



Kudumbashree- A tool for economic empowerment of rural women in Kerala

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Abstract

Kudumbashree, the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission was launched on 17th May 1998 inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It is a community organization of Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) of women in Kerala, has been recognized as an effective strategy for the economic empowerment of women in rural areas. The Empowerment of women in economic, social, and political settings has become one of the most important concerns of the modern and elite world of the 21st century. Kudumbashree is one of the largest women's movements in Asia having over 37 lakh members covering more than 50 percent of households in Kerala. Gender equity and empowerment of women are recognized globally as the key element to achieving progress in all areas. Rural women are regarded as voiceless and defenseless. The Kudumbashree scheme aims to improve the standard of living of poor women in rural areas by setting up micro-credit and productive enterprises. The main objective of this paper is to know about the role of Kudumbashree in the economic empowerment of rural women in Kerala. Ten micro-units of Kudumbashree of Peringammala Gramapanchayath were selected for the study.

Keywords: economic empowerment, Kudumbashree, microenterprise, Neighbourhood Groups

Introduction

Kudumbashree was launched by the Government of Kerala in 1998 to eradicate poverty in rural and urban areas of Kerala through community development schemes, under the leadership of Local Self Governments. It is now considered as one of the largest women-empowering projects in India. It combines different kinds of activities like thrift and credit, micro-enterprises, income-generating activities, and a wide range of welfare activities. The meaning of 'Kudumbashree' is the prosperity of the family. In traditional societies, women were confined to the four walls of the houses performing household activities. The most common explanation of 'women's empowerment' is the ability to exercise full control over one's actions. The major objective of Kudumbashree units is poverty eradication, women empowerment, and achieving self-sufficiency. Activities such as microcredit and micro-enterprises under the scheme were undertaken by locally formed Community Development Societies consisting of rural households. As per documents associated with Kudumbashree, women want to identify their inner strength, growth opportunities, and their role in reshaping their destiny. Kudumbashree as a change-maker, a mission that empowered women to attain the goal of self-employment. Among the Kudumbashree activities which increased the confidence and capacity of poor women were meetings during a week, discussions, participation in planning and implementation process of developmental activities, socio-cultural activities, etc. It made remarkable achievement in the development of tribal women were made through Kudumbashree units and it enabled them to achieve social empowerment. One of the remarkable contributions of Kudumbashree in the economic empowerment of its members is that it has brought about great change in the borrowing capacity as well as the borrowing profile of rural women.

Kudumbashree, with lakhs of women, does make changes in the socio-economic and political life of not only their own but also their families, neighbors, community, and society.

The strategy on participation through different schemes and empowerment adopted in the Kudumbashree mission ensures sustainable livelihoods to many poor rural women and their families. The capability of the poor women of the State in many areas has improved considerably.

Review of Literature

1. Dr. Raghavan (2006) in his study identified Kudumbashree as a unique model of participatory development for poor women in rural and urban areas; these projects in turn helped to wipe out poverty completely from the state. In their study, the authors concluded that the Kudumbashree mission ensured sustainable livelihood to many poor women and created a positive outcome through its strategies of participation and empowerment.
2. Chitra. N. Nair & Lalitha (2012) found in their study that a major portion of the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the Kudumbashree program were middle-aged, belonged to a nuclear family, had higher secondary education, and had an annual income less than 24,000. Some of the major constraints faced by the beneficiaries were family background, difficulty in bringing members together, daily household work burden, delay in availing benefits, lack of suitable marketing place, etc. So, the authors suggested effective implementation of the Kudumbashree program where the thrust is given to training on a need-oriented basis and follow-up conducted regularly.

3. Dr. Chandrasekar & Shivaprakash (2010) concluded in their study that information, Communicating time and technology initiatives for women was made possible under the leadership of Kudumbashree acted as a potential tool for their empowerment and also effectively overcome their socio-economic barriers. The authors also identified that these initiatives enabled poor women to enter into IT-enabled jobs and also ensured them a minimum level of income adequate to meet the family needs.

Objectives of the study

- To analyze the role of Kudumbashree in the socio-economic status of rural women
- To analyze major initiatives Kudumbashree for the economic empowerment of women
- To assess the effectiveness of different projects of Kudumbashree for rural women

Research Methodology

The research was exploratory and descriptive. Primary data was collected by using a structured questionnaire. 100 members from 10 Kudumbashree units in Peringammala panchayat are taken as respondents. The Secondary data for the present study constitutes the Audited Financial Statements obtained from journals, magazines, books, and other periodicals, authentic publications, and reports of the Government of India, Government of Kerala, and Kudumbashree. The data collected were analyzed by using percentages.

Working Structure of Kudumbashree

Kudumbashree, the poverty eradication mission of Kerala state, is a community-based self-help initiative involving poor women. It was launched by the government of Kerala in 1998 with the active support of the government of India and NABARD for wiping out absolute poverty within 10 years. The project is implemented through local self-governments empowered by some constitutional amendments. The structure of Kudumbashree is a three tiers Community Based Organization for its decentralized effective administration. The lowest tier is the Neighbourhood Group (NHG) consisting of some women members from poor families conducting a meeting weekly in the house of any of the members. The second tier is the Area Development Society (ADS) which is in the ward level consisting of a convenient group of NHGs. The third tier is Community Development Society (CDS) is the higher one and is the union of all the ADSs in the Local Self Government body. The selected area of study, Peringammala Grama Panchayats is located in Nedumangadu Taluk, Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala State and which is a purely rural area. This Panchayat consists of 19 wards and the total population of this Grama Panchayaths is 21477. There are 374 Kudumbashree units are working in this Panchayat. The majority of the Kudumbashree units are entering into the micro-investment projects and these units are investing in different projects like Tailoring unit, Bakery, Flourmill, Pappadmanufacturing, Dairy farm, Food products making.

Innovations in Kudumbashree

Thrift and credit and linkage banking, micro-enterprise development, clean Kerala business, Santhwanam, Rothstein KASS Women's Initiative, EKSAT, Nutrimix, Bhavanashree,

Livelihood Oriented Business School (LOBS), Certificate course for the poor, GRQ (Goat-Rabbit-Quail) project, LED register, Market innovations retail network, Samagra project.

1. Microfinance

a. Thrift and credit

Kudumbashree promotes neighborhood groups (NHGs) and is used in thrift mobilization, which encourages poor women to save more and also to avail credit at a low cost. But how much amount is to be provided as a loan and for what purpose is to be used is always decided by NHG. Repayment is collected during weekly NHG meetings.

b. Linkage banking

Linkage banking is one of the flagship programs of Kudumbashree. NABARD SHG bank linkage grading procedures are applied while selecting the NHGs for availing loans assists NHG in getting graded by the bank. Bank will provide loans to those NHGs who pass the 80% mark in grading. The loan amount provided to NHG is linked with the thrift amount maintained by the group as internal loans. Four times of thrift maintained by the NHG is the maximum amount of loan that can be given to NHG. CDS some times borrow bulk loans from banks to lend it to the NHG for that CDS charges more interest than bank charges to NHG. Then bank fixes a date for the repayment of the loan, within that date NHG pays it to the CDS, and CDS, in turn, pays the collected amount to the bank.

c. Matching grant to thrift and credit societies. It is an incentive provided to NHGs. It is linked to the thrift mobilized, the performance of NHG in the grading, and the loan availed from the banks.

Micro-enterprises of Kudumbashree

Enterprises engaged in the manufacture or production, processing, or preservation of goods –A micro enterprise is an enterprise where investment in plant and machinery does not exceed rs.25 lakh. Innovation fund was initiated by Kudumbashree for supporting Micro enterprises. The maximum amount eligible should not exceed 50% of the total project cost including subsidy and innovation fund. Suitable innovative microenterprise projects will be identified by micro-enterprise and samagra teams in the district and head office. Who will then submit the proposal to the head office? Technology fund is mainly used to procure advanced and innovative technologies for setting up micro-enterprises under Kudumbashree. The cost of technology includes the cost to develop new technology, purchase of technology from research organizations, laboratories, individuals, etc. The proposal from the district mission team will be scrutinized by a screening committee at the state level. Supporting and sustaining micro-enterprises is always a challenge faced by development administration. Many efforts were taken by the Kudumbashree mission with the help of local self-government for the purpose. There is a micro-enterprise team headed by a program officer, under the leadership of assistant district mission coordinators. At the CDS level, there is a micro-enterprise subcommittee to coordinate the micro-enterprise in the panchayaths in the ADS and at the NHG levels, there are income generating volunteers to look after the matters of ME.

Innovative enterprises under Kudumbashree

a. Solid waste management

Kudumbashree initiated solid waste management to clean the Kerala business. Women from Kudumbashree and belong to poor families are engaged to involve in these kinds of activities indoor household waste collection and transport to the transit point fixed by the urban local bodies.

b. Nature fresh

Kudumbashree started a micro-enterprise called nature fresh in Idukki district and Palakkad district. Cows were distributed to women entrepreneurs. The milk produced is delivered to houses within one hour in bottles by a four-member women marketing group

c. Amrutham food supplement

The Merstham unit produces a baby food supplement developed by the central plantation crops research institute (CPCRI) Kasargode. This has four hundred operational units. Wheat required for the production of the food supplement is provided at a subsidy rate of Rs. 4.5/Kg under wheat-based nutrition program.

4.4 Samagra

Samagra is an initiative independently developed by Kudumbashree being implemented in the state in collaboration with the three-tier local self-governments and other agencies. It is an attempt to address the entire production-supply value chain holistically, by scaling up productive activity both qualitatively and quantitatively and seeking viable supply opportunities. The samagra projects are owned and implemented by the three-tier panchayaths. At the grass-root level CDS takes care of the implementation program. The district mission coordinator will be the implementing officer. Details of samagra projects that are implemented in various districts are given below.

a. Nendran banana

b. Harithasree

It is proposed to cultivate, collect and market vegetables in the Panchayats neighboring the corporation area. Different types of vegetables will be packed in two-kilo packets and delivered to houses once in three days. For this, a marketing network will be formed.

c. Ksheerashree

This project is to enhance the production of milk to meet the milk production deficit in the Trivandrum district. The milk produced will be directly marketed to the consumers as fresh milk within two hours.

d. Nedumoana Mini apparel park

In Nedumpanagrama Panchayat skill development in tailoring has been extensively undertaken. The proposed unit would be a high-end semi-automated facility and would employ state-of-the-art machinery for producing high-quality apparel. It would be an integrated facility and would have adequate operation functions from fabric processing to final packaging and quality control.

e. Madhuram

It was carried by Pathanamthitta district panchayaths to provide direct employment and income to 10000 women by the production of 20 lakh liters of honey and participation of 25000 rubber farmers.

f. ornamental fish projects

g. Ksheerasagaram

h. Thirumadhurama

i. Haritham

j. Nivedyam

k. Kondattom

l. Manufacturing of footwear uppers.

m. Goat village

n. Saphalam

This is the first time that a community-based cashew project has been attempted in the district known for its high quality of cashew. The above-said initiatives of Kudumbashree helped poor women to attain freedom, autonomy, and self-confidence. It is a women-based poverty alleviation project.

Collective farming

This program was initiated by the Kudumbashree, which includes identification of available land, selection of beneficiaries, clustering them into groups, giving them training, distribution of inputs, and release of incentives.

Responsible tourism

This is an initiative led by the state department of tourism to make the tourism industry socially, environmentally, and economically responsible to the people.

Data analysis

The age-wise distribution of respondents is tabulated in table -1.

Table 1: Age-wise classification

Sl. No	Age slot	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	18-23	12	12
2	24-29	20	20
3	30-35	15	15
4	36-41	25	25
5	42-47	10	10
6	48-53	8	8
7	54-59	5	5
8	60 and above	5	5
	Total	100	100

The table highlights that most of the members fell within the 36-41 age slab (25percentage). The second highest no of respondents fell within 24-29 age slab (20 percentage).

The marital status of the Kudumbashree members was also ascertained at the time of the interview and the data collected was compiled and tabulated in the table below:

Table 2: Marital Status of the Kudumbashree Members

Sl. No	Marital status	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Married	80	80
2	Unmarried	8	8
3	Widowed	8	8
4	Divorced	4	4
	Total	100	100

The Education level of the Kudumbashree members was compiled and tabulated as shown below:

Table 3: Education level of women

Sl. No	Education	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Below SSLC	9	9
2	SSLC	60	70
3	Plus two /Pre-degree	20	10
4	Graduation	7	7
5	Post-Graduation	4	4
	Total	100	100

The education level of women tabulated in Table -3 shows that 60% has passed the secondary school education and 20 has plus two/pre-degree, While 7 has graduation, 4of the total 100 respondents are postgraduates.

Table 4: Major factors for the empowerment of women as per respondents' views

Sl. No	Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Training	7	7
2	Entrepreneurship skill	6	6
3	Funding	20	20
4	Coordination	5	5
5	Support from NGO	8	8
6	Support from government	24	24
7	Support from family	30	30
	Total	100	100

Table-4 reveals the most important factors for the empowerment of women according to the respondents. respondents out of 100 (30%) said that support from family is the most important factor. Besides this, funding and support from the government were considered the next most important factors (20%, 24%) respectively

Table 5: Usefulness of Kudumbashree in a respondent's life

Sl. No	Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Very useful	55	55
2	Useful	40	40
3	Not useful	5	5
	Total	100	100

Table 6: Occupation-wise Distribution of Kudumbashree Members

Sl. No	Occupation	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Agriculture and allied	9	9
2	Business	28	28
3	Housewife	40	40
4	Skilled laborers	11	11
5	Unskilled laborers	12	12
	Total	100	100

The largest share of Kudumbashree members was found to be housewives (40%), followed by entrepreneurs in business (28%) forming the next largest share. Unskilled laborers formed the next most dominant group (12%) while skilled laborers (11%) came in fourth place respectively.

Table 6: Increasing of income per year

Sl. No	Income range	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Less than 5000	4	4
2	5001-10000	7	7
3	10001-15000	30	30
4	15001-20000	45	45
5	Above 20000	14	14
	Total	100	100

Table-7 shows that for 45% of the total 100 respondents income increased to Rs. 15001-20000 per year and for 30% of respondents, income per year increased to Rs.10001-15000. Lastly, for 14 % of the respondents, the rise in income was to Rs.20000/-.

Findings

- The highest number of respondents ie. 25% percentage fell in the 36-41age slab, 20percentage in 24-29 age slab and 15 percentage of the total 100 respondents fell between the ages 30-35.
- 55 percentage of the total 100 respondents mentioned that the Kudumbashree units are very useful', 40 percent considered it 'useful' while 5percent believed that Kudumbashree units find no usefulness in their life.
- 45 percentage of the total 100 respondents' income increased to Rs. 15001-20000 per year and for 30 percent income per year increased to Rs10001-15000. A fairly big group (14percentage) had income rise to Rs.20000/-

Conclusion

Kudumbashree makes drastic changes in the socio-economic life of women in Kerala generally and particularly in rural areas of Thiruvananthapuram. Kudumbashree project boosted the women empowering strategies adopted in Kerala state. The success of Kudumbashree is not only for the individual benefits of women but also their family, community, etc. Kudumbashree has enhanced entrepreneurship and leadership, and the capacity of women to work and earn together. Empowering women and improving their social and economic status are essential ingredients for realizing the full potential of economic and political development of the entire society and it ensuring sustainable development. Kudumbashree is regarded as the major agent of change by participating women in various income generating-cum developmental activities, the morale and confidence of women have also become very high. In a conclusion, we can say that the Kudumbashree units in Peringammala Panchayat play an important role in the overall development of this Panchayat. The majority of the units have worked for the achievement of women empowerment objectives and to a great extent they gain the same. Through starting SBU's Kudumbashree units provide earnings to the members and results in economic empowerment and conducting the small units, the Entrepreneurial empowerment is also possible to a great extent.

Suggestions

Major suggestions from respondents and researchers are listed below:

- Continuous and rigorous leadership training required for individual and group members
- Long duration funding with a low-interest rate is required for sustainable women empowerment via entrepreneurial activities.
- Women empowerment and awareness program should be conducted at regular intervals.

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