



KUDUMBASHREE – A PROJECT FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Women's empowerment will enhance the quality and quantity of human resources available for development.

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) are the primary units of the Kudumbashree community organisation. Ten to twenty women from a neighbourhood form a NHG. Kudumbashree, a community organization of Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) of women in Kerala, has been recognized as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas: bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights or for empowerment. Kudumbashree is the poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala. The name Kudumbashree in Malayalam language means 'prosperity of the family'. The name represents 'Kudumbashree Mission' or SPEM as well as the Kudumbashree Community Network.

Key words: *women empowerment, kudumbashree, NHGs*

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MEANING OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Women's empowerment can be defined as promoting women's sense of self worth, to determine their own choices, to be self reliant, to be financially independent, their ability to make decision for their personal and development. It also means that various projects undertaken to improve the political, economic and social status of women around the world.

Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to

opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. Women's empowerment will enhance the quality and quantity of human resources available for development. Empowerment if one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and developments. There are different types of women empowerment – social, education, economic, political, psychological.



Economic empowerment of women allows them to access, control and benefit from various resources and income. It helps them to learn how to manage risks and improve their well beings'

There are various agencies that were formed to help women from economically weaker section of the society to become economically independent. This paper focus on Kudumbashree community organization

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) are the primary units of the Kudumbashree community organisation. Ten to twenty women from a neighbourhood form a NHG. The membership, structure, and functions of the NHGs are bound by the byelaws of Kudumbashree CDS. Membership to NHGs is open to all adult women, but limited to a single women membership per family. If a woman leaves the group then another women from her family can become the member. The economic state of the families-whether they are poor or not is decided on the standards set by the government.

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Kudumbashree was set up in 1997 following the

recommendations of a three member Task Force appointed by the State government. Its formation was in the context of the devolution of powers to the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Kerala, and the Peoples' Plan Campaign, which attempted to draw up the Ninth Plan of the local governments from below through the PRIs.

Kudumbashree has a three-tier structure for its women community network, with Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the middle level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. The community structure that Kudumbashree accepted is the one that evolved from the experiments in Alappuzha Municipality and Malappuram in early 1990s.

The Prime Minister A.B Vajpayee inaugurated the mission at Malappuram on 17th May 1998. SPEM was registered under the Travancore-Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act of 1955 in November 1998. SPEM started functioning on 1st April 1999 under the local self-government department; it was named Kudumbashree mission. The aim of the Kudumbashree scheme is to improve the standard of living of poor women in rural areas by setting up micro-credit and productive enterprises. Kudumbashree community network was extended to cover the entire State

At the time of Kudumbashree's formation, its mandate was eradication of absolute poverty in Kerala. The Kudumbashree programs as see today, came out of a system that promoted innovation and encouraged new ideas. Several of the schemes came out of inputs and demands from the field. The current programs domains evolved over the years. As of now Kudumbashree has three major programs



domains:

- Economic Empowerment
- Social Empowerment
- Women Empowerment

In addition to these, Kudumbashree also implements the urban poverty alleviation programmes of the Government of India.

Some of the activities included in the three major programs domains

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

• **Micro Enterprises Development & Marketing**

Micro Enterprises Development is an important strategy of Kudumbashree towards economic empowerment of women. All members of Kudumbashree are encouraged to start 'Micro Enterprises' using local resources, and financial aid, skill training, handholding and marketing support provided by the Mission

- **Farm activities- Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)** a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) aims at increasing the visibility of women in agriculture, reducing drudgery and providing a livelihood opportunity by adopting sustainable and eco friendly agriculture.

Kudumbashree, the programme implementing agency (PIA) for Kerala, has undertaken the project through the institution of Joint Liability Group (JLG) of women farmers.

- **Training programs** Capacity building is an ongoing process where the Mission capacitates all its stakeholders for its sustainability in the long run. The Mission fulfills this objective by providing necessary handholding support in the form of trainings and providing required resources to its various stakeholders. As the

Mission's activities are varied, the type of trainings offered and services it renders too varies.

- **Micro finance** Kudumbashree with its core mission to wipeout absolute poverty through women empowerment has indeed touched many lives through its integrated, comprehensive approach. Thousands of the poor and the marginalized population are building their lives, their families and their society through these neighborhood groups.

The financial empowerment of women in Kerala through the focused initiative of Kudumbashree has gone long way drawing even International recognition. Since inception Microfinance has been the basic thrust of Kudumbashree to address poverty. It has been proved without doubt that microfinance is the effective tool for development and contributed to the women and economic development of the society to a great extent.

Kudumbashree recognizes that capacitating women to understand and exercise their rights is a basic requirement for the success and sustainability of any poverty eradication program. Kudumbashree has attempted to bring every poor woman in the state to federations of NHGs and capacitate them to address the issues of women by enhancing or improving female work participation, health and nutritional status, participation in decision making, local governance and their role in planning in addition to make them as local entrepreneurs for finding their livelihoods.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:

- **BUDs Institutions** - Kudumbashree initiated



the Disability Mainstreaming Program namely Buds. To avoid the sin of labeling and stigmatizing towards the mentally challenged, the school was named as “BUDs”. The first BUDS institution was started at Venganoor Panchayat in 2004.

With the policy focus on inclusive and integrated education more and more mentally challenged children began to enroll in government schools. This has provided the mentally challenged children an opportunity for schooling in an inclusive atmosphere where they can learn upto the age of 18

- **Destitute Free Kerala** is different from other poverty eradication projects in the sense that instead of focusing on a particular aspect of poverty, it endeavours to look into various dimensions of poverty. While many of the basic, developmental and psychological needs of a **Destitute Free Kerala** beneficiary family are taken care under the aegis of Kudumbashree, the other needs are satisfied by Government Departments like LSGIs, Health Department, and Public Distribution System etc.
- **Balasabha**. The prime objective of constituting Balasabhas is to prevent inter-generational transmission of poverty through capability enhancement of children. Small Learning Groups for experimental and systematic learning, opportunities for understanding democratic process, participation in conserving environment, enabling children to unfold the intricacies of collectivisation are the basic focal points of Balasabha.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

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- Snehitha Network is a 24 hours working gender help desk. It works to avail support and help to the shield less women in society. The main aim of the center is to provide help and support to those women and children who are in distress and provide voice for their issues and concerns, also to prevent, protect and prevail over domestic violence through advocacy, empowerment and social change. Snehitha also looks to enhance the socio-economic status of young, underprivileged women by empowering them with self-confidence and the required skills to enable them to become independent and contribute to family and society

CONCLUSION:

Kudumbashree has been in force for over 25 years. It has empowered poor women in Kerala and also made them politically and socially active by honing



their leadership qualities. It has provided a unique platform to poor women and instilled confidence among them to improve their lives. Yet, it faces challenges few are competition from branded product, with changing times its marketing skills need to be upgrade, training is required to market its product, increasing cost of production. In any venture there are always ups and downs, kudumbashree has lightened the life of many women and their families in leading better life and societal progress.

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