

Working Paper 608

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KERALA'S REDISTRIBUTIVE POLICY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE STATE'S PUBLIC EXPENDITURE POLICIES

Megha Susan Philip* and K Gayithri**

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to critically assess the public expenditure policies of Kerala from 1980 till 2025. The state has always been at the forefront of the development discourse, given its welfare-oriented approaches that led to its social advancements. Public expenditure policies have played an immense role in the state's achievements. However, the rising economic inequalities and marginalities raise critical questions on the effectiveness and direction of its fiscal policy. Using secondary data sources, this paper attempts to trace the direction of the state expenditure policy. The findings reveal that there is a declining prioritisation of social and economic services spending in the overall budget of the state, particularly in the post-FRA and post-reform phases. Expenditure on general services with lesser redistributive outcomes have grown during the same period. The over-reliance of the state on the central transfers majorly in the form of tied transfers curtails the state's ability to manoeuvre developmental activities. Though gender budgeting is a commendable approach by the state to bring about gender inclusivity, there are still constraints in the form of monitoring their efficiency. Overall, the state has shifted its focus from redistributive developmental activities to maintenance-oriented policies, which need to be restructured focussing on equity, efficiency and autonomy.

Keywords: Public Expenditure, redistribution, welfare state, inequality, Kerala

Introduction

Kerala's status as a welfare state has an immense role to play in its development path. The Kerala model is widely acknowledged as a fruit of a collection of events and factors that eventually led the state to take the responsibility of building a space that gave equal capabilities and entitlements that could eventually lead to equal functioning. Franke & Chasin (1995) refer to Kerala's development as a social justice development due to its very nature of evolution through various social, political, and cultural events. The role of the state in ensuring these is established, given that market forces often fail to provide individuals with the needs that ensure the upliftment or welfare of the society such as food, education, health and so on.

The pre-independence period marked the active role of rulers of the princely states (Travancore, Cochin and Malabar) in provisioning social sector goods such as education and health (Desai, 2005; Jeffrey, 1992; Ramachandran, 1997; Raman, 2010). Along with this, the role of missionaries is also acknowledged, that they set up several educational and health institutions while promoting women's education (Balakrishnan, 2020; Desai, 2005). Women in the state were entrusted with more freedom when compared to the rest of the country to make progress in education and health outcomes due to

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existence of matrilineal inheritance practices followed in some parts of the state (Jeffrey, 2004; Ramachandran, 1997). The post-independence period witnessed rising upheaval in the state in the form of caste movements and agrarian movements that resulted in bringing the first communist government to power in 1956. The left government (Left Democratic Party) strongly stressed on the redistributive objective of the government and upheld its welfare goals. The state government policies, hence, adopted a welfarist and redistributive approach that broadly looked at two aspects: the socialisation of production and the socialisation of consumption and mobility (Heller, 1995). The two aspects of redistribution and the welfare policies in the state was primarily followed by all the consecutive governments in power.

The state's advancements when compared to national averages in terms of social indicators, is very evident (see Table 1). The period during the 1960s and 1970s was characterised by low economic growth. However, the state had high social development which drew the attention of many scholars across the globe. The phenomena have been highly popularised as the Kerala model of development. The model was praised for its social development that followed a path with low inequality. However, post 1987, the narrative has been different, given various structural changes that took place around the same time. Following the rise in oil prices, migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries became a trend. Moreover, the reforms of 1991, while having larger impacts on the country as whole, caused major changes in the economic conditions of the state. The state's economy grew at a faster rate with the services sector taking the lead. However, the period witnessed increased inequality among the population.

Table 1: Social Indicators

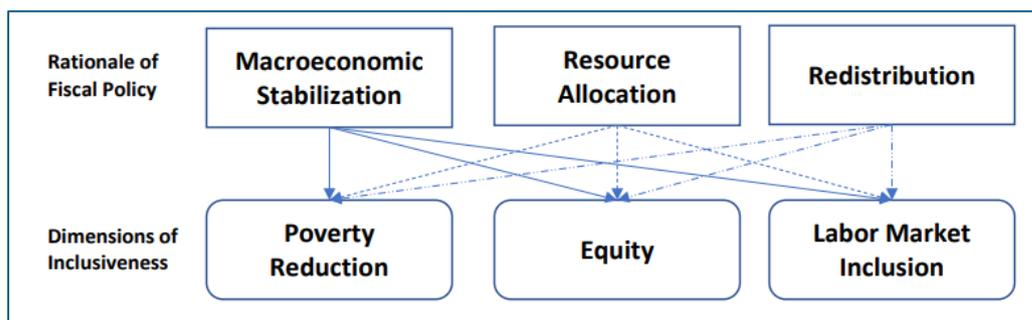
Year	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)		Life Expectancy at birth				Literacy Rate					
	Kerala	India	Kerala		India		Kerala			India		
			Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
1951	128	140	45	43	32	33	36.43	58.35	47.18	27.16	8.86	18.33
1961	94	129	50	48	41	42	45.56	64.89	55.08	40.4	15.35	28.3
1971	61	114	61	60	45	46	62.53	77.13	69.75	45.96	21.97	34.45
1981	34	110	68	64	50	51	73.36	84.56	78.85	56.38	29.76	43.57
1991	16.5	91	74	71	60	59	86.17	93.62	89.81	64.13	39.29	52.21
2001	11.2	64.47	75.3	69.7	63.75	62.12	87.86	94.20	90.86	75.26	53.67	64.84
2011	12.3	44	77.7	71.6	65.4	68.8	91.61	96.02	93.91	82.14	65.46	74.04
2016	-	-	77.9	72.2	70.2	67.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2019	6	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2022	7	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Parayil, Govidan (1996), Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority (2015) and SRS Reports 2011, 2019,2025, GoI

The role of public finance and public expenditure in particular, in bringing distributive justice or inclusivity in the countries/ states have been widely established (Estrada *et al*, 2014; Zouhar *et al*, 2021). The theoretical framework for public expenditure and its redistributive capacity was given by Musgrave (1959). He identifies three major roles for the state: macroeconomic stabilisation, resource allocation, and redistribution. Musgrave further notes the potential for public spending to bring inclusive growth in economies. The three broad rationales for public policy, as propounded by Musgrave, have inclusive

implications in the form of poverty reduction, equity, and labour market inclusion (equal opportunity). Finding the right mix of policies is essential to achieve the objectives of inclusive growth that combines reduction in inequality and poverty, along with advancements in the economy. Public expenditure can have impacts on poverty and thereby inequality, directly and indirectly. Indirect policies consist of policies that are growth-oriented that according to Drèze and Sen (1989) would result in allocation of resources through trickle-down effects leading to inclusive growth. Direct policies on the other hand include public spending on various social and economic services through various anti-poverty or welfare schemes that aim to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor in terms of capabilities and functioning (Drèze & Sen, 1989; Mukherjee & Badola, 2021). Expenditures on education, health, sanitation, drinking water, housing, nutrition (Rao, 2002), and rural employment programmes (Ravallion & Datt, 1995), agriculture, energy, irrigation, rural infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges (Ranis, 1995) have impact on reducing poverty and thereby, inequality in both direct and indirect ways. These expenditures provide individuals better opportunities to build capabilities that enable the poor and the vulnerable to move up the ladder and bridge the gap in terms of income and outcomes. Further, it creates externalities in the form of upliftment of the society at large (Mukherjee & Badola, 2021). Hence, assessing the public expenditure policy of a government in these lines can give insights into their alignment towards redistribution.

Figure 1: Musgrave’s Framework of Fiscal Policy and Inclusiveness



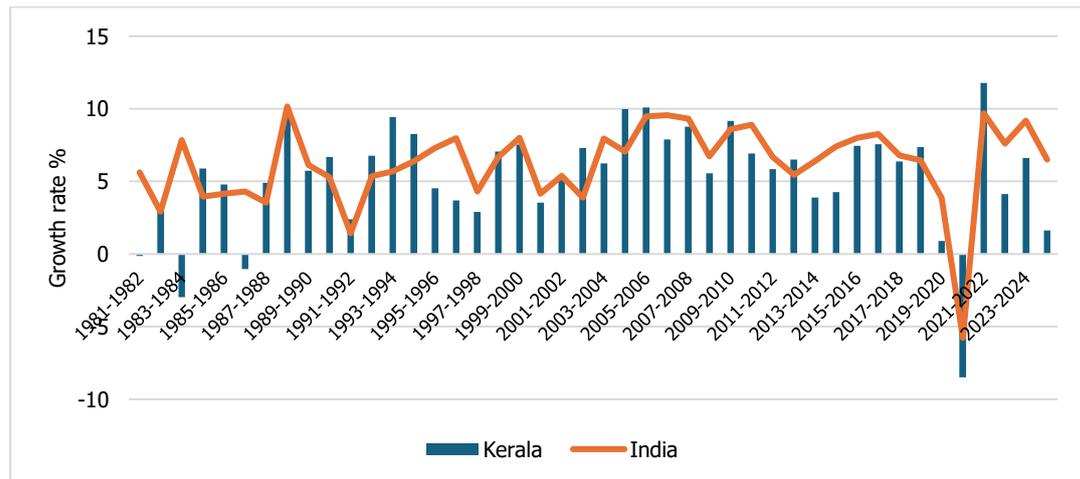
Source: Adapted from Zouhar *et al* (2021). Public Expenditure and Inclusive Growth- A Survey.

The economic progress of the state has made the narrative of Kerala model of development to be relooked. The rising inequality has left its historically marginalised communities such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women to be more vulnerable to the distributional inequality. This change in the narrative demands a closer look at the state’s expenditure policies, given their role in bringing distributional justice in the economy. In this context, it is imperative to assess the state’s public expenditure policies to see how redistributive they have been in the period in question. Hence, this paper attempts to critically assess the redistributive nature of the state’s public expenditure policies since 1980.

Data and Methodology

The paper is based on secondary data sources, which include budget speeches, budget documents including detailed demand for grants, economic reviews, and plan documents. Data on Net/Gross State Domestic Product (NSDP/GSDP) are obtained from the EPWRF¹ database. The paper using descriptive techniques, aims to assess the redistributive nature of public spending in Kerala from 1980-81 to 2024-25. We can identify five different phases in the given period: the transition phase (1980-81 to 1987-88), the economic reform phase (1988-89 to 2003-04), post FRA phase (2004-05 to 2014-15) and the new regime phase (2015-16 to 2024-25). The transition phase denotes the phase in which the state economy of Kerala was transitioning from a low growth economy into a high growth economy (see Figure 2). The economic reforms in the country took form in 1991. However, the state’s economic growth was rapid post 1988 (Sreeraj & Vakulabharanam, 2016). Another major policy change in the state happened in 2003 with the implementation of the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) which brought restrictions on the state’s fiscal policies. The national elections of 2014-15 brought in policy shifts with the new regime which further should be assessed separately. Fiscal consolidation was one of the major priorities of the BJP led Central government. The fourteenth Finance Commission (FC) raised the vertical devolution to 42 per cent from 32 per cent in thirteenth FC and was implemented in 2015-16. The Centre at the same time tried to reduce the Centre’s share on Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) by 15 per cent. The period also witnessed the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 which had serious implications on the state’s fiscal exchequer. In 2021-22, the centre also put hold on the off-budget borrowings which marked one of the major sources of borrowings for the state post 2016. The period post 2014 witnessed a series of political frictions between the Centre and the state on issues of fiscal autonomy and state rights. All of these policy shifts could have significant implications on the nature of public spending of the state. References to these phases will be made wherever necessary.

Figure 2: Growth of GSDP & GDP at 2011-12 Constant Prices



Source: Prepared by author using data obtained from MOSPI²

¹ Economic and Political Weekly Research Foundation

² Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation

Redistributive policies gain greater importance in the event the income distribution is unequal. In the Indian context, inequality in economic terms is measured in terms of consumption expenditure rather than income, given the complexities involved in assessing the income of households. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) conducts the household consumption expenditure survey which enables us to assess the income/ consumption expenditure distribution across the population. Table 2 provides the income inequality estimates as expressed by the Gini coefficient in Kerala and India during the study period. The state's income inequality has been higher than national average throughout the study period except in 1993-94 where we see an absolute decrease in the Gini coefficient, which gives a contradicting view to the development narratives of Kerala. Given this trend, the state's expenditure policies must be more pronounced towards redistribution to address the growing inequality as propounded by Musgrave.

Table 2: Gini Coefficient of Consumption Expenditure

	1983	1993-94	2009-10	2022-23	
				Rural	Urban
Kerala	0.338	0.316	0.413	0.29	0.31
India	0.327	0.326	0.37	0.27	0.31

Source: Sreeraj & Vakulabharanam (2016), MOSPI (2023-24)

Public policies take three different forms: regulatory, distributive, and redistributive. Regulatory policies control or promote certain aspects of economic growth. Distributive and redistributive policies aim to fulfil the government's allocation function. While distributive policies look at provisioning services, such as education and health in a manner that has larger accessibility, redistributive policies aim to target the population/ beneficiaries of a certain provision to ensure their welfare (Kuhlmann & Blum, 2021). Since the study's focus is on redistributive policies, more emphasis is given to analyze those policies from the redistributive angle.

Kerala's Thrust Areas of Redistribution

Kerala's redistributive policies were initially channelled through land reforms, the Public Distribution System (PDS), and the provisioning of social services, including education and health. Various welfare schemes and policies have gained the attention of the governments in power that were channelled through public expenditure. Certain sectors of expenditure that governments often target to achieve redistributive justice and inclusivity include social services such as education, health, (Clements *et al*, 2015), housing, social welfare pensions (Clements *et at*, 2014), women and child development, etc. and economic services including agriculture, rural development, poverty alleviation programmes (Karnam & Acharya, 2018), subsidies in the energy sector (Clements *et al*, 2013), etc. The effectiveness or success of these spending policies on the part of the government depends on their utilisation and targeting to achieve distributional justice.

Socio-economic Services

Kerala's emphasis on the social and economic services and thereby on distributive justice can be analysed by analysing the expenditure pattern of the state over a period of time. A brief account of the state's expenditure from 1980-81 to 2024-25 according to various functional heads, is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Trends in Expenditure by Functional Categories (in Per Capita Real Terms)

Years	Social Services	Economic Services	General Services	Grants-in-aid contributions
1980-81	1,414	936	619	10
1985-86	1,831	936	909	7
1990-91	1,878	1,055	1,427	46
1995-96	1,868	1,235	1,855	59
2000-01	2,394	1,499	3,099	31
2005-06	2,766	2,012	4,049	-
2010-11	4,229	2,393	5,219	933
2015-16	6,732	4,069	8,543	918
2020-21	8,921	5,513	9,586	1,798
2024-25 BE	8,082	4,263	11,878	2,206
CAGR³ (1980-81/2024-25)	4.04	3.51	6.94	13.03

Source: Government of Kerala Budget Documents, various years

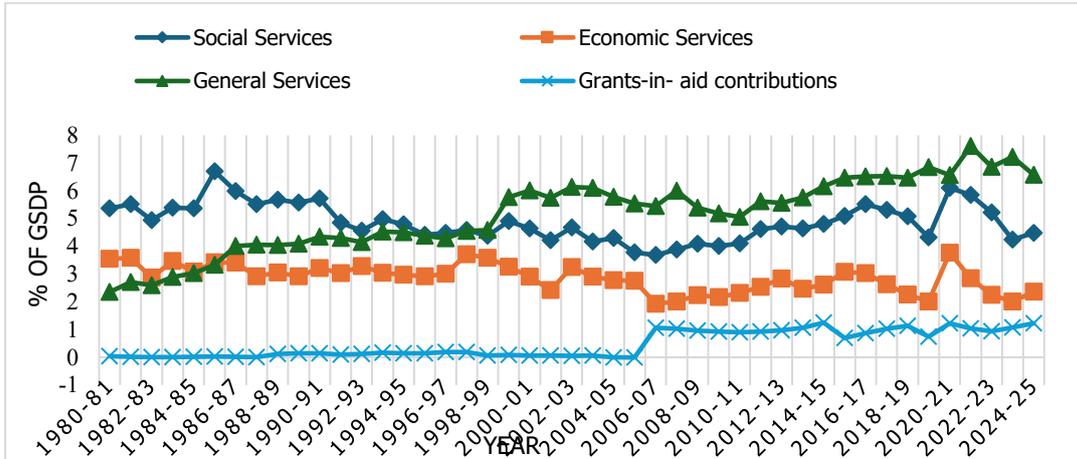
The state's spending on functional categories provides major insights into its redistributive objectives. As mentioned above, expenditure on social and economic services to a certain extent is found to have larger redistributive effects that can lead economies towards inclusive growth. Kerala, though known for its redistributive policies, has portrayed a contradictory image in recent years. Real per capita expenditure on social services remained higher than in other sectors until 1997-98. Following that the per capita real expenditure on general services is found to have overgrown both social and economic services considerably. The CAGR of social and economic services expenditures was significantly lower than that observed for general services. Although an increase is observed for all these expenditure heads over the years, a relatively higher increase for general services is a matter of concern for the state, given its constrained fiscal position. Grants-in-aid contributions to local bodies have significantly increased over the years. Local bodies, through their general purpose and maintenance functions, could be spending on social and economic services indirectly. However, the contributions to the local bodies showed a significant increase only after 2005-06. Given the hard budget constraints, the allocation of a larger share of the limited resources to the general services, which are by and large in the nature of administrative support and considered as non-development expenditure, restrict the availability of resources to the much needed developmental and redistributive purposes. Hence, greater spending on general services can have a significant adverse impact on the larger redistributive goals of the state.

³ Compound Annual Growth Rate

To understand the trend in a more holistic manner, expenditure on functional categories is expressed as a percentage share of GSDP and Total Expenditure (TE). Post 1987, when the state's economy transitioned to a high economic growth phase, the state's expenditure on social and economic services showed a declining trend in terms of share in total expenditure as well as GSDP (see Figures 3 and 4). This decline is more pronounced in the social services than in the economic services. The decline in social services spending was more pronounced after 1991, the year that marked the onset of economic reform in the country. This trend has been supported by scholars citing the state's social development achievements (Joshi, 2005). The decline in the state's spending on economic and social services shows the structural change in the economy, wherein the state largely took the form of a facilitator rather than a provider. The period post 1991 also gave way to a change in the composition of the total expenditure of the state. The share of general services in the total expenditure showed an upward trend during the same period. The expenditure on general services⁴ includes spending on various heads such as organs of the state, fiscal services, administrative services, interest payments and servicing of debt, pensions and miscellaneous expenditures comprising spending on state lotteries and others. These expenditures are relatively unproductive and non-redistributive in nature. Given this, a higher spending on general services could mean a shift in the state's redistributive priorities. In the given period, the increase in general services spending is seen to be majorly contributed by increased spending on interest payments and pensions (see Figure 5). The year 1997 marked the year which the state introduced the seventh pay scale revision which in turn had its implications on the pension payments. Post FRA in 2003, the payments on interest payments and servicing of debt showed a decline which was evident in the state's decreased fiscal deficit majorly contributed by decrease in revenue deficit (see figure 6). However, the overall spending share of general services in total spending remained significantly higher than the other sectors. A reduction is observed for general services in 2020-21 during the pandemic of COVID-19 which demanded higher channelling of funds on social and economic services. Despite the reduction in total expenditure share, the spending on general services remained considerably higher than the other two sectors in terms of percentage of GSDP. However, the turnaround of trend did not last past 2020-21. After the year 2020-21, expenditure on economic and social services as a share of GSDP and TE are found to decline until 2023-24 unlike the expected trend. However, expenditure on general services rises back to its previous levels majorly due to higher spending on miscellaneous services including lotteries. Furthermore, increase in miscellaneous general service expenditure majorly contributed by state lotteries is evident post 2010, which further indicates the growing prioritisation by the state on unproductive and non-redistributive heads of expenditure.

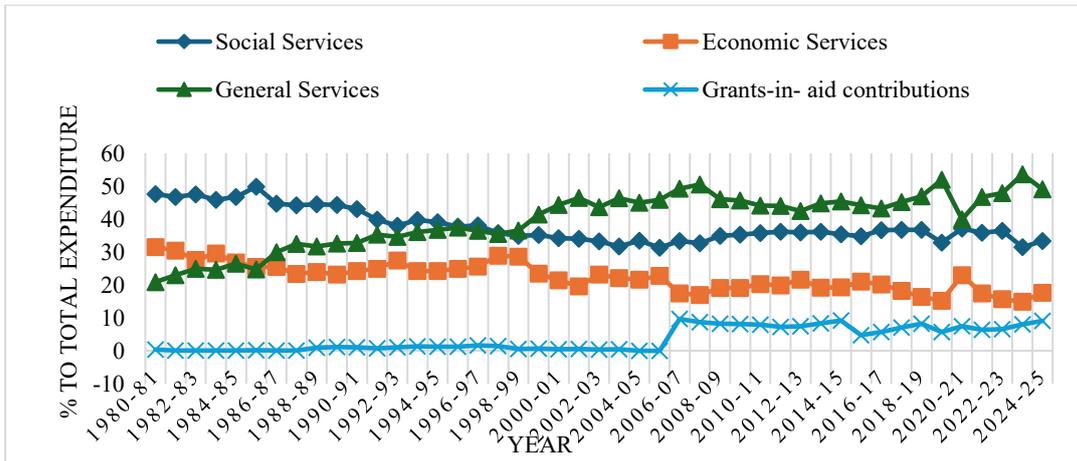
⁴ Here, only revenue side of expenditure is considered as it constitutes the largest share in the total expenditure- typically over 80 per cent of the total expenditure.

Figure 3: Functional Categories Expenditure as a Percentage of GSDP



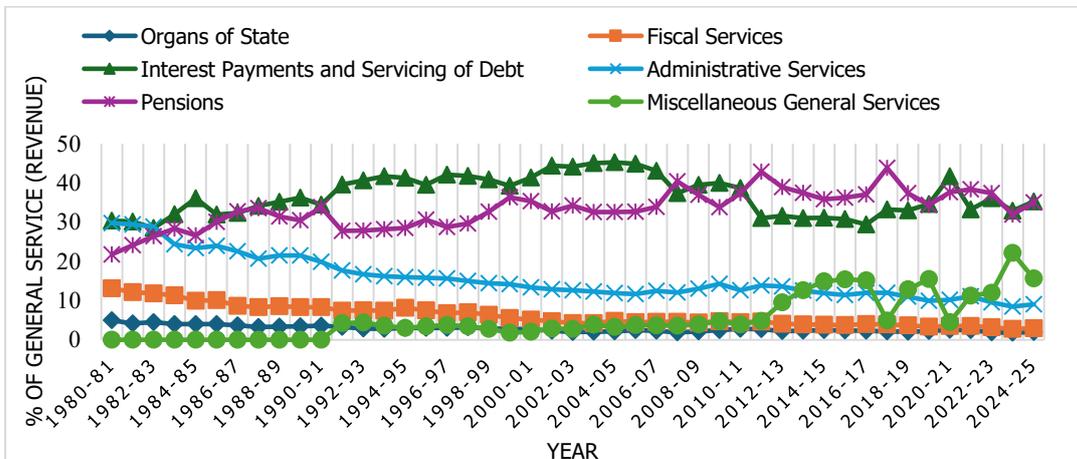
Source: Prepared by the author using various Kerala Budget Documents

Figure 4: Functional Categories Expenditure as a percentage of Total Expenditure



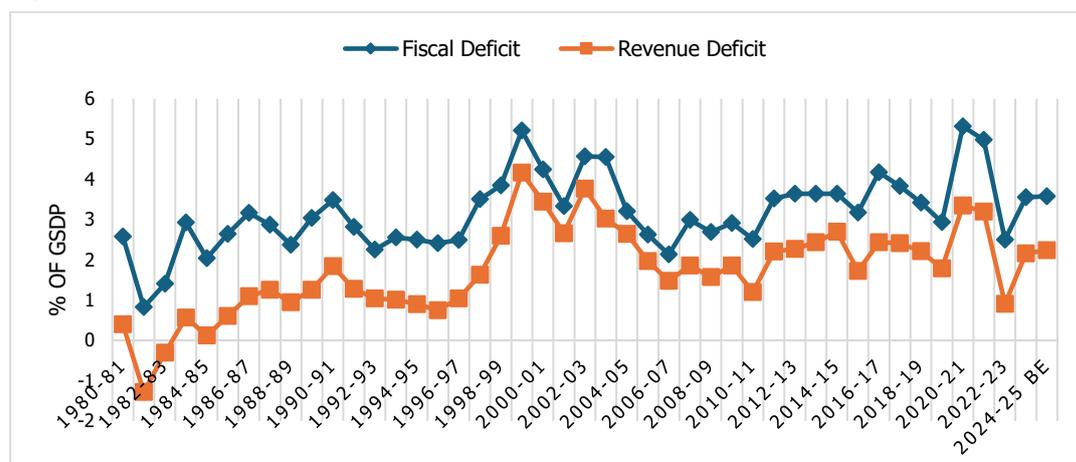
Source: Same as Figure 3

Figure 5: Components of General Services (Revenue Expenditure)



Source: Same as Figure 3

Figure 6: Trend of Deficit Indicators



Source: Same as Figure 3

The over-emphasis given for general services spending should be seen with caution by the state due to its innate fiscal position characterised by a huge fiscal deficit (with high revenue deficit), inability to mobilise funds, huge public debt, over-dependence on the Central funds transferred through CSS and tax shares (Bhanumurthy *et al*, 2019; George, 2007; Mohan, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). It requires further attention because the size and mix of expenditure have a major role to play in the public sphere to bring in distributive justice (Clement *et al*, 2015). Hence, it must be analysed whether this trend means a gradual movement away from the larger goal of distributive justice and inclusive growth. Given the restricted revenue sources for the state, a larger spending on general services could have implications for substituting major heads of expenditure under the development (social and economic) services. Hence, in the following section, the composition of these services over the given period is analysed to see which heads have been compromised that eventually resulted in the larger share of general services in the total spending of the state.

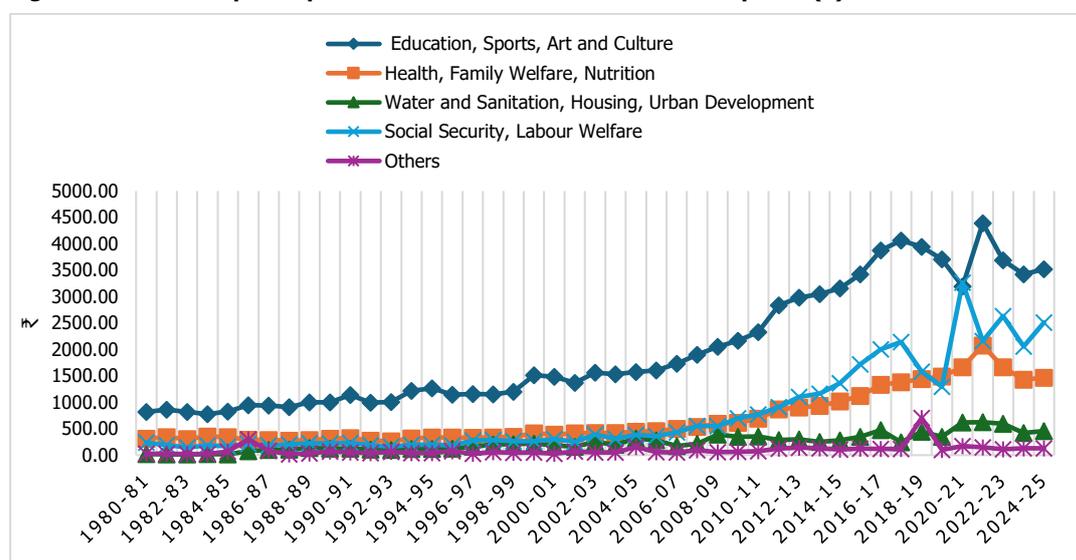
Social Services

The sub-sectors within the social services include Education, Health, Water and Sanitation, Housing, Urban Development, Social Security and Welfare, Labour Welfare and others⁵. These sectors are generally considered as expenditure that has the potential to improve the social well-being of the population. The literature provides evidence for high redistributive effects for public expenditure on social services, with special emphasis on expenditures on education and health, (Davoodi *et al*, 2003), social welfare programs (van de Walle, 2003), etc. In the previous section, it was seen that the spending on social services has seen a setback when expressed in terms of share in the TE and GSDP. Hence, it is imperative to examine the spending pattern on these individual sub-sectors to arrive at a comprehensive conclusion as to whether the decline in overall social services spending in turn can have an impact on redistribution.

⁵ Others include Relief on Natural Calamities and Information and Publicity

The per capita expenditure on sectors such as education, health, and social security has seen a higher increase when compared to other sectors. The per capita spending on other sectors including Housing, Urban Development, Water and Sanitation have remained consistently lower in all phases (see Figure 7). Spending on education shows a decline in 2020-21 which is taken over by Social Security and Welfare due to a higher roll-out of welfare schemes such as pensions during the COVID-19 pandemic. A relatively higher growth was observed for the health sector as well post 2020-21 which again can be attributed to the pandemic. However, before 2020-21, per capita spending on education declined. The only rise was observed in 2021-22 which can be attributed to expenditure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This decline can be attributed to the reduction in grants provided by the Central government for various Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) (PRS India, 2019).

Figure 7: Real Per capita expenditure on Social Services in 2011-12 prices (₹)



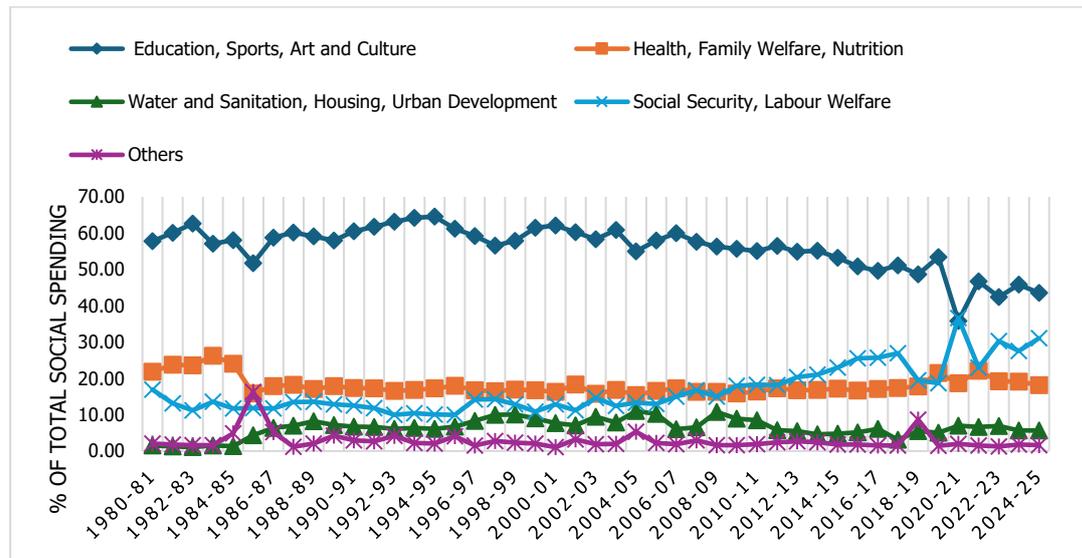
Source: Same as Figure 3

- Note:
1. Health includes Medical and Public Health, Family welfare, and Nutrition
 2. Social Security and Labour Welfare includes the Social Security and Welfare, Welfare of SC, ST and OBCs and Labour and Labour Welfare
 3. Others include Relief on Natural Calamities and Information and Publicity.

The share of the subsectors in the total social services spending was consistent over the studied period, except during the pandemic (see Figure 8). However, examining their share of total state expenditure is when the real picture emerges. The sector with the largest decline in terms of share in total expenditure is education, which has a highly redistributive nature (see Figure 9). Moreover, the sector's share in TE is observed to be growing lower than the average spending by most of the states in the country post 2017-18 (PRS India, 2019). The downward trend of this type with respect to sectors with high redistributive effects is a matter of concern. This trend has greater implications for the state's developmental outlook. The state's SC and ST populations are highly dependent on government-funded educational institutions. Of the total SC and ST students in the state, only 3.25 per cent of SC and 2.06 per cent of ST students are enrolled in private institutions. Although the dropout rates of SC and ST

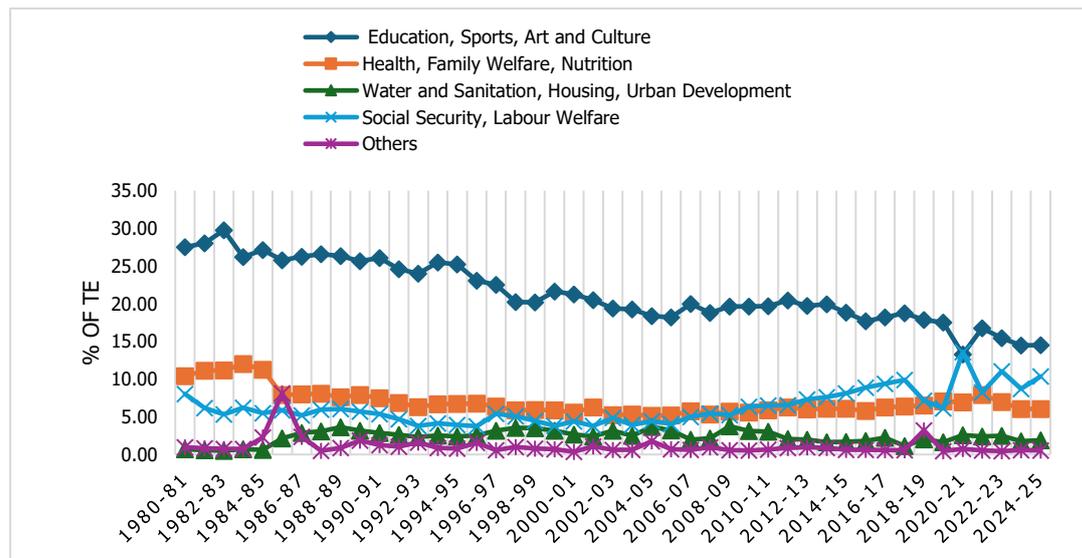
students were significantly lower than the national averages, they lagged considerably behind the general category of students. This inequality is more pronounced in higher-education institutions. While around 80 per cent of general category students attend and pass the higher education technical courses in the state, the percentage of SC and ST students attaining the same is less than 30 per cent (Government of Kerala, 2022). The state acknowledges this lacuna and strives to provide better distribution of benefits from government spending. However, a decline in educational spending, as observed, can negatively impact the expected outcome.

Figure 8: Composition of Social Services Expenditure (% of Total Social Sector Spending)



Source: Same as Figure 3

Figure 9: Composition of Social Services Expenditure (% of Total Expenditure)

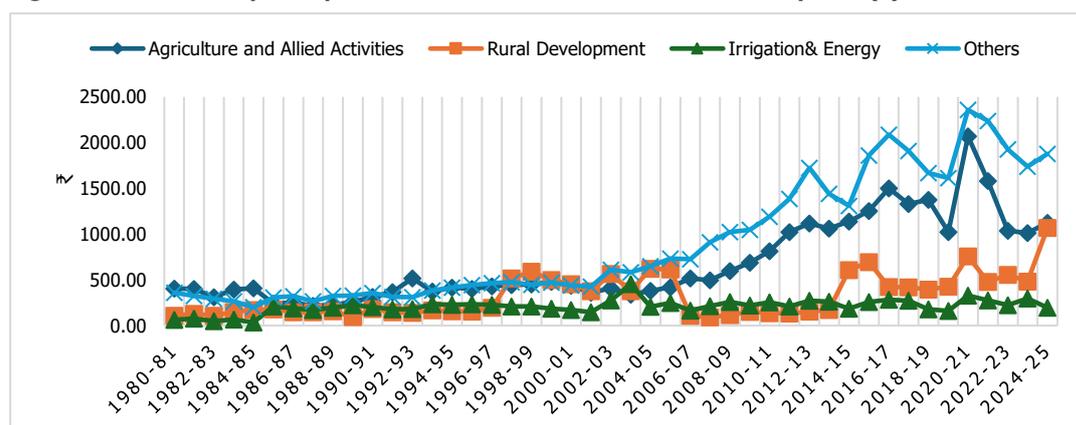


Source: Same as Figure 3

Economic Services

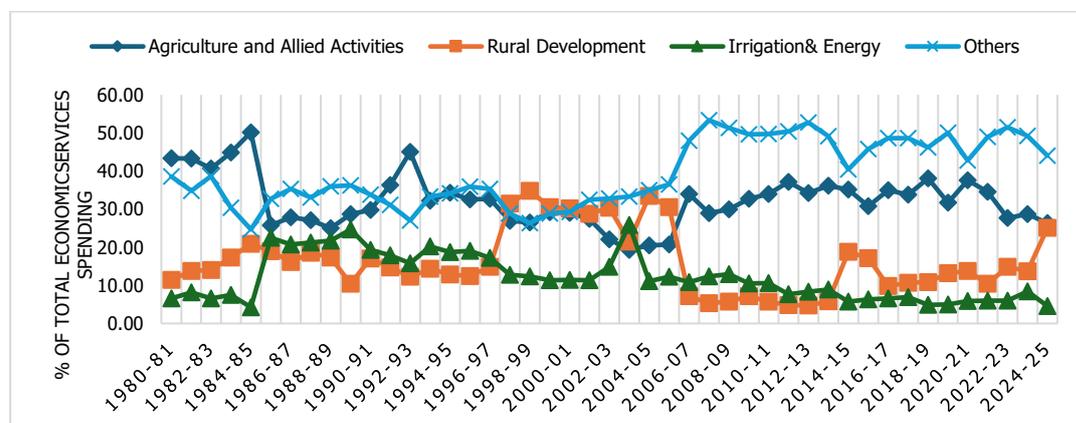
Like social services, the trend of spending on economic services and its subsectors can provide insight into the overall redistributive nature of expenditure policies in Kerala. Spending on sectors including energy subsidies (Clements *et al*, 2013), farm subsidies (Cong & Brady, 2012; Piet & Desjeux, 2021; Rajesh *et al*, 2020) rural development (Karnam & Acharya, 2018), etc. are found to have higher distributional effects. Spending on economic services has consistently been relatively lower than on social services, given the state's high priority on social development goals. However, the economic services include various subsectors that have a high potential to uplift marginalised sections of the population. In per capita real terms, the subsectors that have shown an increase in the given period are the agriculture and allied sector, and Others which include expenditure on transport, communication, science & technology, and general economic services that include expenditure on tourism and other miscellaneous heads, such as investments in trading institutions (see Figure 10). Expenditure on irrigation and energy has remained consistently low throughout the study period. The upward trend is more evident after 2007-08 which marked the beginning of the eleventh Five-Year Plan (FYP) of the country in which the major goal identified was inclusive growth.

Figure 10: Real Per Capita Expenditure on Economic Services in 2011-12 prices (₹)



Source: Same as Figure 3

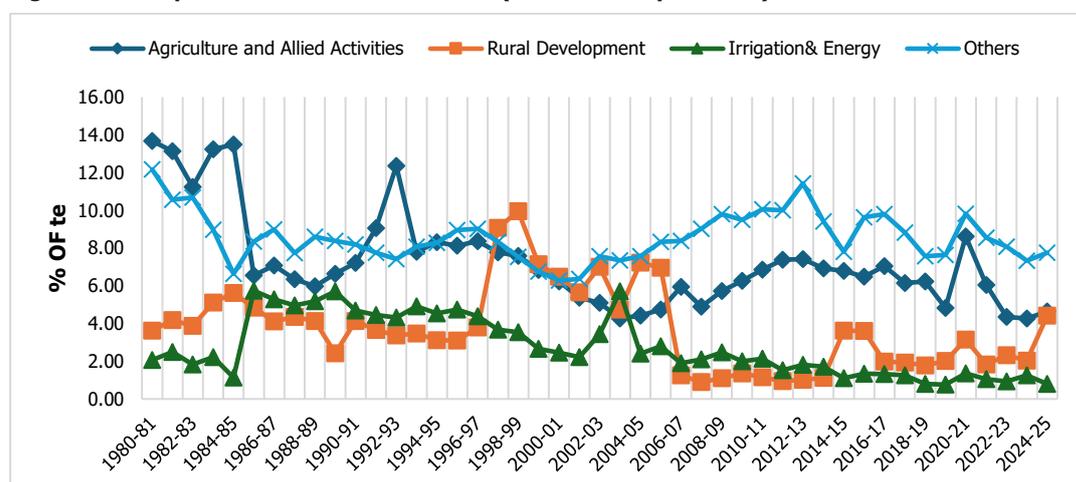
Figure 11: Composition of Economic Services (% of Total Economic Services Spending)



Source: Same as Figure 3

While an upward trend was observed for the agriculture sector with high redistributive effects, the rural development sector was found to take a downward path post 2006-07. The rural development sector includes various schemes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY, erstwhile Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)), and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), which are directly aimed at the poorer sections of the population. Figure 11 shows the trends of various components in the economic services over time. As observed with respect to per capita expenditures, the rural development sector spending experiences a significant decline post 2006-07. The sector's share in expenditure on economic services dropped from 30.50 per cent in 2005-06 to 5.28 per cent in 2007-08. The decline continues until 2014-15. 2005-06 marked the year of the introduction of MGNREGS in the country. The state rolled out the scheme in all its districts by 2008⁶. However, a visible increase in spending on MGNREGS is seen in 2014-15 which has contributed to the rise in the spending on the rural development sector⁷.

Figure 12: Composition of Economic Services (% of Total Expenditure)



Source: Same as Figure 3

The period of decline is in the post-FRA phase which could have influenced the spending pattern of the state. However, from Figure 6 it is seen that, while the fiscal deficit of the state declined post 2003, it increases after 2006-07. Hence, curtailing deficit of the state is expected to not have fully caused the sudden decline in the rural development expenditure. There are three major heads of expenditure within rural development which include rural development, community development and panchayat & land reforms. Table 4 provides the utilisation rate of these heads during the eleventh FYP period which shows satisfactory utilisation of the budgeted expenditure during the period. While the utilisation rate on community and panchayats is satisfactory, there is a visible decline in the utilisation rate of rural development. The major programmes under this heading include IAY (25% State Share), MGNREGS (10% State Share), NRLM (25% State Share), State Support for Prime Minister Gram Swarozgar Yojana (PMGSY)

⁶ Partial implementation was done in some districts before 2008.

⁷ The expenditure on MGNREGS increased from ₹174.35 crores in 2013-14 to ₹1628.5 crores in 2014-15 (Government of Kerala, 2015, 2016)

etc. for which the outlay was ₹360.75 crores during the 11th FYP, while the actual expenditure was only ₹41.63 crores (Government of Kerala, 2014). Moreover, the grants given by the Centre in the form of CSS is also found to be lower during 2005-11 (see Table 8). Rural development sector, as mentioned above, consists of many major CSSs, resulting in a lower expenditure of the sector altogether. Furthermore, outlay utilisation under land reforms has declined drastically to zero. In addition, the budget allocation on land reforms is not under the sector post 2009-10 which could have resulted in the sudden fall. Hence, it can be inferred that it is the low utilisation rate of some of the major CSS and the reduced budget outlay and utilisation on land reforms that may have caused the decline of the sector's spending⁸. Hence, we see a lesser prioritisation of public spending on rural development sector which hinders the objective of redistributive justice, because the sector which was compensated during the same period was tourism and other miscellaneous economic services with lesser redistributive effects (see Figure 12).

Table 4: Utilisation of Rural Development Sector during 11th Plan Period (as a % of Rural Development expenditure)

Years	Rural Development	Community Development & Panchayat	Land Reforms	Total
2007-08	79.61	119.32	17.24	101.73
2008-09	84.88	115.52	128.08	102.02
2009-10	128.59	117.72	62.25	121.22
2010-11	74.83	112.71	0.00	91.24
2011-12	41.20	127.27	0.00	72.56
Total	74.14	118.72	26.16	94.74

Source: Government of Kerala, 11th Five Year Plan, Outlay and Expenditure, 2014

Table 5: Eleventh Plan – Sector-wise Outlay and Expenditure

Sector	Share (% of total)		Actuals in ₹ crore		Utilisation %
	Outlay	Expenditure	Outlay	Expenditure	
Agriculture & Allied Sector	3.43	3.55	2763.12	2698.03	98
Rural Development	1.96	1.96	1575.85	1492.9	95
Special Area Development	0.53	0.38	426.53	286.67	67
Irrigation	2.12	1.58	1707.43	1199.09	70
Energy	6.3	5.51	1492.88	2070.11	139
Industry	1.85	2.72	4458.81	6580.46	148
Transport	5.53	8.66	5077.34	4185.57	82
IST	1.48	1.66	1192.07	1262.74	106
General Economic Service	1.62	1.71	1307.96	1300.23	99
Social Service	18.57	14.49	14957.11	11006.9	74
General Service	43.54	43.28	122.03	304.22	249
Plan Assistance to LSGD	13.06	14.49	10524.34	11009.95	105
Total	100	100	45605.47	43396.87	95

Source: Government of Kerala, 11th Five Year Plan, Outlay and Expenditure, 2014

⁸ A detailed reasoning for the observed trend is being explored.

Gender and Development

A very important and complex component of inclusivity is gender, which is often neglected in budget preparation. Gender Budgeting is a major methodology used by various governments to bring in a gender perspective to the budgets. Advancing women's position and making women more visible through fiscal policy in the form of Gender Budgeting has been widely adopted across the nations in the recent past. It attempts to trace and map the position and budgetary allocations to women across various sectors and schemes. India's attempts to produce a gender budget were initiated in 2005. The state's efforts in gender budgeting were introduced during the 9th FYP through decentralised planning. The Local Self Governments of the state had to earmark 10 per cent of their devolved Plan funds on women-specific sectors/schemes. The state's efforts to raise women's participation through decentralised planning were highly appreciated (Government of Kerala, 2021).

The 11th FYP aimed at addressing the existing lacunae in developing a gender budget for the state. Its focus during the period was to promote gender awareness programmes, livelihood generation and finishing up schooling for the women. The 12th FYP focused on building a women-friendly infrastructure in the state. The 13th FYP for the state lays down a 10% state plan outlay on schemes that can directly benefit women. Major schemes were directed towards livelihood and employment generation, entrepreneurship, skill development, etc. Despite the attempts, their effectiveness remains questionable on various fronts. The 14th FYP embraces the objectives of the earlier plans while also acknowledging the need for having a more nuanced auditing framework to track and monitor the gender responsive budgeting in the state (Government of Kerala, 2023).

Table 6: Allocation of State Plan or Budgetary Resources for Girls and Women (with a specific allocation for Transgender persons)

Years	State Plan Outlay
2017-18	11.4
2018-19	14.6
2019-20	16.8
2020-21	18.4
2021-22	19.54
2022-23	20.2
2023-24	21.12
2024-25 RE	21.35

Source: Gender and Child Budget, Government of Kerala, 2021-22, 2025-26.

In Kerala, the gender budget not only looks at gender from the women's perspective, but through the perspective of transgenders and children (Government of Kerala, 2025). Since 2017-18, the state brings out annual gender budget documents along with the general budget. Though the minimum expenditure set aside for gender budget was 10 per cent in 2017-18, the actual spending was around 11 per cent which increased further in the subsequent years. In 2018-19, the plan outlay increased to 14.6 per cent and to 19.5 per cent in 2021-22. The revised estimated for 2024-25 shows a plan outlay of 20.2 per cent for gender-specific spending (see Table 6). The state's efforts to bring gender perspective to the

budget is only channelled through the expenditure policies. Hence, gender budgeting is a step forward on the larger objective of inclusive development through better redistribution of resources to the marginalised genders including women and transgenders.

Sources of Funding Public Expenditure

The expenditure policy of a government is highly dependent on its revenue. Examining the sources of revenue for Kerala and their trend can provide insights into the trends observed in the state expenditure policy. Table 7 provides a brief account of the varying sources of revenue for the state in the study period.

Table 7: Sources of Revenue (% of Total Revenue)

Sl. No.	Sources of Revenue	1980-81	1985-86	1990-91	1995-96	2000-01	2005-06	2010-11	2015-16	2020-21	2024-25
A	Revenue Receipts	82.05	65.35	71.69	77.63	68.59	70.62	75.49	74.58	64.49	67.19
1	Tax revenue	62.56	44.76	54.49	63.26	58.57	56.77	65.44	55.84	39.12	52.70
	i. State's Own Tax Revenue	43.15	34.82	39.99	48.41	46.12	45.15	52.91	42.13	31.49	41.13
	ii. Share in Central Taxes	19.41	9.94	14.51	14.84	12.46	11.63	12.53	13.71	7.64	11.57
2	Non-Tax Revenue	19.54	20.60	17.19	14.37	10.02	13.84	10.05	18.74	25.36	14.48
	i. State's Own Non-Tax Revenue	12.83	6.76	6.23	7.66	5.18	4.33	4.70	9.10	4.84	8.89
	ii. Grants from the Centre	6.72	13.84	10.96	6.70	4.84	9.52	5.35	9.64	20.52	5.59
	ii.i. CSS	1.53	2.64	3.94	2.98	1.65	1.37	1.78	3.84	3.40	4.10
B	Capital Receipts	17.95	34.65	28.31	22.37	31.41	29.38	24.51	25.42	35.51	32.81
	i. Internal debt	3.62	4.47	1.19	1.75	2.33	3.11	6.62	13.19	8.40	11.15
	ii. Loans and advances from the centre	9.59	20.29	3.24	4.32	4.16	2.62	2.91	0.45	0.36	0.41
	iii. Repayment of loans	1.35	0.87	0.44	0.25	0.16	0.17	0.19	0.05	0.05	0.14
C.	Total (A+B)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Computed using Kerala Budget Documents (various years)

The major source of revenue for the state comes from the state's tax revenue followed by capital receipts and non-tax revenue. The early phase of 1980-87 showed a relatively lower share of capital receipts in the total revenue of the state. The increase after this phase may be attributed to the increased borrowings of the state. The post economic reform phase shows a significant increase in the share of capital receipts in the total revenue. The outstanding liabilities of the state as a percentage of GSDP stood at an average of 32 per cent during the post reform phase. The share of Central Tax transfers in the total revenue was higher in the transition phase when compared to the other phases where there were increased contributions in the form of tied transfers. Periods with lower grants have had a higher share in Central tax transfers, giving the state more autonomy to target on expenditure heads with high priority such as education, health, rural development, agriculture, etc. with high redistributive effects. Overall, there is significant reduction in the share of own tax revenue sources and share in Central taxes. This reduction is compensated by an increased share of grants in the total revenue of the state, which are mostly tied in nature. The growing prominence of CSS is also evident after the FRA phase.

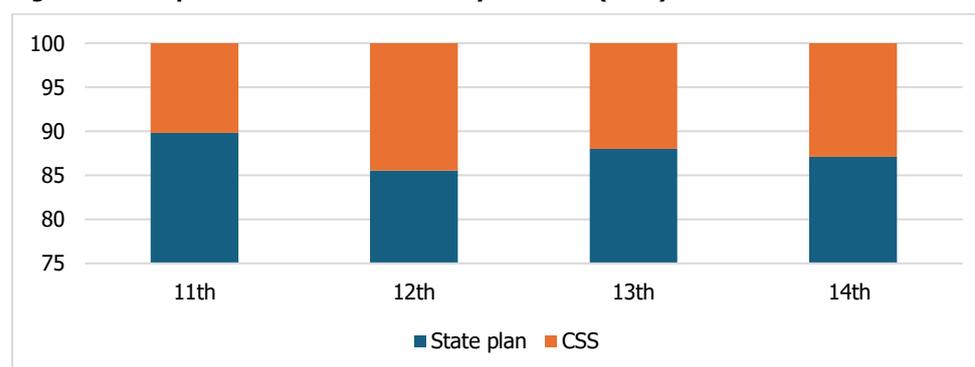
The Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) are schemes that are funded through the respective Central ministries which are implemented by the states. It came into effect as a veil through which the Centre could exercise its discretionary power over the states in terms of the resource transfer. The number of such schemes has burgeoned over the years from 90 by the end of the Fourth FYP to an all-time high of 360 at the end of the 9th FYP. Currently, there are 23 flagship schemes including MGNREGS, Swachh Bharat Mission, National Health Mission (NHM), PMAY, etc. Even though the number of these schemes has been brought down, their share in the total share of the states remains high even today. These schemes pose constraints on the state budget due to their inflexible nature and impose a fiscal burden on the state by way of the requirement of matching contributions (Bhattacharjee, 2014) which act as a hindrance to the federal nature of the country (Chaturvedi, 2011; A. Kumar, 2021). A recent study by Chakraborty and Gupta (2025) reveals the overlapping of functions between the states and the Centre. The CSSs take up more of items under the State list of the Constitution than the Concurrent list after 2021-22.

Table 8: Sector-wise composition of 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th FYP (2007-2027) (as % of Gross Outlay)

Sectors	11th		12th		13th		14th	
	State Plan	CSS						
Agriculture and Allied services	86.31	13.69	87.86	12.14	85.3	14.7	85.64	14.36
Rural Development	99.09	0.91	51.5	48.5	68.64	31.36	43.29	56.71
Co-operation	35.32	64.68	68.1	31.9	70.71	29.29	48.26	51.74
Irrigation and Flood Control	94.49	5.51	79.97	20.03	93.47	6.53	99.22	0.78
Power	99.94	0.06	100	0	100	0	100.00	0.00
Industry & Minerals	98.22	1.78	94.56	5.44	99.1	0.9	97.05	2.95
Transport & Communications	99.39	0.61	99.54	0.46	99.68	0.32	100.00	0.00
Scientific Services and Research	100	0	100	0	99.11	0.89	97.26	2.74
Social and Community Services	73.78	26.22	74.59	25.41	73.46	26.54	78.10	21.90
Economic Services	87.45	12.55	94.61	5.39	96.28	3.72	97.90	2.10
General Services	92.83	7.17	85.65	14.35	98.94	1.06	97.80	2.20
Local Governments' Plan Programmes	100	0	100	0	100	0	100.00	0.00
TOTAL	89.8	10.2	85.53	14.47	88.01	11.99	87.09	12.91
Special Central Assistance to SC and ST	100	0	100	0	100	0	100.00	0.00
Grand Total	89.82	10.18	85.54	14.46	88.01	11.99	87.09	12.91

Source: Computed using data obtained from Finance Department, GoK, Budget in Brief 2022, 2025.

Figure 13: Composition of Gross Plan Outlay of Kerala (in %)



Source: Prepared by author using data obtained from Finance Department, GoK, Budget in Brief (various years)

The share of CSS in the plan outlay has increased over the years. It has increased from 10 per cent in the 11th FYP period to 14.5 per cent in 12th FYP period. A slight decrease was observed during the 13th FYP. However, it is on the rise in the 14th FYP period (see Figure 13). A smaller but similar trend is seen in the case of social services as well. The share of CSS in social services, rural development, agriculture, etc. is evident from Table 8. This trend may reduce the state's ability to manoeuvre the transfers from the Centre according to its welfare objectives and needs, i.e., to achieve distributive justice. However, evidence also suggests that conditional transfers do have positive and complementary effect on states' own spending on development heads including expenditure heads with a redistributive nature (Darshini & Gayithri, 2022).

Discussion and Conclusion

Kerala's welfare-oriented development trajectory has comprised highly anchored redistributive policies. However, with the growth in the economy, the state also experiences high inequality which further demand the redistribution of income through public expenditure policies. The findings from the study reveal that there is a shift in the expenditure priorities of the state in terms of growing general services expenditure which crowds out major developmental and inclusive expenditure heads. The dependence on Central transfers and conditioned transfers in the form of CSS are some other hurdles that restrict the state from achieving its redistributive goals. The failure of the state in achieving distributive justice is evident through the rise of economic inequality and marginalisation of communities like Dalits, fisherfolk, tribals, transgenders, women, etc. Inequality exists in various forms and kinds in the state which undermine the state's developmental achievements.

Earlier studies conducted in the context of the state are highly appraising the rural-urban continuum in the state in terms of its social and economic development. For example, Kabir & Krishnan (2009), etc. in their studies have noted the decline in regional disparity in Kerala in terms of their socio-economic achievements. On the contrary, studies and reports including the Human Development Report by the Government of Kerala (2005), and various researchers (Baiju & Vidya, 2021; Jacob, 2014; Sajid, 2019) were critical of this argument while citing shreds of evidence of inequality in healthcare infrastructure, consumption expenditure, number of schools, population served by public distribution system, poverty rate variation, etc. in the state. Socio-economic differences among castes, excluded

groups such as tribals, Dalits, fishermen, etc. and exclusion of these sections from reaping the benefits of various policies and development achievements have been noted by various studies (Deshpande, 2000; Devika, 2007; Sreeraj & Vakulabharanam, 2016; Subrahmanian & Prasad, 2008). The marginalisation of women in terms of employment rate (though having a high literacy rate) and the rising imbalances in the gender budget allocations (Nair & Moolakkattu, 2018) are some other concerns that are left without addressing despite having implemented numerous direct benefit-oriented welfare schemes by the government. The choice of public expenditure mix and composition and its right management by ensuring targeted spending is the way forward for the state to achieve inclusive growth.

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