

Water, Work, and Worth: How the Kineer Model Restores Dignity via Inclusive Employment, with Cross-Case Evidences

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Abstract: Water is vital not just for survival but also for upholding dignity, supporting livelihoods, and fostering social inclusion. Despite this, academic research on the global bottled water market—now worth \$348 billion and rapidly expanding in India—seldom explores its potential role in promoting social justice. This study fills that gap by investigating the Kineer Water Industry, a social enterprise in India that combines bottled water distribution with inclusive employment opportunities for transgender individuals and other marginalized communities. Using secondary sources and comparative case analysis, the paper positions Kineer alongside global efforts like Jibu, JanaJal, WaterAid, and Global Grassroots, emphasizing its distinctive innovation: turning access to water into a pathway to dignity. Transgender people in India, who face significantly lower literacy and employment rates than the national average, are frequently pushed into informal and stigmatized jobs. Kineer challenges this exclusion by providing roles in bottling, logistics, and sales, redefining employment as a means of recognition, skill development, and social value. The findings highlight three key contributions: (1) using employment to promote dignity, (2) reducing stigma to drive community change, and (3) offering a scalable model for dignity-centered enterprises. Grounded in the Capability Approach and dignity-at-work theories, the study contributes to conversations on inclusive growth and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Water; Dignity; Transgender Employment; Social Enterprise; Inclusive Development; Capability Approach.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Water is widely acknowledged as a basic human right, but its importance goes far beyond mere physical survival—it's deeply connected to dignity, fairness, and the ability to make a living. Access to clean, safe water is not only vital for health and well-being but also plays a significant role in shaping people's chances for employment, inclusion, and social participation. Increasingly, scholars and policymakers recognize water's dual importance: as a life-sustaining resource and as a symbol of dignity that empowers marginalized groups to be part of society in meaningful ways. The link between dignity and employment is especially important. True dignity often comes not just from receiving aid, but from having the opportunity to engage in meaningful, recognized, and respected work. Employment becomes a means of restoring identity, fighting stigma, and building empowerment—particularly for groups who have long been excluded from traditional job markets. Understanding how inclusive employment promotes dignity is key to achieving

both sustainable development and social justice. In this context, India's Kineer Water Industry offers a powerful example of social transformation. By hiring transgender individuals and other marginalized people as brand ambassadors, distributors, and advocates, Kineer redefines water distribution as more than a business—it becomes a vehicle for social inclusion. This approach makes Kineer a leading example of corporate social innovation, where job creation and human rights come together. Even though interest in inclusive business models is growing, there's still limited research on how water-focused companies combine profit goals with inclusive employment to restore dignity. Most existing studies tend to focus either on access to water or on marginalized employment, but rarely on how the two intersect.

➤ *Research Objectives*

This study aims to:

- Explore how the Kineer model puts dignity into action by providing structured employment for marginalized communities.
- Investigate the connection between water-based businesses and inclusive employment as a blueprint for social innovation.
- Offer insights on how such initiatives can shape larger discussions on inclusive growth and corporate responsibility.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Water and Human Dignity — Human Rights and SDG 6*

Water is universally seen as a basic human right and a foundation for dignity. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly officially recognized access to safe drinking water and sanitation as vital to realizing all human rights. This commitment is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” (United Nations, 2015). Beyond its physical necessity, water is closely linked to fairness, social justice, and human well-being. Researchers note that unequal access and exclusion from water services often harm the most vulnerable, eroding their dignity and deepening systemic inequalities (Sultana & Loftus, 2020). Water has thus been described as a “dignity right”—crucial not only for hygiene but also for self-respect and full participation in society (Meier et al., 2014). This view emphasizes that water initiatives should not only be judged by their efficiency or reach but also by how well they promote dignity and reduce inequality.

➤ *Inclusive Employment Models — Social Enterprise and Workforce Integration*

In parallel with the discussion of water and dignity is the growing recognition of employment as a means of inclusion. Studies show that social enterprises strike a balance between financial sustainability and social goals, particularly by integrating marginalized populations into the labor force (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). For communities like transgender individuals or people with disabilities, employment is more than just earning an income—it’s about visibility, empowerment, and dignity (Badgett et al., 2019). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) adds to this by treating inclusive hiring as both a moral obligation and a strategic advantage, helping companies build trust and create shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011). In India, efforts such as Tata’s proactive hiring of transgender workers show how inclusion can enhance both equity and corporate reputation (Jain, 2020). These findings establish employment as a vital route to restoring dignity.

➤ *Social Entrepreneurship in the Water Industry — Global and Indian Perspectives*

The water sector is increasingly becoming a space for social entrepreneurship. Global initiatives like WaterHealth International and Water.org show how creative financing and

local distribution can improve access for underserved groups (Reddy & Batchelor, 2012). In India, organizations like Sulabh International have taken integrated approaches, linking affordable sanitation with dignified jobs for marginalized sanitation workers (Patel, 2016). Similarly, water kiosks and community-run ventures across Africa and South Asia show how water entrepreneurship can build livelihoods and empower local workers (McGranahan et al., 2016). Yet, most of this research focuses either on access or livelihoods. There’s a noticeable gap in studies that explore models like Kineer, which treat water distribution as a tool for both inclusive employment and restoring dignity—especially for transgender communities.

➤ *Theoretical Frameworks — Capabilities, Dignity in Work, and Social Inclusion*

To analyze these models, a solid theoretical foundation is necessary. Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (1999) argues that real development should be measured by the freedoms and opportunities people have to live meaningful lives—not just by economic indicators. Jobs that restore dignity help expand these freedoms, giving marginalized individuals a chance to overcome structural obstacles. The dignity-in-work framework supports this by asserting that meaningful employment must include respect, autonomy, and a sense of contribution to society (Hodson, 2001). Meanwhile, social inclusion theory calls for dismantling the cultural, legal, and institutional barriers that keep people excluded (Silver, 2015). Together, these theories offer the tools to understand the Kineer model not just as a job creation effort, but as a strategy to grow capabilities, affirm dignity, and support inclusive progress.

III. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

This study uses a qualitative case study approach based entirely on secondary data. A comparative case method was adopted to explore how different water-related businesses incorporate inclusive employment and contribute to restoring dignity. Relying on secondary data allows for a structured analysis of organizational models without the limitations of fieldwork, while still enabling meaningful cross-case comparisons.

➤ *Case Selection*

Cases were purposefully selected to ensure they were relevant and diverse. The main criteria were: (a) involvement in water services, (b) clear documentation of job creation or livelihood support, and (c) access to credible secondary data.

• *Primary Case:*

Kineer Water Bottle Industry (India) — selected for its unique model that employs transgender people and other marginalized communities in water distribution, directly linking livelihoods to dignity.

• *Comparative Cases:*

Jibu (East Africa), *JanaJal* (India), *Paani Project* (Pakistan), *Global Grassroots* (Rwanda), *WaterAid* (Malawi and other regions), *Indigenous Wetland Restoration*

(Ecuador), and *Isingiro Water Project* (Uganda). These were chosen as examples of how water initiatives can embed dignity and inclusion through jobs, entrepreneurship, or cultural empowerment.

➤ Data Sources

The research drew entirely from secondary materials, including:

- Peer-reviewed journals focusing on water rights, inclusive employment, and social enterprise.
- Reports from organizations, corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosures, and NGO publications.
- News articles, documentaries, and trusted online platforms.
- Reports from global institutions like the UN, World Bank, and ILO, offering comparative and statistical data. Triangulating across these sources ensured a more complete picture and reduced reliance on any single type of data.

➤ Data Analysis

A document analysis method (Bowen, 2009) was used. Documents were coded thematically to uncover patterns related to employment, dignity, inclusion, and organizational innovation. Coding was guided by frameworks such as Sen's Capability Approach and the dignity-in-work model, while also allowing new themes to emerge naturally from the data. A cross-case analysis helped identify both commonalities and differences across cases, offering insights specific to each context.

➤ Limitations

There are a few limitations due to the exclusive use of secondary data:

- Findings depend on what's already published, which may be incomplete or biased.
- No primary data (e.g., interviews or field visits) were gathered.

- Case studies may vary in how rigorously they were documented.
- There's limited long-term data. Despite these limitations, the research design offers a practical and thorough way to explore the intersection of water services, inclusive employment, and the promotion of human dignity—an area that has received limited academic attention.

IV. RESULTS

Transgender individuals in India have long faced intense social exclusion, marginalization, and economic hardship. Even with constitutional recognition and protective laws in place, discrimination continues to affect their access to education, healthcare, and employment. Data from the 2011 Census highlight this disparity: low literacy rates and heavy reliance on insecure livelihoods such as begging, sex work, and traditional ritual performances. Widespread stigma often drives transgender people out of their homes and out of mainstream job markets, leaving them with few avenues to lead a life of dignity.

In this challenging environment, inclusive enterprises like Kineer play a transformative role. By offering stable employment, Kineer helps break cycles of poverty and confronts long-held societal stereotypes about transgender lives. It provides not just a job, but a chance to reclaim identity, build self-worth, and participate meaningfully in society.

➤ Census 2011 Key Data:

- Total transgender population recorded under "Other": 4,87,803
- Children (ages 0–6): 54,854
- Literacy rate among "Other": approximately 56.1%, compared to the national average of 74.04%
- Estimated workforce participation: about 34%
- Around 66% of this population lives in rural areas.

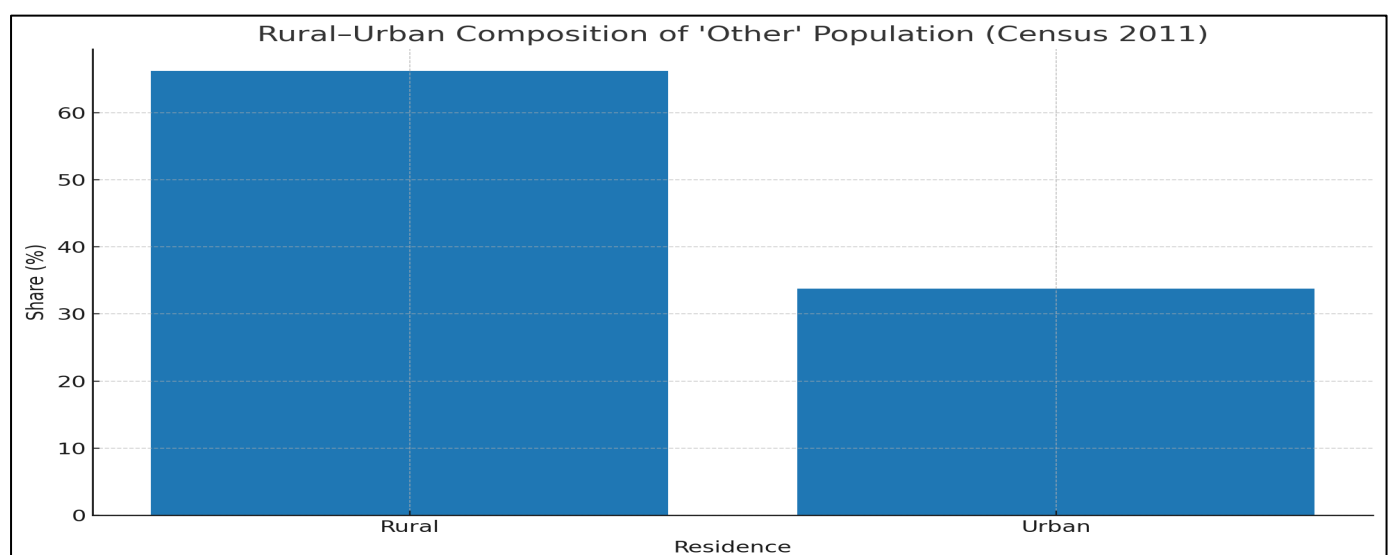


Fig 1 Rural Urban Composition of 'Other' Population

✓ *Where people live:*

The highest concentration of transgender individuals is found in Uttar Pradesh, accounting for 28.2% of the total population (1,37,465 people). This is followed by Andhra Pradesh (9.0%), Maharashtra (8.4%), and Bihar (8.4%). (Refer to the “Top 10 states” chart for more details.)

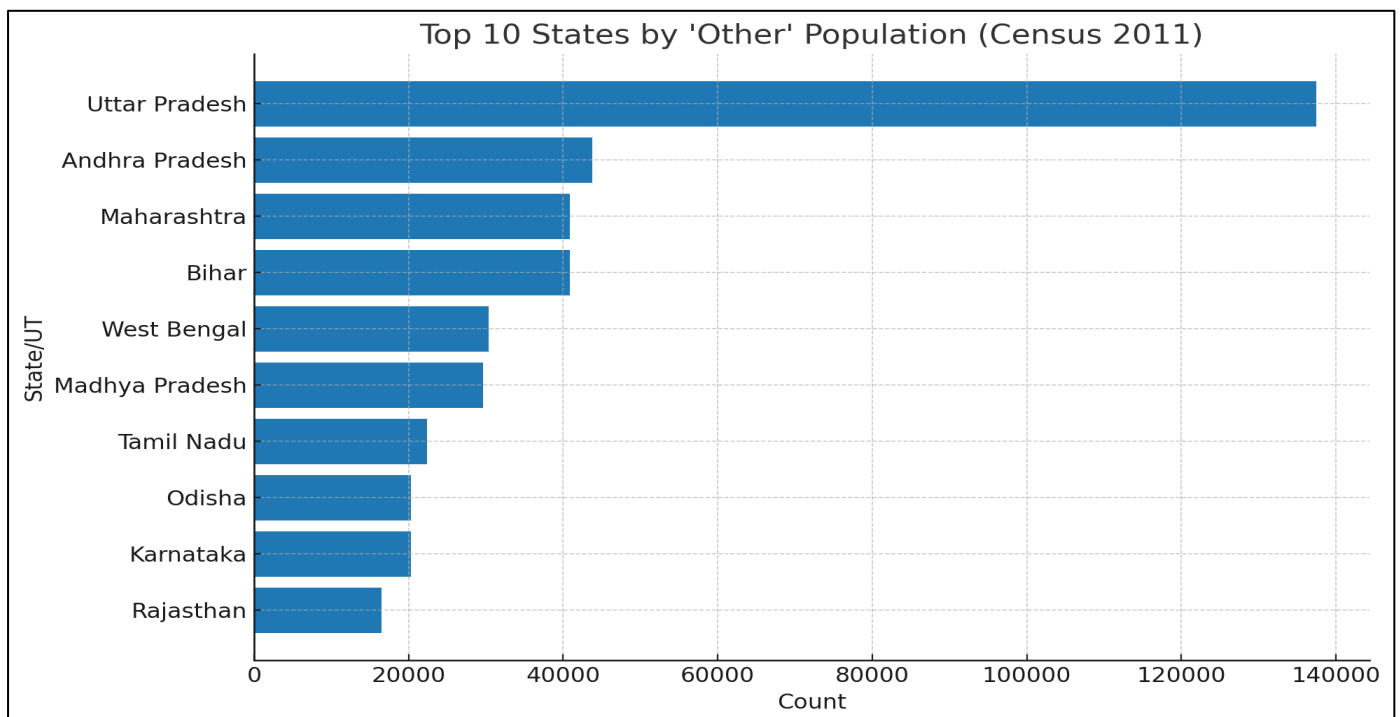


Fig 2 Top 10 States of ‘Other’ Population

✓ *Important Caveat:*

In 2011, individuals could self-identify by selecting the “Other” category. However, the government acknowledges that this category does not fully capture the transgender population. Many transgender persons may have identified as male or female instead, meaning the reported numbers are likely an undercount.

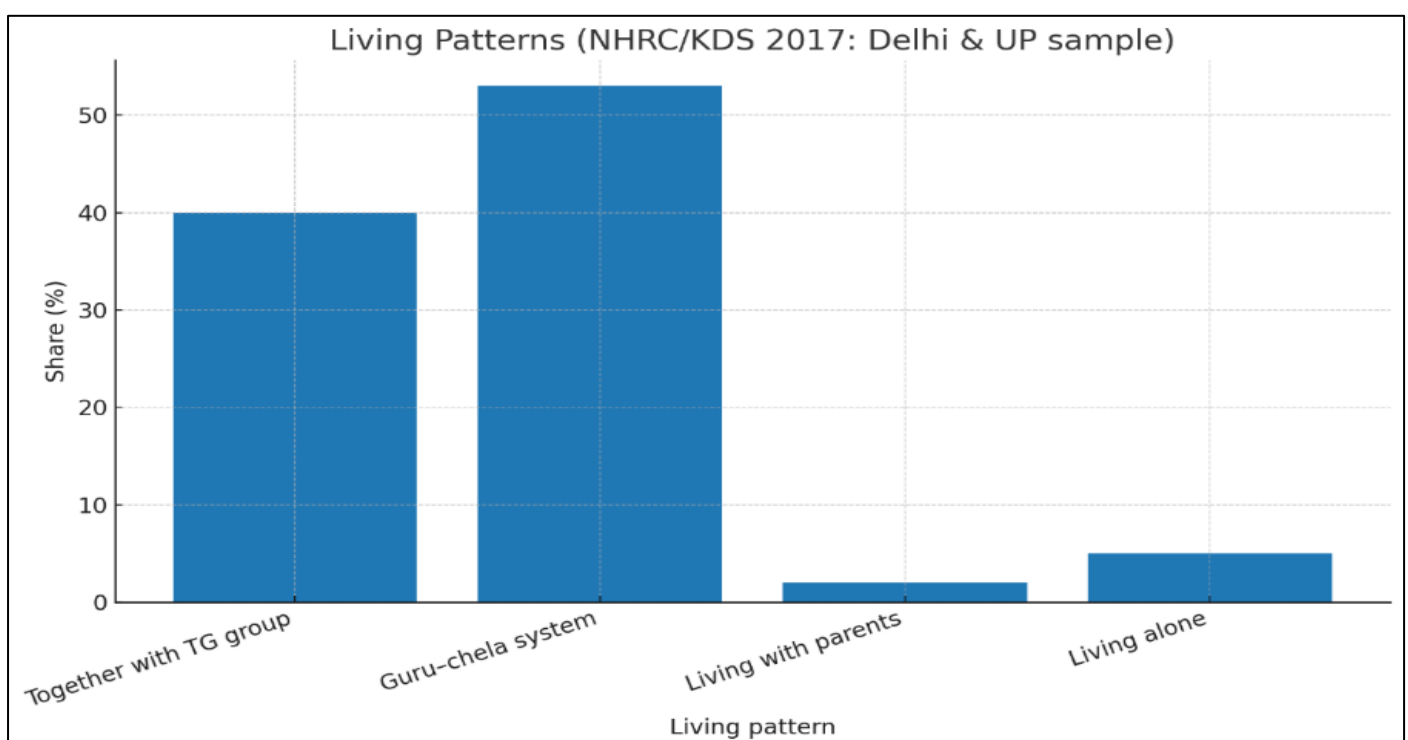


Fig 3 Living Pattern of ‘Other’ Population

V. CONDITIONS & BARRIERS

➤ *Employment is Largely Informal and Precarious.*

In a field study conducted by the NHRC and KDS (sample size: 900, from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh), respondents shared that their primary sources of livelihood included badhai, blessings, and singing (24.4%), followed by begging (10.4%) and sex work (4.6%). Notably, none of the participants reported holding government jobs, and only around 4.6% were employed in the private sector. (Refer to the 'Employment pattern' chart for more details.)

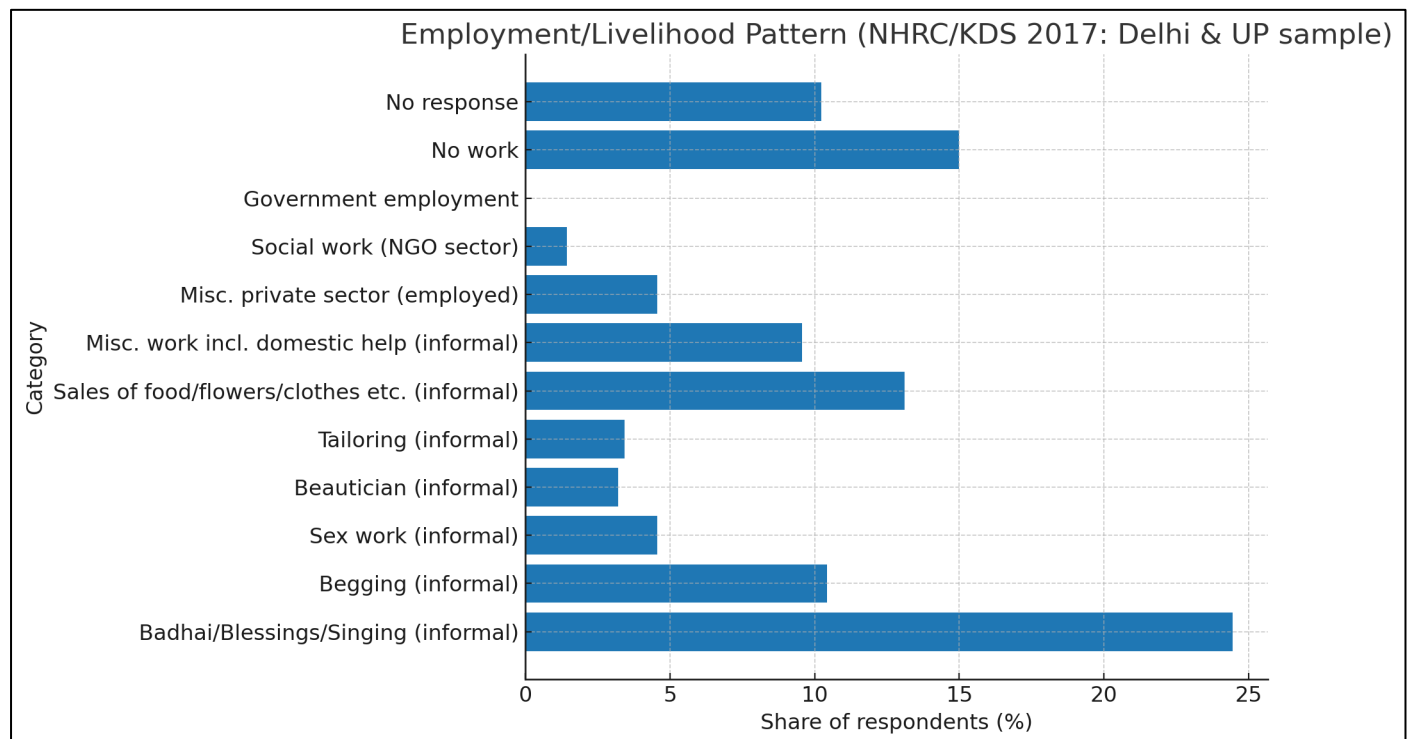


Fig 4 Employment Pattern of 'Other' Population

➤ *Low Earnings.*

The same study found that most respondents had monthly incomes ranging between ₹7,501 and ₹15,000. Only about 1.1% reported earning more than ₹25,000. (See the 'Income distribution' chart for further details.)

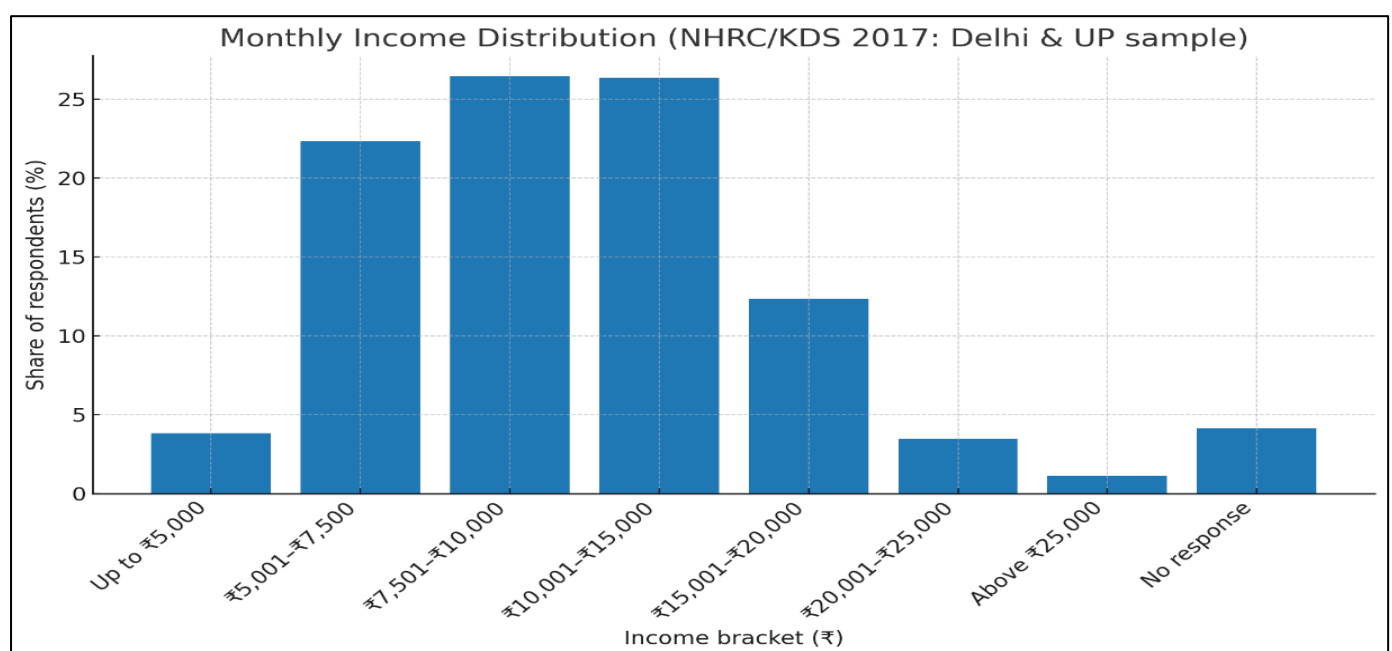


Fig 5 Monthly Income Distribution of 'Other' Population

➤ *Housing & Social Support.*

According to the findings, 81% of respondents lived in rented housing. Most lived either in guru–chela arrangements (53%) or shared spaces with other transgender individuals (40%). Only 2% reported living with their parents—a reflection of widespread family exclusion. (Refer to the two charts on housing and living patterns for more details.)

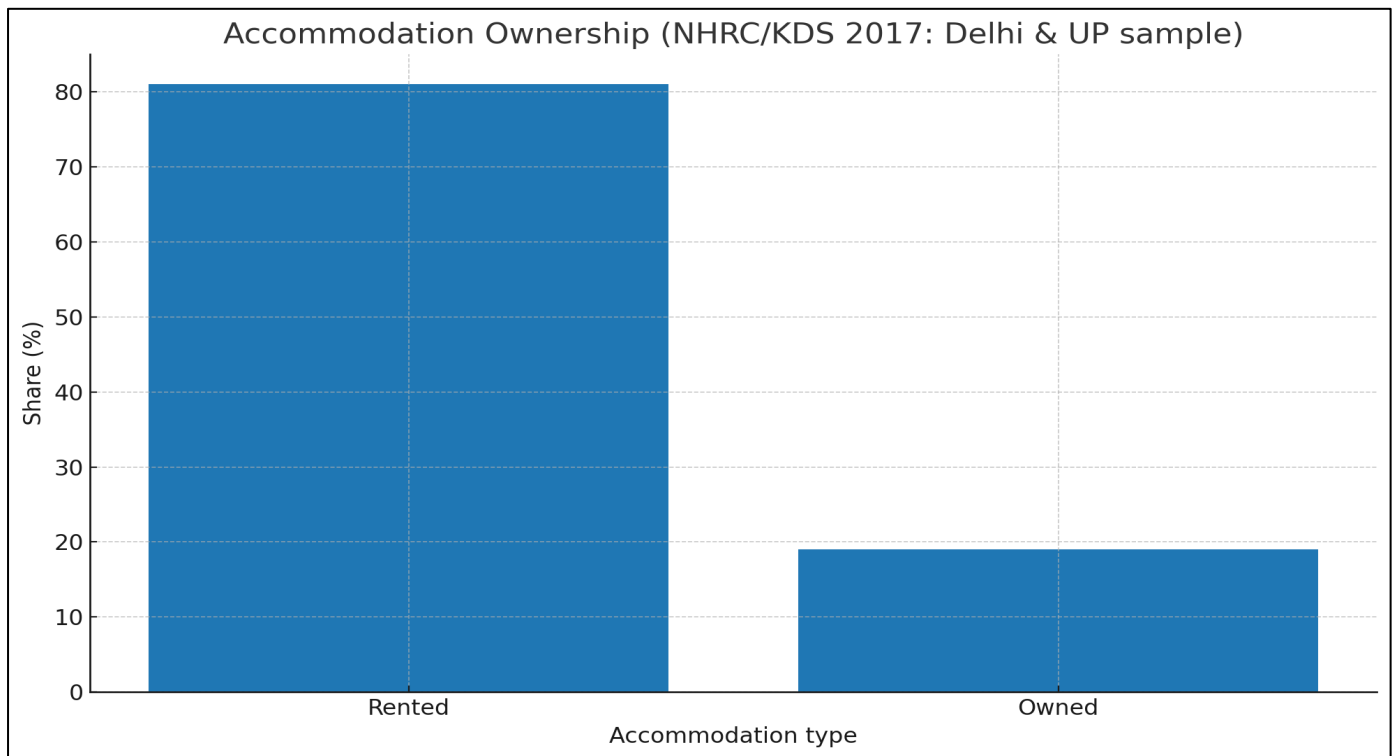


Fig 6 Accommodation Ownership of 'Other' Population

➤ *Education Gap.*

Census data consistently reveal that transgender literacy rates (around 56%) lag significantly behind the national average of 74%. There are also large disparities between states—for example, literacy is relatively high in Mizoram (about 87%) but much lower in Bihar (around 44%). These gaps contribute to ongoing exclusion from formal job opportunities.

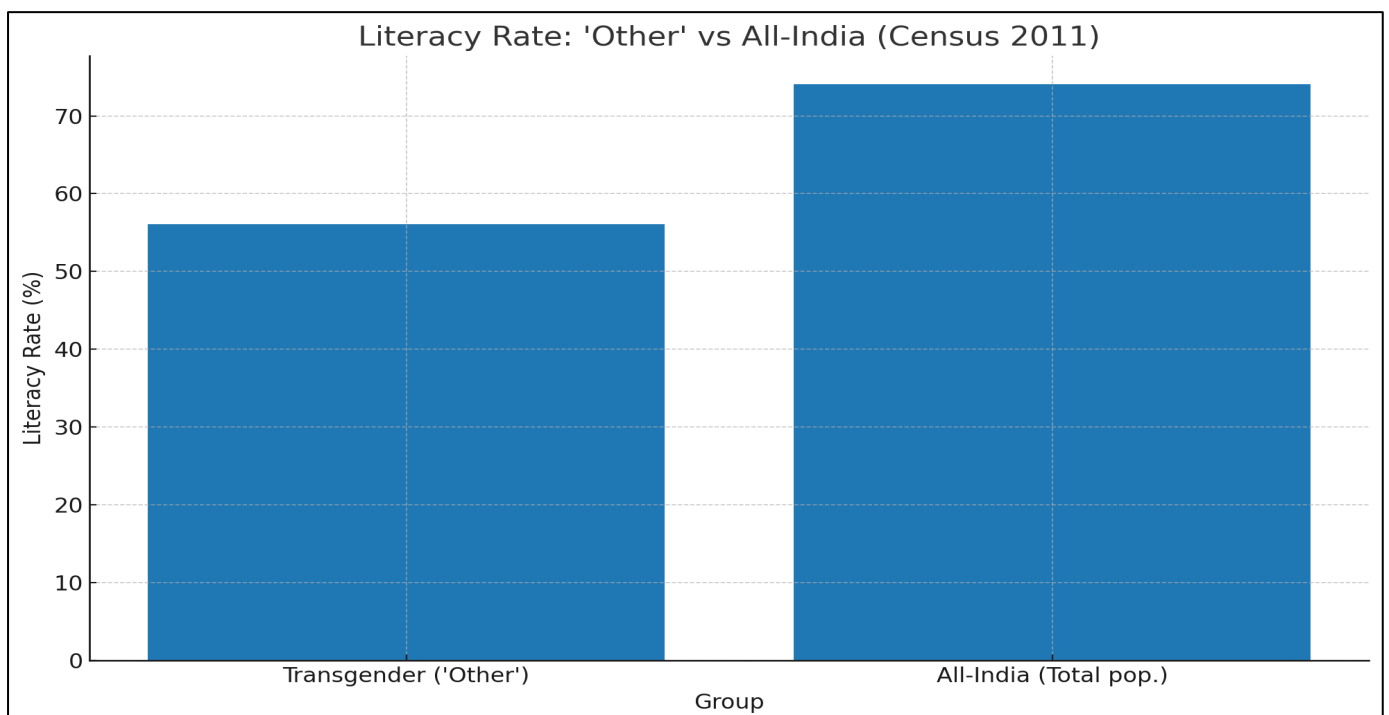


Fig 7 Literacy Rate of 'Other' Population

➤ *Legal & Policy Context That Links Water–Work–Worth to Dignity*

• *Right to Dignity and Self-Identification:*

In the landmark *NALSA v. Union of India* ruling (2014), the Supreme Court officially recognized transgender individuals as a “third gender.” The judgment affirmed their rights to equality and dignity, and supported their right to self-identify their gender.

• *Protection Against Employment Discrimination:*

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, along with the Rules introduced in 2020, prohibits discrimination in hiring and employment. It also ensures transgender individuals can obtain a certificate of identity through the National Transgender Portal.

Even with constitutional recognition and legal protections in place, transgender individuals in India are still largely excluded from formal employment. Instead, many are pushed into low-paying, stigmatized informal jobs—a reality consistently highlighted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). This ongoing exclusion highlights the importance of the Kineer model, which places dignified employment at the heart of its business approach. Kineer offers transgender individuals stable, visible, and customer-facing roles across the water value chain, including bottling, quality control, logistics, and kiosk sales. In doing so, it brings to life the dignity–employment link that laws promise but seldom deliver in real-world practice.

This approach becomes even more meaningful when viewed in relation to state-level population data. States like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar have the highest numbers of transgender residents, making them key areas for expanding inclusive employment efforts and generating broader social impact.

➤ *Kineer Water Industry: Production, Consumption Context, and Inclusive-Employment Model*

• *Origins, Mission, and Legal Footing*

Kineer was founded in 2018 as a social enterprise that leverages the bottled water industry to create dignified job opportunities—particularly for transgender individuals and other marginalized communities. The brand name is a combination of “Kinnar” (a Hindi word for transgender) and “Neer” (meaning water). From the beginning, transgender community members have been directly involved in operating and managing the water packaging plants, making the production space itself a symbol of inclusion.

Kineer Services Private Limited is officially registered in India under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Its business classification covers water collection, purification, and distribution. Corporate filings and AGM records indicate an active operational status, with directors such as Deepak Goyal and Manish Jain listed on official documents.

The Kineer Water Bottle Industry operates as a mission-driven business, combining the sale and distribution of packaged drinking water with a clear commitment to inclusive employment. The enterprise is built on two core pillars:

• *Workforce Inclusion:*

- ✓ Provides employment to transgender persons, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups in roles such as sales agents, distributors, and outreach workers.
- ✓ Structured roles include brand ambassadors, distribution managers, and community engagement coordinators.
- ✓ Workers receive training in communication, sales, and logistics to support their professional growth.

• *Revenue & Distribution:*

- ✓ Operates on a hybrid B2B and B2C model, supplying water bottles to organizations (corporates, NGOs, events) and directly to end consumers.
- ✓ The brand highlights both water purity and dignity in labor, positioning Kineer as a socially responsible choice in the marketplace."

Table 1 Kineer Employment Model Structure

Role Category	Primary Workforce Group	Functions	Training Provided
Brand Ambassadors	Transgender employees	Public campaigns, awareness, promotions	Soft skills, communication
Distribution Agents	Mixed marginalized groups	Logistics, supply chain, retail delivery	Sales, accounting basics
Community Engagement Staff	Transgender & women workers	CSR outreach, community ties, advocacy	Leadership, networking

➤ *Impact on Employees — Income, Skill-Building, Social Acceptance*

- *Secondary data indicates that Kineer’s employment model has a strong positive impact on the well-being of its employees:*

✓ *Income:*

Employees receive steady wages along with performance-based incentives, offering financial stability that stands in contrast to the uncertain and often stigmatized livelihoods many transgender individuals have previously relied on, such as begging or sex work.

✓ *Skill-Building:*

Through structured training in areas like sales, customer service, and distribution, workers gain valuable professional skills, increasing their chances of employment beyond Kineer.

✓ *Social Acceptance:*

Employees have reported a boost in self-esteem and a reduction in societal stigma, as their roles provide them with public-facing, respected employment that enhances their visibility and dignity.

➤ *Community Perception — Reduction in Stigma, Improved Inclusion*

- *Community feedback on Kineer's initiative has been overwhelmingly positive, as highlighted in media coverage and NGO reports:*

✓ *Reduction in Stigma:*

When transgender individuals are seen in professional roles, it challenges existing stereotypes and helps reduce societal bias.

✓ *Improved Inclusion:*

As a visible social brand, Kineer sparks public conversations around equality, dignity, and representation, contributing to broader social awareness.

✓ *Corporate Acceptance:*

Many large organizations that source water from Kineer view their partnerships as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts. This not only supports Kineer's mission but also helps normalize transgender employment in mainstream business environments.

Table 2 Community-Level Outcomes of Kineer Model

Dimension	Evidence from Secondary Data
Reduction in Stigma	Media reports highlighting public acceptance
Social Dialogue	Increased awareness of transgender employment rights
Corporate Engagement	Partnerships framed under CSR and ethical branding

VI. DATA AVAILABILITY NOTE (COMPANY SCALE)

Public sources do not reveal the exact annual production volumes or sales tonnage for Kineer. However, various secondary reports suggest that the company began with multiple operational units. Around 2020, there were reports of four packaged drinking water factories in Delhi, and by 2022, sources noted that “one factory turned into five across India.” These developments are summarized in the table titled “Kineer: Reported Number of Factories Over Time.”

Before diving into Kineer's specific market segments, it's important to understand the broader context of the global and Indian bottled water industries. On a global scale, bottled water is currently the fastest-growing beverage category, valued at approximately US \$348.6 billion in 2024 and expected to reach US \$509.2 billion by 2030, with a projected CAGR of around 6.4%. Some forecasts are even more optimistic, predicting growth from US \$378 billion in 2025 to US \$674.8 billion by 2033 (CAGR 7.5%). The Asia Pacific region leads the market, making up nearly 45% of global revenue in 2024. This surge is fueled by increasing health awareness, urbanization, the demand for convenience, and concerns over public water quality.

In India, packaged water serves as a quasi-utility, largely due to unreliable tap water and growing hygiene consciousness. The Indian market is expected to reach US \$8.28 billion in 2025, and forecasted to grow to US \$13.65 billion by 2030, with a CAGR of 10.5%. Other estimates suggest even faster growth—from US \$9.5 billion in 2024 to US \$29.7 billion by 2033, reflecting a CAGR of 12.45%. Volume growth has been impressive, with reports

indicating a 40–45% increase in recent years. This is driven by rising disposable incomes, shifts in consumer lifestyles, and ongoing inadequacies in public water infrastructure.

Within this expanding ecosystem, bulk water packaging (such as 20-liter jars) continues to be essential for homes, offices, and the hospitality sector, even though still water holds the largest share of revenue.

Understanding this broader landscape—global trends, India's rapid market growth, and the importance of packaging formats—sets the stage for analyzing Kineer's brand strategy and market positioning.

➤ *Production & Operations (How Kineer Works)*

• *Manufacturing & Workforce:*

Kineer's packaged drinking water factories are run and managed by members of the transgender community—a deliberate decision to turn employment into a source of dignity.

• *SKUs:*

At launch, Kineer offered common packaged water sizes popular in the Indian market—250 ml, 500 ml, 1 L, and 20 L—aligning with standard consumer demand.

• *Channels & Pricing Strategy:*

The company initially focused on business-to-business (B2B) sales—supplying corporates and institutions. Pricing was set around the industry average. For context, typical MRPs in India in 2019 were ₹20 (1 L), ₹35 (2 L), and ₹80–₹120 (20 L). Kineer stayed near this median and provided invoice-based discounts on large orders.

- *Supply Chain Economics:*

In India's retail bottled water space, local shops handle about 90% of volume. Profit margins are heavily skewed towards the retailers: distributors earn around 3%, wholesalers about 5%, and retailers 50–80%, depending on the brand. These margin dynamics make the bottled water business especially challenging for new entrants like Kineer.

- *Corporate Adoption:*

Secondary reports list several institutions and companies as early or ongoing buyers of Kineer water—such as Barclays, Vistara, The Lalit Hotels, ISS, JLL, HCL, Amity University, and Sodexo. This supports the idea that Kineer targeted institutional buyers first.

➤ *Consumption Landscape (Market Demand & Structure)*

Since Kineer's specific sales volumes are not publicly disclosed, its performance can be contextualized within broader industry trends:

- *Market Size (Value):*

India's bottled water market was worth around ₹160 billion in 2018 and was projected to grow to ₹403.06 billion by 2023, with a CAGR of ~20.75%.

- *Market Size (Volume):*

Bottled water volume was expected to reach 35.53 billion liters by 2023, growing at a CAGR of ~18.25%.

- *Per-Capita Consumption:*

Although the market is growing fast, per-capita bottled water consumption in India is still about 5 liters per person per year—much lower than the global average of 24 liters. This points to significant room for growth.

- *SKU Structure:*

In 2018, 1-liter bottles had the highest market share (~42%), followed by 500 ml and 250 ml sizes—aligning with the SKUs chosen by Kineer.

- *Brand Landscape:*

From 2015 to 2019, the off-trade bottled water market in India was highly fragmented. Leading brands included Kinley, Parle/Bisleri, Aquafina, and Oxyrich, alongside a large segment categorized as "Others."

These data points show that Kineer is operating in a fast-growing but highly competitive and low-margin sector—where scale, distribution strategy, and brand trust matter significantly.

✓ *Social Impact (Employment as Dignity)*

Kineer's greatest impact happens on the factory floor. Its plants are intentionally structured to employ transgender individuals in meaningful, public-facing roles like production, logistics, and brand ambassadorship. Media and ecosystem commentary consistently point out how this shifts societal perceptions while also building skills and providing income. Kineer, along with the Garima Foundation, has also initiated broader livelihood and inclusion efforts tied to its

water business, signaling a holistic approach to CSR and inclusive employment.

✓ *Kineer's Position in the Indian Bottled Water Industry*

An MBA case study on Kineer outlines the dual challenge it faces: building a brand and managing distribution in a commodity-based market. Competing against national giants with well-established retail networks is tough, which is why Kineer's early strategy leaned toward B2B. Institutional buyers often have DEI and CSR goals, making them ideal partners for a socially-driven business like Kineer. This alignment supports both social impact and business stability.

✓ *Production Benchmarks (Industry-Wide, Not Kineer-Specific)*

To understand potential production scales, industry templates suggest that small- to medium-sized bottled water units typically produce around 4 million liters annually (~40 lakh liters/year). Production lines often run at rates of around 50 bottles per minute with a filtration capacity of ~5,000 liters/hour. These are illustrative figures—not specific to Kineer.

Global Water Initiatives that Embody "Dignity from Water"

There is a growing global movement recognizing water not just as a necessity but as a pathway to dignity, employment, and social inclusion. Kineer's mission aligns with several international efforts:

- *Jibu (East Africa):*

A franchise model enabling local entrepreneurs—more than half of whom are women—to purify and sell water. This supports community economies while fostering dignity through ownership.

- *JanaJal (India):*

Solar-powered Water ATMs in underserved areas that improve access and create jobs for trained local operators, fostering trust and community ties.

- *The Paani Project (Pakistan):*

Builds hand pumps and solar water systems while training locals in maintenance. It also connects women's water access with vocational training.

- *Global Grassroots (Rwanda):*

Women survivors of trauma run water ventures that serve over 114,000 people. These projects deliver infrastructure and restore psychosocial dignity by putting women in leadership roles.

- *WaterAid (Malawi & beyond):*

By reducing daily water collection time from 55 minutes, solar-powered taps free up time for girls to attend school and for families to improve their quality of life.

- *Indigenous Wetland Restoration (Ecuador):*

Reviving ancient wetland systems increased water availability tenfold while preserving cultural heritage and food security.

- *Isingiro Water Project (Uganda):*

With a €79.5 million investment, this project brought clean water and sanitation to more than 340,000 refugees and local residents—offering dignity through equitable access.

These initiatives, like Kineer, show how water access can become a foundation for dignity, empowerment, and social transformation.

Table 3 Dignity Dimension of Cross-Case Evidences

Initiative	Dignity Dimension
Jibu & JanaJal	Empower local entrepreneurs, create jobs, and promote women's leadership
Paani Project	Combines water security with employment + women's vocational training
Global Grassroots	Women survivors lead water enterprises, gaining autonomy and recognition
WaterAid	Saves time → improves safety, health, education, especially for girls
Ecuador Wetland Project	Restores indigenous knowledge, ecological dignity, and food security
Isingiro (Uganda)	Ensures refugees and host populations gain equitable access and social inclusion

These global examples show that water-related initiatives can do more than provide a basic resource—they can also restore dignity, create jobs, and reduce exclusion. Like Jibu and JanaJal, Kineer uses water distribution as a business model. However, what sets Kineer apart is its focus on employing transgender and marginalized individuals—a group that has long been shut out of India's formal workforce.

Just as Water Aid and Global Grassroots prioritize saving time, improving safety, and empowering women, Kineer puts dignity at the center of employment for transgender persons, helping them move away from stigmatized forms of survival. Taken together, these cases highlight Kineer as part of a larger global shift where water is not just a product to sell, but a powerful tool for promoting justice, inclusion, and human value.

VII. DISCUSSION

➤ *Linking Water, Work, and Worth — Theoretical Implications*

This study contributes to discussions on human rights and social entrepreneurship by showing how employment transforms water access into social value. Using Sen's Capability Approach, Kineer's employment model enhances both instrumental capabilities (like income, job tenure, and skills) and intrinsic ones (like autonomy, recognition, and respect). The dignity-at-work perspective adds that value isn't only created through product delivery—being included in visible and socially respected roles is a form of value in itself. The central insight is that water enterprises can actively promote dignity when jobs provide recognition, purpose, and growth—not just when they expand access to water.

➤ *Unique Contributions of the Kineer Model — From Product to Platform*

Kineer transforms water distribution from a basic service into a platform for inclusion, putting transgender individuals in public-facing and operational roles. The company's model stands out in three ways: (a) hiring people for visible roles, (b) offering structured training and upskilling, and (c) linking its brand directly to dignity. These elements challenge social hierarchies and offer legitimacy not

just through rights, but through respected labor roles. However, they also need to be supported by strong labor practices and real advancement paths.

➤ *Transferability — Conditions for Expanding to Other Sectors*

The core ideas here—like inclusive hiring, supplier diversity, and building career ladders—can apply to other essential-goods sectors (e.g., sanitation, clean energy, basic healthcare). But success depends on several factors:

- Whether the sector's distribution systems can absorb inclusive hiring without hurting margins
- Whether buyers are willing to match inclusion with procurement goals
- How local stigma and regulations might affect adoption It works best where large institutions or public-sector buyers can create steady demand, and where certification systems help reduce buyer concerns about quality.

➤ *Challenges and Risks — Assessment and Mitigation*

• *Financial Sustainability & Unit Economics:*

Bottled water has tight margins, fluctuating input costs, and strong downstream retail control. Social impact can't always justify higher costs.

✓ *Mitigation:*

Diversify income streams (e.g., B2B, bulk, events), secure long-term contracts, and streamline logistics using localized micro-hubs or franchises. Monitor financial health closely to avoid mission drift.

• *Market Competition & Differentiation:*

Big brands dominate with their scale and trust. Social messaging alone may not attract customers.

✓ *Mitigation:*

Obtain third-party quality certifications, offer delivery guarantees, and combine inclusion stories with measurable quality metrics.

- *CSR Reliance & Procurement Risk:*
Overdependence on CSR partnerships creates revenue unpredictability and power imbalances.

✓ *Mitigation:*

Shift toward performance-based contracts, grow a diverse client base, and explore procurement standards focused on social impact.

- *Stigma & Public Acceptance:*

Visibility can invite backlash, and limiting roles to entry-level may reinforce stereotypes.

✓ *Mitigation:*

Introduce protections like anti-harassment policies, mental health support, and create promotion pathways. Engage communities to normalize inclusion.

- *Growth & Governance:*

Scaling too fast (e.g., franchising) may compromise labor quality and social values.

✓ *Mitigation:*

Use standardized contracts, conduct social and quality audits, and track inclusion metrics alongside business KPIs.

- *Measuring Impact:*

Current data shows promise, but lacks rigorous evidence.

✓ *Mitigation:*

Use mixed methods (e.g., surveys, wage tracking, customer feedback) and publish progress on employment outcomes and dignity indicators.

➤ *Policy and Practice Implications*

Public and corporate buyers can support inclusion by setting diversity targets, tying contracts to outcomes, and providing affordable financing to inclusive enterprises. For practitioners, the key is to make inclusion part of the business model—not a tradeoff against performance.

➤ *Limitations and Future Research*

This study is based on secondary data. Future fieldwork should investigate:

- How customer interaction reduces stigma
- How wages and roles evolve compared to peers
- What conditions help scale inclusive models in different cities or procurement systems

VIII. CONCLUSION

This research examined the intersection of water, work, and dignity through the Kineer case in India, with comparisons from global water initiatives. It finds that water isn't just a basic need—it can be a vehicle for social inclusion and empowerment. Unlike many global projects that focus on health, safety, or ownership, Kineer puts transgender employment at the heart of its mission. By doing so, it turns water into a means for creating visibility, respect, and

opportunity in a sector known for tough competition and low margins.

➤ *Key Contributions:*

- *Employment as dignity:*

Structured work brings stability, recognition, and growth.

- *Community transformation:*

It breaks stereotypes and increases social acceptance.

- *Global insight:*

Kineer shows how water enterprises can lead with dignity as their core identity.

These findings enrich theory by connecting Sen's capabilities and dignity-at-work, showing how service businesses can go beyond access to promote justice and inclusion.

➤ *Policy Implications*

- *Corporates & CSR:*

Move from charity to inclusive supply chains. Supporting firms like Kineer builds both social impact and long-term resilience.

- *Social Entrepreneurs:*

Kineer proves essential goods can be delivery channels for inclusion. This insight can extend to energy, food, and health.

- *Policy Makers:*

Incentivize business models that link service to jobs. Align water (SDG 6) and decent work (SDG 8) goals through partnerships and supportive regulation.

➤ *Future Research Directions*

- Measure income, skills, and dignity outcomes using comparison groups.
- Track long-term effects on stigma, mobility, and financial independence.
- Compare other sectors to see where similar dignity-driven employment models can thrive.

FINAL REFLECTION

Kineer redefines water as more than a commodity—it becomes a symbol of dignity and belonging. By creating meaningful employment, it challenges deep-rooted biases and reshapes the role of marginalized labor in India. For policymakers, entrepreneurs, and corporations, the message is clear: essential services can deliver justice, not just access. Kineer offers a compelling model for merging human rights, economic inclusion, and sustainable development.

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