 to create ‘The Future We Want’ (Clark, 2015; Tomuschat, 2021). The key objectives of the sustainable development agenda, including poverty eradication, reduction of inequalities, and achieving environmental sustainability, depend on firm and decisive local action and ownership, which is sourced in a well-coordinated multi-level public governance system (Oosterhof, 2018). Hence emerged

the concept of localisation of SDGs, which refers to the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national and subnational sustainable development goals and targets (Reddy, 2016; UNDP, 2014). Localisation of SDGs requires capable and strong local governments that are well-capacitated to take the lead in organising all the key role players and stakeholders and mobilising resources to bring about local development initiatives (Reddy, 2016).

Since localisation induces that local realities must be taken into account to bring out the best course of development, heterogeneity in implementing SDGs is inherent in the localisation principle. This heterogeneity is apparent in the assessment of localisation practices undertaken globally, as evident from the Voluntary National Reviews. The common implementation practice seen in the top SDG Indexed countries is that countries prioritise their strategies upon those SDGs identified as relevant from the feedback received from local governments (Lanshina et al., 2019). India, being a key member country in adopting the UN resolution on ‘Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, has recognised the need for appropriate policies for SDG localisation owing to the heterogeneity in terms of varied physical, ecological, demographical, and socio-economic features of different states and regions in the country (NITI Aayog, 2022). An all-inclusive application at the national level may not provide the results expected, and hence, India has put forward the model of designing and implementing localisation in the trajectory of attaining SDGs.

National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, which replaced the National Planning Commission in 2018, plays a central role in the localisation model in India by evolving the mechanism through which the states, districts, cities and villages take part in the implementation of SDGs. The institutional structure for the implementation of SDGs in India places Parliament at the top level, providing supervision along with the Comptroller and Auditor General, who reviews the preparation of SDGs (Curry et al., 2024; Khalid et al., 2020; NITI Aayog, 2022). The NITI Aayog sets the agenda, monitors and coordinates the entire operation and supervises the ministries in the implementation of SDGs (Jain and Mishra, 2019). At the state level, the operations are headed by the High-Level Committees of each state headed by the chief secretary and the committee is supervised by the respective State Legislatures. The High-Level Committee decentralises the data collection and analysis to the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, coordination and monitoring are done by the State Planning Department, and implementation is undertaken by the line departments (Kandpal and Okitasari, 2023). Several steps, such as sensitisation, indicator frameworks, improving data ecosystem, building partnerships, setting up SDG coordination centre, activating dashboards, and review mechanisms, were adopted at the state level to localise SDGs. However, the true impetus to localisation happens remoter at the micro-level, wherein the local level governments identify the developmental needs of the community through their platforms and adopt tools and innovations to conceive the process.

The 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, 1992, which envisaged a three-tier local government structure, has been a critical step in decentralising power and strengthening local self-governance in India. These three tiers—Grama Panchayats (constitutionally designated term for the lowest tier of administration at the Village

level), Block Panchayats at the Intermediate tier, and District Panchayats at the highest level were given the power to plan for economic development and social justice and implement schemes and projects for this purpose (Mohapatra, 2013; Jha, 2018). Twenty-nine functions that form the basis of rural development, including agriculture, land improvement, water management, animal husbandry, dairy, rural housing, drinking water, small-scale industries, etc., have been transferred to the Panchayats. This forms the constitutional imperative for the localisation of development goals as these functions have a direct bearing on the SDG implementation and its targets. With the adoption of SDGs, NITI Ayog has devised an action plan for localising SDGs via the existing decentralised structure through development plans. For this, the line of action is to integrate the development plans of Panchayats with SDGs through a thematic approach that will impart the vital focus for holistic, sustainable development. Consequently, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has integrated the seventeen SDGs into nine themes, each with a vision statement further mapping the themes to SDGs and related departments (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2021). The nine themes are a call of action to attain at least one of the themes in a fiscal year, such as a poverty-free village; a healthy village; a child-friendly village; a water-sufficient village; a clean and green village; a self-sufficient infrastructure village; a socially secured village; a village with good governance; and a women-friendly village. These themes are interlinked and interrelated to each other and concern all SDGs. A thematic approach to SDGs has been taken as they easily relate to the Panchayats and the community, thereby helping to provide a vision for the Panchayats to achieve SDGs in rural areas for holistic development.

Within the states of India, the south Indian state of Kerala has always attracted international attention due to its particular experience of attaining high human development status amidst low levels of resources (Franke and Chasin, 1993; Nair, 2018; Parameswaran, 2000; Ramachandran, 1997; Tharamangalam, 2010). With the constitutional imperative of decentralised governance, Kerala enabled decentralisation through the Kerala Panchayat Raj (KPR) Act of 1994. As such, administrative decentralisation was done by creating a three-tier local governance structure with Grama Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and District Panchayat and transferring functions, functionaries, and funds for local-level planning and implementation (Bandyopadhyay, 1997; Franke and Chasin, 2000; Tharakan, 2005). Kerala's decentralisation efforts with the people's plan, combined with the convergence measures induced by good governance, which resulted in empowering local governments to develop and plan according to the needs of the society, have been acknowledged across the globe (Hari, 2022; Issac and Franke, 2000; Oommen et al., 2017; Thomas, 2016). When India adopted the localisation of SDGs, Kerala acted as a frontrunner and was consecutively ranked first in the SDG India Index created by NITI Ayog for four years. Within India, Kerala is the first state where all GPs have identified the priority development theme and incorporated projects to attain saturation in the identified theme (Government of India, 2024). To understand how the integration of SDGs into the development plan of Panchayats takes place, the case of one of the best Grama Panchayats (Uzhamalakkal Grama Panchayat) in the state, which has identified the theme of self-sufficient infrastructure and adopted projects to attain the same, is considered. The paper examines the innovative projects included in

the development plan of the selected panchayat to become a self-sufficient infrastructure village, analyses how it contributes to the attainment of SDGs and discusses the implementation process.

Section II is the methods part, and Section III examines the guidelines for SDG localisation at the Grama Panchayat level, the projects implemented in the selected Grama Panchayat, and their relation to SDGs. Section IV is the discussion part, and Section V concludes the study.

2. Methods

To assess the integration of SDGs into the Village Development Plan through the projects undertaken in the selected Grama Panchayat on the theme of self-sufficient infrastructure, we follow a qualitative research method involving in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case study analysis of the representative projects, supported by the SDG Impact Assessment Tool (SDG-IAT).

2.1. Selection of the panchayat and projects

To effectively represent the forerunner status of the state in the SDGs, the best-performing GP was selected. Towards this, the Swaraj Trophy (the award instituted by the Government of Kerala for the best Grama Panchayat) was used as the identifier, and Uzhamalakkal Grama Panchayat (UGP) was selected since it has received the award for the best Panchayat consecutively for the last two years. Following this, the team made an exploratory pilot, conducting reflective discussions with the officials of the GP and identified 'self-sufficient infrastructure' as their priority development theme. Among the 30 major projects identified related to infrastructure provision during the last two years, five significant projects aligning with the theme of self-sufficient infrastructure and addressing the SDGs were selected. The selected projects include the provisioning of both hard (asset creation) and soft infrastructure (human capital and institutions that ensure service delivery). They are titled Drinking Water for Every House, Revitalising Agriculture, Rehabilitation of Differently Abled, Farm Plan Management and Garbage Disposal, and all are examined as case studies in detail.

2.2. Collection of data

The assessment of GP projects necessitates harnessing information from the stakeholders, as any project can only be designed, implemented, and completed by creating an appropriate environment, which is enabled by the effective participation of these stakeholders. The stakeholders here are identified as three groups: the Providers, the Facilitators, and the End Beneficiaries.

- Providers: The President of the GP, The Secretary of the GP, concerned Project Implementing Officers (agriculture, medical, and other extension officers), concerned Assistant Project Implementing Officers, and the GP Member to the area.
- Facilitators: Members of Committees and Community-based Organisations relevant to the concerned project, such as the Development Committee of the project and Women's Self-help Groups.

- End beneficiaries: Five beneficiary households randomly selected for each project.

The team made observational visits to the Panchayat and each project area to gain a preliminary understanding of the design and impact of these projects on SDGs. These visits gave insight into how the people articulated their requirements, the relevance of these requirements to each SDGs, and the decision-making process, which was reflected in the project document. These observational visits provided the team with a foundational understanding of the actions taken on SDGs.

Subsequently, two Focus Group Discussions were conducted for each project, one involving providers and facilitators and the other comprising beneficiaries. Both groups were presented with three main themes: ‘What is the project about?’, ‘How is it related to SDGs?’, and ‘What are the threats or challenges?’ Additionally, the first group was asked to discuss the activities of the specified project, and the second group was prompted to reflect on how the project affected their lives and livelihoods.

Based on the feedback from the FGDs, the team conducted in-depth interviews with five members of each stakeholder group for each project, focusing on detailed information on the implication of the projects on SDGs. Additionally, the providers were asked about the rationale behind the selection of the project and the implementation procedures employed. The objective behind interviewing the facilitators was to assess their activities and how their involvement impacted implementation. To triangulate the results, the beneficiaries were asked about the changes in their livelihood and further elicited views, opinions, information, and suggestions. The article is based on the evidence from these sources and the records and minutes books of the several meetings held as part of the planning process in the Grama Panchayat.

2.3. Data analysis

To ensure an objective approach to SDG evaluation, the research employed the SDG-IAT, a qualitative and reflective tool developed by West Sweden Nexus for Sustainable Development. This tool serves as an assessment mechanism to visualise these projects’ potential impacts on the complex SDG framework (Wexus, 2021). To encompass all the multi-dimensional aspects of the global goals, the SDG-IAT promotes stakeholder participation in evaluating the project. Using the iterative binary questions built into the assessment tool, initially, the knowledge and confidence level is assessed, and then the size and type of impact each of the projects have on the seventeen SDGs is framed into five impact categories (Directly positive, indirectly positive, no impact, indirectly negative and directly negative) from the qualitative data. The responses were collated and coded, and since the assessments revealed no negative impacts, only the direct and indirect positive impacts were reported.

3. Results

3.1. Development plans of villages as tools of SDG localisation

The implementation of SDGs ought to have substantial transfers of funds, resources, and authority from the central government to local governments to identify

and deal with the development problem efficiently and cost-effectively (Awortwi, 2016). Integrating this principle through the decentralised governance structure, India has identified the preparation and implementation of development plans, as mandated by Article 243G of her Constitution, as the major tool for achieving economic development and social justice in the country. By constitutional mandate, Grama Panchayats (GPs) are required to prepare the Grama Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) for their area, utilising the resources available to them, converging and integrating all Central and State Schemes. When SDGs were declared and India initiated policies to achieve them, GPs were identified as the key institutions for localising SDGs, and consequently, GPDP became the instrument of localisation of SDGs.

The preparation of GPDP in the GP should be done through a participatory, inclusive, and transparent cyclical process. It starts with the constitution of a 'Grama Panchayat Planning Facilitation Team' (GPPFT) under the chairmanship of the president of GP. In addition to the elected representatives, the GPPFT composition should include the line department representatives and special invitees to harness the expertise. The GPPFT organises Grama Sabha (Village Assemblies) to facilitate environment creation and social mobilisation. The Village Assemblies work as the general body of the GP, and the GPDP preparation, being a participatory process, mainstreaming of relevant issues through the village assemblies is of vital importance. In addition to taking note of the development needs of the Panchayat arising from the village assembly, the needs should also be identified through the verification of secondary data consolidated in the e-GramSwaraj portal (e-GramSwaraj is a portal designed by the Indian Ministry of Local Self-Governance to bring about transparency in decentralised planning) from various sources such as Census, Socio-Economic and Caste Census, Mission Antyodaya, data published by line departments and previous GPDP surveys. To fill the gaps in the secondary data, primary data should again be collected through Participatory Rural Appraisal, Focus Group Discussion, Household Survey, and Neighbourhood Survey, over and above the secondary data. The issues thus identified are assessed to reveal the development status of the GPs. After this meticulous collection of data, situational analysis should be done to identify the gaps in infrastructure, amenities, and services in the GPs, followed by the preparation of a Development Status Report (DSR), which forms a very important document in the planning process. The DSR is to be presented in the village assembly to create awareness about real-time issues and to identify development issues and convergence strategies further. The Visioning Exercise followed will articulate the development agenda for the next five years and the key thematic area to be adopted annually. This participatory exercise ensures objectivity in the planning process and provides people with a sense of ownership. A very important step in the planning process is resource and activity identification since, in exercising the GPDP, the GPs must use all the combinations of resources available to them. The Financial Resources Envelope of a GP includes: a) Own Source Revenue; b) Central and State Finance Commission Grant; c) Central Sector Schemes (CSS) and State Schemes entrusted to GPs; d) Voluntary contributions; e) Corporate Social Responsibility funds if assured and available to the GPs; and f) Funds available through banking sector/leveraging bank finances. CSS and State Schemes entrusted to GPs become pertinent in this context

since, apart from planning for economic development and social justice, the Local Self-Governance Institutions (LSGIs) are also required to incorporate and implement Central and State Government Schemes relating to the subjects of rural development. The Panchayats should strive for convergence with the concerned central ministries in the respective sectors through their schemes, thereby ensuring the deliverables that may be incorporated into the GPDP. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Animal Husbandry, and Ministry of Jalshakti (Ministry of Water Resources) have several schemes like the National Rural Livelihood Mission, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Rashtriya Krushi Vikas Yojana (Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sector Rejuvenation), National AYUSH Mission, PM Awas Yojana (Affordable housing for all), Integrated Child Development Scheme and so on related to agriculture, crop insurance, health and immunisation, social forestry, irrigation, poverty eradication, electricity connection, which are to be implemented through the GPs (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2018). After the estimation of the Resource Envelope and identification of corresponding activities, a special village assembly is to be conducted to deliberate on the developmental needs and gaps. The frontline workers of the line department are to present the progress and fund utilisation of projects implemented in the current year and proposed activities and funds to be allocated in the plan period to incorporate into the GPDP. Once approved, a Draft Plan with prioritised works in focus areas, fund allocation, and timelines is prepared and presented at the Development Seminar. The feedback and suggestions from the Development Seminar are incorporated into the GPDP, and a special meeting of the village assembly is then convened to discuss and finalise the GPDP.

Thus, based upon the constitutional mandate and funds acquired from several sources, GPs become a platform of people-led development through the participatory planning process as they lie at the core of local action. Accordingly, GPs, with the effective incorporation and consolidation of inter-linked targets of the SDGs into the GPDP and prioritising their actions related to specific needs of the locality in line with the SDGs, would provide a thrust to the realisation of SDGs. The line of action for integrating GPDP with SDGs is done through a thematic approach that imparts a vital focus for holistic, sustainable development. Towards this, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has integrated the 17 SDGs into nine themes, each with a vision statement and further mapped the themes to SDGs (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Mapping of themes to SDGs.

No.	Theme	SDGs Mapped
1.	Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13 and 15
2.	Healthy Village	2 and 3
3.	Child-Friendly Village	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
4.	Water Sufficient Village	6 and 15
5.	Clean and Green Village	6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15
6.	Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 11
7.	Socially Just and Socially Secured Village	1, 2, 5, 10 and 16
8.	Village with Good Governance	1 and 6
9.	Women-Friendly or Engendered Village	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8

The practical approach to theme identification encompasses analysis of needs reported by the community in the village assembly, GP Status reports, Panchayat Development Index reports, and Focus Group discussions with stakeholders, experts, teachers, and frontline workers. This is followed by listing themes as per priority, preparation of activities planned for the year, preparing a shortlist of activities to be incorporated in the GPDP, preparing sources of funds, and finally, ensuring that the activities included in the GPDP are undertaken. After the theme identification and incorporation into the GPDP, the GPs are to work on the mapped SDGs by selecting projects and allocating funds to attain the same. This merging of the SDGs into thematic areas to be worked on by the GPs by way of including them in the GPDP multiplies the importance of GPDP, which compels to regard GPs as the torchbearers of SDG attainment. The GPs are to identify one among the various themes as the core focus, identify projects, and prioritise funds for the attainment of the same.

3.2. Integrating SDGs to village development plan through the provision of Infrastructure: The case of best village panchayat, ‘Uzhamalakkal Grama Panchayat’ in Kerala, South India

Uzhamalakkal Grama Panchayat (UGP), in the capital district of Kerala, is spread over an area of 18.74 sq. km. The GP constitutes 15 wards (Grama Panchayats are further divided into wards, making it the smallest administrative unit in the local self-governance system) with 21,472 inhabitants as of March 2023. The UGP bagged the Swaraj Trophy for two consecutive years, in 2021–2022 and 2022–2023. The Panchayat has selected the theme of Self-Sufficient Infrastructure following the planning cycle elaborated in the previous part. Five major projects implemented by the GP, the process followed, and the affect on SDGs is analysed.

3.2.1. Project I: Drinking water for every house

About the project

The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM—Water for Every House) is a centrally sponsored scheme of the Government of India that aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024 to all households in rural India. This noble aim is based on the foundational framework of creating infrastructure, from sourcing water to transporting the purified water to each house. The JJM is focused on assisting, empowering, and facilitating the GPs in planning, implementing, managing, owning, operating, and maintaining their own water supply systems. In measuring the progress attained through the mission, Kerala is the lowest performer among Indian states, with only 38.56 percent completed FHTC, revealing that a faction of GPs in Kerala has been able to complete this scheme (Government of India, 2023). Kerala Water Authority (KWA) is the Nodal body of the scheme to the state, and the gap analysis reveals an award-FHTC gap of 3,513,253 connections in the state. This shows the existence of hindrances to development processes in the state attributable mainly to implementation failures and popular uprisings against land accession (Kannan, 2022). Against this background of least fund utilisation of JJM across the state, UGP transpires as a forerunner in implementing the scheme.

Course of action

Before the project initiation, only 5 percent of the households in the selected GP were covered under piped water connection, and the adjacent GP, Aryanad, also reported the same situation (Government of India, 2023). Under the JJM, a joint effort is put forth by both the GPs to ensure tap water connection to all the 14,000 households of the panchayats. The severe water shortage issue was discussed in the village assemblies, which was then proposed via the GP body to the KWA and then taken up by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jalshakti, Government of India. Land accession is an important challenge in the project, and the concerned panchayats are responsible for identifying locations suitable for the construction of a pumping treatment unit. The GP identified a private property at an altitude of 185 meters and took the initiative to purchase the land using the GP plan fund to enable a water treatment unit. The unit draws water from the well constructed in the nearby river for purification, and from the elevation, water is supplied through pipelines to the households.

This large-scale project, worth Rs. 146 crores (17,469,757 USD), is being funded with the cooperation of the union government, state government, GP and beneficiaries at 50%, 25%, 15% and 10%, respectively. The beneficiary contribution to the project amounts to around Rs. 2000 (24 USD) per household, which is collected by the GP and handed over to the KWA. Apart from the budget to maintain roads damaged in the laying of the pipelines, an amount of Rs. 5 crores (598,279 USD) is allotted to the GP as well, ensuring that no externalities will be detrimental to the daily lives of the residents. The project guidelines state that to equip the GPs, the district executive officer has formed an Implementation Supporting Agency. For the project to be implemented according to its objectives, the participation of end beneficiaries is essential. Towards this, awareness has to be generated regarding the operations and running of the project. So, in UGP, Kudumbashree (Women Self Help Groups (SHG)) takes up the capacity development activities by training the members regarding the importance of the project and equipping them with the skills necessary for running the system such as collection of beneficiary fees and user fees. The Women SHG members, with their large network, continue the dissemination of information among the end-beneficiaries in the panchayats.

Affect on SDGs

With the direct motive of ensuring clean water to citizens, this flagship mission of the centre is expected to improve the nation's status in SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation by ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water for all. The project indicates infrastructural improvements through pipe water connection to all houses, improving reliable and resilient infrastructure in the GP, which provides affordable and equitable access for all, directly impacting SDG 9. The project hopes to increase water-use efficiency in the concerned villages and address water scarcity through the supply of freshwater through integrated water resources management, appropriating the participation of local communities. With sustainable management, efficient use of the nearby river, and peculiar geomorphology, the project helps attain SDG12: Responsible Production and Consumption in the GP. The project is proposed to cover all the households in the GP irrespective of their economic status, ensuring equal rights to basic services, a target covered under SDG 1: No Poverty. By ensuring

access to a year-round clean water supply, this project indirectly impacts SDG 2 as well. Likewise, clean water leads to reduced usage of unfiltered water, improving the Good Health and Well-being of the citizens (SDG 3). Finally, this policy framework induces resource efficiency by adopting integrated policy, impacting SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. These affects are shown in **Figure 1**.

Drinking Water for Every House



Figure 1. Project on drinking water for every house: Affect on SDGs.

3.2.2. Project II: Revitalising agriculture through paddy cultivation

About the project

The UGP is a special ecological zone capable of preventing natural disasters to some extent, as per the scientific assessments conducted and published by the GP. The GP has evolved an action plan to protect this environment by uplifting the agricultural sector. UGP has brought about positive changes in the agriculture sector as a result of decentralised planning activities, accomplished through incorporating paddy cultivation in the Kedaram (Project aimed at increasing paddy cultivation) project of the Local Self Government Department (LSGD). This revitalising agriculture project mainly extends financial support to the farmers in the form of subsidies towards operational and capital costs, as well as labour support by appropriating manpower in the form of workforce available with the GP.

Course of Action

Recent trends, as per the autonomous studies conducted by the GP, show a considerable decrease in agricultural production in the area. Loss of water in the topsoil due to soil erosion, lack of scientific fertilisation, ignorance of the scientific methods of farming, poor infrastructure facilities and lack of availability of agricultural labour are several attributes that contribute to this circumstance. The trend is also visible in the cultivation of paddy, which was once the most important cultivation in the GP. Owing to the decrease in profitability, the fallow trend has increased, drastically reducing paddy cultivation from a total area of 45 hectares to less than 10 acres.

Interest in paddy cultivation has been brought back to the farmers through the priority given to the development of infrastructure in paddy fields and the provision of seeds, fertilisers and other inputs to farmers at subsidised rates (Focus Group Discussion, 2023). Currently, Uzhamalakkal is the only GP undertaking paddy cultivation in the respective Block Panchayat. The paddy field of 3.36 hectares is cultivated through a cluster-based farming group of 30 members. The LSGD project has mandated a maximum subsidy of Rs. 25,000 (300 USD) per hectare to meet procuring costs, obtaining manure, and engaging labour and capital, which is accountably transferred to the beneficiaries. Moreover, all possible economic support, such as the provision of a liming subsidy of Rs. 5400 (65 USD), sustainable rice

development scheme supports worth Rs. 5500 (66 USD) per hectare, and a production bonus of Rs. 100 (1 USD) per hectare, are appropriated through the efficiently working Krishibhavan (Agriculture Office) in the GP. Acknowledging the lean of farmers towards mechanised farming methods, emphasis has been placed on such infrastructural development to reduce production costs and ensure the sustainability of paddy cultivation in the long run. Towards this, the scheme for empowering clusters to mechanisation put forth by the Department of Agriculture is utilised. The scheme mandates that clusters may buy machines at a loan, of which 90 percent will be reimbursed as a subsidy. The destruction of crops by wild bores is rampant in the area, and to address this, a solar fencing scheme has been running since the last financial year, and bore-up repellent has also been given through the Agriculture Office.

The project was completed with the help of the Rashtriya Krushi Vikas Yojana (Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sector Rejuvenation) scheme, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Government of India, which aims to make farming a remunerative activity by funding employment in the farming sector as a criterion. The UGP appropriated this fund by employing Karshika Karmasena (Agricultural Technicians) members who are cultivating in the paddy fields. An action plan was prepared to make the cultivating land as well as the fallow land suitable for this method of cultivation, using all possible measures of convergence and ensuring the cooperation of farmers and farm labourers. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme workforce was appropriated to clean the fallow land and prepare the land for cultivation. With the Women SHG neighbourhood linking and the formation of the Agricultural Work Force, the works were streamlined. To ensure proper irrigation, the UGP implemented a watershed-based master plan. Upon harvesting, rice was to be stored in a safe house facilitated by the UGP. A marketing chain has been started by collecting organic agricultural products and commencing a Marketing Center. Thus, from preparing the land to marketing the rice harvested, the UGP assists the farmers in improving paddy cultivation. This support is translated in terms of output as well, by the paddy fields reaping an average output of two tons per hectare during each harvest.

Affect on SDGs

The GP took up the selected Paddy Field project with the noble aim of increasing productivity in the sector by incentivising through income and subsidy schemes. These supported activities promote resilient practices in paddy cultivation, ensuring the sustainability of the project and making it the prime booster of SDG 2 in the GP. With the provision of infrastructure for mechanisation, provision of storage facility, and a marketing channel, the project contributes to SDG 9. With the promotion of the labour-intensive sector, the GP can provide a steady income for the farmers involved in the cultivation. Even though the cluster-based farming group has only thirty members, the synergy through Women SHG and Agriculture Technicians paves the way for employing at least sixty people in this project, inducing heightened achievement in SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. This further creates positive impacts in SDG 10 through the wage protection policies inherent in the project and also improves SDG 5 by appropriating activities of the Women SHGs. All these activities improve the indicators of SDG 1: No Poverty in the GP. As the project has procurement

practices as a component, improvements in Responsible Production can also be seen. With the sale of organic rice cultivated, the GP also ensures the Good Health of the citizens. As the project was initiated to reverse the fallow condition of the wetlands, this project also has a direct bearing on SDG 15. The protection of wetlands is an indirect subcomponent of SDG 6, and this further strengthens the resilience of the geography to natural disasters, indirectly impacting SDG 13: Climate Action. The affects identified are illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Revitalising Agriculture

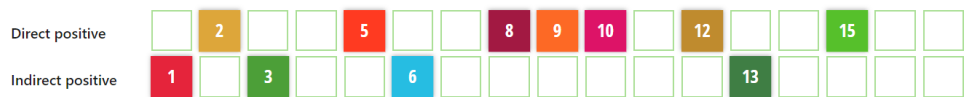


Figure 2. Project on revitalising agriculture: Affect on SDGs.

3.2.3. Project III: Rehabilitation of differently abled through BUDS school and BUDS rehabilitation centre

About the project

The BUDS project is a flagship project operated by the GP to uplift the lives of the differently abled poor population in the village by delivering them with a stress-free environment, providing education, improving interpersonal skills, and promoting leisure and social life. The idea of BUDS institutions—BUDS School and BUDS Rehabilitation Centre (BRC)—in itself is built upon a cooperative framework, wherein the Social Justice department serves as the apex regulator, various departments provide financial assistance to the development of the infrastructure, GPs function as the administrative body through the transfer of power, Women SHG functions as the support and guidance body, along with community participation to ease the inclusion process of the differently abled to the society. These institutions help in the overall growth of the students through activities specifically designed to create a haven for them. The institution is not just limited to improving the students but also provides help to the families by addressing the emotional and economic hardships of the families in attending to their wards.

Course of action

The BUDS school in UGP was started in 1998, identifying the need for special schools in the panchayat. The school was set up by the panchayat, which initially offered comprehensive training to an appointed staff member and three needy families. Traversing the initial-stage adversities regarding the lack of infrastructure and facilities, the BUDS school in UGP now houses both the school and the BRC. The growth of the institution is due to proper convergence and systemic governance exemplified in the basic infrastructure itself, such that it is functioning in the Panchayat-owned building and land. Currently, the institution accommodates twenty-four students of the Mentally-Retarded category over the age of eighteen and functions with two teachers, one helper, and one driver for the owned vehicle. The permissible teacher-student ratio is 1:8, but due to the excess demand, the institution is working on a ratio of 1:16. The admission to the school is direct; parents of the needy directly

contact the teacher, ensuring no leakages in the system. Wide awareness regarding the functioning of the institution is passed on through neighbourhood groups, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, and ward-level representatives. The panchayat-owned vehicle picks up the students from their houses and drops them off at the institution. The students engage in a systematic schedule designed to enrich their lives by imparting colours to their thoughts and voicing their minds. The institution provides breakfast and lunch to the students, funded by the Social Justice department, ensuring proper dietary intake is met. Apart from the educational aspects, the institution also ensures that a monthly health checkup of the students is undertaken by converging with the Family Health Centre.

For such a socially relevant institution, a multi-level monitoring system is mandatory to ensure service is rendered to the neediest. The institution's functioning is overseen by the GP welfare committee, the management committee, and the mothers' Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). The welfare committee meeting is held thrice a year, with the committee president as the chair, GP president, vice president, assistant secretary and others as members to examine the working of the institution. The management committee is a multistakeholder monitoring board that meets four times a year to oversee the development of the institution. All the meetings and decisions of the monitoring bodies are recorded, ensuring transparency.

A large-scale project of this quantum cannot be run by the GP alone with limited funds and resources, necessitating a multiparty approach. The funding is supported by the higher local governance units, and the honorarium of the teachers is shared by the GP and Block Panchayat, such that the GP pays for nine months, and the Block Panchayat pays the rest. Thus, the institution is keyed on the foundation of convergence and is accelerated through innovative practices. Vocational rehabilitation of parents is also a major component in the functioning of this particular BUDS institution. The Women SHG district mission funds the component in kind and cash by providing training in making cloth bags and seed pens and a lump sum fund of Rs.1,49,000 (1782 USD). This unit is registered as a society, and the products are standardised and branded as '*Ithal*' and sold along with all the other '*Ithal*' products accumulated from other BRCs in the state, providing a mode of livelihood for the parents.

Affect on SDGs

The BUDS school was envisioned as a platform of change that upholds the principle of inclusivity by providing sufficient infrastructure to enable quality education for vulnerable sections. By eliminating disparities and ensuring their access to education in a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment, this project has direct implications for SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 9: Infrastructure, Industry and Innovation. Through rendering education and skills, a community so sidelined in society is brought to the forefront, reducing the evils of inequalities. The students of the institution are mostly from poor economic backgrounds, with little to no access to nutritious food. With the meals offered in the institution, their dietary needs are met, improving the indicators of Zero Hunger. An important component in developing Sustainable Communities is the provision of safe, affordable transportation systems for vulnerable groups. Through the owned vehicle, the institution ensures that this

component is achieved. The differently abled population often needs more access to quality healthcare. With the monthly visit from the Family Health Centre, proper and essential health care services can be availed by them in a comfortable space. It is to be noted that one of the monitoring bodies is the Mothers’ Parent-Teacher Association. Often, in the case of such children, fathers abandon the family, leaving the mother to take care of the child. A group of such strong women at the decision-making level is a true example of Gender Empowerment (SDG 5). Also, through the vocational rehabilitation programme, a parallel income source is generated for the parents, inducing improvements in SDG 8. Thus, BUDS schools and BRC are essentially social protection systems, ensuring coverage of the poor and vulnerable through proper institutional mechanisms, infrastructure, and convergence flow in place. These affects are illustrated in **Figure 3**.

Rehabilitation of Differently Abled

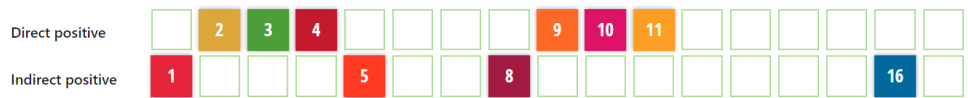


figure 3. project on Rehabilitation of Differently Abled: Affect on SDGs.

3.2.4. Project IV: Farm plan management through farm plan-based production programme

About the project

With the introduction of the Farm Plan-based Development Approach in 2022–2023, Kerala saw a shift from the individual crop-based approach to an integrated multiple cropping farming-based development of holdings. This approach was conceptualised with the realisation that scientific interventions and aiding infrastructure improvements are to be done at the basic farm unit to effectively tap resource potentials. Apart from agriculture activities, allied sector activities such as animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries are also included in this comprehensive project. Thus, through the scientific selection of components, improved infrastructure, and sustainable agro-management practices, the production economy of the state can be enlarged, and the income of the farmer can be enhanced. The state guidelines mandate that the project be implemented under three schemes, monitored by the additional director of Agriculture. The three schemes cover all the stages from pre-production to supply of the end products. The three schemes under the approach are: (a) Farm Plan-based Production Programme; (b) Scheme on the Development of Production Organisations and Technology Support; and (c) Scheme on Supply Chain/Value Chain Development and Integration (Government of Kerala, 2024).

Course of action

The farm plan-based production programme is a flagship project of the state with a total project outlay of Rs. 1200 lakhs (1,435,407 USD) for pre-production and production support of inputs and services for the establishment of model farms. The project appropriates all possible convergence and monitoring measures to create the desired impact. As the project in its entirety is based on scientific interventions in

agricultural practices, Agriculture Offices, with the support of LSGIs, are the implementing body. The Agriculture Office at the GP level aims to identify individual farm units having a minimum area of 10 cents to a maximum area of 200 cents. The units are developed based on the scientific resource-based plan prepared by the agriculture officer in consultation with the farmers and the scientists from Kerala Agricultural University, which is attached to block-level agriculture knowledge centres. Under this project, the focus is on an integrated farming system-based model and cropping systems based on coconut, spices, vegetables, and fruits, along with a suitable mix of livestock. For the development of allied activities, support from respective departments is also tapped. Conservation of natural resource base is an important component of the project, leading to earmarking a total outlay of Rs. 50 lakhs (59,828 USD) towards farm plan-based soil and water conservation. By scientifically testing the soil and providing soil health cards, the base is strengthened. Along with the incentives towards mechanisation, credit support through Farmer Credit Cards is also arranged. An important system used to ensure transparency in the implementation of the project is that the assistance will be entirely technical and not through cash transfers.

The UGP identified ten units in 2022–2023, of which one was an integrated farm unit. The committee headed by the agriculture officer devised the best farm plan for the said units based on the tests conducted in the field, geographical requirements, cost-benefit ratio evolved, and forecasted returns for the next five years. Towards the development of the unit to an integrated farm holding, a subsidy of Rs. 25,000 (299 USD) was sanctioned, which is matched for the materials purchased. For the current year, fifteen new farm units were identified, and support was extended, combining all line departments. To ensure that there are no leakages, geotagging along with their resource database, was made mandatory this year.

Affect on SDGs

Since the project enhances rural agricultural productive capacity through research, extension services and infrastructural improvements (SDG 9), it is sure to develop a sustainable food production system, which improves SDG 2: Zero Hunger. The project has scope for the provision of paid labour, promoting economic self-reliance among cultivators (SDG 8), which further plays a great role in reducing poverty (SDG 1) and inequalities (SDG 10) in society. Also, the project mandates that 50 percent of the selected holdings must be owned by women, promoting gender equality (SDG 5). With scientific backing, sustainable use of soil and water (SDG 6) is guaranteed, promoting sustainable use of Land (SDG 15) through Responsible Production (SDG 12). This further points to the aspect of capacity building to meet Climate Change (SDG 13). As the production is to be organic, healthy consumption through the consumption chain is ensured, improving health indicators (SDG 3). As a whole, the project ensures sustainable communities (SDG 11) in the state, protecting traditional agricultural practices using scientific innovations. These affects are illustrated in **Figure 4**.

Farm Plan Management



Figure 4. Project on farm plan management: Affect on SDGs.

3.2.5. Project V: Garbage disposal

About the project

According to official estimates, the total quantity of waste generated in Kerala every year is about 22 metric tons (Government of Kerala, 2023b). The management of biodegradable waste is the accountability of individual housing units. In contrast, the tracking, management and disposal of non-biodegradable waste is the responsibility of the government to prevent mishandling of garbage. To attain sustainable sanitation through scientific garbage management systems, the efficacy of the decentralised regime is utilised, and the GPs, which are the closest to the centres of garbage generation, are entrusted with the subject of sanitation and waste disposal. For this purpose, a specialised agency was constituted by the state government as a micro-entrepreneurial initiative named Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) under the Women SHG mission, supervised by *Suchitwa* Mission (technical support group in the waste management sector) and *Haritha Kerala* Mission (eco-friendly development initiatives). All the GPs have formed HKS and are assigned to collect, transport, process, recycle/dispose of, and manage inorganic garbage materials. The group also guides households on organic garbage management to achieve the goal of a garbage-free Kerala.

Course of action

The UGP owes its successful feat of bagging awards to the exceptionally well-working HKS. The panchayat is graded first in the Sanitary panchayat awards in Thiruvananthapuram district. Also, the Swaraj trophy won this year was based on the water and sanitation component. So, the awards serve as a testament to the GP's achievements in the sanitation component. There are 30 HKS members in the GP, with two posted in each ward, and the HKS members collect non-biodegradable garbage from households and collect monthly user fees. The GP ensures that the user fee is transferred monthly to the members after deducting the expenses. The UGP collects 92 percent of user fees, as opposed to the lower collection of other GPs. This is proof of how much the GP has sensitised its citizens to the importance of garbage management.

The management of garbage collection and disposal follows an orderly, well-defined process. Nonbiodegradable garbage like plastic, bottles, PVC, steel, tubes, e-garbage, etc., are collected from households at regular intervals. In marking collection and user fees, UGP has installed Quick Response codes to ensure end-to-end transparency in each household, which is the first phase in the state government's Smart Garbage Monitor System. The garbage collected is then delivered to mini material collection centres in each ward and then to the Material Collection Facility (MCF) at the GP level. The garbage is systematically sorted into categories there. A

policy intervention that created a huge difference in the income of the HKS members is the baling machine unit installed at the main MCF to compress plastic garbage into blocks. The administration applied for the baling machine unit through the Swatch Bharat Gramin (Clean India Rural) fund, and the project was approved. The difference the baling machine created is the removal of an intermediary in the process. In other GPs, the garbage segregated is collected by Clean Kerala Company, which is then taken to bailing machine units, processed, pressed and used in road tarring. In UGP, the HKS directly does the bailing process, improving their income. The e-garbage collected is sorted and collected by Clean Kerala Company, which is taken to neighbouring states to be disposed of properly. The medical garbage is collected by the IMAGE Consortium, which specialises in the disposal of medical garbage. Thus, a systematic disposal of garbage generated in the GP is ensured.

Affect on SDGs

The important impact this project produces is on SDG 11, relating to ensuring sanitation in communities through integrated management of garbage. The SDG 12 indices relevant to creating environmentally sound frameworks for managing and reducing all kinds of garbage also come under the objectives of this project. The garbage management system is run with the infrastructural support of a vehicle for collecting garbage from households and a baling machine (SDG 9). With the baling infrastructure added, sustainable economic benefits are reaped by the HKS members (SDG 8). By ensuring stable income and jobs for marginalised women, this project creates impacts on their economic and social lives, leading to a reduction in poverty (SDG 1) and inequalities (SDG 10) and, further, heightened empowerment (SDG 5). Proper garbage management ensures that no garbage is not attended to, safeguarding the population from vector-borne diseases spread by improper disposal of garbage (SDG 3). The Affect on SDGs are shown in **Figure 5** below.

Garbage Disposal

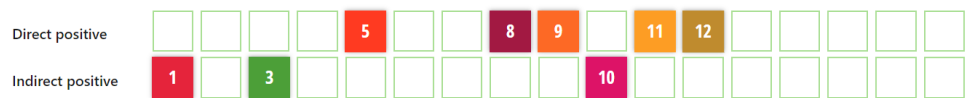


Figure 5. Project on garbage disposal: Affect on SDGs.

4. Discussion

With the advent of the post-2015 development agenda and the consequent policy shift towards placing the local at the core of action, the nations built on decentralised development gained momentum in attaining SDGs (Boadway and Dougherty, 2018). India, with its history of decentralised planning, could easily transfer to local governments the functions pertaining to SDGs, owing to the resource dependency and policy harmony exhibited at the centre and local levels. Harnessing this pre-existing structure and engaging in a more democratic and decentralised method through the formation of NITI Aayog at the centre, collaborative planning for SDGs is set in motion in the country (Guha and Chakrabarti, 2019; Ranjan, 2023). The GPs in India mandated to work in tandem with international goals and priorities set by the nation

are to be the cover image of localisation. This function of GPs is met through a cyclical process of GPDP preparation, which collects feedback from the stakeholders, analyses the viability by identifying the resource envelope and transforms the developmental needs into plans for implementation. The transformation of needs into plans is vital in the process, such that only those GPs who evolve a systematic plan that effectively places all the development priorities in their GPDP can be the frontrunners. This is a virtuous avenue for the GPs as they stand as the cornerstone of the nation's developmental aspirations. UGP, charged with its commitment to appropriate all possible positive economies to its citizens, is one such frontrunner.

Of the nine Sankalp themes, the 'Village with Self-Sufficient Infrastructure' theme encompasses the development of both hard and soft infrastructure to bring about improved quality of living for the residents. Through undertaking projects in a synchronised convergence with other development-oriented schemes available to the GP, the composite effects brought about through this theme are bound to be multi-dimensional (Ghosal, 2013; Nirala, 2020). The UGP primarily provides weightage to hard infrastructure, as they work on the principle that an asset created now will transfigure into the cornerstone for future growth. The development of underlying soft infrastructure in the form of education and health of the residents, as well as improved democratic systems, are also accounted for in the UGP under this theme. Thus, with the systemic selection of projects through a thorough and proper study of the project guidelines, the viability of the projects towards infrastructural development is ensured. The GP has proven results of this exercise in the form of improved economic benefits from a baling machine unit, water purification unit of the JJM project, BUDS institution infrastructure functioning as a livelihood rehabilitation centre to the differently abled children, and farm plan-based units serving as real-time role models. Consequently, the beneficiaries experience improved lifestyle and well-being, empowering them to strive towards further growth. To realise these multidimensional benefits, the GP has undertaken certain administrative efforts, which could be categorised into three broad dimensions, further delved into in the following paragraphs.

The low fund utilisation capacity of local governments has hindered the creation of livelihood and durable assets in the nation (Chaturvedi, 2021). Realising this, the GP combined the efforts of machinery and members to achieve the initial goal of 100% fund utilisation. While the average fund utilisation in the GPs of the state is at 90%, the UGP has achieved this tremendous feat consecutively since 2020 (Government of Kerala, 2023a). Once the goal was attained, the executive ensured the sustainability of full fund utilisation by converging with projects of centre, state and line departments on the thematic areas, thereby inducing further growth. Thus, the activities of the GP prove that the optimum utilisation of machinery by translating schemes to fund-backed projects can make the local body a frontrunner, reiterating the importance of development plans formulated through effective and responsive application of Good Governance. This further accelerates the importance of the integration of central and state schemes. The appropriation of all possible convergence measures induces development in the GP, such that the GP can select projects suitable to the local needs per their administrative and technical guidelines. The analysis of projects justifies that UGP is working to meet the demands of the population while simultaneously aiming

for their overall development. The drinking water project is entirely funded by the centre and supported by the state nodal department and GP manpower. To revitalise agriculture, the GP has adopted state projects and appropriated a centrally sponsored scheme towards funding for agriculture technicians. The rest of the projects are run by the effective combination of the state's three-tier governance structure, providing interventions wherever necessary. Thus, the self-sufficient infrastructure projects are up and running in the GP, appropriating all possible convergence with the state, upper tiers, line departments, dedicated working bodies, and citizens.

Being the closest rung of administration to the people, the GPs are the best bodies to assimilate community participation in project implementation, placing the community as the leaders of localisation. Empirical studies have revealed that the efficient working of the GPs is positively correlated with transparency of governance and community engagement (John and Nayak, 2023). In UGP, the sustainability of the projects undertaken is ensured through the elements of community ownership. Since the initiation of the projects is mainly through the popular needs raised through the village assemblies, the community propels the requirements for infrastructure, which are further planned and projectised by the administration. The direct participation of the population through purpose-driven groups and indirect participation by adhering to the project guidelines serve as the cornerstone in the effective delivery of the projects. Thus, all the infrastructural projects developed in UGP are successful due to the maintenance of proper channels of implementation, originating from the needs of the population in the areas of water, sanitation, health, and education, as encountered in the case studies, exhibiting complete transparency and accountability to the community.

The monitoring mechanisms for the successful implementation of infrastructure projects are strongly in place. The GPDP mandates that both project-level and plan-level monitoring mechanisms must operate simultaneously. Such mechanisms for the robust application of GPDP include community-based monitoring mechanisms, monitoring bodies, field monitoring by officials, IT monitoring, and plan monitoring at the upper levels (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2018). The community-based monitoring is done effectively through the Women SHGs, Agriculture Technicians, and Cluster-based farming units, according to the structure of the project. The projects of greater quantum have multi-level monitoring at the community, project implementation, and GP administration levels, as seen in the case of BUDS school. The farm activities are monitored primarily by the Agriculture Officer of the GP Agriculture Office. The relevant committees do the plan-level monitoring at the GP, and strict geo-tagging and plan uploading are followed to be monitored at the state and central levels. This multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanism induces the feeling of ownership in citizens and accountability from the part of the implementing body, ensuring the sustainability of project implementation.

To ensure sustainability in the implementation process of innovative projects, a GP has to overcome several challenges. The UGP becomes a forerunner to other GPs by using innovations to tackle challenges highlighted in the existing literature (Government of India, 2018; Reddy, 2016). To address the issue of insufficient resource allocation to fulfil the projects as envisioned, the UGP decided to proceed with the convergence principle by mobilising both financial and human resources from

several agencies, including funds from the Centre Sector Schemes, State Sector Schemes, funds of the concerned departments, NGOs etc., and engaging labour from specialised agencies. Transparency in this regard is ensured through ensuring community participation at all levels, the presentation of the GPDP in the Grama Sabha, and the uploading of the same in the Central government's Panchayat Enterprise Suite portal. Inadequate community participation in the planning process is a significant issue. UGP overcame this obstacle by directly creating awareness among the populace and indirectly through community-based organisations. This awareness creation helped reduce resistance from beneficiary groups; for instance, most were willing to pay user fees for the Drinking Water project and the Garbage Disposal project. The UGP could also generate positive economies, such that the neighbouring GPs could converge to envision projects with considerably lesser costs. For instance, UGP works with Aryanad GP to solve the water crisis in these geographically similar localities, substantially reducing costs. Other GPs can well emulate these innovative actions taken by UGP to address the challenges to promote global goals. The case studies of different infrastructure-based projects undertaken in UGP endorse the localisation principle that with proper planning and implementation of such projects, the lowest tier of administration in the nation can significantly contribute to the improvement of national development targets. Correspondingly, through the initial provision of basic and support infrastructure to the pain areas, and then sustainably managing the asset created by utilising both financial and human resources stemmed from active community participation, the infrastructural projects undertaken ensure that the village is, indeed, becoming 'self-sufficient', reiterating the principle of sustainability. Thus, the success exhibited by UGP in the implementation of projects aiming for Sustainable Development through improvements in infrastructure can be well emulated by other GPs in the nation.

5. Conclusion

The GPs are the heart of the nation's participatory planning process, which further places them at the core of localisation. The GPDP, based on the ideologies of equity and inclusiveness, are the vehicle for local development as they match people's needs, basic services, and aspirations. As the GPs are the institutions closest to the common people, the impact of undertaking projects at the GP will directly affect their lives, propelling the importance of demand-driven projectisation. The projects are finalised from a list of feasible and executable works generated from the prioritised activities identified and prepared in consultation with technical personnel of line departments. The assistance from line departments helps induce synergy and increase local resource mobilisation, facilitating improvement in service delivery. Further, with the full and informed participation of all relevant local stakeholders, a localised SDG framework can be introduced in the GPDP through convergence and collaborations with multi-stakeholders. Thus, the felt needs of the population translate as the theme for improvement in the fiscal year. In line with this cyclical strategy, the best-performing GP of the state identified that the needs of the population reflect further development, and the administration came to a consensus that the development of hard and soft infrastructure is the pathway to sustain the attained development and improve

further. In this regard, Uzhamalakkal Grama Panchayat, focusing on infrastructure development, has become one of the best-performing GPs in the state.

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