



Empowering the Marginalized: A Developmental Review of the Transgender Livelihoods

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Abstract

Transgender people in India facing severe social stigma, legal invisibility and systemic exclusion from traditional socio-economic systems. Even after the Supreme Court's NALSA judgment in 2014 that legally recognised transgender people as 'third gender', the community has been mired with inadequate access to education, formal employment, healthcare, and entitlements. Though the state is one of the few states in the country that has a transgender welfare policy in place, Karnataka has a long way to go in terms of addressing transgender issues.

The present paper is based on the finding that transgender are largely invisible as an economic group and face livelihood difficulties and challenges, economic interventions and a policy intervention is something that trans population forms a unique group. It is a review of secondary data and policy documents exploring how the economic empowerment of transgender persons is undermined by structural barriers, discrimination, and gaps in policy implementation. Key findings identify high levels of unemployment, low literacy, poor access to healthcare and limited involvement in skill development programmes.

The paper advocates a developmental model, which combines inclusive policy formulations, community participation and targeted interventions. Recommendations include enhancing the capacities of local transgender welfare boards, increasing accessibility of vocational training and credit, and sensitizing service providers in all sectors. This article argues for transitioning from welfare-focused to empowerment-focused models that prioritize dignity, equity, and sustainable livelihoods for transgender people in the region.

Keywords: Transgender community, livelihood challenges, economic empowerment, Kalyana Karnataka, developmental approach, inclusive policy

Introduction

Transgender in India form a part of the most socio-economically excluded and politically abused sections of the society, being subject to all the attendant vices of discrimination, exclusion and legal neglect. Known traditionally as Hijras in the Indian culture, the transgender citizens of India have always been given a dual characterization, being a part of the society while their identity is accepted through these long ages as hallowed and condemned beings at the same time. A stereotype of Hijra, the term used with related groups, is that of ugly and impetuous women engaged in clapping and singing as part of religious rituals, and as seekers of alms (Reddy, 2005) [11]. Transgender people, although culturally visible, have been largely excluded from the mainstream discussion of citizenship, development, and equality.

The pivotal legal basis for recognition of transgender rights

is the NALSA judgment of 2014, in which the Supreme Court of India upheld the right of persons to identify themselves as male, female or third gender (Supreme Court of India, 2014) [13]. This historic verdict identified the transgender community as a socially and educationally backward class, providing them reservations under the Indian Constitution for education and employment.

Following the NALSA court ruling, The Government of India introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which made discrimination illegal and welfare support instated. Critics, however claim that the Act does not comply with international human rights standards particularly when it comes to the need for a medical screening for recognition of gender identity, and vagueness on how to implement socio-economic rights (Hines, 2020) [5].

While policies have made some progress in India,

particularly in semi-urban and rural areas such as Kalyana Karnataka still have to struggle to get healthcare, education, a roof over their heads and respectable livelihood opportunities. Deeply engrained discrimination, absence of institutional responsiveness and lack of information about transgender communities further hampered the development of an effective development strategy (UNDP India, 2017)^[14]. As such, to ensure justice and inclusive growth for them, need is to understand the livelihood challenges and to design pathways of economic empowerment of transgender persons particularly within backward regions.

Conceptual Framework

The key concepts on which the analysis of livelihood challenges and economic empowerment of transgender people is based are related concepts that are important in understanding both structural and socio-economic aspects of marginalisation and development.

- **Livelihood:** Livelihoods in this context means the options and opportunities people have for securing the basics of life – food, shelter, education and healthcare. & Conway, 1992) a livelihood is understood as the "capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living". For communities on the margin, such as for a transgender person, livelihood means the possibility to have access to a dignified, secured and sustainable source of earning that is not stigmatized and discriminated.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The potential for individuals to participate, contribute and benefit from unemployment breadwinners or loss of main source of income due to an discrimination. It is about increasing access to resources, opportunities and control over economic resources (Kabeer 2005)^[11]. Economic empowerment, for transgender communities, is about more than just the ability to be financially independent, but to feel valued and safe in control of their lives in a society that often marginalizes them.
- **Developmental Approach:** Development of literacy can take a long-term, broad-based people-centred approach by focusing on socio-economic development needs of the individual, the family, and the community. Unlike the commitment instrument of the welfare approach, the developmental model's purpose is to create capabilities, increase resistance, and overcome systemic injustices through structural changes.

Transgender Policy in Karnataka

Karnataka is one of the first states in India to introduce a full transgender policy (2017), to overcome marginalization and raise the social and economic status of transgender people. However, some experts believe that the Census number is not accurate because many people in this group fear sharing their identity which creates stigma and reliable techniques to report such information are rarely used (National Human Rights Commission [NHRC], 2018)^[9]. Even though Bengaluru has seen a lot of activism and institutional help, the Kalyana Karnataka area which consists of Kalaburagi, Ballari, Bidar, Yadgir, Koppal, Raichur and Vijayanagara districts, is not very advanced in terms of literacy, jobs and healthcare availability.

Importance of the Review

This paper uses literature, existing policies and data from the population to talk about the difficulties and development programs for transgender people in Kalyana Karnataka. The study seeks to fill the knowledge gap about how the underdeveloped regions around the world face multiple challenges because of their gender identity and the social and economic situation they live with. Using human rights, inclusive planning and development, the paper guides improvements in transgender life outcomes.

The impact of this study results from its attention to a geographic area that is typically missing in wider transgender discussions. This paper promotes fairer development by focusing on transgender people and provides useful guidance for policymakers.

Objectives of the Paper

- To explore the livelihood challenges faced by transgender individuals.
- It aims to assess the effectiveness of existing governmental and non-governmental initiatives intended to economically empower the transgender community.
- The study seeks to propose a developmental framework that promotes inclusive and sustainable livelihood opportunities tailored to the needs of transgender persons in underdeveloped regions.

Research Questions

1. What are the major livelihood challenges faced by transgender individuals in Kalyana Karnataka?
2. What are the existing government and non-government initiatives aimed at empowering transgender persons economically in this region?
3. How can a developmental approach be used to frame inclusive and sustainable livelihood solutions for transgender communities?
4. What policy recommendations can be drawn to strengthen economic empowerment for transgender people in backward regions like Kalyana Karnataka?

Methodology of the Article

This study employs a review-based qualitative research design to synthesize and analyze existing literature, policy documents, and empirical data related to the livelihood challenges and economic empowerment of transgender individuals in India. The purpose of this methodological approach is to construct a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic conditions, systemic barriers, and policy interventions affecting the transgender population.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

A wide range of secondary data sources were consulted, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, NGO publications, legal texts, and national surveys. Key documents include the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, the Karnataka State Transgender Policy (2017), reports from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data, and regional socio-economic development plans. Databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, Shodhganga, and Google Scholar were used to

identify relevant scholarly articles published between 2010 and 2024.

Inclusion criteria for literature selection included

- 1. Relevance to transgender issues in livelihood and economic empowerment.
- 2. Studies or reports addressing policies, developmental models, or case studies in the Indian or Karnataka context;
- 3. Preference for sources based on empirical evidence, policy evaluation, or theoretical framing.

Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis was employed to categorize the literature under core themes such as livelihood challenges, systemic discrimination, skill development, access to financial services, and policy interventions. Special attention was

given to developmental models that have been successfully implemented in other states or internationally.

The conceptual framework was guided by principles from development studies, gender studies, and rights-based approaches. A critical lens was applied to examine the gaps between policy provisions and ground-level implementation, and to identify best practices and scalable models for inclusion.

Limitations

As a review-based study, this article is limited by the availability and scope of existing literature, particularly with respect to disaggregated regional data specific to transgender persons in Kalyana Karnataka. Primary field data was not collected; hence, findings rely heavily on secondary interpretations and available statistics.

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Transgender Population Estimates – Global, India, and Karnataka

Region	Estimated Transgender Population	% of Total Population	Source
Global	~25 million	~0.3–0.5%	WHO (2022); UNAIDS (2020)
India (2011 Census)	487,803	0.04%	Census of India (2011)
Karnataka (2011)	20,266	0.03%	Census of India (2011)
Karnataka (Est. 2023)*	~75,000 (approx.)	~0.1% (projected)	NHRC (2018) ^[9] ; NGOs & Transgender Welfare Board Reports

Table 1 provides a view of the estimated number of transgender people at world, national and regional levels. In many countries, it is estimated that 25 million identify as transgender which is roughly 0.3–0.5% of all people globally (WHO, 2022; UNAIDS, 2020). On the other hand, the 2011 Indian Census found that only 487,803 people who identified as transgender make up just 0.04% of India’s total population. People facing this challenge are mistreated because of stigma against them, their failure to identify themselves and the inefficient counting system. Karnataka included 20,266 transgender people in the 2011 census, representing 0.03% of the population. Yet, civil society organizations and state welfare boards believe the

current number of transgender people in Karnataka is roughly 75,000, about 0.1%, like the estimates seen around the globe. When issues are not correctly reported, policy plans, how resources are used and efforts to include everyone in development are all affected.

For Kalyana Karnataka such differences in data are very important, since they make it possible to leave out transgender groups from developmental programs because of untrustworthy population statistics. According to this theory, there is a high priority on collecting new data that is clearly separated by gender and supported by everyone’s participation.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Indicators of Transgender Population in India and Karnataka

Indicator	India (National Average)	Karnataka (State Avg.)	Source
Literacy Rate (Transgender)	57%	60%	NHRC (2018) ^[9] ; Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Employment Rate	46%	42%	National Transgender Survey (2020); KSCPCR (2022)
Access to Government Schemes	Less than 25%	~30%	UNDP India (2017) ^[14] ; Karnataka Govt. Reports
Living Below Poverty Line (BPL)	Over 60%	~55%	NHRC (2018) ^[9] ; State Policy Reports
Access to Formal Education	~50%	~58%	Transgender Welfare Board; Sangama NGO Reports

Statistics on the socio-economic standing of transgender individuals are listed in Table 2 by both national and state levels. While the literacy rate for most people in India is about 77%, only 57% of transgender people can read and write. In Karnataka, 60% of the population is literate, but this figure points to issues including discrimination, early dropping out and a lack of material for all students. More than half the transgender community in India does not have employment-of those who do, many work in sectors that carry a stigma. Even though state policies are progressive, the proportion of economically empowered women in Karnataka is only 42%. What is more, less than a

third of transgender persons in Karnataka can use official welfare schemes like housing, skill training or health insurance, proving that transgender people still face exclusion and lack knowledge of these schemes.

A large majority of transgender people in India are living below the poverty line, while in Karnataka, this number is still over half. More than half the community not even have schooling which cuts their chances for future employment.

The data suggests that transgender people in Karnataka, especially in the backward region known as Kalyana Karnataka, are vulnerable in many areas of society and work. Myths about minorities and barriers to education,

employment, healthcare and social protection worsen their hardships, requiring special, rights-focused and inclusive support.

Karnataka State Transgender Policy (2017) – Key Insights

The Karnataka State Transgender Policy was the first of its kind in India, adopted in 2017. The policy was shaped according to the Supreme Court's 2014 ^[13] NALSA judgment which declared transgender persons to be a 'third gender' and gave them the right to fairness, dignity and work. In the Union of India, 2014.

The policy works to ensure that transgender people enjoy social justice, more opportunities and a sense of belonging by facing systemic issues and stigma. It uses a method that gives rights and eases involvement for transgender people in education, health, employment, housing and political matters.

Important features in the policy

- Ensuring each person gets official identity documents, including Aadhaar, ration cards and voter ID.
- Including transgender students in state-approved schooling, helping school communities understand transgender issues and granting scholarships for trans students.
- Accessing surgery for sex reassignment, counselling and other gender-affirming healthcare services is available for free in government hospitals.
- Jobs and Work: Skills training, policy for assigning jobs and backing programs for independent approaches to work.
- Supporting Transgender Individuals: Developing 'Garima Greh' and housing proposals made exclusively for transgender persons.
- Help for victims from violence and discrimination: avenues for legal support, the awareness of law enforcement agencies and ways to resolve disagreements.
- Though the policy is a good step for women, it is not easy to roll out, monitor or provide outreach in some areas because people are not well informed and local support mechanisms are inadequate (Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Karnataka, 2017).

A Developmental Model for Economic Empowerment

A development model for transgender empowerment in Kalyana Karnataka should seek to integrate transgender rights into overall development strategies, rather than only offering small, temporary help. This includes all stages of policy creation and implementation in schools, jobs, hospitals and politics.

Development Planning

Achieving inclusive growth that transgender people are recognized by the government in official development policies. Government departments should systematically gather information on women and men, appoint transgender members to Grama Panchayats and add objectives for the transgender community to local plans. These indicators should reflect the special issues transgender individuals face

in housing, sanitation and skill development.

Transgender individuals benefit greatly from skill development programs designed to help them find work. Such programs should be made for regional markets and include areas such as training for jobs, digital understanding, starting own business and handling finances. Localizing systems like DDU-GKY and NRLM for transgender persons can greatly improve their welfare (Ministry of Rural Development, 2022) ^[8]. Also, microfinance institutions and cooperative banks must provide credit and loans to individuals without requiring collateral as part of inclusive banking norms.

Ensuring that transgender voices are heard in local policymaking is accomplished by earmarking spaces for them on these bodies. These state boards should be set up as strong, independent agencies handling transgender welfare planning, budgeting and solving complaints. Having support for identity papers and for accessing programs helps make it easier for persons with disabilities to become involved.

Need for Sensitization within Communities and Institutions

Having a stigma against them remains a major problem for them getting work. As a result, it is important to build comprehensive awareness campaigns that cover schools, government groups, police and the medical sector. Campaigns should include inspiring details about transgender individuals and teach about rights, with the aim of changing people's views and decreasing daily discrimination.

Models for Supporting Transgenders

Long-term economic participation of those who are marginalized can be achieved through livelihood promotion models. By using community institutions created by the NRLM such as SHGs and federation, the program can respond to the unique needs of transgender groups. Proactive states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, have introduced transgender-specialized SHGs that help improve social status and unforeseen conditions through agency-based work, tailoring small workshops and various trades (Sinha & Bhatia, 2019) ^[12].

A few important parts of these adaptations are offers of capacity-building workshops, mentorship by leading SHG members, power to take part in Panchayat protestations and equitable access to revolving funds and non-interest loans. Collective choices and shared financial services by SHGs support transgender persons, encourage them to avoid unfair employment and help protect their self-respect. The model developed can be applied to Kalyana Karnataka, where the number of SHGs for transgender people is still very low.

CBR stands for Community-Based Rehabilitation

CBR was first introduced by the WHO and ILO for people with disabilities and encourages local, multiple-sector projects for social inclusion and better earnings. The CBR matrix covers health, education, livelihood, social participation and empowerment which make it suitable for use among transgender people (ILO, 2004) ^[6].

Community mobilization, peer assistance, jobs training in the area and services people can use easily would fall under CBR for transgender inclusion. As a result, local NGOs,

healthcare staff and schools work together with the community to deal with discrimination, boost access to help and encourage income generation. In the less developed and semi-urban regions of Kalyana Karnataka, where formal institutions are limited such a model makes it easier to send services through community efforts.

The public private strategy

With PPP, private companies offer advancements, greater productivity and funding, while public government teams add openness and responsibility to the process. Such efforts help transgender people gain skills, get jobs and start businesses by focusing on communities close to cities. Some examples, NGOs like Humsafar Trust or Naz Foundation with corporate CSR teams along with government skill missions so they can provide gender-sensitive coaching in places such as hotels, stores, online positions and art spaces. They might also provide private companies that sponsor job fairs, assist with apprenticeships or provide small investments to support transgender business founders. PPPs in Kalyana Karnataka may be coordinated with current DSDAs, so that targeted training and placement programs are available through support from local industries and business groups.

PPP models increase the chances for new policy initiatives, promote CSR approaches for enhancing basic rights groups and foster a market that benefits everyone. As a result, individuals gain chances for work as well as to run their own business and achieve lasting independence from money worries.

Conclusion

It is evident from literature and policy reports that transgender people living in India facing significant job barriers because of discrimination, limited access to education and being overlooked for main job opportunities. Though laws and policies exist to offer protection to transgender people, the reality is that the gap between what they offer and the problems faced is still great. The shift from supporting welfare to developing policies that help everyone, boost skills and provide ongoing support. Using livelihood programs, CBR and PPPs would adapt well to the local social and financial circumstances. Balanced and sustainable economic growth is more likely when transgender people are fully represented in all development and skill development plans.

Community and institutional understanding are essential for challenging the social prejudice that makes it difficult for transgender people to get the resources and respect they deserve. According to the findings, it is important for agencies, community groups and private supporters to join forces and make an inclusive development ecosystem that treats transgender individuals as actors in local economic progress, not just recipients.

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