Economic Aspects of the Champions Boat League in Kerala:A Study of Rowers' Remuneration, Training-Camp Expenditure and Rural Economic Development

Arun K. Saseendran[1], Saika S[2], Adhila[3]

[1]Associate Professor, Sree Narayana Arts & Science College, Kumarakom, Kottayam

[2,3]Guest Lecturer, Sree Narayana Arts & Science College, Kumarakom, Kottayam

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101100400

Received: 09 November 2026; Accepted: 14 November 2026; Published: 27 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Traditional snake-boat racing (Vallam Kali) in Kerala has increasingly combined community-based cultural practice with organised sporting competition and tourism promotion. The Champions Boat League (CBL), launched by the Kerala Tourism Department in 2019, represents an institutional effort to present traditional boat racing through a league format. This article examines the economic dimensions of this transition, with particular attention to rowers' remuneration, training-camp expenditure, local employment and rural economic linkages. It uses a descriptive and exploratory design based on the source document supplied for the study, selected government material, published news reports and academic literature on sports-event impact assessment. The proposed seasonal remuneration range of ₹1 lakh–₹1.5 lakh per rower and the proposed training-camp expenditure figure of ₹40 lakh are treated as preliminary parameters for field verification, not as established averages. Published reports indicate that costs can be substantial: one 2025 report described remuneration of ₹15–20 lakh for rowers over an 18-day period and food expenditure of ₹9–12 lakh for a camp, while another reported a ₹1.25 crore Nehru Trophy campaign expenditure by Pallathuruthy Boat Club in 2024. These are club- and event-specific examples and cannot be generalised to all teams. The analysis argues that the league's economic contribution extends beyond prize money to seasonal labour income, procurement, transport, accommodation, food services and visitor spending. It also identifies financial uncertainty, irregular event schedules and limited public financial documentation as constraints on sustainability. The article recommends standardised club accounts, timely disbursement of incentives, diversified sponsorship, local procurement strategies and a systematic economic-impact assessment framework. Since primary field data have not yet been collected, the article presents an evidence-based preliminary analysis and a framework for subsequent empirical investigation.

Keywords: Champions Boat League; Vallam Kali; snake-boat racing; rowers' remuneration; training-camp expenditure; sports economics; rural development; tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kerala's backwater landscape supports a distinctive sporting and cultural tradition in which long, narrow Chundan Vallams are crewed by large teams of rowers. Vallam Kali is not merely a competition: it is associated with village identity, collective organisation, local festivals, boat-owning communities and intergenerational cultural knowledge. The Nehru Trophy Boat Race, first held in 1952, is among the best-known events in this tradition. Contemporary reporting describes snake boats as commonly linked to village ownership and local boat clubs, with approximately 80–90 oarsmen on a typical racing crew (Abraham, 2025).

The introduction of the Champions Boat League in 2019 sought to connect this cultural practice with a structured sporting and tourism product. Kerala Tourism presents the CBL as a league of traditional boat races across several districts and venues. Its official portal records the league's successive seasons and the integration of established local races into a wider event calendar (Kerala Tourism, n.d.). The league format has the potential to

improve visibility, attract spectators and sponsors, and create more predictable opportunities for clubs and service providers.

Professionalisation, however, changes the financial requirements of participation. Clubs may need to recruit or remunerate experienced rowers, provide food and accommodation, arrange transport, engage coaches and support staff, maintain boats, and meet event-related costs. These expenses can be concentrated within a relatively short training and competition season. Consequently, boat racing can function as a temporary but significant source of income and demand in backwater communities.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the cultural prominence and growing commercial profile of professional boat racing, the economic relationship between rowers' earnings, club expenditure and local development has not been documented comprehensively in the material available for this study. Club-level expenditure figures are reported in the media, but they vary by team, event, duration, recruitment strategy and competitive ambition. The proposed figures of ₹1 lakh–₹1.5 lakh in seasonal remuneration per rower and ₹40 lakh for a training camp therefore require verification through club records and respondent interviews.

Without consistent financial records, it is difficult to estimate how much expenditure remains within the local economy, how much flows to suppliers outside the region, whether athlete payments are timely, and whether the income generated is sufficient to support the costs and risks borne by clubs. The central problem addressed here is the absence of a systematic, locally grounded assessment connecting athlete remuneration and training expenditure with the wider economic effects of the CBL and associated boat-racing events.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the economic transformation of traditional boat racing through the Champions Boat League.
- To analyse the remuneration received by professional rowers during the racing season.
- To examine the major components of training-camp expenditure.
- To identify direct and indirect employment opportunities associated with boat racing.
- To assess the potential contribution of boat racing to local and rural economic activity.
- To examine financial sustainability challenges faced by participating boat clubs.
- To suggest measures for improving the economic viability and local development impact of professional boat racing.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the seasonal remuneration received by rowers, and how does it vary across clubs and events?
2. What are the principal expenditure components of a boat-racing training camp?
3. Which local occupations and businesses receive income from training camps and race events?
4. What are the principal sources of finance for participating clubs?
5. How do event cancellations, delayed payments and uncertain schedules affect clubs and workers?
6. What financial and institutional measures could improve the sustainability of the CBL?

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

5.1 Professionalisation and the CBL

Kerala Tourism's official CBL portal describes the league as a platform for presenting traditional snake-boat races across multiple venues. The league brings together pre-existing local races within a wider tourism and sporting framework (Kerala Tourism, n.d.). The Government of Kerala's public communication on the league also traces its launch to 2019 and explains its ambition to give the traditional races a wider organised profile (Department of Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2024).

5.2 Cost structure and remuneration

News reports provide useful, though non-uniform, evidence of the costs faced by clubs. Onmanorama reported in August 2025 that rower remuneration for an 18-day period could amount to ₹15–20 lakh, food for the same period could cost ₹9–12 lakh, and total seasonal expenditure for a club could reach ₹60–80 lakh, including camp rent, maintenance and race-day expenses (Onmanorama, 2025). These estimates describe the clubs and circumstances covered by the report; they should not be treated as statewide averages.

Abraham (2025), reporting on Pallathuruthy Boat Club, noted that each participating rower received ₹50,000 for the Nehru Trophy campaign, that food expenditure was approximately ₹40,000 per day for a 125-member team, and that the club spent around ₹1.25 crore on the 2024 Nehru Trophy campaign. The club expected its 2025 expenditure to exceed ₹1.5 crore. The figures illustrate the scale of expenditure that can arise in a highly competitive campaign, but they do not establish a standard cost for all clubs.

5.3 Institutional and financial uncertainty

The New Indian Express reported in September 2024 that repeated interruptions, reduced budget allocations and delayed payments had created uncertainty for clubs. The report cited government allocations of ₹20 crore for the first CBL season in 2019, ₹15 crore in 2022, ₹12 crore in 2023 and ₹9.96 crore in 2024. It also reported club-level seasonal investment in the range of ₹1 crore–₹2.5 crore and described one club's expenditure and losses associated with postponement and cancellation (The New Indian Express, 2024). These reported figures point to the importance of predictable event calendars and transparent payment arrangements.

5.4 Sports-event impact assessment

Research on sports tourism has used input-output analysis, multiplier methods and social accounting matrices to examine the relationship between event-related demand, income and regional value added (Li & Jago, 2013; Pedauga et al., 2022). The OECD (2023) distinguishes direct effects from indirect supply-chain effects and induced household-spending effects. It also cautions that a credible assessment should consider deadweight, displacement and leakages rather than counting all spending in the host area as a net benefit. These principles are relevant to Vallam Kali because some expenditure may be locally retained while other payments may go to suppliers and workers from outside the immediate area.

5.5 Research gap

The available sources provide descriptive evidence on league development, club expenditure and the financial challenges of participation. However, the material reviewed does not provide a systematic dataset linking rower-level earnings, detailed camp accounts, local supplier receipts, visitor spending and household outcomes. This study addresses the gap by proposing an integrated framework for examining these dimensions, while recognising that primary data collection is required before definitive empirical conclusions can be drawn.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research design

The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory design. The present article is a preliminary secondary-data analysis based on the supplied research proposal and publicly available government, media and academic sources. It does not claim to report completed interviews or a completed questionnaire survey.

6.2 Sources of data

Secondary sources include Kerala Tourism's CBL portal, Government of Kerala public information, published reports on training camps and boat-club expenditure, and peer-reviewed literature on sports-event economic impact. The proposed primary data sources are boat-club presidents and secretaries, rowers, team captains, boat owners and Vallam Samithi representatives, sponsors, coaches, camp managers, food suppliers and accommodation providers.

6.3 Proposed sampling

For a subsequent field study, three to five boat clubs from Alappuzha and Kottayam districts may be selected purposively. A proposed sample of approximately 30–50 rowers may be supplemented by interviews with club office-bearers and local service providers. The final sample size should be determined by access, research objectives and the need to represent variation in club size, competitive level and expenditure.

6.4 Tools of analysis

The proposed analysis includes percentage analysis, averages, comparison of expenditure categories, income distribution analysis and thematic interpretation of stakeholder interviews. Where sufficiently detailed and reliable data are available, the study may estimate local retention and apply an appropriate regional multiplier. A multiplier should not be assumed without a defensible local input-output or social-accounting basis.

6.5 Limitations

The main limitation is the absence of completed primary field data and audited club accounts. Media reports provide useful case evidence but may differ in coverage period, accounting definitions and club circumstances. The remuneration range and ₹40 lakh training-camp figure supplied in the original proposal are preliminary parameters and cannot be interpreted as established averages. The article therefore distinguishes reported facts, proposed study assumptions and analytical interpretation.

7. ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Rowers' remuneration and seasonal income

The proposed seasonal remuneration range of ₹1 lakh–₹1.5 lakh per rower over approximately two months is a useful starting hypothesis for field investigation. It should be tested by recording actual payments, payment dates, bonuses, deductions, travel allowances and the number of days for which the athlete is engaged. A simple two-month equivalent is ₹50,000–₹75,000 per month, but this arithmetic should not be confused with a regular annual salary: the income is seasonal and may be interrupted by selection decisions, cancellations or differences between clubs.

Published examples show that remuneration arrangements vary. The Indian Express reported a ₹50,000 payment per rower for Pallathuruthy Boat Club's Nehru Trophy participation in 2025, whereas Onmanorama reported aggregate rower remuneration of ₹15–20 lakh for an 18-day camp period in the clubs it covered (Abraham, 2025; Onmanorama, 2025). These figures are not directly interchangeable because one is a per-rower payment and the other an aggregate club cost over a stated period. They nevertheless demonstrate why a field survey must capture both individual and club-level accounts.

For participating households, seasonal payments may help meet consumption, education, debt repayment and other expenses. At the same time, dependence on short-term sporting income creates uncertainty. Clubs and league organisers could improve income security by publishing payment schedules, issuing written engagement terms and ensuring that agreed remuneration and bonuses are disbursed promptly.

7.2 Training-camp expenditure

A training camp is an economic unit in its own right. Its expenditure may include food and nutrition, accommodation or building rent, local transport, medical and recovery support, coaching, strength and conditioning, equipment, boat maintenance, utilities and administrative costs. Food is especially important because a large crew trains intensively and requires regular meals. Onmanorama's 2025 report cited ₹9–12 lakh for food over an 18-day period and ₹15–20 lakh for rower remuneration over that period in the clubs discussed (Onmanorama, 2025).

The proposed ₹40 lakh camp expenditure figure should be treated as a case-study budget to be itemised and verified, not as a universal cost. For analysis, each club should maintain a ledger with the following headings:

(i) athlete payments; (ii) food and provisions; (iii) accommodation and utilities; (iv) coaching and support staff; (v) transport; (vi) health and safety; (vii) boat and equipment maintenance; and (viii) administration and contingency. Recording supplier location is equally important: a purchase from a nearby village has a different local-retention effect from a purchase made outside the district.

A comparative camp-cost analysis should calculate the share of each category in total expenditure. For example, the percentage share of food expenditure is calculated as food expenditure divided by total camp expenditure, multiplied by 100. Such percentages should be calculated only after actual accounts have been collected; the present article does not fabricate a cost breakdown for the proposed ₹40 lakh figure.

7.3 Direct, indirect and induced economic effects

Direct economic effects arise from payments made by clubs and organisers to rowers, coaches, cooks, cleaners, camp managers, transport operators and suppliers. Visitor expenditure on food, local transport, accommodation and small retail services can also contribute directly to the host economy. The scale of these effects depends on the number of events, duration of camps, team size, visitor numbers and the proportion of spending that occurs within the local area.

Indirect effects arise when businesses receiving event-related payments purchase goods and services from other businesses. For instance, a catering provider may purchase vegetables, fish, rice, fuel and other provisions from local traders and producers. An accommodation provider may hire cleaning and maintenance services. Induced effects occur when rowers and workers spend their earnings on household consumption in the region. These rounds of spending can support additional local activity, but their size must be measured rather than assumed.

A sound estimate should deduct or separately identify spending that would have occurred without the event, spending displaced from other local activities, and payments that leak out of the study area. This follows the OECD (2023) guidance that gross spending is not automatically equivalent to net local economic impact.

7.4 Rural employment and local business linkages

Boat racing can generate temporary work for cooks, kitchen assistants, cleaners, drivers, mechanics, boat repair workers, event staff, security personnel, photographers, vendors and accommodation providers. The demand may extend to fishers, farmers, grocery shops, bakeries and transport services. The concentration of camps and events in backwater villages creates an opportunity to connect sports expenditure with existing rural supply chains.

The development benefit will be stronger when clubs procure locally, use transparent supplier arrangements and provide opportunities for small enterprises. However, employment should be classified carefully: permanent, seasonal, casual and unpaid volunteer work are not equivalent. A field survey should record the number of workers, days employed, wage rates, gender, place of residence and whether the work is additional to existing employment.

7.5 Financial sustainability of boat clubs and the league

High expenditure combined with uncertain prize money, sponsorship and event schedules can expose clubs to considerable financial risk. The New Indian Express (2024) documented interruptions to the CBL and concerns about reduced allocations and delayed payments. Such uncertainty can affect recruitment, training decisions and the ability of clubs to honour commitments to athletes and suppliers.

A sustainable model should combine public support with sponsorship, media and event partnerships, ticketing where appropriate, local business participation and transparent club-level budgeting. Public funding remains important because the league also serves cultural-preservation and tourism-promotion objectives that may not be fully captured by private revenue. At the same time, public support should be linked to audited accounts, timely reporting and clear performance indicators.

8. MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

7. The CBL represents an institutional effort to organise and promote Kerala's traditional boat races as a sporting and tourism product.

8. Professional participation involves substantial seasonal expenditure, including athlete remuneration, food, accommodation, coaching, transport and maintenance.

9. Published reports show significant variation in expenditure across clubs and campaigns; reported case figures should not be treated as statewide averages.

10. The proposed remuneration range of ₹1 lakh–₹1.5 lakh per rower and the proposed ₹40 lakh camp expenditure require verification through primary data and club accounts.

11. Boat-racing expenditure has the potential to support local employment and business activity through direct payments and supply-chain purchases.

12. Event interruptions, uncertain sponsorship and delayed disbursement of financial incentives can weaken club-level financial sustainability.

13. A reliable estimate of net rural economic impact requires data on local spending, visitor expenditure, leakage, displacement and the counterfactual level of economic activity.

9. SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

14. Introduce a standardised financial reporting format for participating clubs, with separate records for remuneration, food, accommodation, transport, coaching, maintenance and administration.

15. Conduct an annual independent economic-impact assessment covering athletes, clubs, suppliers, visitors and host communities.

16. Ensure that prize money, participation incentives and approved reimbursements are disbursed according to a published timetable.

17. Encourage multi-year sponsorship agreements and partnerships with responsible local businesses to reduce dependence on a single source of finance.

18. Promote local procurement from farmers, fishers, cooperatives, caterers and small enterprises wherever quality, safety and cost permit.

19. Provide basic written engagement terms for rowers and support workers, including payment dates, allowances and cancellation-related conditions.

20. Develop a digital record of participating clubs, athletes, event schedules, payments and expenditure to improve transparency and research access.

21. Coordinate the race calendar with tourism stakeholders and local bodies so that accommodation, transport, waste management and visitor services can be planned in advance.

22. Support athlete welfare through safe training practices, nutrition planning, first aid, insurance options and access to qualified coaching.

23. Preserve the community ownership and cultural character of Vallam Kali while improving professional management and financial accountability.

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue XI November 2026

CONCLUSION

The Champions Boat League has the potential to connect Kerala's traditional boat-racing culture with sports tourism, seasonal employment and rural business development. Its economic significance cannot be assessed solely through prize money or the expenditure of a single high-profile club. The remuneration received by rowers, the cost of maintaining training camps, local procurement, visitor spending and the financial stability of participating clubs must be examined together.

The available reports demonstrate that some clubs incur substantial costs and that the scale of expenditure differs across teams and events. They also reveal the risks created by uncertain schedules and delayed financial support. The proposed remuneration and training-camp figures in this study provide useful parameters for a structured field investigation, but they should not be presented as verified averages until supported by respondent data and financial records.

A transparent and evidence-based development model can strengthen both the sporting and cultural value of Vallam Kali. Regular economic assessment, predictable institutional support, diversified sponsorship, local supply-chain participation and improved athlete welfare would help ensure that the benefits of professional boat racing are shared more widely across Kerala's backwater communities.

REFERENCES

1. Abraham, B. (2025, August 29). Nehru Trophy 2025: A behind-the-scenes look at how teams prepare for Kerala's biggest boat race. The Indian Express. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/nehru-trophy-2025-a-behind-the-scenes-look-at-how-teams-prepare-for-keralas-biggest-boat-race-10217042/
2. Department of Public Relations, Government of Kerala. (2024, November). Kerala Calling: Champions Boat League feature. Government of Kerala. https://www.prd.kerala.gov.in/sites/default/files/inline-files/kerala%20calling%20november%202024.pdf
3. Kerala Tourism. (n.d.). Champions Boat League. Government of Kerala. Retrieved November 17, 2026, from https://www.keralatourism.org/champions-boat-league
4. Li, S., & Jago, L. (2013). Evaluating economic impacts of major sports events—A meta analysis of the key trends. Current Issues in Tourism, 16(6), 591–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.736482
5. OECD. (2023). How to measure the impact of culture, sports and business events: A guide, Part I. OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers. https://doi.org/10.1787/c7249496-en
6. Onmanorama. (2025, August 12). Nehru Trophy Boat Race: Kottayam teams open training camps. https://www.onmanorama.com/travel/travel-news/2025/08/12/nehru-trophy-boat-race-kottayam-teams-training.html
7. Pedauga, L. E., Pardo-Fanjul, A., Redondo, J. C., & Izquierdo, J. M. (2022). Assessing the economic contribution of sports tourism events: A regional social accounting matrix analysis approach. Tourism Economics, 28(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/1354816620975656
8. The New Indian Express. (2024, September 3). Clubs in crisis as Champions Boat League goes off track in Kerala. https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2024/Sep/03/clubs-in-crisis-as-champions-boat-league-goes-off-track-in-kerala.