

Digital Governance, Restitution Law and Sustainable Rural Development: Strengthening Employment Accountability under DDU-GKY in India

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Abstract

Publicly funded rural skill-development programmes can support sustainable livelihoods only when training translates into decent, sufficiently durable employment and when administrative failures can be detected and remedied. This paper examines the accountability architecture of the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), using the supplied study of national programme performance and district-level Kerala data for 2015–16 to 2023–24, supplemented by official programme material, Kudumbashree statistics, DDU-GKY guidelines, and a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) performance audit of implementation in Uttar Pradesh. The study adopts a descriptive, documentary and policy-legal design. It finds substantial variation in Kerala's reported annual training volumes across districts and years, alongside an incomplete placement series that cannot be treated as a cohort-matched employment rate. Kudumbashree's published data as of 1 March 2025 report 77,717 training completions and 55,421 appointments cumulatively, while the CAG's Uttar Pradesh audit documents weaknesses in placement evidence, post-placement tracking and timely action against underperforming implementing agencies. These sources point to a central governance problem: digital records can improve traceability, but data systems alone do not guarantee truthful reporting, fair access, employment continuity or effective remedies. The paper proposes a sustainable-rural-development framework linking expenditure and training milestones to independently verified employment outcomes, one-year follow-up, beneficiary-accessible grievance handling, privacy safeguards, risk-based audit and proportionate corrective or restitution-oriented measures. Restitution is treated as a remedial governance principle, not an automatic legal entitlement: any compensation or recovery must rest on applicable rules, evidence of breach, causation, loss and due process. The paper concludes with a phased implementation roadmap and measurable indicators for accountability, inclusion and livelihood sustainability.

Keywords: DDU-GKY; Digital governance; Rural livelihoods; Employment accountability; Kudumbashree; Restitution, Sustainable development; Grievance redressal, ICT Integration.

1. Introduction

Skill development is often presented as a bridge between rural poverty and productive employment. In programmes designed for poor rural youth, however, the public purpose is not satisfied by training counts alone. The pathway from mobilisation to enrolment, training, assessment, certification, placement, wage payment, retention and progression is a chain of interdependent commitments.

A break at any stage can reduce the value of public expenditure and impose costs on participants who have invested time, foregone alternative work, travelled or migrated, or relied on a promised route into employment. Sustainable rural development therefore requires a broader performance lens than the number of candidates trained. The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), launched in 2014 under the Ministry of Rural Development, is a placement-linked skill-development programme for poor rural youth and part of the rural livelihoods policy architecture.

Its institutional design includes central guidelines, State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs), project implementing agencies (PIAs), training centres, assessors and employers. The Kaushal Bharat information system supports programme administration and reporting. Programme design has increasingly recognised that placement is not a single event: post-placement support, retention and career progression matter. The official DDU-GKY 2.0 material describes an end-to-end digital approach spanning candidate and training-centre management, assessment, financial management, monitoring, placement tracking and grievance processes (Ministry of Rural Development [MoRD], 2026a, 2026b).

This article focuses on how digital governance, restitution principles and sustainable development can be joined in one accountability framework, because advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have dramatically changed every aspect of business, industry, governance, personal life. ICT is growingly influencing the governance as digital systems can create time-stamped records, identify unusual gaps, support audit trails, allow candidates to check their own status and make grievance handling more visible. Yet data can be incomplete, outdated, misclassified or strategically manipulated. The system can also exclude candidates who lack reliable connectivity, digital literacy, accessible devices, language support or confidence in online complaints.

The policy challenge is not simply to digitise administration, but to ensure that data can be challenged, independently verified and converted into corrective action. The empirical base is the supplied a study on DDU-GKY in India and Keralam by Surendran et. al. (2023). It reports national indicators through June 2024 and district-level Keralam tables for training, assessment, certification and dropout-related indicators, alongside an incomplete annual placement series. These data are used as reported and are not silently reconciled with newer dashboard figures.

The paper also draws on Kudumbashree's official data snapshot dated 1 March 2025 and the CAG's audit of DDU-GKY implementation in Uttar Pradesh. The latter is a warning about potential control failures in the scheme, not evidence that the same irregularities occurred in Keralam. The main argument is that sustainable rural-development policy should measure whether a programme reliably delivers its promised pathway and whether failures are detected and remedied.

Restitution is used here in a careful, governance-oriented sense: restoration of an affected beneficiary to the position that would reasonably have existed absent a proven programme failure, where legally and factually appropriate. It does not imply that every unsuccessful job search creates a compensable claim. A claimant would need to identify the relevant undertaking or duty, establish breach and causal harm, and proceed through the applicable administrative or legal mechanism.

2. Programme Context and Sustainable Rural Development

2.1 DDU-GKY as a placement-linked intervention

DDU-GKY differs from training-only interventions because placement-linked outcomes are integral to its stated purpose.

The scheme's guidelines provide for standardised training and for post-placement tracking, counselling and facilitation over a one-year period; employment evidence may include employer documentation, wage records and bank-payment evidence, depending on the applicable guidelines and circumstances (MoRD, n.d.).

Such requirements are significant because a placement letter alone may not show that work began, wages were paid, conditions were acceptable, or the candidate remained employed. The distinction between 'appointed', 'placed', 'continuity' and 'retained' is therefore not merely statistical; it determines whether reported outcomes correspond to the intended livelihood benefit.

The revised DDU-GKY 2.0 approach further emphasises longer-duration placement and employment retention, and describes digital dashboards, a public candidate portal, automated grievance processes, certificate verification, digital attendance and placement tracking (MoRD, 2026a). These announced features create an opportunity to make the programme's operational chain more auditable. Their practical effectiveness, however, depends on implementation, data quality, access for beneficiaries and independent validation.

2.2 Sustainability beyond initial placement

Sustainable rural development is multidimensional. Economically, the relevant outcome is a reliable improvement in income, work stability, productive capability and career mobility. Socially, it includes equitable access for women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, persons with disabilities and youth from remote areas, as well as safety and fair treatment during migration.

Institutionally, it requires predictable service standards, transparent expenditure, accountable contractors and meaningful grievance redress. Environmentally, skill strategies can support rural resilience where training is connected to locally relevant green occupations, energy efficiency, repair, sustainable tourism, agro-processing, waste management and climate adaptation. DDU-GKY cannot by itself guarantee all these outcomes, but programme design can align skills and placement with local development strategies rather than treating migration or placement counts as the sole indicators of success.

Sustainability also requires attention to the opportunity costs borne by trainees. A participant may leave a household livelihood, incur transport costs, relocate, or decline other training in reliance on a programme's placement commitment. When an agency fails to deliver a promised service, the public interest includes both the efficient use of programme funds and the fair treatment of the individual. This is where accountability and restitution-oriented thinking become relevant.

3. Literature Review and Conceptual Foundations

The literature on skill development repeatedly distinguishes training outputs from labour-market outcomes. The supplied study reviews work suggesting that the employment effect of a training intervention may be strongest shortly after training and can fade over subsequent months, underscoring the need to examine retention and income rather than only initial placement (Chakravorty & Bedi, 2019, as cited in the supplied study).

Babu and Kinkhabwala (2019) emphasise the role of industry engagement in aligning skills with employer needs. This literature supports stronger employer partnerships and job-quality indicators, but it also suggests that a training programme cannot be judged by its own administrative outputs alone.

Research on the role of ICT in public administration often highlights the potential for improved coordination, information access and service monitoring. The relevant mechanism is not digitisation per se; it is the way information changes incentives and makes decisions contestable. A database that only records a PIA's claim can reproduce the same asymmetry as a paper file.

A system that links the claim to candidate confirmation, payroll evidence, employer validation, audit sampling and an accessible appeal path is more likely to support accountability. This paper treats ICT as governance infrastructure that must be combined with institutional checks. Restitution has a distinct legal history, including restoration of benefits unjustly retained and remedies designed to reverse unjust enrichment or redress a legally recognised loss.

In public programmes, however, the legal route depends on the source of duty, the governing guidelines, contract terms, administrative law, applicable statutes and facts of the case. The principle is best used here to design remedial pathways: correct inaccurate records, provide omitted support, facilitate a promised service, recover funds from a defaulting implementing agency where authorised, and consider compensation only where a lawful basis and evidence support it.

This avoids overstating restitution as a free-standing statutory right available in every failed placement case. Accountability is multi-layered. Upward accountability concerns compliance with funder rules; horizontal accountability concerns checks by auditors, state missions and oversight bodies; downward accountability concerns whether beneficiaries can obtain truthful information, challenge decisions and receive remedies. DDU-GKY needs all three.

The CAG's audit of Uttar Pradesh for 2016–2022 found shortfalls against placement targets, delayed action against poorly performing agencies, weaknesses in verification documents, and failures to track some placed candidates for the prescribed period (Comptroller and Auditor General of India [CAG], 2025). It also reported cases involving questionable or fabricated evidence. These are documented findings for the audited state and period, not proof of a nationwide pattern. They nevertheless illustrate the types of control risks a national scheme's monitoring architecture should be designed to detect.

The key role of ICT integration in India in general and the State of Kerala in particular need not be overemphasized. While Digital India and several other ICT initiatives at the national (India) level seek to transform the nation digitally across all sectors, the sub-national (State of Kerala) level mandate at present is to transform the State into a Knowledge Economy before the entire world – the global village. In this context, this research paper has accorded paramount significance for the notion and practice of ICT integration, and its varied manifestations including digital governance.

The conceptual contribution of this paper is to connect four strands: sustainable livelihoods, digital public administration, performance accountability and restitution-oriented remedies. It argues that a programme becomes more sustainable when its digital record follows the beneficiary's pathway, when performance indicators distinguish output from outcome, when grievance handling is accessible and independent, and when remedies are linked to established facts and applicable rules.

4. Objectives and Research Questions

The study has five objectives: (1) describe reported national DDU-GKY performance and Kerala district-level training patterns; (2) identify measurement and accountability gaps between training, certification, placement and retention; (3) assess how digital governance could strengthen expenditure traceability and outcome verification; (4) develop a legally cautious restitution-oriented framework for addressing demonstrable programme failures; and (5) propose indicators and institutional reforms consistent with inclusive and sustainable rural development.

The research questions are: How do the supplied data portray training and placement performance? What do the data reveal—and not reveal—about district-level equity and programme effectiveness? Which digital controls are most relevant to expenditure, training and employment continuity? What kinds of remedies can be designed for verified service failures without presuming automatic legal compensation? How can accountability be integrated into sustainable rural-development planning?

5. Data and Methodology

5.1 Research design

The study uses a descriptive, documentary and policy-legal design. It analyses secondary information available, official programme guidance, a Kudumbashree DDU-GKY data snapshot, current official descriptions of DDU-GKY 2.0, and a CAG performance audit. The empirical component is descriptive rather than causal. It does not find the effect of digital systems on placement, compare treatment and control groups, or infer individual legal injury from aggregate data.

5.2 Data scope and measurement

The supplied paper reports national status indicators for the period 2015–16 to 2023–24, with the last year based on data through June 2024. It also provides district-wise annual tables for Keralam on training and other indicators, and a separate placement series that is available only for some years. The source notes that percentages in tables represent district or state shares as indicated in its own presentation.

For clarity, this article uses raw candidate counts where available and labels the placement data as reported rather than treating them as cohort-matched rates. A second, separate source is Kudumbashree's official DDU-GKY page with data as of 1 March 2025. It reports cumulative targets, training commenced, training completed, appointments, projects and PIAs, along with financial-year data. The snapshot is used as an updated administrative reference, not as a replacement for the supplied historical series.

Differences between the two sources may reflect different cut-off dates, definitions, reporting updates or data migration. No direct comparison is interpreted as a trend unless the definitions and reference dates are aligned.

5.3 Analytical procedure and limitations

The analysis summarises annual training volumes, identifies selected district variation, and compares the reported training and placement series cautiously. Tables and figures are constructed from the source entries. District annual totals are reproduced as reported; a district's sum across years is not a population-adjusted measure and should not be read as an effectiveness ranking.

The final year is partial and should not be compared directly with full financial years. The paper also uses the CAG audit as a governance-risk case study. Limitations include missing placement years, lack of individual-level linkage, absence of wages and job-quality data, lack of district population denominators, incomplete information on expenditure by district, and lack of beneficiary survey or grievance data. These limitations preclude causal or legal conclusions about individual cases.

6. Empirical Findings

6.1 National programme status in the supplied study

The source study's national table records approximately 1.89 million enrolled candidates and 1.73 million trained candidates over the period covered. It also records 1.57 million assessed candidates, approximately 944,778 certified candidates, 1.10 million appointed candidates, 925,540 candidates with monthly continuity of at least three months, and 479,353 candidates in the 'placed' column. These figures should be read with attention to the original table's definitions and reporting date.

In particular, 'appointed', 'monthly continuity' and 'placed' are not necessarily interchangeable concepts. The fact that the source reports more appointments than placed candidates is a reason to preserve the distinct labels and seek metadata, not a basis for assuming an error or computing a simple conversion rate. The difference between training, assessment and certification counts also illustrates why a performance dashboard should publish both counts and transition rates using consistent cohorts.

An aggregate comparison of totals accumulated over multiple years can mix different batches and time horizons. It can show the scale of programme activity but cannot answer whether an individual cohort progressed from enrolment to certification and employment.

A stronger system would calculate cohort-specific transition rates, identify elapsed time between milestones and explain all exclusions or status changes.

6.2 Keralam training trends

Table 1. Reported annual DDU-GKY training in Keralam

Financial year	Candidates trained	Coverage note
2015–16	3,154	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2016–17	11,278	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2017–18	11,874	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2018–19	13,298	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2019–20	13,446	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2020–21	3,612	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2021–22	5,308	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2022–23	8,635	Full-year figure as transcribed from source
2023–24*	5,077	Partial year (through June 2024)

* Note: For FY 2024 the figure is through June 2024 and is not a full-year observation.

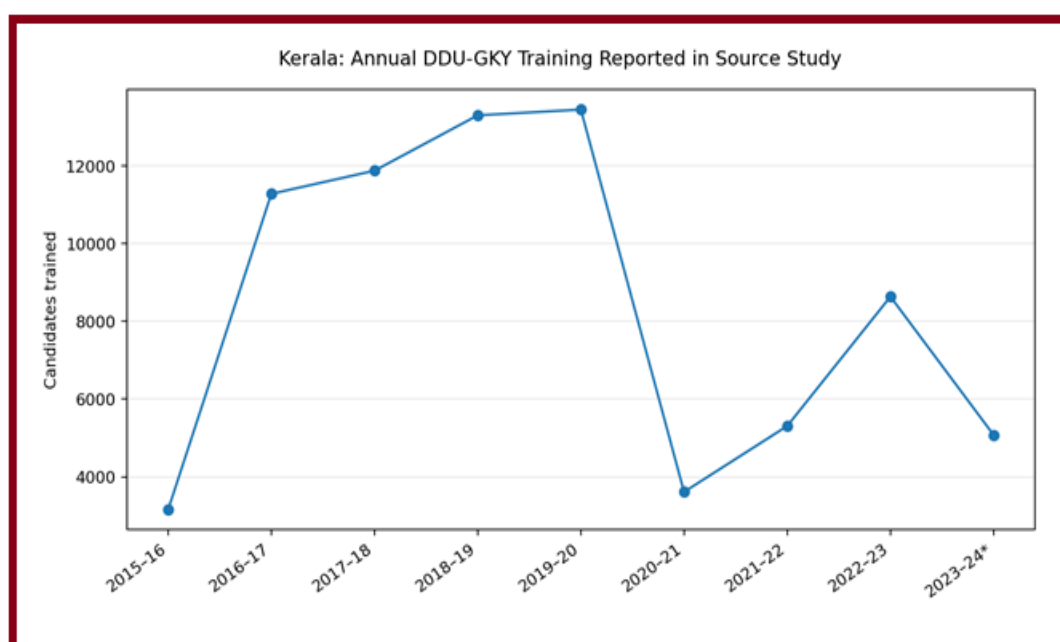


Figure 1. Keralam annual training volumes reported in the supplied study

Note. For FY 2024) (June 2024); apparent decline cannot be taken as a full-year contraction.

The district table shows that annual training volumes changed materially across the period. Summed district entries rise from 3,154 in 2015–16 to a high of 13,446 in 2019–20, then fall to 3,612 in 2020–21, recover to 5,308 in 2021–22 and 8,635 in 2022–23, before reaching 5,077 through June 2024. The pattern is consistent with disruption around the pandemic period and subsequent variation in programme activity, but the table alone cannot isolate pandemic effects from changes in targets, project cycles, reporting practices or labour demand.

The 2023–24 number is incomplete and should not be compared with full-year observations without a monthly adjustment or full-year data. A district-level perspective matters because a statewide total can hide uneven programme reach. Higher counts may reflect population size, training-centre location, local PIA capacity, course availability, mobilisation practices, or district-specific demand.

Lower counts may indicate limited capacity or low target allocation, but they may also reflect different demographic denominators or project timing.

Equity analysis therefore requires district population and eligible-youth denominators, social-group disaggregation, travel distances, accessibility data and the distribution of sanctioned seats. Counts alone are a screening tool, not proof of discrimination or exclusion.

6.3 District variation and local concentration

Table 2. Selected district training entries: sum across reported years and selected annual observations

District	Sum of annual entries	2015–16	2019–20	2022–23	2023–24
Malappuram	7,717	98	2,341	1,349	714
Ernakulam	7,333	510	1,007	440	289
Palakkad	6,684	148	1,277	858	479
Thiruvananthapuram	6,620	437	579	355	278
Kozhikode	6,463	495	995	1,079	507
Thrissur	5,643	230	818	787	333
Kannur	5,364	40	572	504	316
Wayanad	5,155	285	1,072	770	367

* Note: For FY 2024 the figure is through June 2024 and not for the full-year.

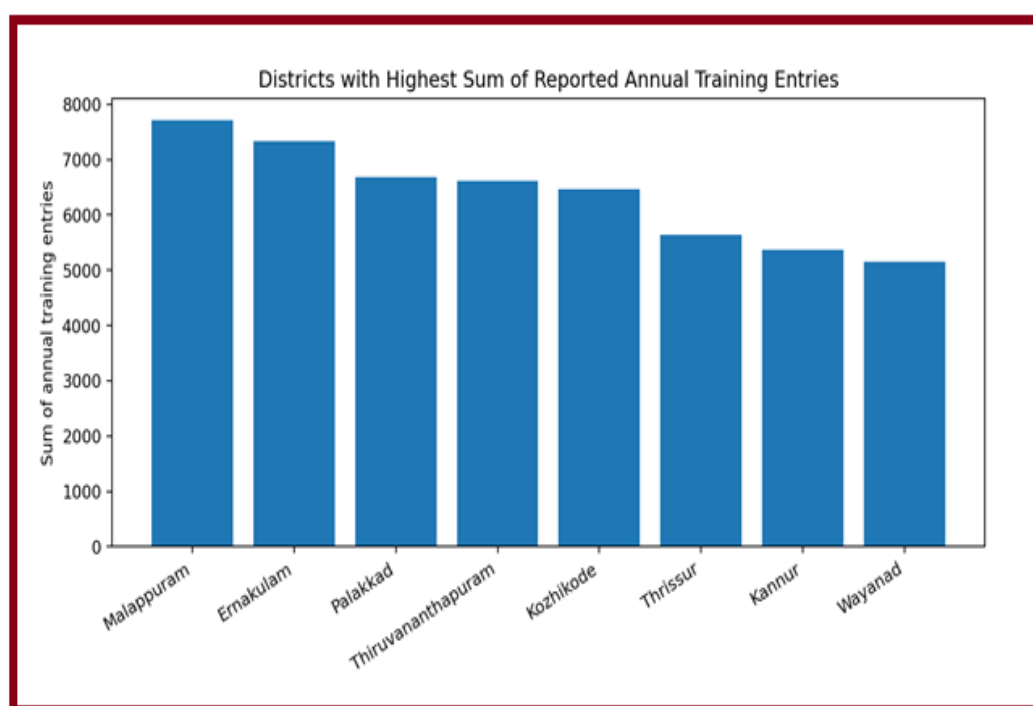


Figure 2. Districts with the highest sum of annual training entries in the supplied table

The ranking describes reported volume only; it is not adjusted for population, eligibility, targets, or number of project batches. The source's district tables also show that the geographical pattern is not fixed over time. For example, the supplied study reports high training volumes in several districts during selected years and substantial changes in the shares attributed to Malappuram, Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kannur and other districts.

This supports a monitoring approach that flags abrupt district-level changes for explanation. A change may be justified by a planned target shift or a project-cycle effect; the purpose of an alert is to request an explanation and supporting evidence, not to assume misconduct. The analytical priority is to move from raw volume to access-adjusted measures.

Useful district indicators include candidates enrolled per 1,000 eligible rural youth; completion and certification rates by cohort; median days from training completion to assessment; placement and verified wage-employment rates at three, six and twelve months; the share of candidates who received post-placement support; and differences across gender, social group, disability status and remote locations. Where sample sizes are small, dashboards should suppress identifiable cells and display uncertainty to protect privacy.

6.4 Placement data and the limits of ratio interpretation

Table 3. Training and placement series reported for Keralam

Financial year	Trained	Placed	Interpretation
2015-16	3,154	Not reported	Not computable
2016-17	11,278	6,207	Different cohorts / timing not established
2017-18	11,874	5,093	Different cohorts / timing not established
2018-19	13,298	9,656	Different cohorts / timing not established
2019-20	13,446	8,390	Different cohorts / timing not established
2020-21	3,612	2,931	Different cohorts / timing not established
2021-22	5,308	718	Different cohorts / timing not established

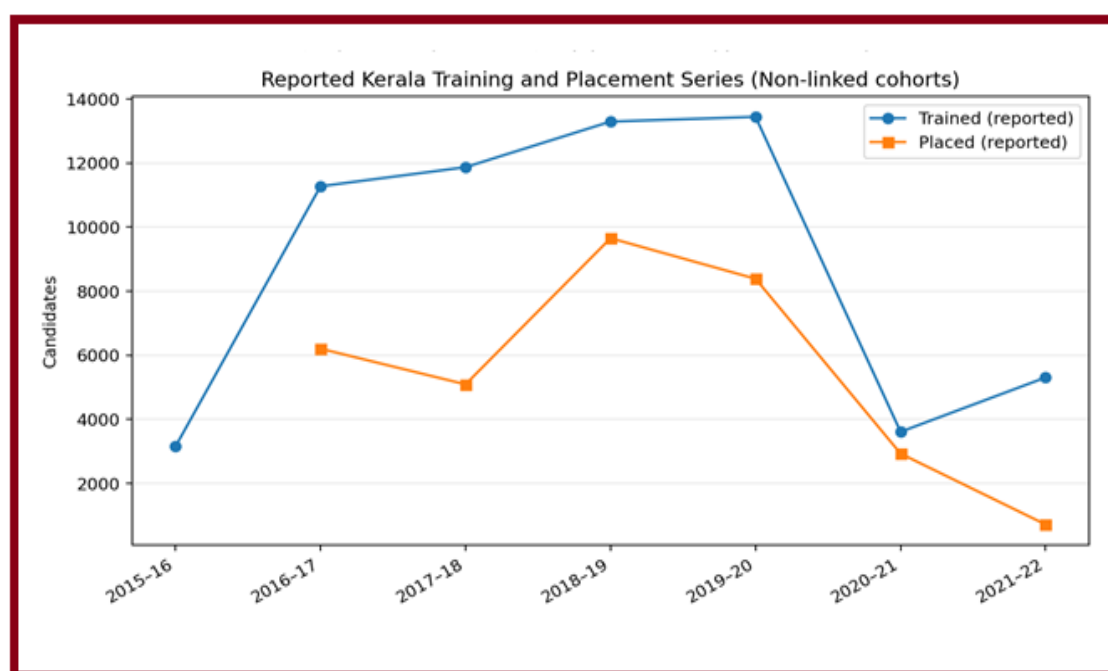


Figure 3. Reported training and placement figures for selected Keralam years

The series may not follow the same candidate cohorts or placement windows. Missing placement observations are not zero; visual comparisons are descriptive only. The source gives placement figures for 2016-17 through 2021-22, but does not supply corresponding placement counts for all years. It reports 6,207 placements in 2016-17, 5,093 in 2017-18, 9,656 in 2018-19, 8,390 in 2019-20, 2,931 in 2020-21 and 718 in 2021-22.

These counts are not necessarily linked to the trainees reported in the same financial year; placements may follow training with a lag, and the source does not supply batch-level identifiers or the date window used. Thus, even where training and placement counts are both present, their ratio cannot be interpreted as a placement probability for a candidate cohort.

The sharp reduction in reported placements in 2020-21 and 2021-22 merits further investigation, but the descriptive series cannot attribute it to COVID-19, programme failure, migration conditions or changes in reporting.

It is a governance signal for triangulation: compare project-level targets, completion dates, employer demand, candidate confirmations, wage evidence, and the timing of data uploads. A robust system should show whether placement is not yet due, is verified, is disputed, or is unreported. The dashboard should not collapse these statuses into a single blank or zero.

6.5 Updated Kudumbashree snapshot

Kudumbashree's official DDU-GKY data page, dated 1 March 2025, reports 1,09,258 total target, 1,17,453 candidates sanctioned, 85,937 training commencements, 77,717 training completions and 55,421 appointments, with 234 projects and 177 PIAs. The page's year-wise table shows, among other entries, 12,812 training completions and 9,957 appointments in 2019–20; 8,234 completions and 6,124 appointments in 2022–23; and 4,794 completions and 3,404 appointments in 2023–24 (Kudumbashree, 2025).

These figures provide a more recent administrative snapshot, but 'appointed' should not be silently equated with the supplied study's 'placed' variable. They also do not establish 12-month retention or job quality unless supported by separate tracking data. The differences between this snapshot and the supplied study should be reconciled through metadata and cohort definitions rather than by selecting whichever figure supports a preferred conclusion.

This is a practical example of why data governance must include provenance: publication date, extraction date, data owner, status definition, revision history, cohort period and treatment of legacy records. The national Kaushal Bharat dashboard itself warns that migration of legacy data may create deviations and that state SRLMs own the underlying figures (MoRD, 2026c). This is a valuable disclosure, but it also makes version control and independent reconciliation important.

7. Accountability Gaps and What They Mean for Sustainable Development

7.1 Output accountability versus livelihood accountability

A training centre may meet a training target while failing to connect participants with suitable employment. A PIA may upload an appointment letter without demonstrating that the candidate commenced work or received wages. An employer may offer work that ends quickly, is geographically unsuitable, or does not match the training.

A candidate may leave a job for reasons outside the programme's control. Each scenario requires a different response. Output accountability asks whether training was delivered and recorded; livelihood accountability asks whether the intended employment benefit was realised and sustained, and whether the programme fulfilled the support obligations applicable to that stage. A sustainable programme should publish a results chain: mobilisation and eligibility; enrolment; attendance and completion; assessment and certification; job offer; candidate-confirmed joining; verified wages; employment continuity; post-placement support; and career progression.

For each transition, the system should record a status, responsible actor, date, evidence type and reason for failure or delay. The goal is not to turn every social outcome into a rigid numeric target, but to make it possible to distinguish a legitimate labour-market setback from an administrative failure, inaccurate claim or unfulfilled commitment.

7.2 Expenditure traceability and implementing-agency incentives

Public expenditure accountability is stronger when financial releases and instalments can be linked to verifiable milestones. This does not mean every payment should be delayed until long-term outcomes are known; training providers must be paid for services actually delivered, and candidates should not bear the risk of delayed administrative payments.

Rather, payment rules should specify what evidence supports each milestone, what portion is contingent on employment outcomes, and what happens when records are disputed. Risk-based audits can focus on unusually high placement claims, implausible wage patterns, repeated employer addresses, clusters of candidates with identical documentation, or missing follow-up records. The CAG's Uttar Pradesh audit illustrates the cost of weak controls: it documented shortfalls against placement targets, gaps in one-year tracking, incomplete documents and cases where placement evidence raised serious doubts (CAG, 2025).

The audit also criticised delayed action against defaulting PIAs and non-recovery of funds in the cases it reviewed. This should be treated as an institutional learning source, not a conclusion about Kerala. The transferable lesson is to establish prompt escalation, evidence standards, audit sampling and consequence management, while protecting candidates from being penalised for provider misconduct.

7.3 Access, inclusion and digital exclusion

Digital governance may reduce information asymmetry, but it can also create a new barrier if a candidate must navigate an app or portal to claim a benefit. A beneficiary may have limited literacy, poor connectivity, a shared phone, disability-related accessibility needs, or concerns about retaliation. A fair system therefore offers multiple routes: online portal, toll-free or callback service, SMS or messaging where appropriate, in-person help desk, community-level facilitation and a written/offline complaint option.

A complaint should be registered by staff on behalf of a candidate without requiring the candidate to own a smartphone or submit a digitally signed document. Inclusion also requires a distinction between data visibility and personal exposure. Public dashboards should disclose aggregate performance, not personal identifiers, health details, bank statements, caste or disability data at individual level. Beneficiaries should be able to see and correct their own records through secure authentication and assisted channels.

Access by PIAs, employers, assessors and officials should be role-based, logged and limited to legitimate purposes. Data retention should follow applicable law and programme requirements, with deletion or anonymisation where suitable.

8. Digital Governance Architecture for Sustainable Rural Development

8.1 A beneficiary-centred digital record

The core design proposal is a beneficiary-centred record that follows the programme journey without making the person responsible for administrative fragmentation. A unique candidate identifier should connect the mobilisation record, eligibility confirmation, training batch, attendance, assessment, certification, placement evidence, post-placement support and grievance history.

The record should identify which institution submitted each entry, when it was changed, and what evidence supports the change. Corrections should preserve an audit trail rather than overwriting the original record without explanation. At the placement stage, evidence should be layered. A job offer is not equivalent to joining; joining is not equivalent to wage receipt; wage receipt for one month is not equivalent to employment continuity.

Depending on the scheme rules and lawful data access, verification may combine employer confirmation, candidate confirmation, payslips, bank credit evidence or other acceptable records. No single data source should be treated as infallible. A candidate must be able to dispute an inaccurate status without losing access to other programme support.

8.2 Digital dashboards and early-warning rules

Dashboards should support three levels of monitoring. First, a public dashboard should show aggregate performance by state, district, sector, gender and other lawful, privacy-protective categories, together with definitions and data dates.

Second, an operational dashboard should show overdue actions, incomplete files, unresolved complaints, delayed assessments, unverified placements and candidates due for follow-up.

Third, an audit dashboard should identify outliers and patterns for independent review. Automated flags should initiate human verification, not automatic punishment. E.g. A high placement rate accompanied by low candidate confirmation or missing wage evidence should trigger a sample audit, not an immediate conclusion of fraud.

Early-warning rules can include: training completion without assessment beyond a defined service standard; certification delays; placement claims with no candidate confirmation; repeated use of the same employer evidence across unrelated candidates; absence of required tracking contacts; high dropout rates concentrated in a batch; complaint clusters; and abrupt divergence between expenditure and verified milestones. The thresholds must be published or at least documented for auditors, tested for false positives and periodically revised. Small projects may need qualitative review rather than statistical thresholds.

8.3 Interoperability and data stewardship

Interoperability with relevant skill, employment and benefit systems may reduce duplicate entry, but it should be designed around a defined purpose and lawful data-sharing basis. The system should not collect every available personal detail merely because integration is technically possible. Data-sharing agreements should specify the data fields, purpose, legal authority, retention, security controls, correction process and responsibility for responding to beneficiaries.

The public dashboard should state whether figures are provisional, revised, migrated or audited. This is especially important when a data platform acknowledges that historical records are still being migrated. A state-level data stewardship function should be responsible for standard definitions, quality assurance, metadata, reconciliation and privacy compliance.

District offices should review anomalies and support candidates in correcting records. PIAs should be responsible for timely, accurate submissions but should not be the sole verifier of their own performance. Employers should provide evidence in standardised formats, and independent assessors or auditors should test the reliability of selected records. Candidate confirmation must be sought in a manner that is voluntary, safe and not coercive.

9. Restitution-Oriented Governance: Principles and Remedies

9.1 Restitution as a remedial design principle

Restitution-oriented governance begins with a practical question: when a public programme fails to deliver an applicable commitment, what can be done to restore the affected person, correct the record, prevent repetition and recover public resources where authorised? This paper does not assert a general statutory right to compensation for every unsuccessful placement.

The legal outcome depends on the programme guidelines in force, the terms of any undertaking, the role of each institution, evidence of breach, causation and actual loss, limitation periods and the forum with jurisdiction. So, restitution is a framework for identifying proportionate remedies, not a substitute for legal analysis.

A remedy ladder may start with correction and explanation, then delivery of an omitted service or support, referral to a verified employer or alternative placement support where still meaningful, reimbursement of an expense where rules or law authorise it, and administrative action against a defaulting provider. Recovery of public funds, penalties, contract termination or blacklisting must follow the governing rules and procedural fairness.

Compensation to a beneficiary should be considered only where an applicable legal basis exists and evidence supports the loss and causal connection. The candidate should not be required to prove a complex legal case merely to obtain a correction to a false digital record or to ask for a service the scheme expressly provides.

9.2 Evidence and due process

A restitution-oriented system requires a structured case file. The candidate should be able to describe the expected benefit, the actual failure, dates, relevant communications and resulting harm. The authority should retrieve programme records rather than placing the full evidentiary burden on the individual.

The PIA and employer should have a fair opportunity to respond. Decisions should explain the evidence accepted, the rule applied, the remedy granted or refused, and the available review route. Where fraud is suspected, records should be preserved and referred to the competent authority; the grievance officer should not prejudice criminal liability.

The remedial system should distinguish administrative error, provider non-performance, employer conduct, labour-market mismatch and personal circumstances. If a course was not delivered as approved, a corrective training opportunity or refund/recovery action may be relevant. If an appointment was falsely reported, the primary issue is verification, correction of the outcome record and action against responsible actors, subject to due process.

If a candidate obtained a job but left because of unsafe or unsuitable conditions, the case may require counselling, a safe referral or grievance under applicable labour law rather than a finding that the training provider breached its duty. If a job simply did not materialise despite reasonable efforts and no specific commitment was breached, the remedy may be additional support rather than compensation.

9.3 Proposed digital accountability and remedy cycle

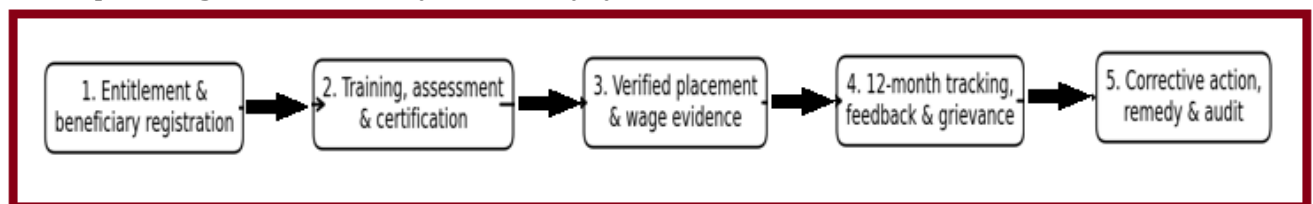


Figure 4. Proposed accountability cycle for DDU-GKY

The model is a policy proposal. Each remedial step must follow the applicable scheme rules, data-protection requirements and procedural safeguards.

10. Legal and Institutional Foundations

10.1 Programme guidelines, contracts and public accountability

The first legal reference point is the DDU-GKY guideline and sanction framework applicable to the project and period in question. These documents define the service obligations, eligible costs, evidence requirements, placement standards, tracking duties and consequences of default. The relevant state implementation arrangements, agreements with PIAs and employer commitments may add operational duties.

A case should be assessed against the version in force when the relevant events occurred, rather than applying a later rule retrospectively without authority. The Right to Information Act, 2005 provides a route for requesting non-exempt information held by public authorities, subject to its provisions and privacy-related limits.

Aggregate sanction orders, project-wise performance, audit reports, action-taken records and applicable guidelines may be relevant to public scrutiny. Individual beneficiary information and commercially or legally protected material require careful treatment under the law. Transparency should not be confused with publishing personal data; disclosure must be lawful, proportionate and purpose-specific.

10.2 Data protection and privacy

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 are relevant to the design of digital beneficiary systems.

The Rules were notified in November 2025, but commencement is phased; a system must check which provisions are in force at the time of deployment and comply with applicable requirements rather than assuming all duties became operative simultaneously (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology [MeitY], 2025; Government of India, 2023).

Even where a particular provision has not yet commenced, privacy by design is prudent: purpose limitation, data minimisation, clear notices, security, correction pathways, access control and responsible retention. Skill-programme data can reveal sensitive life circumstances through combinations of identity, location, bank transactions, social-group status and employment history. Such information should not be exposed on public dashboards.

Data-sharing with employers or third-party service providers should be restricted to what is necessary for verification and support. A beneficiary's refusal to provide irrelevant data should not be used as a pretext to deny an otherwise valid programme benefit. Where biometric or face-based attendance is used, fallback procedures are needed for technical failure, disability, poor connectivity or authentication errors.

10.3 Administrative fairness and review

Administrative fairness requires notice of adverse findings, an opportunity to respond, reasoned decisions, consistent standards and review by an authority not directly implicated in the original decision. A grievance system should not be controlled solely by the PIA against whom the complaint is made.

Cases involving alleged false placement claims, harassment, wage non-payment or unsafe migration may need referral to competent labour, police, legal services or other authorities. The digital system should record referrals and track whether they were acted upon, while protecting confidentiality and avoiding unnecessary duplication of personal records.

11. Policy Framework and Implementation Roadmap

11.1 Immediate actions: first six months

The first phase should establish a data dictionary and baseline. MoRD and state missions should publish definitions for enrolled, trained, assessed, certified, appointed, placed, verified employment, continuity and retained status. Each dashboard should display a date stamp, source, cohort period, revision history and known limitations.

Keralam should reconcile the supplied historical tables with the state MIS and publish an explanatory note for any differences rather than silently replacing older values. Each district should create a list of unresolved data-quality issues and overdue post-placement follow-ups.

A grievance service standard should specify how complaints are registered, acknowledged, assigned, investigated and reviewed. An illustrative standard could require acknowledgement within three working days, assignment to an officer within seven days and a reasoned initial response within thirty days, subject to complexity and existing rules.

These are proposed operational targets, not claims about current statutory deadlines. Candidates should be informed of their rights, the evidence required and the escalation route in Malayalam and other relevant languages, using accessible formats and plain language.

11.2 Medium-term actions: six to eighteen months

The second phase should pilot cohort-level tracking in selected districts with different labour-market conditions. The pilot should include candidate confirmation at joining, wage verification at defined intervals, one-year tracking, reasons for separation, employer feedback and candidate satisfaction.

Independent sampling should compare portal records with candidate interviews and permissible employment evidence.

An external evaluation should assess false-positive flags, data-entry burden, candidate exclusion and the time taken to resolve grievances. Pilot districts should include remote and high-vulnerability areas rather than only high-capacity centres.

Payment and contract management should be aligned with verifiable service delivery. Sanctioned payments should not be withheld arbitrarily where a provider has delivered an approved service; at the same time, unsupported placement claims should not trigger outcome-linked payments. The rules should set out the evidence required, audit rights, correction windows, dispute process and consequences for repeated non-compliance.

Any recovery from a PIA should follow contractual and administrative procedures. Beneficiaries should not be required to repay training costs because a placement did not occur unless a valid rule and lawful basis specifically apply.

11.3 Long-term actions: eighteen to thirty-six months

The third phase should integrate programme accountability with district skill plans, local economic development and green transition opportunities. District dashboards should identify sectors with sustainable demand, wage progression and retention, and compare outcomes with training costs. Partnerships with employers should include transparent job descriptions, wage ranges, working conditions, grievance contacts and migration support.

Where local employment is viable, training should support local enterprise, cooperatives and small businesses as well as wage employment. Where migration is necessary, candidates should receive pre-departure information, safe accommodation and transport guidance, and accessible support after relocation.

A periodic independent evaluation should examine distributional effects, not just aggregate averages. It should ask whether women and disadvantaged groups access the same range of courses, whether remote districts face longer travel times, whether candidates with disabilities receive reasonable accommodation, whether post-placement support reaches those who need it, and whether complaints result in action.

Public reports should publish anonymised outcomes and the status of corrective measures. The legislature, audit institutions and civil society should be able to scrutinise aggregate results without obtaining unnecessary access to personal records.

12. Proposed Monitoring Indicators

Table 4. Proposed dashboard indicators for sustainable employment accountability

Indicator	Operational definition	Reporting cycle	Verification responsibility
Training completion	Completed trainees / enrolled cohort	Quarterly; by district, gender and social group	State SRLM; independently sampled
Certification transition	Certified / assessed within a defined cohort	Quarterly	Assessment agency and SRLM
Verified placement	Candidate-confirmed joining plus acceptable employment evidence	Monthly/ Quarterly	PIA submission; independent sample verification
Employment continuity	Candidates still employed at 3, 6 and 12 months / verified placed cohort	Quarterly cohorts	PIA follow-up; candidate confirmation
Wage reliability	Candidates with verified wage receipt and wage level/sampled placed cohort	Quarterly	Candidate consent and lawful evidence handling

Post-placement support	Eligible candidates receiving documented support/eligible placed cohort	Quarterly	State mission audit
Grievance accessibility	Complaints acknowledged within standard; offline/assisted share	Monthly	Independent grievance cell
Remedy effectiveness	Cases resolved with corrective action; repeat complaints; appeal reversals	Quarterly	State mission and external review
Equity of access	Access-adjusted enrolment, completion and retention gaps	Annual	District planning unit; privacy-protective reporting
Expenditure integrity	Share of sampled claims with complete and consistent evidence	Quarterly/Annual audit	Internal audit and CAG/authorised auditors

13. Discussion

The evidence supports a measured conclusion. Keralam has substantial DDU-GKY activity, but reported volumes vary by year and district. The supplied placement series is incomplete and not cohort-linked, while Kudumbashree's later snapshot uses the term 'appointed' and has a different reporting date. These differences are not minor presentation issues: they show why public programme performance needs harmonised definitions and traceable revisions.

The strongest empirical result is therefore not a causal estimate, but a diagnosis of information and accountability constraints that limit confident interpretation of outcome data. The CAG's Uttar Pradesh findings reinforce the importance of verification and post-placement tracking. They demonstrate that even when a programme has formal requirements, the operational system may fail to verify claims or enforce obligations in a timely manner.

A state should not wait for a scandal or audit finding before designing these controls. It should routinely test evidence, publish corrective actions and protect candidates from the consequences of inaccurate provider reporting. The transfer of lessons across states must remain cautious because implementation arrangements and audit samples differ. In fact, the vital role of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in skill development is without doubt in this ICT era.

ICT integration has become an imperative for any entity for its competitiveness, survival and sustained growth. Government schemes like DDU-GKY is no exception to this global trend. Rapid advances in ICT and allied services like financial technology (FinTech) play key role in skill development initiatives like DDU-GKY in India. Policy statements of the Union and State Governments in India accord high priority to ICT integration in this Digital India regime in India.

This is particularly true in respect of Keralam (or, Kerala) that is mandated to Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission which in turn seeks to transform Keralam into a knowledge economy. Many global, national (India) and sub-national (Keralam, or Kerala) experiences highlighted the vital development potential of ICT. Global experiences, like that of Philippines as noted by Pickens (2009) underline the vast potential of ICT adoption (e.g. use of Mobile phones) for inclusive growth.

Many experiences in India too, indicate that ICT adoption (Fintech, E-CRM) is an imperative and not a choice. A field-based study in Keralam in India by Joju et. al. (2017a) noted a significant improvement in customer attitudes to ICT-based bank products due to e-CRM. Another study by Joju et. al. (2017b) noted prominent increase in the service quality of the banks in Keralam due to their FinTech adoption.

Besides ICT, the need for alternative financing models like housing microfinance was noted by Manoj (2015). Similar findings were made about the use banking technology for better service quality by Joju and Manoj (2019) and the role of ICT for effective social banking by Manoj (2019). In India, ICT is fast growing as an effective tool in the context of skill development also, particularly in an advanced State like Keralam which is well ahead of the nation in education, literacy, health indices and in various socio-economic indices.

Sarojkumari, et al. (2023) noted the vital need for ICT-based tools for scientific health management in this ICT era. Manoj (2023) argued that adopting ESG frameworks provides a viable route for sustainable real estate transition in India.

Sreedevi et. al. (2025), noted that there exist specific and distinct socio-linguistic strategies and confirmed that language use in a multi-lingual setting is very symbolic and a socially developed one. All the above success stories show that ICT adoption, ESG adoption, Digital governance of various Governmental schemes (like, DDU-GKY) etc. have become essential for inclusive growth in India.

Given the key significance of ICT in India, especially in Keralam, digital governance can contribute to sustainable rural development through three mechanisms. First, it can reduce information asymmetry by giving candidates and administrators access to the same status record.

Second, it can improve incentives by linking public claims to evidence and independent review.

Third, it can enable learning by revealing where candidates exit the pathway and whether the reasons vary by district, sector or group. None of these mechanisms is automatic. If digital records are inaccurate, if grievance decisions are not independent, or if excluded candidates cannot access the system, digitisation can simply make weak administration more efficient at recording its own claims.

Restitution-oriented governance adds the missing remedial dimension. Accountability is incomplete if a dashboard identifies a failure but the affected candidate cannot obtain correction, support or review. Yet a remedy must be proportionate and legally grounded.

Administrative correction and delivery of an omitted service may be appropriate for a relatively straightforward failure. Recovery from an implementing agency may be appropriate where rules and evidence support it. Compensation requires a stronger legal basis and proof of harm and causation. This differentiated approach protects beneficiaries without turning aggregate underperformance into an unsupported claim of individual liability.

Finally, sustainability should inform what counts as success. A programme may record placement but deliver insecure, underpaid or short-lived work. It may place candidates outside the state but provide insufficient migration support. It may train candidates in a sector with weak local demand. The monitoring framework should therefore include retention, wage receipt, job quality, safety, career progression and candidate experience, alongside training and placement counts. Local development planning can then use the data to adapt course offerings and employer partnerships.

14. Limitations and Further Research

This study relies on secondary aggregate data and official documents. It does not have access to individual candidate records, employer interviews, project-level expenditure, grievance files or a beneficiary survey. The supplied study's placement observations are incomplete and do not establish cohort-level conversion rates. District totals are not adjusted for population, eligibility or sanctioned targets.

The updated Kudumbashree snapshot and historical source use potentially different definitions and cut-off dates. Consequently, the paper cannot establish causal effects of digital governance, estimate programme impact on income, prove unlawful conduct by a particular Keralam PIA, or determine individual compensation entitlements.

Further research should assemble anonymised batch-level data with clear cohort identifiers and consistent outcome definitions. A district panel could examine whether target allocation, PIA capacity, sector mix and local labour-market conditions explain variations in training and retention. Qualitative interviews with candidates, district officials, PIAs and employers could identify barriers to access and the actual use of grievance systems.

A pilot of candidate-confirmed placement verification could compare administrative claims with independently checked employment outcomes. Legal case studies could examine how existing administrative remedies, contractual enforcement, labour law and public-law review operate in particular documented cases.

15. Conclusion

DDU-GKY's contribution to sustainable rural development depends on more than the delivery of training. The programme must connect skills to verifiable employment, support candidates after placement, maintain reliable records and respond when commitments are not met. The supplied national and Keralam data show significant programme scale and geographical variation, but also incomplete placement observations and limits on cohort interpretation.

Kudumbashree's later administrative snapshot provides useful additional context, while the CAG's Uttar Pradesh audit shows why formal tracking and verification duties require active enforcement. A sustainable accountability system should link digital records to clear definitions, independent verification, accessible grievance redress, privacy protection and proportionate remedies.

Digital dashboards should expose system-level performance while safeguarding personal data; early-warning flags should lead to human review; and the candidate should be able to correct a record or challenge a claim without depending solely on the implementing agency. Restitution-oriented governance can help structure corrective action, service restoration and authorised recovery, while compensation remains dependent on applicable law and evidence of breach, causation and loss. The central policy recommendation is to move from a training-count model toward a transparent livelihood-outcome model.

By combining cohort-based monitoring, district-sensitive planning, reliable wage and retention evidence, independent audit and beneficiary-centred remedies, DDU-GKY can strengthen both the integrity of public expenditure and the substantive inclusion of rural youth. Such a framework would support sustainable development not by assuming every placement succeeds, but by ensuring that failures are visible, explainable, contestable and addressed fairly.

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