

Digital Justice and Economic Inclusion: A Restitution-Based Framework for Accountability in India's Rural Skill Development Programmes

Dr. Firos Khan M C¹; Dr. Sandra Surendran²; Dr. Neeraja James³; Aditya M⁴; Dr. Jacob Joju⁵

¹Post Doctoral Fellow, Department of Applied Economics, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), Kochi, Kerala, India – 682 022. ORCID ID: 0009-0003-3822-6291

Email: firoskhanmc@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Economics, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), Kochi, Kerala, India – 682 022. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4305-9953.

Email: sandrakrish1919@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor and Head of the Department, Department of Economics and Research Centre, St. Albert's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam, Kerala, India – 682 018. ORCID ID: 0009-0000-0094-0017

Email: neerajajames2222@gmail.com

⁴B.Sc. (Honours) (Economics) Student, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE), 846 Shivaji Nagar, Deccan Gymkhana, BMCC Road, Pune, Maharashtra, India – 411004. ORCID ID: 0009-0007-9449-4556 Email: adityam36912@gmail.com

⁵Post Doctoral Fellow, Department of Applied Economics, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), Kochi, Kerala, India – 682 022. Email: mailerjoju@gmail.com.

Abstract

Rural skill-development programmes are expected to convert public expenditure and training into credible opportunities for dignified and sustained employment. Yet administrative indicators—enrolment, training completion, assessment and certification—do not necessarily establish whether beneficiaries obtain promised jobs, receive wages and support, or can challenge inaccurate records and unmet commitments. This paper develops a restitution-based framework for digital justice and economic inclusion in India's Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), using a secondary-data study of national and Kerala performance for 2015–16 to 2023–24 as its empirical foundation. The source study reports 1,891,189 enrolments, 1,726,824 trained candidates, 944,778 certified candidates and 479,353 placements nationally. For Kerala, it reports 75,682 trained candidates and 12,161 placements through June 2024, while acknowledging gaps in annual placement reporting. These figures suggest a need to study the entire beneficiary journey rather than treat training volume as a proxy for inclusion. The study clubs descriptive analysis with doctrinal and policy analysis of programme guidelines, digital monitoring, transparency, privacy and grievance mechanisms. It proposes a beneficiary-centred model built around traceable digital records, verifiable placement and retention claims, accessible complaints, time-bound decisions, reasoned remedies, independent audits and privacy safeguards. Restitution is conceptualised not as an automatic entitlement to a job, but as a process for correcting wrongful records, recovering withheld benefits where legally due, addressing contractual or procedural failures, and restoring access to promised services. The paper concludes that digitalisation contributes to justice only when records are contestable, institutions are answerable and remedies are practical for rural youth, including those facing digital, linguistic, gender, caste or disability barriers.

Keywords: DDU-GKY; Digital justice; Economic inclusion; Restitution; Rural youth; Grievance redressal; Digital governance; Skill development; ICT integration.

Introduction

Skill development is an important instrument of rural livelihood policy because education and training can expand occupational choice, labour mobility and the capacity to secure wage employment.

India's DDU-GKY is a placement-linked skilling initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development, intended to support rural poor youth in securing wage employment. Its implementation involves central and state institutions, technical support agencies and project implementing agencies (PIAs), creating a multi-actor accountability chain (National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj [NIRDPR], n.d.).

The scheme's stated orientation toward training and placement makes outcome verification central: the public purpose is not completed merely when a candidate is enrolled or attends a course.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration is growingly becoming an imperative for any entity for its competitiveness, survival and growth. Even 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. These studies show that ICT adoption, ESG adoption, Digital governance of various Governmental schemes (like, DDU-GKY) etc. have become essential for inclusive growth in India.

In this ICT era, digital management information systems can improve the administration of a complex programme. The Ministry's Kaushal Bharat platform has been described in official material as an end-to-end system for monitoring mobilisation, training, placement and tracking, with role-based access, reporting functions and mobile applications for inspection and placement management (Ministry of Rural Development [MoRD], n.d.-a).

Such infrastructure can create a traceable administrative record. However, digital data are not identical to justice. An entry that a candidate has been placed may not establish that the job existed, that wages were paid, that the worker remained employed, or that the employment met the applicable conditions. Likewise, a beneficiary may be unable to correct an error if the portal is inaccessible, the complaint route is unclear or the relevant institution does not respond.

This paper asks how digital monitoring can be connected to accountability and restitution in DDU-GKY. It takes a rights-oriented approach without assuming that every unsuccessful placement automatically creates a legally enforceable right to a particular job. Instead, it distinguishes programme commitments, administrative duties, contractual obligations and the evidence needed to establish a specific claim.

The paper argues that restitution is a useful analytical lens because it shifts attention from aggregate outputs to what should happen when an identifiable beneficiary suffers a loss or is denied a promised process. The empirical starting point is the study by Surendran et. al. (2023), which compiles national figures from Kaushal Bharat and Keralam district-level information from the DDU-GKY Cell, Kudumbashree–State Poverty Eradication Mission.

It reports a national cumulative total of 479,353 placements against 1,891,189 enrolled candidates and a Keralam total of 12,161 placements against 75,682 trained candidates through June 2024. The data are descriptive and have important limitations, including incomplete year-specific placement reporting for Keralam and differences between administrative status categories. The paper treats these limitations as part of the accountability problem, not as proof of misconduct.

It makes four contributions. First, it reframes DDU-GKY performance through a beneficiary journey: mobilisation, enrolment, training, assessment, certification, placement, retention and remedy.

Second, it identifies where digital records can strengthen or weaken accountability.

Third, it proposes a restitution-based framework for correcting records and responding to failures. Fourth, it outlines practical institutional reforms that could be tested in Keralam and adapted nationally.

2. Programme and Institutional Context

2.1 DDU-GKY as a placement-linked programme

DDU-GKY grew out of the Aajeevika Skills programme and the special-project component of the earlier rural livelihoods architecture. Official descriptions identify its central purpose as meeting rural youth occupational aspirations and improving skills for wage employment. Implementation is distributed across the MoRD, state missions, technical support bodies and PIAs; the programme also operates through defined guidelines and standard operating procedures (NIRDPR, n.d.).

The multi-level structure is necessary for scale, but it can create uncertainty for a beneficiary who does not know which institution is responsible for a delayed certificate, disputed attendance, misleading placement claim, non-payment or unresolved complaint.

The programme's accountability challenge is therefore both vertical and horizontal. Vertically, central policy and funding must translate into state-level implementation and local service delivery. Horizontally, training providers, assessors, employers and placement support personnel must exchange accurate information.

A failure at one point can be obscured if each actor reports only its own activity. A training provider may report completion; an assessment body may report certification; a PIA may record placement; and an employer may later terminate or never actually engage the candidate. A credible system must preserve the history of these stages and identify which actor is answerable for each.

2.2 Digital monitoring already exists, but monitoring is not redress

Official descriptions of Kaushal Bharat identify an end-to-end management information system covering mobilisation, training, placement and tracking, with reporting and mobile-based inspection and placement-management functions (MoRD, n.d.-a).

The DDU-GKY notification portal also lists programme guidelines, standard operating procedures, an earlier notification on dealing with complaints/defaults, Aadhaar-related implementation and an automation notice concerning Aadhaar-enabled biometric attendance (MoRD, n.d.-b). These are significant institutional building blocks. They establish that the programme has procedural and digital instruments relevant to monitoring.

Nevertheless, monitoring and redress perform different functions. Monitoring answers questions such as whether a record exists, whether a target has been reached and whether a project is progressing. Redress asks whether a person was adversely affected, what evidence is relevant, which authority must decide the claim, what remedy is legally and administratively available, and whether that remedy was delivered.

A portal can make a problem visible without resolving it. The proposed framework therefore treats digital monitoring as evidence infrastructure within a broader accountability system.

3. Review of Literature and Conceptual Foundations

3.1 Skills programmes and employment outcomes

The literature cited in the source study points to a gap between training participation and durable employment. Chakravorty and Bedi's (2019) evaluation of skills training in rural Bihar is summarised in the source study as finding an initial employment gain that did not persist over time for all graduates; reported reasons for leaving jobs included discrimination and wages insufficient to meet living costs.

The lesson is not that DDU-GKY necessarily produces the same results in every state, but that placement counts alone are incomplete indicators of programme success. Retention, wage adequacy, work conditions and reasons for separation are necessary to interpret outcomes. Babu and Kinkhabwala (2019) emphasise the role of industry participation in skilling, while the source study's discussion of Keralam initiatives highlights the importance of institutional design, local context and resource support.

Research on ICT-based micro-enterprises associated with Kudumbashree also links digital tools to women's empowerment while recognising that technology requires training, resources and institutional support (Chandarsekar & Prakash, 2010, as cited in Surendran et. al. (2023). Taken together, these studies suggest that training outcomes depend on the interaction between skills, employers, social conditions and implementation arrangements.

3.2 Digital governance and accountability

Digital systems can reduce information asymmetry by creating time-stamped records, standardising reporting and enabling comparisons across projects and locations. They can also make administrative decisions more legible to auditors and citizens. In DDU-GKY, records of attendance, assessment, certification, placement and continuity could support verification of both public performance claims and individual complaints.

A digital audit trail can also help identify discrepancies—for example, a candidate marked as placed without an employer confirmation or a certificate marked as issued but not accessible to the candidate. Yet digital governance can reproduce exclusion when the person affected lacks connectivity, digital literacy, a suitable device, accessible interfaces or confidence in submitting a complaint.

It can also produce false confidence if data are incomplete, entered late or not independently verified. An attendance system may record presence but not training quality; a placement record may identify an employer but not confirm actual wages; a dashboard may show aggregate success while concealing district, gender, caste, disability or income-based disparities.

Digital systems should therefore be assessed by the quality of their evidence and the accessibility of their correction mechanisms, not only by their technological sophistication.

3.3 Restitution, public accountability and beneficiary rights

Restitution is used here as a remedial principle: where an identifiable administrative, contractual or procedural failure causes a beneficiary to lose a benefit, incur a cost or suffer an avoidable disadvantage, the responsible institution should take appropriate steps to restore the position that ought reasonably to have existed, subject to law and evidence.

Restitution may include correcting an inaccurate record, providing a withheld certificate, reimbursing an authorised expense, re-performing a promised service, reconsidering a decision, facilitating a fresh placement process, or referring a wage or employment dispute to the competent authority. It does not mean that a public programme can guarantee employment regardless of labour-market conditions.

The Right to Information Act, 2005 provides a statutory transparency route for obtaining information held by public authorities and is explicitly directed toward transparency and accountability (Government of India, 2005). It can complement, but does not replace, an individual grievance mechanism. Similarly, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 establishes a framework for processing digital personal data for lawful purposes while recognising individual data protection interests (Government of India, 2023).

For a programme handling identity, attendance, assessment and employment information, accountability and privacy must be designed together. Public transparency should concern programme performance and decision processes; it should not expose beneficiaries' personal details unnecessarily.

3.4 Research gap

The available source study primarily describes programme growth and status counts. It does not directly measure the accessibility or effectiveness of grievance redressal, the prevalence of false placement records, the time taken to resolve complaints, or the amount of beneficiary loss remedied.

This paper does not claim to fill those empirical gaps with invented data. Instead, it extends the descriptive evidence into a conceptual and policy framework, specifying indicators and institutional mechanisms that future primary research could measure.

4. Objectives and Research Questions

The principal objective is to develop a restitution-based digital accountability framework for DDU-GKY that connects programme monitoring to economic inclusion and beneficiary remedies.

- i. To interpret national and Keralam DDU-GKY performance indicators in terms of the full beneficiary journey rather than training volume alone.
- ii. To identify accountability risks arising from fragmented institutional responsibility, incomplete data and weakly visible grievance processes.
- iii. To analyse the relevance of transparency, administrative fairness and data-protection principles to digital monitoring of skill development.
- iv. To propose practical mechanisms for verification, complaint handling, restitution and independent evaluation.
- v. To establish a future research agenda for testing the framework across Keralam districts and comparable states.

In line with these objectives, the paper addresses four research questions as follows:

- 1) What do the reported training, certification and placement figures reveal—and what do they not reveal—about inclusion?
- 2) How can digital records make programme commitments verifiable?
- 3) What forms of restitution are appropriate when programme delivery or records fail?
- 4) What institutional safeguards are required to ensure that digital accountability does not exclude or expose beneficiaries?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

The study uses a descriptive secondary-data analysis combined with doctrinal and policy analysis. The empirical component is based on Surendran et. al. (2023) study, which reports national cumulative administrative data for 2015–16 to 2023–24 and district-level annual data for Keralam.

The policy component reviews official DDU-GKY programme descriptions and notification material, the Right to Information Act, 2005, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. The purpose is analytical framework development, not causal impact evaluation.

5.2 Data sources and indicators

At national level, the source study reports 3,440 projects, 1,891,189 enrolled candidates, 1,726,824 trained candidates, 1,570,960 assessed candidates, 944,778 certified candidates and 479,353 placed candidates. It also reports 110,435 dropouts, 53,225 candidates undergoing training, 1,103,801 appointed candidates and 925,540 with monthly continuity of at least three months.

At Keralam level, annual training totals are available for 2015–16 through 2023–24 (the last year only through June 2024), and the source reports 75,682 trained candidates and 12,161 placements. Annual placement values are missing for 2015–16, 2022–23 and 2023–24 in the supplied table.

5.3 Analytical procedures

The paper calculates simple descriptive ratios from reported totals to show progression between administrative stages. Ratios are interpreted cautiously because the source's categories may not be a single linked cohort: the number assessed, certified or placed may relate to candidates from different enrolment years, and the data do not supply individual-level linkage or follow-up.

The ratio of placements to enrolled candidates is therefore an aggregate status ratio, not a cohort placement probability. The paper uses the missingness and status-category issues to identify requirements for improved data governance.

5.4 Limitations and ethical approach

The data are secondary, cover only the period through June 2024 and include incomplete annual placement reporting for Keralam. The source study does not provide microdata, complaint records, wages, job quality, beneficiary interviews or employer validation. No causal inference is made and no individual-level outcomes are invented.

Policy and legal recommendations are presented as proposals for institutional design; specific legal remedies in an actual case would depend on the applicable guidelines, contracts, facts and competent forum. Personal data should be processed only for legitimate purposes and with proportionate safeguards.

6. Empirical Findings

6.1 National status: attrition across the administrative pipeline

Indicator	Reported total	Approx. Share (Percent)
Enrolled	1,891,189	100.0 percent
Trained	1,726,824	91.3 percent
Assessed	1,570,960	83.1 percent
Certified	944,778	49.9 percent
Placed	479,353	25.3 percent
Monthly continuity of at least 3 months	925,540	48.9 percent
Dropouts	110,435	5.8 percent

Source: Surendran et. al. (2023)

The reported totals show a substantial administrative reach: the number recorded as trained is about 91.3 percent of enrolment. Certification is lower, at approximately 49.9 percent of enrolment, while recorded placement is approximately 25.3 percent. These comparisons should not be read as proof that the remaining candidates were denied employment or that all recorded placements were durable. Rather, they show why a programme dashboard should make the denominator, cohort definition, reporting date and verification rule explicit.

A public statement that ‘25.3 percent were placed’ means something different if it compares a multi-year cumulative placement total with enrolment across all cohorts than if it follows a defined cohort for six or twelve months. The source also reports 925,540 candidates with monthly continuity of at least three months, a figure larger than the reported placement total. This may reflect differences in the administrative definitions or timing of the underlying status categories.

It is not appropriate to silently reconcile the figures. A restitution-oriented system would publish a data dictionary, clarify whether categories are cumulative or mutually exclusive, and preserve the update history so that inconsistencies can be investigated.

6.2 Keralam: scale, volatility and missing placement information

Financial year	Candidates trained	Candidates placed (reported)	Interpretive note
2015–16	3,154	Not available	Placement series incomplete
2016–17	11,278	6,207	Reported placement count
2017–18	11,874	5,093	Reported placement count
2018–19	13,298	9,656	Highest reported placement total in listed years
2019–20	13,446	8,390	Highest training total
2020–21	3,612	2,931	Sharp training decline during pandemic period
2021–22	5,308	718	Low reported placements relative to training
2022–23	8,635	Not available	Placement series incomplete
2023–24*	5,077	Not available	Data only through June 2024
Total	75,682	12,161	As reported in source study

Source: Surendran et. al. (2023).

Keralam’s annual training totals increased from 3,154 in 2015–16 to a peak of 13,446 in 2019–20, fell to 3,612 in 2020–21, and subsequently recovered to 8,635 in 2022–23 before reaching 5,077 by June 2024. The decline in 2020–21 is temporally consistent with pandemic disruption, but the available data alone cannot isolate COVID-19 from changes in project cycles, reporting or other factors.

Annual placement data are incomplete for three listed years, and the total placement figure is not a complete annual series. The reported aggregate ratio of 6.22 trained candidates per placement is an important diagnostic signal, but it must not be misrepresented as a cohort conversion rate.

The training total covers nine reporting years, while the placement total includes only the placements recorded in the source’s available data. Missing placement observations and differences in timing can affect the ratio. A robust digital dashboard should display both observed values and data completeness, including a warning when year-wise reporting is unavailable.

6.3 District variation and equity

The district tables in the source study show uneven distribution of training, assessment, certification, dropout and continuity.

For example, Malappuram recorded 2,341 trainees in 2019–20, approximately 17.41 percent of that year's Keralam total; Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram also recorded substantial numbers in several early years.

The source identifies district-level variation in dropout and certification patterns, including spikes in particular years and changes after 2019–20. Such differences may reflect population, project location, provider capacity, demand, travel distance, local labour markets or data quality. The study does not contain the explanatory variables required to find which mechanisms dominate.

A justice-centred monitoring system should not rank districts solely by total candidates trained. It should compare access and outcomes relative to eligible rural youth, disaggregate results where legally and ethically appropriate, and flag missing data.

A district with fewer placements may have a smaller target or a different project mix; a district with many recorded placements may still have poor wage or retention outcomes. Equity analysis therefore requires denominators, context and outcome quality.

7. Digital Justice: From Data Capture to Contestable Evidence

7.1 The beneficiary journey as the unit of accountability

The programme should be represented as a sequence of verifiable events: (1) eligibility and informed enrolment; (2) course and provider assignment; (3) attendance and training delivery; (4) assessment; (5) certification; (6) employer matching and placement; (7) wage and employment verification; (8) retention follow-up; and (9) complaint, correction and remedy where required. Each event should have a responsible institution, date, evidence standard and correction route.

This allows administrators to distinguish genuine service delivery from a status entry that has not been independently substantiated. A beneficiary-facing record should present essential information in plain language and in relevant local languages. It should show the current status, the institution responsible for the next step, documents or actions needed from the beneficiary, the expected timeline and a route to challenge an error. The person should be able to obtain a paper or assisted copy, so that a digital-only interface does not become a condition for accessing the programme.

7.2 Verification rules for placement and retention

Placement is especially important because it is the link between publicly funded training and economic inclusion. A verified placement record should identify the employer, role, location, joining date and applicable evidence of engagement, while limiting public disclosure of personal information. Where programme guidelines require particular placement conditions, verification should test those conditions.

Follow-up at three, six and twelve months should record whether the candidate remains employed, has changed jobs or has left, with reasons collected sensitively and voluntarily. The system should distinguish 'offered', 'joined', 'wages received', 'retained' and 'verified by employer/beneficiary' rather than combining them into one status.

Verification should not depend solely on the PIA that is evaluated against placement targets. A proportionate model can combine candidate confirmation, employer confirmation, documentary evidence where appropriate, risk-based sample audits and independent calls or visits. Candidates must be able to dispute a record without being penalised or having their access to unrelated services restricted. Where an employer's response is unavailable, the record should state 'pending verification' rather than automatically treating the placement as confirmed.

7.3 Transparency without privacy harm

Public dashboards should publish aggregate project, district, provider and cohort indicators, with clear definitions and update dates. They should show denominators, missing values, revisions and data-quality flags.

Individual-level information—identity numbers, contact details, bank details, caste or disability information, complaint narratives and employment documents—should not be placed in public dashboards. Access should be role-based and logged, and data should be retained only for a defined lawful purpose and period.

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 makes responsible processing a core legal consideration; implementation should be checked against the Act's applicable commencement provisions and rules rather than assuming every provision has the same effective date (Government of India, 2023; Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, 2025).

Data minimisation and accountability are complementary. The system needs enough information to verify performance and remedy individual errors, but it does not need to expose a beneficiary's identity to the public to demonstrate that a provider has met a target. An anonymised identifier can support a case file, while public reporting can disclose counts and rates. Privacy-preserving design is particularly important for young people from disadvantaged households who may have limited ability to challenge misuse of their personal information.

8. Restitution-Based Framework for Accountability

8.1 Principles

Beneficiary-centredness: the system should be understandable and usable by the person affected, not only by programme officials.

1. Traceability: each key status should be linked to a date, responsible actor, evidence and history of revisions.
2. Contestability: beneficiaries must be able to challenge inaccurate, incomplete or misleading records.
3. Proportionality: remedies should fit the proven failure and the applicable programme rules, contract or law.
4. Timeliness: complaints should receive acknowledgement, a named case owner, a deadline and a reasoned outcome.
5. Independence: high-risk or disputed cases should be reviewable by an authority not responsible for the original entry.
6. Non-exclusion: offline, assisted, multilingual and disability-accessible routes should accompany digital access.
7. Privacy and security: use only necessary data, restrict access, log changes and provide safe handling of sensitive complaints.

8.2 The five-stage restitution process

Stage	Mechanism	Expected output
1. Detect	Automated data-quality flags, beneficiary notification, audits and complaint intake	A logged discrepancy or complaint with case ID
2. Establish Facts	Review attendance, assessment, certificate, placement and payment evidence; contact beneficiary and relevant provider	Evidence summary and identification of responsible actor
3. Decide	A competent officer applies programme guidelines, contract terms and relevant law; gives reasons and explains review rights	Written, accessible decision within a published timeline
4. Remedy	Correct records; issue delayed documents; arrange re-assessment or service completion where appropriate; refer wage/legal disputes; recover or reimburse amounts only where legally due	Specific corrective action, responsible person and completion date
5. Learn	Aggregate complaint analysis, independent audit, recurrence review and publication of anonymised outcomes	Systemic changes, provider improvement or proportionate sanctions

The stages separate the correction of a database entry from the substantive remedy. If a candidate's certification is wrongly recorded as incomplete, the first task is to verify the assessment and correct the status. If the certificate was never issued despite successful completion, the remedy may include issuing it.

If a candidate was recorded as placed without joining the employer, the record should be corrected and the underlying reporting process investigated. If an employer withheld wages, the case may require referral to the appropriate labour-law authority or contractual process; the programme's digital grievance channel should not pretend to adjudicate matters outside its jurisdiction.

8.3 What restitution can—and cannot—mean

Restitution is not a blanket guarantee of a job, a fixed salary or a particular employment duration unless a specific legal or contractual commitment establishes that obligation. The framework proposes a graduated remedy menu: correction of records; release of a certificate or other withheld deliverable; re-performance of training or assessment where the original process failed; fresh placement assistance; recovery of an unauthorised fee where supported by rules and evidence; referral of wage, discrimination or workplace-safety claims to competent authorities; and disciplinary or contractual action where misconduct is established.

A reasoned decision should explain the evidence, the responsible institution, the remedy and any available appeal or review. The remedy must also be practical. A beneficiary may need travel costs, an accessible appointment, a telephone explanation or assistance from a trusted support person to participate in a process.

Digital justice is not achieved if the person must repeatedly visit offices, upload documents already held by government or navigate a portal that is inaccessible on a low-cost phone. The system should apply a 'no wrong door' principle: a complaint received by the wrong programme unit should be transferred to the competent office, with the complainant informed and the original filing date preserved.

8.4 Grievance design and service standards

A proposed service standard would acknowledge complaints within three working days, conduct an initial classification within seven working days and issue a reasoned decision within thirty days, with written notice if a complex case requires an extension. These are proposed policy targets, not a claim that existing DDU-GKY rules already prescribe these deadlines.

Urgent cases involving threats, harassment, identity misuse or immediate safety concerns should receive expedited handling. Each decision should identify the next review route and deadline. Cases should be tracked until the remedy is completed, not closed merely because a response was sent. The complaint channel should accept web forms, telephone calls, SMS or messaging-based requests, written submissions through local facilitation centres and in-person complaints.

A complainant should receive a unique reference number and a means to check progress. Anonymous reports may be useful for systemic risk detection, although individual restitution normally requires enough information to establish the claim. The design should protect complainants from retaliation and should not make a provider the sole gatekeeper for complaints about that provider.

9. Legal and Policy Foundations

9.1 Transparency and access to information

The Right to Information Act, 2005 provides a legal mechanism for citizens to seek information held by public authorities and seeks to promote transparency and accountability (Government of India, 2005). In the DDU-GKY context, information requests may be relevant to scheme guidelines, sanctioned targets, aggregate performance, inspection records, complaint procedures and action taken, subject to lawful exemptions and privacy limits.

RTI is not a substitute for a prompt operational grievance channel: an information response may clarify what happened but may not itself correct a placement record or provide the service due. Routine proactive disclosure is preferable to requiring each beneficiary to file an RTI application for basic programme information.

Public dashboards and periodic reports should provide project-wise and district-wise aggregate data, definitions, update dates, audit summaries and complaint-resolution statistics. The RTI framework can then function as a supplementary accountability mechanism where routine disclosure is inadequate.

9.2 Administrative fairness and reasoned decisions

A fair programme should make applicable conditions accessible, apply them consistently and provide a meaningful opportunity to correct material errors. Where a decision affects certification, eligibility, placement support or a complaint, the affected person should receive an intelligible explanation.

A bare portal status is not a sufficient explanation where the person disputes its accuracy. Reasons also improve institutional learning: they make it possible to identify recurring failure modes, such as delayed employer confirmation or incorrect candidate identity matching.

This paper does not assert that every programme dispute automatically creates a constitutional or statutory cause of action. The legal route depends on the nature of the decision, the relevant guidelines, contractual arrangements, public-law duties and the facts.

The framework's minimum administrative proposal is that programme authorities create a clear internal review route and preserve access to legally available external remedies. It should not require beneficiaries to waive other rights in order to use an internal portal.

9.3 Data protection and responsible digital systems

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 recognises the need to process digital personal data for lawful purposes while protecting individuals' data interests (Government of India, 2023). The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology reported that the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 were notified on 14 November 2025 (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, 2025).

For operational implementation, agencies should consult the official Act, rules and commencement notifications to determine the obligations applicable at the relevant time. A programme-wide data-governance policy should specify the purpose of each data field, lawful basis for collection and use, access permissions, retention period, correction procedure, breach response and the process for sharing information with employers or service providers.

Sensitive personal information should not be used to create opaque risk scores that deny a candidate access to training or placement support. Any automated flag should be explainable, reviewable by a human officer and open to challenge. Digital identity and biometric systems should include exception procedures for authentication failure so that a technical error does not become a denial of service.

9.4 Contractual and institutional accountability

Because DDU-GKY involves PIAs, training centres, assessors and employers, responsibility should be allocated through enforceable project agreements and standard operating procedures. Each stage should specify the evidence required, who enters and validates the record, who pays for the service, what happens when a target or standard is not met, and how a candidate can complain.

Audit findings should inform corrective action and, where warranted under applicable rules, contractual consequences. Sanctions should be evidence-based and proportionate, and should not deprive beneficiaries of remedies because the institution responsible has been penalised. A critical distinction is between institutional performance management and individual redress.

A provider may receive a poor rating because of repeated verified failures, while an individual candidate still needs a certificate, a corrected record or placement assistance. Conversely, a provider's strong aggregate rating should not prevent investigation of an individual complaint. The two systems should exchange information while maintaining separate decision records.

10. Policy Recommendations

10.1 Create a beneficiary-facing digital ledger

Each enrolled candidate should have a portable, plain-language record of enrolment, training attendance, assessment outcome, certification, placement status and follow-up. The record should show dates, responsible institutions, the source of verification and any pending action.

It should be accessible through a secure portal and through assisted offline channels. Candidates should be able to download or request a copy and submit a correction request without depending on the training provider being challenged.

10.2 Publish a data dictionary and completeness score

The programme should define 'trained', 'assessed', 'certified', 'appointed', 'placed' and 'monthly continuity' in a public data dictionary. It should state whether each indicator is a cohort measure, a cumulative status or a count of events, and how duplicates and delayed updates are handled.

Each dashboard should display a completeness score and date of last update. Missing values must be shown as missing, not zero. Revised figures should retain a version history and explain material changes.

10.3 Verify placements and employment quality

Placement reporting should distinguish offer, joining, wage payment and retention. Verification should combine candidate confirmation, employer evidence and risk-based independent audit. Follow-up should record job changes and reasons for separation without treating every departure as programme failure; some departures may reflect better opportunities, while others may reveal discrimination, unsafe conditions or inadequate wages.

Reporting should include job type, wage band where appropriate, location, contract type and retention intervals in anonymised aggregate form.

10.4 Establish an independent grievance and restitution unit

A designated grievance unit should be institutionally separate from the project team whose decision is disputed. It should have authority to request records from PIAs, training centres and relevant state units, issue reasoned decisions within service standards, direct record corrections and refer matters outside its jurisdiction.

A state-level oversight committee could review anonymised trends and unresolved cases, while an independent audit function samples placement records and grievance outcomes.

10.5 Make inclusion a design requirement

Keralam implementation should use local-language communication and district facilitation through existing public and community institutions where feasible. The system should support low-bandwidth phones, assisted filing, accessible formats and non-digital submissions.

Outreach should specifically consider women with care responsibilities, candidates with disabilities, socially disadvantaged groups and youth in remote areas. Disaggregated analysis should be undertaken only where data quality and privacy safeguards permit, and small cells should be suppressed where identification risk is high.

10.6 Use complaints as programme-learning data

A complaint is not only a case to close; it is evidence about programme design. Monthly analysis should identify repeated problems by stage, provider, district and type—such as delays in assessment, non-issuance of certificates, placement mismatch, unverified employment, unauthorised charges or inaccessible digital services.

Corrective action should be assigned to a named institution and monitored until completion. Aggregate complaint outcomes, including average resolution time and proportion of remedies completed, should be published.

10.7 Align performance incentives with quality, not volume alone

Provider performance should not be determined solely by enrolment, training completion or placement counts. A balanced scorecard should include data integrity, candidate satisfaction, wage and retention evidence, employer validation, complaint responsiveness, inclusion and independent audit results.

The scorecard should not reward the suppression of complaints or penalise providers simply because beneficiaries exercise their rights. Audit sampling and beneficiary contact should be independent enough to reduce incentives to inflate results.

11. Proposed Monitoring Framework and Indicators

Dimension	Suggested indicator	Verification source	Accountability use
Access	Eligible applicants enrolled; disaggregated participation where safe	Eligibility/enrolment records; sample checks	Identify exclusion and geographic gaps
Training delivery	Attendance, instructional hours and completion	Attendance log, inspections, candidate confirmation	Detect false attendance or low delivery
Assessment	Time from course completion to assessment; appeal/correction rate	Assessment records and independent sample	Resolve delays and scoring disputes
Certification	Share of eligible successful candidates receiving certificates on time	Issuance log and candidate confirmation	Trigger document delivery and record correction
Placement	Verified joining rate among a defined cohort	Employer and candidate confirmation	Separate offers from actual employment
Employment quality	Wage payment, role relevance and retention at 3/6/12 months	Candidate follow-up; employer records; sample audits	Measure economic inclusion beyond placement
Grievance access	Complaints per 1,000 beneficiaries; channel and accessibility	Case-management system and independent survey	Detect barriers; do not treat high complaint rates alone as poor performance
Grievance resolution	Median time to decision; proportion with reasoned decisions	Case records and beneficiary survey	Assess responsiveness
Restitution	Share of accepted remedies completed by deadline	Remedy register and audit	Ensure case closure means actual correction
Data integrity	Missingness, duplicate rate, revisions and audit discrepancy	System logs and independent audits	Improve reliability and deter manipulation
Privacy	Access violations, breaches and correction requests	Security logs and incident register	Protect beneficiaries and ensure lawful processing

The indicators should be piloted before being used to allocate funding or impose sanctions. Baselines and targets should be developed using verified programme data and consultation with beneficiaries, state missions, PIAs and employers. The framework should also publish the definition and denominator for each indicator so that districts and providers are compared fairly.

12. Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Indicative period	Priority actions	Deliverables
Phase I: Standards	0–6 months	Map existing data fields, guidelines and complaint routes; define statuses and responsibilities; consult beneficiaries	Data dictionary, responsibility matrix and grievance standard
Phase II: Pilot	6–12 months	Pilot beneficiary ledger, placement verification and complaint tracking in selected Keralam districts	Pilot dashboard, audit sample and usability report
Phase III: Evaluation	12–18 months	Independently review accuracy, access, resolution times, privacy and cost	Evaluation report and revised operating procedures
Phase IV: Scale	18–36 months	Extend validated features, train staff and publish periodic outcome reports	Statewide system and annual accountability report

The roadmap is a proposed sequence rather than a statement of existing government commitments. Pilot selection should include districts with different labour-market conditions and digital access profiles. Evaluation should examine whether the system improves data quality and remedy completion without increasing exclusion, surveillance risk or administrative burden. Beneficiaries should participate in testing and review, not merely be treated as data subjects.

13. Discussion

The empirical evidence supports a shift in the unit of analysis from ‘training delivered’ to ‘beneficiary journey completed with verifiable outcomes’. Nationally, the source study’s reported placement count is markedly below enrolment, while certification is also substantially below enrolment. Keralam’s training series shows pronounced variation and the placement series contains missing annual values.

These findings do not establish the cause of the gaps, nor do they show that all candidates without recorded placement were denied a job. They do establish that aggregate training figures alone are insufficient to assess economic inclusion. Digital systems can improve the evidence available to decision-makers, but their design determines whether that evidence is useful to beneficiaries. If the system is designed mainly for upward reporting, it may optimise the production of administrative numbers.

If it is designed for contestability, it can help a candidate identify a missing certificate, challenge a false placement, ask why a complaint remains pending or obtain proof of the service received. The same digital infrastructure can thus support either bureaucratic control or accountable public service. The distinction lies in access, verification, review and remedy.

Restitution also clarifies the relationship between inclusion and accountability. Inclusion is not achieved simply by bringing disadvantaged youth into a training centre. It requires a fair chance to receive the promised service, obtain accurate recognition of achievement and access suitable employment support. Where an institution’s failure is established, the remedy should be specific and practical.

A database correction without the missing certificate may be incomplete; a complaint response without completed corrective action may be a paper remedy. Conversely, a candidate’s inability to obtain a job in a changing labour market does not automatically prove an institutional breach.

A fair system must investigate the facts and apply the relevant standards rather than presume either success or wrongdoing.

The framework has implications beyond DDU-GKY. Other public programmes that connect training, certification, benefits or placement can use a similar design: define the service promise, record evidence, give the affected person access to their record, enable correction, assign responsibility, and track remedy completion. This approach treats digital public infrastructure as a way of strengthening institutional responsibility instead of its substitute.

14. Limitations and Future Research

The paper is constrained by the secondary data in the source study. The national table is cumulative and does not identify the same cohort at each stage; the Keralam data are reported only through June 2024 for the final year; and annual placement values are unavailable for three listed years.

The paper has no direct evidence about beneficiary experiences, grievance volumes, job quality, wages, employer compliance, digital access or actual restitution. Accordingly, the proposed framework is conceptual and normative, and its effectiveness remains to be tested.

Future research should link anonymised candidate-level records across training, certification, placement and retention, with an ethically approved protocol and strict data minimisation. A representative beneficiary survey could measure whether candidates know how to complain, how much time they spend seeking remedies, whether job offers match expectations and why jobs end. Interviews with PIAs, state officials, employers and grievance officers could map responsibility gaps.

A pilot evaluation could compare districts before and after introducing beneficiary-facing records and independent verification, while accounting for programme mix and labour-market conditions. Research should also examine gender, disability, caste and geographic differences without publishing small-cell data that could identify individuals.

15. Conclusion

This paper has argued that digital justice in rural skill development requires more than an online monitoring platform. It requires a system in which programme commitments are clear, records are verifiable, beneficiaries can contest errors, decisions are reasoned and appropriate remedies are completed.

The attached DDU-GKY study provides a useful empirical foundation: it reports substantial national training activity but lower cumulative counts at certification and placement stages, while Keralam's annual data show volatility and incomplete placement reporting. These figures should be interpreted cautiously because the source does not provide a linked cohort or complete annual placement series. Their policy significance is that outcome measurement and data quality must be made more transparent.

The proposed restitution-based framework combines a beneficiary-facing digital ledger, independent placement verification, a clear data dictionary, accessible grievance channels, time-bound review, a proportionate remedy menu, privacy safeguards and public reporting of anonymised accountability indicators.

It does not promise that every trainee is legally entitled to a job. Instead, it establishes a practical principle: where an identifiable failure in programme administration, documentation, service delivery or a relevant contractual commitment is demonstrated, the responsible institution should investigate and provide the correction or remedy available under applicable rules and law.

Economic inclusion should ultimately be judged not only by how many people enter training, but by whether the system supports fair access, credible certification, real employment opportunities, sustainable outcomes and meaningful redress.

Digital infrastructure becomes an instrument of justice when beneficiaries can use it to understand, verify and challenge the decisions that shape their livelihoods.

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