

Research Paper

# Unveiling The Gender Gap: Investigating Gender-Specific Barriers And Challenges Impeding Skill Development In Ddugky Programs In Kerala

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**Abstract:** In education, Gender Equity (GE) is pivotal for fostering social empowerment and building a more inclusive society. Gender-based disparities in access to education remain prevalent despite significant advancements. Skill Development (SD) is crucial for fulfilling the aspirations of a burgeoning young population in today's competitive landscape. The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), which seeks to address this issue by providing placement-related SD opportunities for rural youth, was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development. Limited research focuses on the Gender Gap (GG) that hinders skill acquisition through these programs while numerous studies examine the DDU-GKY scheme's effectiveness. Also, this study seeks to address this gap by analysing the gender-specific barriers and challenges that undermine the success of DDU-GKY initiatives in Kerala. To gain a better understanding of the variables preventing SD in the area, a sample study of 150 participants from different DDU-GKY centers in Kerala was conducted.

**Keywords:** Skill Development, Gender Gap, DDUGKY, Gender-Specific Barriers.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In India, the employment sector faces significant challenges due to its structural complexities, including a large informal workforce, high under-employment rates, skill gaps, and rigid labor laws and institutions affecting labor markets. The Govt. of India has initiated several SD programs among which DDUGKY is a notable one [1, 2, and 3]. It is a demand-driven, placement-related SD intervention by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. The program is designed to equip impoverished rural youth with the essential knowledge, mindset, and skills to secure employment in the formal sector [4, 5, and 6]. The occupational aspirations of the SD initiative under the DDU-GKY program are illustrated in Figure 1.

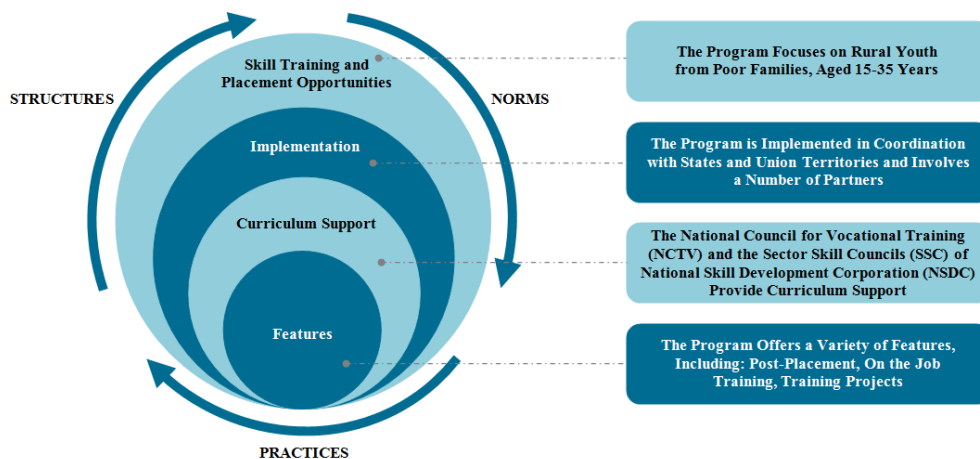


Figure 1: Impact of DDU-GKY initiatives

Gender inequality (GI) is a global phenomenon, which manifests itself in diverse forms depending on the socio-economic condition of society. In several countries, the GG is substantial; also, women's productivity levels remain low due to a lack of access to education and other opportunities [7, 8]. Gender-specific challenges that impede SD programs include social norms that prioritize male education over female, resulting in lower access for women. Furthermore, logistical barriers, such as lack of childcare and mobility issues, prevent women from enrolling and completing these programs [9, 10].

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In education and SD, gender disparities continue to hinder equitable economic and social progress, despite numerous initiatives aimed at empowering rural youth. The DDU-GKY, which is an SD program designed to enhance employability and entrepreneurship, has made significant strides in providing opportunities for rural populations. Nevertheless, the program's effectiveness is often undermined by persistent gender-specific challenges. These challenges, including societal norms, logistical barriers, economic constraints, and systemic biases, limit the participation and success of women in skill acquisition initiatives. In Kerala, gender disparity is relatively lower compared to other states; however, DDU-GKY places significant emphasis on training women, reserving 33% of seats for them, along with 50% for SC/ST candidates and 15% for minorities. These marginalized communities themselves experience gender disparities, raising the question of whether such inequalities impact the outcomes of DDU-GKY programs in Kerala. This study aims to uncover the underlying dynamics that perpetuate GI in SD by investigating the factors that impede women's enrolment, training experiences, job placements, and retention. The findings will give insight into the development of targeted strategies to bridge these gaps and foster more inclusive skill development. It may also promote the effective implementation of DDU-GKY programs, ultimately strengthening GE and empowering rural youth in the region.

### **1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is of critical importance in addressing the gender-specific challenges that impede the effectiveness of the DDU-GKY programs in Kerala. The research offers valuable insights into the socio-cultural, economic, and systemic factors contributing to the GG by exploring the barriers faced by women in accessing, participating in, and benefiting from these SD initiatives. The study may provide valuable resources for (i) policymakers, (ii) practitioners, and (iii) stakeholders in the field of SD and youth empowerment. Understanding these challenges will enable the formulation of more inclusive policies and targeted interventions to enhance the participation and success of women in DDU-GKY programs. Also, the study will contribute to refining the Skill India initiative by aligning its strategies with the specific needs and aspirations of rural women in Kerala. The research aims to foster greater employability, economic independence, and social empowerment for women by addressing gender inequities in SD, thereby contributing to the overall development of rural communities. Besides, the study's outcomes will provide a foundation for future research on gender-focused improvements in SD initiatives, creating pathways for sustainable and inclusive growth.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To examine challenges to Gender equity in DDUGKY programs in Kerala.
- To appraise the Gender Gap challenges in (i) enrolment, (ii) training, (iii) finding job appointments, (iv) placement, and (v) retention of the candidates trained in DDUGKY programs
- To recommend measures to bridge the GGs, improve the DDUGKY program implementation, and facilitate SD activities in Kerala.

The remaining part is arranged as follows: Section 2 addresses the existing literature review, Section 3 depicts the research methodology, Section 4 represents the analysis results and discusses the analysis, and finally, Section 5 concludes the paper and proposes a new direction for advancing research with future scope.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

V. Lalitha [2019] aimed to analyse the skill training for rural Youth under DDU-GKY at NAC in Telangana. By using a simple random sampling technique, a total of 430 candidates who had undergone skill training at NAC PIA were considered. As per the findings, the youth were highly inspired after joining the training. Nevertheless, rigid statistical analysis could not be made due to the lack of normality in the data.

Deepa M. J [2022] considered the effectiveness of SD programs and factors affecting SD programs and employability under the DDUGKY. By employing a simple random sampling technique, 154 samples were collected as of the PIAs in the Kancheepuram district. As per the study, mobilization had a very serious impact on the scheme's effectiveness. Also, domain knowledge and communication are crucial in the employability of the respondents. There was an effective implementation in the selected district; however, they weren't up to the expectations at certain points.

Sakshi [2023] examined young women's specific constraints in accessing skilling opportunities. Also, this study identified the government intervention to set up National Skill Training Institutes (NSTI) for promising women's participation in skills. To collect data from 1807 respondents, both qualitative and quantitative research was utilized. As per the outcome, most female students cited physical access to the ITIs as a barrier due to their remote location along with lack of transportation. The NCVT maintained that apprenticeship data did not distinguish between ITI enrolled and fresh apprentices.

Sandhya Rani [2016] scrutinized the SD programs for reducing GI in India. The study was centered on secondary data as of the necessary published and unpublished online information. As per the study, India grappled with a dual challenge of an acute shortage of highly skilled labor and the unemployability of a significant portion of its educated workforce. Also, the study showed that the state government established state-level missions to gear SD activities in the Mission mode with appropriate structures.

Antarjeeta Nayak and Ramakrishna Biswal [2023] recognized the engagement of tribal and rural communities with Skill India, focusing on awareness, participation, and challenges. By using systematic random sampling, two hundred rural and tribal women were considered. Based on descriptive statistics, the study's findings were analyzed. Lastly, the study proved that the Skill India program tried to promote women's participation in SD and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, there was still a long way to go to achieve gender parity. Besides, women participation in the program remained low.

Yogesh. C. Joshi and Darshana Dave [2018] aimed at SD programs and their issues and challenges in rural Gujarat. Lastly, the result concluded that the government implemented several SD schemes and programs in rural areas of Gujarat. The awareness of these schemes was good, but further improvement was needed among youth in rural areas. Nevertheless, the SD courses were done by a lower proportion of respondents in rural areas.

Ashutosh Tripathi [2023] discovered the factors influencing students' vocational training program enrollment (PMKVY, DDUGKY, UPSDM, ITI). The primary source of data was 597 participants from several vocational training centres in Uttar Pradesh. The result of the study was explored based on a quantitative approach. The study demonstrated that these programs welcomed people from all backgrounds and genders. Compared to other ages, youth were keen on these programs to boost their careers. Nevertheless, the study was only limited to the geographical context of the Manipur district, whereas the same result was not generalizable to other geographical areas.

Shashi Bala and Puja Singhal [2019] elucidated the gender issues in India's technical along vocational education programs. Here, a gender-based approach was adopted to find female outcomes compared to male outcomes. As per the study, skill premiums were falling for women in labor-intensive sectors along with rising in capital-intensive sectors. Nevertheless, it had no huge effect on the total workforce's skill premium owing to the lower female labor force participation rate.

Anweshaa Ghosh [2023] aimed to explore women's skills in non-traditional livelihoods. Case studies were selected from the Institute of Social Studies Trust in the non-traditional livelihoods network in India. By employing a gender-responsive as well as intersectional approach, the case studies were chosen and appraised. For skilling women, most schemes were in feminized forms of the work domain. These were designed as of a male perspective as well as were often blind or, at best, aware of women's unequal position in society in technical and better employable skills cases.

M. Soundarapandian *et al.* [2023] studied the role of DDU-GKY in empowering women along with weaker sections in India. Data was collected and analyzed from the DDU-GKY, particularly from the women and the weaker section category (SC/ST/Minorities) from 2014-15 to 2021-22. The study found that the SC, ST, and minorities benefited less from the training process than the women who took part in it. The COVID-19 pandemic had a key impact on project implementation agencies. Nevertheless, the data revealed that the number of female participants exceeded the stipulated level.

Despite extensive research on SD programs under DDU-GKY, gaps remain in understanding gender equity, particularly in Kerala. Prior studies focus on SD effectiveness and gender barriers but lack a Kerala-specific perspective. Sectoral disparities in training and employment remain underexplored. Additionally, long-term employment outcomes for women and policy effectiveness in promoting gender inclusion require deeper analysis. This study addresses these gaps by examining socio-cultural, economic, and systemic barriers to women's participation and retention in DDU-GKY, contributing to gender-inclusive policy recommendations.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a quantitative approach with random sampling to effectively investigate gender gaps and challenges in skill development under the DDU-GKY program in Kerala. Primary data are collected through a structured online survey via Google Forms, administered to 150 participants from various DDUGKY training centers in Kerala. A five-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") is used to measure both independent and dependent variables. The study follows rigorous ethical standards to safeguard

participant privacy and maintain anonymity. Informed consent is obtained from all participants before their engagement in the survey.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Here, the GE gap in education related to DDUGKY SD programs and the GG challenges in (i) enrolment, (ii) training, (iii) finding job appointments, (iv) placement, together with (v) retention of the trained candidates impeding SD in DDUGKY programs have been analyzed and discussed. Also, various effective measures to bridge the gaps and improve the DDUGKY program implementation in Kerala are discussed.

**Table 4. 1 Distribution of Respondents based on their Age, Gender, Education, Marital Status, and Community**

Characteristics		n	%
Gender	Male	55	36.67
	Female	95	63.33
Age	15-20	12	8
	20-25	58	38.67
	25-30	54	36
	30-35	20	13.33
	35-40	6	4
Education	SSLC	15	10
	Plus Two	58	38.67
	Graduation	55	36.67
	Post Graduation	22	14.67
Marital Status	Married	69	46
	Unmarried	75	50
	Divorced	6	4
Community	SC	35	23.33
	ST	39	26
	Minorities	64	42.67
	Others	12	8
Family Size	More than 9 Members	47	31.33
	7-9 Members	26	17.33
	4-6 Members	62	41.33
	Up to 3 Members	15	10
TOTAL		150	100

Source: Primary Data

#### 4.1 Gender equity gap in education related to DDUGKY skill development programs

By equipping individuals with essential skills and knowledge, education nurtures personal growth, social cohesion, and economic prosperity. It empowers people to subsidize their communities and partake in development processes. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023 indicates that The unemployment rate for women rose to 3.2% (up from 2.9% in 2022-23), while for men, it slightly decreased to 3.2% from 3.3(Directorate General of Employment, n.d.). Enrolling girls in educational and SD programs like DDUGKY opens opportunities for employment, informed decision-making, and broader life choices. DDUGKY has a strong emphasis on training women, with 33% of seats reserved for them, 50% for SC/ST candidates, and 15% for minorities. However Socioeconomic and cultural barriers hinder GE in SD in various forms.

**Key gender-related challenges in education and skill development**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	One-sample t-test with test value 3	
			T	Sig.
Socio-cultural barriers	3.93	0.87	21.175	0.000
Economic barriers	2.99	0.80	-0.382	0.703
Policy and systemic barriers	3.12	0.73	2.013	0.046

**(a) Socio-cultural Barriers**

3.93 is the mean score for socio-cultural barriers, with a 0.87 standard deviation, which depicts that respondents largely agreed these barriers significantly impact GE in SD. The one-sample t-test result ( $t = 21.175, p = 0.000$ ) shows a statistically significant result at the 0.05 level. This suggests that socio-cultural barriers, such as gender stereotypes, societal norms, and expectations, are widely perceived as crucial impediments to equitable participation in programs like DDUGKY. The high mean value and significant t-test reinforce the need to prioritize addressing these barriers through community education, awareness campaigns, and programs that challenge traditional norms.

**(b) Economic Barriers**

2.99 is the mean score for economic barriers with a 0.80 standard deviation, indicating a neutral overall perception among respondents. The t-test result ( $t = -0.382, p = 0.703$ ) is not statistically significant, meaning that respondents did not consistently view economic barriers, such as poverty, education costs, and opportunity costs, as major challenges. As per the neutral stance, economic constraints are either less impactful compared to other barriers or that they vary widely across individual circumstances. It is important to note that the DDUGKY course is entirely free, with no fees, free uniforms, free accommodation, and free books and materials provided to participants this finding suggests economic barriers may not be universally acknowledged, financial support mechanisms like scholarships and stipends should still be targeted to economically disadvantaged participants who may face these challenges.

**(c) Policy and Systemic Barriers**

3.12 is the mean score for policy and systemic barriers with a standard deviation of 0.73, reflecting a slightly positive perception. The t-test result ( $t=2.013, p=0.046$ ) is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that these barriers are meaningfully recognized as challenges to GE in SD programs. This includes issues like inadequate infrastructure and gender biases in curricula and teaching practices, with the latter being the more prominent concern. The significant t-test result highlights the measurable impact of these barriers although the mean value is slightly above neutral. Addressing these issues through systemic improvements, such as enhancing infrastructure and implementing inclusive curricula, can help reduce these barriers and promote GE.

**(a) Socio-cultural barriers**

Socio-cultural norms, shaped by traditional beliefs, significantly impede GE in education and SD. These barriers include:

- **Gender Stereotypes and Societal Expectations:** Gender stereotypes impose rigid roles for men and women, restricting girls' educational and SD opportunities. These societal norms, passed down through generations, disproportionately affect girls' participation. Among the respondents, 45% of the respondents identify gender stereotypes and societal expectations as significant barriers.
- **Early Marriage and Child Labour:** Early marriage and child labor are persistent issues despite legal prohibitions, especially in rural and marginalized communities. These practices perpetuate cycles of poverty and GI. However, only 25% of respondents identify early marriage and child labor as primary challenges to GE in SD programs.
- **Gender-Based Violence and Harassment:** Violence against women and girls, comprising domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and human trafficking, remains a significant deterrent to their participation in education and SD initiatives. Approximately 30% of participants identify gender-based violence and harassment as critical barriers to GE in DDUGKY programs.

The socio-cultural barriers impacting GE in DDUGKY SD programs are illustrated in Figure 2.

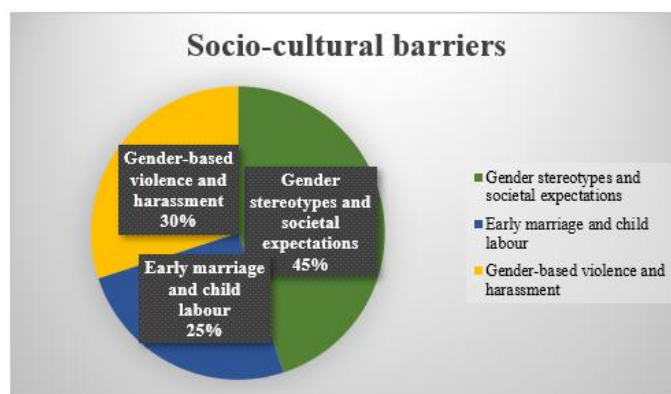


Figure 2: Socio-cultural barriers

### (b) Economic barriers

Economic barriers to education are financial obstacles that can make it difficult for people to access quality education. Budget constraints, limited resources, and systemic inequalities hinder individuals from low-income backgrounds from accessing quality education.

- **Poverty and its impact on girls' education:** Poverty is one of the main reasons why girls around the world do not get an education. The World Bank estimates that limited educational opportunities for girls cost countries between US\$15 trillion and \$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings. It has been observed that 55% of respondents point out that poverty and its impact on girls' education has a greater gender disparity challenge under the DDU-GKY scheme of SD.
- **Cost of education and opportunity costs for families:** Opportunity costs are a key consideration in cost-benefit analyses of education investments. They should be assessed with the learner in mind, not the school or system. Compared to poverty and its impact on girls' education, a considerable proportion of respondents (45%) agree that the cost of education and opportunity costs for families have a major challenge in GE in education enrolment in the DDUGKY scheme. Thus, Figure 3 represents the economic barriers to GE in DDUGKY programs.

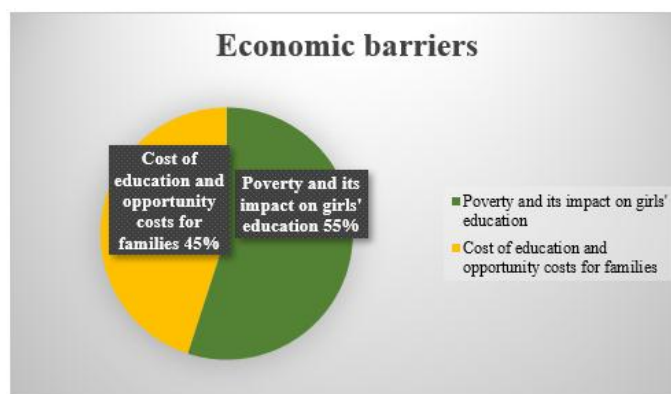


Figure 3: Economic barriers

### (c) Policy and systemic barriers

Systemic barriers are policies, practices, or procedures, which prevent people from participating fully in a situation or give some people unequal access to resources, opportunities, or rights. They can be based on geographical and racial background, class, gender, and ability.

- **Inadequate infrastructure:** DDUGKY centers are well-equipped with the necessary infrastructure, as projects are sanctioned only after meeting the required standards outlined in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). The SOP ensures training centers have proper facilities, including training rooms, electricity, clean water, and sanitation. Despite these provisions, 40% of participants still identify inadequate infrastructure as a challenge in addressing gender equality (GE) issues in DDUGKY skill development programs.
- **Gender biases in curriculum and teaching practices:** Gender bias is being unintentionally perpetuated by teachers by clearly defining gender-appropriate roles for girls and boys. Teachers encourage girls to join courses like Healthcare & Wellness, Beauty & Wellness, Apparel & Textiles, etc. Most participants are of the view that gender biases in curriculum and teaching practices are the major challenges in GE of SD, i.e. 60%. Figure 4 demonstrates the policy and systemic barriers in DDUGKY programs.

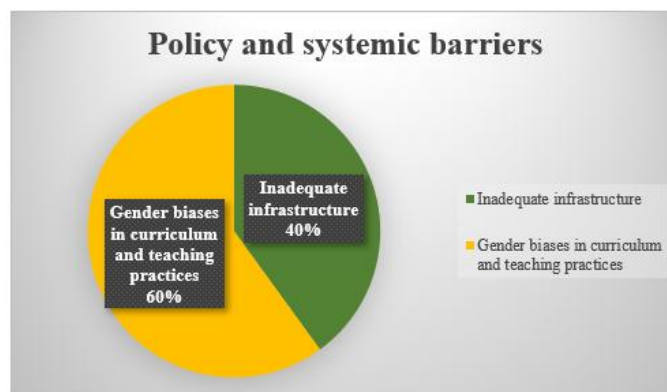


Figure 4: Policy and systemic barriers

#### 4.2 Gender Gap Challenges in Enrolment, Training, and Employment

The study examines the specific challenges related to the GG in enrolment, training, and employment outcomes within DDUGKY programs in Kerala. The findings reveal systemic barriers that hold back women’s participation and success in SD initiatives based on survey responses from 150 participants. Table 1 summarizes these challenges, key findings, and actionable implications. These implications are elaborated further to provide concrete measures that can be combined into the DDUGKY framework for effective implementation.

Table 1: Gender Gap Challenges in Enrolment, Training, and Employment in DDUGKY Programs

Category	Challenges	Key Findings	Implications
Enrolment	Societal norms and family responsibilities	45% of women cited societal norms and family responsibilities as a barrier.	Launch community engagement programs involving local leaders to challenge gender norms.
	Logistical barriers (transportation and distance)	41% of women cited a lack of safe transportation as a barrier.	Provide free or subsidized transport and establish satellite training centers in rural areas.
	Awareness gaps	42% of women were aware of the program compared to 68% of men.	Conduct awareness campaigns using local media, targeting women and their families.
Training Experiences	Inadequate facilities (e.g., childcare and restrooms)	54% of women reported inadequate infrastructure.	Develop women-friendly training centers with childcare facilities and separate restrooms.
	- Lack of mentorship and career guidance	Only 36% of women received adequate mentorship compared to 65% of men.	Introduce mentorship programs with women professionals and alumni as role models.
	Curriculum biases	48% of women found training modules focused on feminized roles (e.g., retail).	Redesign curricula to include technical, STEM-related, and leadership-focused training for women.
Employment and Retention	Sectoral imbalance in job placements	Only 15% of employed women were placed in technical roles compared to 46% of men.	Partner with technical and STEM industries to ensure MORE placement opportunities for women.
	Work-life balance challenges	63% of employed women reported difficulties in balancing family and work.	Promote flexible work schedules and workplace childcare options.
	- Workplace safety concerns	42% of women cited unsafe working conditions as a reason for job dissatisfaction.	Advocate for workplace policies that include safe transportation, harassment redressal mechanisms, and secure environments.

#### 4.3 Suggestions for Bridging Gender Gaps and Improving DDUGKY Implementation

1. **Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Enforce policies ensuring equal access, retention, and completion for women.
2. **Infrastructure:** Improve facilities, such as restrooms, childcare, and safe transportation, and establish rural training centers.
3. **Socio-Cultural Norms:** Address harmful stereotypes through community programs and involve local leaders.
4. **Financial Support:** Provide economically disadvantaged women scholarships, stipends, and incentives.
5. **Safe Environments:** Ensure training spaces are free from harassment and discrimination, with easy and effective reporting mechanisms.
6. **Monitoring:** Track progress with regular data collection and adjust programs as needed.
7. **Leadership Development:** Offer mentorship and training, connecting women with role models.

8. **Entrepreneurship:** Link programs with initiatives like Skill India, offering resources for enterprise development.
  9. **Curriculum:** Revise and enhance courses to include technical skills and competencies aligned with high-growth sectors.
  10. **Flexible Training:** Allow flexible schedules to accommodate women's responsibilities.
  11. **Employer Engagement:** Partner with industries to create inclusive workplaces with safety measures and flexible policies.
- These steps can bridge GGs and enhance women's participation and success in DDUGKY programs.

## V. CONCLUSION

Here, the study examined the GG challenges in (i) enrolment, (ii) training, (iii) finding job appointments, (iv) placement, as well as (v) retention of the trained candidates, which impeded SD in DDUGKY programs. As per the study, societal norms and family responsibilities, sectoral imbalance in job placements, work-life balance, and inadequate facilities were key gender-specific challenges impeding SD in DDUGKY programs. The DDUGKY initiative emphasizes women, SC, ST, and minority skill development. Because of this, the study's sample is mainly composed of participants of these groups, especially Muslims, which had significant effects on the findings. While the program has substantially improved access to skill development training and certification, gaps persist in training quality, industry partnerships, and post-training employment opportunities. This program fulfilled the target of rural development, and the DDUGKY program was one step ahead of traditional SD programs. These findings highlighted the gender-specific challenges and importance of skill training in empowering rural youth and driving sustainable economic development in Kerala.

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