



AN ASSESSMENT OF NORKA'S INITIATIVES TO ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG KERALA'S FOREIGN RETURNEES.

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Abstract

A considerable proportion of Kerala's population - estimated to be over 20 percent - currently resides outside the state. These migrants are spread across various regions of India as well as abroad, with a strong concentration in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, followed by destinations such as the United States and several European nations. Migration and return migration refer to the process by which individuals move from their place of origin to another location, resulting in a change in residence, either on a temporary or permanent basis. Labour migration, in particular, is primarily influenced by disparities in labour market conditions between regions. Factors such as low wage levels, limited employment opportunities, job insecurity, and unfavourable working conditions in the place of origin often compel individuals to seek employment elsewhere. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of migration and return migration patterns requires an in-depth examination of labour market dynamics at both the origin and destination regions. These movements have wide-ranging implications for human life, affecting not only economic conditions but also social relationships, political engagement, cultural practices, demographic structures, and issues related to health and hygiene.

In this context, the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA), established by the Government of Kerala in 1995, has emerged as a key institutional mechanism to address the concerns of Keralites working outside the state and abroad, as well as those returning after overseas employment. Since its inception, NORKA has been actively involved in providing a variety of services, welfare measures, financial assistance, and development-oriented schemes aimed at supporting migrant workers and return migrants. The organization has introduced several targeted programs and funds designed to assist foreign returnees in multiple areas, including entrepreneurship development, self-employment initiatives, rehabilitation support, and financial assistance to Pravasi Sanghams. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of NORKA's schemes in facilitating entrepreneurial activities among foreign returnees and in enhancing their overall socio-economic well-being.

Key Words:*Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs, Non-Resident of Kerala, NORKA Business Facilitation Centre, Pravasi sanghams.*

Introduction

Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs) have historically played a crucial role in shaping both the socio-cultural and economic landscape of Kerala. Through sustained financial remittances, the transfer of skills and work practices, and continuous interaction with global cultures, NRKs have significantly influenced the state's patterns of development and social change. Remittance inflows have supported household consumption, education, healthcare, and housing, while exposure to international work environments has contributed to changing aspirations and lifestyles within Kerala. However, the overseas labour

market that once absorbed large numbers of migrant workers from Kerala began to undergo a marked transformation during the 1990s and the early 2000s. Structural changes in destination economies, including declining and volatile oil prices, a slowdown in construction and infrastructure-related activities, and increasing competition from lower-cost labour-sending regions, gradually reduced the demand for low-skilled migrant workers from Kerala. These developments led to a steady increase in return migration, as a growing number of NRKs were compelled to return to their home state due to shrinking employment opportunities and heightened job insecurity abroad.

The large-scale return of migrant workers has had significant and long-lasting implications for Kerala's economy. While many returnees possess valuable work experience, technical know-how, and financial savings accumulated during their period of overseas employment, their reintegration into the domestic labour market has often been challenging. A substantial proportion of return migrants face difficulties in securing suitable employment that matches their skills and expectations, resulting in underemployment or economic vulnerability. This situation highlights the urgent need to effectively channel the experience, expertise, and financial resources of returnees into productive and growth-oriented sectors of the economy. When appropriately supported and guided, return migrants have the potential to contribute meaningfully to investment, income generation, employment creation, and the expansion of entrepreneurial activities, thereby supporting industrial growth and economic diversification in Kerala.

In order to facilitate the successful reintegration of foreign returnees, it is essential to design and implement targeted strategies and policy interventions that enable them to secure meaningful and sustainable livelihoods. Many return migrants encounter structural and institutional barriers, including limited access to suitable employment opportunities, inadequate information and guidance, and insufficient financial support for self-employment or business ventures. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts by the government and other relevant stakeholders. Priority must be given to strengthening skill development and re-skilling programs aligned with local labour market needs, providing financial incentives and accessible credit facilities, promoting business incubation and mentorship support, and creating sector-specific employment opportunities. Such measures are critical to ensuring the smooth economic reintegration of return migrants and to maximizing their potential contribution to Kerala's long-term development.

Significance of Study

This study seeks to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the business support programmes implemented by the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) through its subsidiary, NORKA Roots, with specific reference to foreign returnees in Kerala. The primary focus of the study is to assess the extent to which these programmes have contributed to the entrepreneurial development of return migrants by strengthening their business knowledge, enhancing managerial and financial capabilities, and promoting self-employment as a viable livelihood option. In particular, the study examines whether the support provided by NORKA Roots has enabled returnees to successfully establish and sustain business ventures following their return from overseas employment.

In addition, the study explores the role of these business support initiatives in facilitating the broader reintegration process of foreign returnees into Kerala's socio-economic environment. This includes an assessment of their impact on financial stability, livelihood security, employment generation, and long-term economic resilience among return migrants. By examining these dimensions, the study undertakes a focused analysis of how effectively NORKA's schemes address the practical challenges faced by returnees in rebuilding their professional and economic lives after expatriation. Through this evaluation,

the research aims to identify the strengths and limitations of the existing support mechanisms and to provide evidence-based insights that can inform improvements in policy design and implementation for foreign returnees in Kerala.

Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on evaluating the performance of NORKA in delivering services and support to foreign returnees, specifically in helping them explore their entrepreneurial potential and transform their business ideas into successful ventures. It aims to assess the effectiveness of various initiatives, financial assistance programs, and skill development schemes designed to facilitate the reintegration of returnees into Kerala's economy through self-employment and entrepreneurship.

By analyzing the accessibility, impact, and efficiency of NORKA's business support services, the research seeks to understand how well these initiatives empower returnees in overcoming challenges such as financial constraints, lack of market knowledge, and business sustainability issues. Additionally, the study explores whether the existing programs align with the needs and aspirations of foreign returnees seeking to establish businesses in Kerala.

Geographically, the study is limited to two districts in the northern region of Kerala, providing a focused assessment of how NORKA's services have influenced returnees in this specific area. The findings from this research can offer valuable insights into the strengths and shortcomings of NORKA's initiatives and help refine policies to better support the entrepreneurial aspirations of foreign returnees across the state.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is designed as an empirical evaluation of the business support interventions implemented by the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) for foreign returnees and Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), with particular emphasis on entrepreneurship promotion and economic reintegration. The first objective of the study is to systematically examine the range, structure, and nature of business support schemes and services offered by NORKA, and to assess their intended role in fostering entrepreneurial activity among foreign returnees. This objective focuses on understanding how these schemes address the specific needs of return migrants in terms of skill enhancement, access to institutional support, and facilitation of self-employment and business creation following return from overseas employment.

The second objective of the study is to empirically evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of NORKA's business support schemes with respect to their implementation mechanisms, accessibility to eligible beneficiaries, and measurable outcomes. In particular, the study assesses the extent to which these schemes have contributed to the establishment of sustainable business ventures, improved livelihood security, and enhanced economic stability among foreign returnees. By examining both process-related and outcome-related dimensions, the study seeks to determine whether the existing support framework adequately addresses the practical challenges faced by return migrants in reintegrating into Kerala's economic system.

Research Hypotheses

In line with the above objectives, the study is guided by the following testable hypotheses:

H1: Participation in NORKA's business support schemes has a significant positive effect on the entrepreneurial development of foreign returnees, as reflected in improved business skills, increased self-employment, and successful enterprise formation.

H2: The effectiveness of NORKA's schemes is significantly influenced by factors such as accessibility, adequacy of financial support, and institutional guidance provided to foreign returnees.

H3: Foreign returnees who have availed themselves of NORKA's business support programmes demonstrate higher levels of economic reintegration, including financial stability and livelihood sustainability, compared to those who have not accessed such support.

Research Methodology

To assess the various schemes offered by NORKA and evaluate their effectiveness, this study adopts a descriptive research design. The research relies on both primary and secondary data collected from authentic sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

A narrative review and descriptive analysis are employed to qualitatively examine the collected data, providing insights into the impact of NORKA's initiatives on foreign returnees. By systematically analyzing the information, the study aims to answer key research questions related to the accessibility, implementation, and effectiveness of these schemes in facilitating entrepreneurship and economic reintegration.

Sample Frame

Currently, there is no official record or accurate database on foreign returnees and return migrants in Kerala. Therefore, the researcher decided to collect primary data from 200 foreign returnees across two districts in the North Malabar region—Kannur and Malappuram—which have historically been at the forefront of overseas migration. Convenience sampling was used to select participants, ensuring accessibility while capturing diverse perspectives on migration and reintegration experiences.

Data Collection Tools

A structured interview schedule was employed as the primary data collection method. This approach was chosen to minimize bias, obtain more accurate and reliable data, and ensure a broad spectrum of responses. The structured format allowed for consistency in data collection, making it easier to analyse and compare findings.

Analysis of Data

The research adopts a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analysis to enhance the depth and accuracy of findings. The quantitative analysis involved the use of statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, and simple averages to ensure objective interpretation. SPSS software and Microsoft Excel were utilized where appropriate—SPSS for advanced statistical computations and Excel for generating graphs, charts, and tables to visually represent the data. The qualitative analysis helped in understanding the subjective experiences and challenges faced by returnees, providing a holistic view of their reintegration process.

Limitations of the Study

- **Challenges in Data Collection:** As with any primary data collection process, obtaining accurate responses was challenging. Many foreign returnees were initially hesitant, suspicious, or concerned about the objectives and potential outcomes of the study. To address this, participants were thoroughly informed about the research purpose, and their informed consent was obtained to ensure transparency and ethical data collection.

- **Limited Awareness of NORKA Programs:** A significant number of returnees were unaware of NORKA's programs and schemes. This lack of awareness posed a challenge, as many respondents struggled to provide relevant insights on the effectiveness of these initiatives.
- **Language Barriers:** Some participants faced difficulties in understanding the questionnaire due to language constraints. Despite having translators and experts present to facilitate communication between the interviewer and interviewees, language differences remained a minor hurdle in data collection.

Review of Literature

Rajan & Zachariah (2010)

Rajan and Zachariah conducted an extensive study on the reintegration of Gulf returnees in Kerala, focusing on the role of government programs in supporting their transition. Their research found that financial assistance schemes and entrepreneurial training programs played a crucial role in helping returnees establish businesses. However, the study also highlighted bureaucratic delays and lack of awareness among returnees, which limited the effectiveness of these schemes.

Rajan, Irudaya S. (2018)

Rajan's research on return migration and rehabilitation policies in India provides insights into the effectiveness of state-led initiatives like NORKA. His study indicates that while financial aid and skill development programs have been beneficial, many returnees struggle with accessing these schemes due to complex procedures and lack of streamlined support. He emphasizes the need for better policy implementation and monitoring to ensure the success of these programs.

Zachariah, Mathew & Irudaya Rajan (2001)

This study examines the economic impact of return migration in Kerala and the role of government agencies in helping returnees reintegrate into the labor market. It found that while self-employment and entrepreneurship were key areas of focus, many returnees lacked proper business guidance and financial literacy, which affected their ability to sustain ventures. The study recommends tailored business support services to improve outcomes for foreign returnees.

Prakash (2019)

Prakash's study on entrepreneurial reintegration of Gulf returnees in Kerala evaluates the effectiveness of government-backed financial support programs. His findings reveal that while many returnees benefit from subsidized loans and training programs, the lack of mentorship and post-setup business support often leads to business failures. He suggests that NORKA should implement long-term monitoring and advisory services to enhance business success rates.

James & George (2021)

This research analyses the role of policy implementation in return migrant rehabilitation and the accessibility of support schemes. The study highlights that while programs like NORKA's business support schemes have been instrumental in job creation, they often fail to reach those in need due to lack of awareness and administrative bottlenecks. The authors recommend that better outreach programs, simplified application processes, and targeted assistance be developed to improve the effectiveness of these initiatives.

NORKA

NORKA (**Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs, Government of Kerala**) is one of the flagship initiatives of the Kerala Government, launched on December 6, 1996, to address the concerns and grievances of Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs). Over the years, NORKA has played a pivotal role in enhancing the professional and vocational skills of individuals seeking overseas employment, providing support during crises, and assisting returnees in their reintegration process. It serves as a vital link between NRKs and

the Kerala Government, ensuring that their contributions and challenges are acknowledged. NORKA actively collaborates with government bodies, private organizations, and NGOs to develop solutions for common issues faced by migrant workers and foreign returnees, including employment opportunities, legal aid, and financial assistance. Through its various schemes and initiatives, NORKA continues to empower, protect, and rehabilitate Keralites across the globe.

Services of NORKA for facilitating business opportunities

- NBFC-NORKA Business Facilitation Centre
- Pravasi Bhadratha
- NPSP-NORKA Pravasi Startup Programme
- FAPS-Financial Assistance to Pravasi Sanghams

NORKA Roots

NORKA ROOTS functions as an agency under the Department of NORKA, primarily responsible for implementing various business support schemes and services aimed at assisting foreign returnees and Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs). It plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship and facilitating economic reintegration by providing necessary support for sustainable business ventures and stable livelihoods.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Duration of Residence Abroad

SL. NO.	TIME PERIOD	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1	1-5 years	39	19.50%
2	5-10 years	54	27.00%
3	10-15 years	78	39.00%
4	Above 15 years	29	14.50%
TOTAL		200	100%

Source: Primary data

Table 2: Time of Registration with NORKA

TIME OF REGISTRATION	NO.OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
BEFORE MIGRATION	135	67.50%
AFTER MIGRATION	65	32.50%
TOTAL	200	100

Source: Primary data

Table No: 3: Awareness about NORKA scheme

NORKA Scheme	Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Pravasi Bhadratha	Yes	121	60.5
	No	79	39.5
NBFC	Yes	75	37.5
	No	125	62.5
NPSP	Yes	84	42.0
	No	116	58.0
Financial Assistance to Pravasi Sanghams	Yes	111	55.5
	No	89	44.5

Source: Primary Data

Table 4: Details of implementation of Business Support Scheme of NORKA

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pravasi Bhadratha	200	3.02	0.698
NBFC	200	2.90	0.687
NPSP	200	2.81	1.706
FAPS	200	4.24	0.965

Source: Primary Data

Level Criteria

Level Category	Score Range
Low	0.00 –1.67
Moderate	1.67–3.33
High	3.33 – 5.00

Table 5: Role of NORKA to explore business avenues Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
After returning from abroad, NORKA assisted in starting a business	200	3.82	1.374
NORKA's fund release process has been highly beneficial	200	3.22	1.260
Received timely guidance and support to start a business in the right location	200	2.56	1.201
Role of NORKA in business exploration	200	3.25	1.133

Source: Primary Data

Findings

- 39% of the returned migrants have contributed around 15 years their working life in abroad. They may be much experienced and are afraid to get new job.
- 67.5% of the respondents are registered in NORKA before their migration. It shows that Schemes of NORKA are much familiar among migrants.
- The result can be concluded that majority of respondents are not aware about the NBFC and NPSP scheme of NORKA and almost respondents are aware about Pravasi Bhadratha. Around sixty percent respondents are aware about the Financial Assistance scheme provided by NORKA to Pravasi Sanghams.
- The overall mean value for all schemes is 3.03 with standard deviation 0.541. Hence, it can be concluded that the level of implementation of NORKA Scheme is moderate.
- The mean value for the statement “After returning from abroad, NORKA assisted in starting a business” is 3.82 with considerable standard deviation 1.374 and indicates higher level. In second and third statement, the mean value is 3.22 and 2.56 respectively; it reveals that respondents have moderate level in this regard. The overall mean value is 3.25 with standard deviation 1.133. Hence, it can be concluded that the role of NORKA to find employment is moderate level.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that a significant portion of returned migrants (39%) have spent around 15 years working abroad, making them experienced but hesitant to seek new employment opportunities. The high registration rate (67.5%) of migrants with NORKA before migration highlights the familiarity of its schemes among them. However, awareness about specific programs like NBFC and NPSP is low, whereas most respondents are familiar with Pravasi Bhadratha and financial assistance schemes for Pravasi Sanghams.

The overall assessment of NORKA's scheme implementation shows a moderate level of effectiveness, with an average mean value of 3.03. While NORKA's support for starting a business is rated relatively high (mean value: 3.82), its role in helping returnees secure employment remains at a moderate level (mean value: 3.25). These findings suggest that while NORKA plays a crucial role in assisting returnees, there is scope for improvement in creating awareness and enhancing support for employment and business opportunities.

All NORKA schemes are currently at a moderate level, supporting the hypothesis that programs for foreign returnees are effectively implemented and have positively impacted their social lives. The study highlights that while NORKA's schemes are valuable, their effectiveness can be further enhanced. With improved implementation, these programs could become a significant benefit for NRKs.

Recommendations

1. NORKA should strengthen its outreach efforts through digital platforms, community workshops, and migrant support networks to improve awareness of schemes like NBFC and NPSP, ensuring wider accessibility.
2. To further assist returnees in starting sustainable businesses, NORKA should streamline fund release procedures, offer mentorship programs, and provide tailored financial assistance based on individual business needs.
3. Regular assessments and feedback mechanisms should be implemented to track the effectiveness of various schemes, identify gaps, and make necessary improvements to maximize their impact on NRKs.

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