Mobilizing Local Resources as a Catalyst in Community Development – A Case Study of Kudumbasree Units in Kerala

Abstract

One of the sustaining elements of communitarian social work is the meaningful involvement of the people who are supposed to benefit from the collective effort. A community that has the right orientation, has multiple sets of skills to see through their own process of development, has a better chance of sustaining community work in its development. Community-based programmes and SHGs are important components of the neighborhoods, villages, towns and cities in which they operate. Such groups can improve the quality of life within their communities by responding to local needs, providing new solutions to problems which may be quite old. The indicator that such groups meet local needs is their ability to mobilize people and resources within the community.

Every community, even the poorest, has resources that can be used to implement projects that respond to local needs - both financial and non-
financial contributions to improve projects. Local resources not only allow for the implementation of successful community projects, but also contribute to the long-term sustainability of initiatives. By mobilizing local resources to communitarian work, both the community and local contributors benefit in a number of ways. This paper explores Kudumba sree programme for poverty reduction launched by the Kerala government which has really proved how a community can be emerged and flourish by using local resources. The programme as an effective communitarian work marked its efficacy by bridging the gap between needs and resources in a cost effective manner.

Key words: community development, local resources, kudumba sree

Introduction

Kudumbashree is a multi-faceted women based participatory poverty eradication programme jointly initiated by Government of Kerala and NABARD. It is implemented by community based organizations (CBOs) of poor women in co-operation with Local Self Government Institutions. Kudumbasree is the flagship programme of Kerala state Govt. for poverty eradication which provides 2, 34,756 self-employment opportunities to women below poverty line, Which has succeeded in making a significant dent on poverty in the state. The Kerala state Poverty eradication mission implemented the Kudumbasree programme by organizing the poor by creating community based structure of women below poverty line with focus on self help demands led over by available resources under the leadership of local Government. This programme covers the entire rural area of about 1, 35,572 neighbourhood groups, 13,199 area development societies, and 991 community development societies. Kudumbasree is the largest micro finance institution in Kerala. It mobilizes a sum of 376.06 cores as thrift and disbursed as credit to its members. The thrift and credit societies at neighbourhood group level motivate and facilitate the poor to save and provide them with cost effective and easy credit. The poor
families bring in small sums according to their capacity, pool them together for a corpus and take back loans to meet their immediate needs without depending on money lenders. Kudumbasree aims at eradicating absolute poverty within a definite time frame of 10 years under the leadership of Local Self Governments formed and empowered by the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution of India. Unlike many other similar programmes, it follows a process approach rather than a project approach. The slogan of the mission is “reaching out to families through women and reaching out to community through families”. In order to achieve the mission within a predetermined period, kudumbasree set the following principal objectives

• Facilitating self identification of the Poor families through the poverty risk index
• Empowering the women of the poor strata to improve their individual and collective capabilities.
• Encouraging thrift investment through credit by developing community developed societies to work as informal banks of the poor.
• Improving income of the poor through upgrades of vocational and managerial skill and creation of the opportunities for self employment and wage employment.
• Ensuring access to basic amenities like safe drinking water, sanitary facilities, improved shelter and healthy living environment.
• Promoting functional literacy among the poor and supporting continuing education.

Hence Kudumbasree aims at the all round empowerment of women and thus to eradicate the evil of poverty which is believed to be helping them to develop a self sufficient, self reliant and sustainable lively hood in the near future.
The State led Kudumbashree Model

The beginning of decentralization of government in the state of Kerala in India came in two bursts in transfer of powers to local governments. First in October 1995 when the decision to transfer most of the development institutions to local governments along with staff was made and the second in August 1996 when the decision to transfer about a third of State Plan resources to local governments was announced and the People’s Plan Campaign launched. Alongside it was decided to universalize the Anti-Poverty Program of the State under the name of Kudumbashree. Kudumbashree the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) was launched by Government of Kerala in 1998 with the active support of Government of India and NABARD for wiping out absolute poverty within a period of 10 years. (Kudumbashree Annual Administration Report, 2009-2010) The project is implemented through Local Self Governments empowered by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments. The slogan of the Mission is “Reaching out to families through women and reaching out to community through families”. Today 3.6 million women participate in the Kudumbashree movement in the state cutting across political ideologies and religious faiths. Through the Community Development Society (CDS) system 36 lakh women of State have been organized into 1,82,969 grass root level Neighborhood groups. Apart from thrift mobilization and informal banking, the CDS structure has given birth to 29,436 vibrant microenterprises.

Social and Economical Empowerment of Women – Kudumbashree Model of Kerala

In the post independence period of India in fact there is no drought of programmes and projects to deal with the poverty situation. However all the programmes are planned and implemented by the bureaucrats without much insight and followed a top down approach. These programmes were supply driven and not need based and demand driven.
and were not taken in to account of the magnitude of poverty, causes of poverty and variables of poverty. The perception of poverty itself was ambiguous and vague and also the estimation of poverty was inaccurate, insufficient and purposeless. The income was only factor that based for determining poverty. In fact it was based on the purchasing capacity of the family to procure food. The aspirations of the poor, the basic needs of the poor, the levels of deprivations of the poor were not considered and someone else took decision on his prerogative. In this context it inevitable to discuss about the very successful anti poverty programme of Kerala state government under the brand name “Kudumbashree” means prosperity of the family.

The Kudumbashree is the largest poverty eradication mission and women-empowerment project in the country and also mighty women’s movements in Asia with a full-time women membership of 3.7 million, engaged in an array of gainful activities covers more than 50% of the households in Kerala launched by government of Kerala for wiping out absolute poverty by empowering poor women flock from the state within a period of 10 years is a holistic, participatory, women oriented innovative overarching poverty reduction approach. This process is implemented through Local Self Governments formed and empowered by the 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments. The Mission follows a process approach rather than a project approach. The Kudumbashree envision prosperity of the poor families in the state with multiple programmes that will provide them information, create awareness, build up their capability and capacity, enhance their confidence and show them opportunity for better social security and empower them physically, socially, economically and politically.

STRUCTURE OF CBO’S IN KUDUMBASHREE

a) Neighbourhood Group (NHG)

The lower most tiers constitute the Neighbourhood Group consisting of
20-40 women members selected from the poor families. These NHG’s are called ‘Ayalkootams’ (meaning ‘neighbourhood’ in Malayalam) by the women. Meetings are convened on a weekly basis in the houses of NHG members. In the meeting the various problems faced by the Group members are discussed along with suggestions for improving the situation. In the weekly meeting all the members bring thrift, which will be collected and recycled to the system by way of sanctioning loans. Five volunteers are selected at this level: the Community Health Volunteer, Income generation activities volunteer, Infrastructure Volunteer, Secretary and the President. They look into the respective activities and problems of their groups.

b) Area Development Society (ADS)

The second tier is Area Development Society which is formed at the ward level by federating 10-15 NHG’s. The ADS function through three distinct bodies:

General Body: It consists of the five volunteers and all the NHG’s are a part of it.

Governing Body: It is constituted by electing a President, Secretary and a five member Committee from the General Body. Links with the Local Self Government: In Grama panchayats the ward member is the patron of the ADS and in Urban Local Bodies a separate Monitoring & advisory Committee is constituted with the ward Councillor as the chairperson.

c) Community Development Society (CDS)

At the Panchayat / Municipal level a Community Development Society (CDS), a registered body under the Charitable Societies Act is formed by federating various ADS’s. It too includes three distinct bodies:

General Body: It consists of all the ADS Chairpersons and ADS Governing Body members along with representatives of Resource Persons and Officers of the Local Body involved in the implementation
of the Poverty Alleviation and Women Empowerment Programmes.

Even though Kerala State is well-known for its egalitarian policies in terms of healthcare, redistributive actions and social reforms, and its health indicators close to those of high-resource countries despite a poor per-capita income, it is not clear whether socio-economic disparities in terms of life expectancy are observed. There is an increased emphasis on encouraging NHG women to actively participate in *grama sabhas*, thus politically scaling up. Active involvement in preparation of anti poverty sub plans and in the *grama sabhas* are expected to improve convergence and empower women. Community contracting is also gaining increasing popularity. Kudumbashree’s upcoming Bhavan Shree programme is an example of implementation by the grassroots population. It is also an example of Kudumbashree trying to bridge the information and skills gaps for effective community contracting. In this program, Kudumbashree aims to motivate and train below-poverty-line (BPL) households to construct their own houses instead of waiting for years to obtain government-subsidized housing. Loans will be provided at subsidized interest rates of 7.8 percent per year. Kudumbashree aims to provide technical training to interested NHG members in building houses. The NHG infrastructure volunteer is responsible for collecting interest. The CDS is responsible for ensuring prompt repayment of the loans and monitoring the implementation of the housing scheme at the grassroots.

**New Areas of Intervention**

- *Arogya Swayam Sahaya Sangham (health self-help groups)*. Currently, Kudumbashree is focusing on capacity building among NHGs to manage minor ailments as well as chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus and to promote health by changing risky behaviors. Kudumbashree is training NHG health volunteers to this end.
• *Balasabhas (children’s clubs)* are grassroots groups of the children of NHG members. The objective of these clubs is to boost healthy growth and development of children and to provide an atmosphere for informal learning.

• *Destitute identification and rehabilitation.* From its monitoring system, Kudumbashree learned that destitute families are being left out of NHGs. The Kudumbashree CBOs often failed to enroll the poorest of the poor in their vicinity. According to the Kudumbashree staff, this was perhaps because destitute families find it hard to contribute thrift, set up and run profitable microenterprises, or to express their needs. Destitute rehabilitation is going to be one of the thrust areas of Kudumbashree in years to come. Elected representatives at the state, regional, *gram panchayat*, and CDS levels have already been trained in related areas. The central government released Rs 80 million to Kudumbashree for a destitute rehabilitation and tracking program.

**Research Methodology**

**Objective of the study**

The main objective of this research paper is to describe how the economic and social empowerment of poor women flock of Kudumbashree mobilized resources effectively for community development.

The study used both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected by using a questionnaire schedule among 45 kudumbasree workers in the Kunnamthanam (Gram Panchayat) of Pathanamthitta District of Kerala state, who claimed to have successfully engaged in the self-employment programme. The sample selection was on systematic random sampling. The questionnaire was developed to assess their socio-economic development after their participation in Kudumbasree.
Programme. Secondary sources included books, journals, articles and reports from newspapers, weekly’s, magazines, etc. The data collected from both the primary and secondary sources were quantified and analyzed in qualitative terms which revealed that there was considerable improvement in the socioeconomic status of women who participated in the Kudumbasree Programme in Kunnamthanam Panchayat, Pathnamthitta district, Kerala.

**Basic Principles for the selection of the sample are as follows:**
Normative identification of the poor – simple, non-monitory individuals. Indicators on the basis of which the study group is selected included the organization of the poor, inclusiveness – every below poverty level persons.

**Micro Enterprises:** Kudumbashree definition of micro enterprise. i. An enterprise with investment ranging from Rs.5000 to Rs. 250000, ii. Turn over between Rs 100000 and Rs500000, iii. Generating at least Rs 1500 per member per month and an enterprise fully owned, managed and operated by members themselves (OME)

**Some of the programmes undertaken by women for empowerment under Kudumbasree are shown below.**
Laundry Units, Direct Marketing Group,

**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 projects.

**Hypothesis:** -Women will become socioeconomically developed after
participating in Kudumbasree programme, Women taking part in Kudumbasree programme will be able to enhance their community through effective use of resources such as manpower and local resources.

- Women joining Kudumbasree will become more participatory, involved and active, women will become more responsible after joining Kudumbasree programme, and women will be able to analyze themselves or their strengths better after taking part in Kudumbasree programme.

**Table-1**

*Showing the Banking Skill of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particular</th>
<th>No of respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much confident</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less confident</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results and Discussion**

From table-1 it can be observed that 53% that of the respondents who participated in kudumbasree programme developed their level of confidence to take up responsibilities after joining the initiative. One fourth of the kudumbasree women said that they don’t have much confidence, but improved their level of confidence after working in the programme. Only 22% reported that they lack confidence to take up responsibilities.

**Table-2**

*Showing the Participation in Gramasabha and Meetings*
In these study 67% or 30 members from the study sample reported that they will actively participate in meetings by asking questions and express opinions openly. 24% told that they only join with others and don’t openly express alone. 9% of them said that they don’t participate, but sit passively in the meetings.

**Table-3**

**Showing the Interest of Respondents in Co-Ordinating Programmes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Interest</th>
<th>Frequency of respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>66.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table-3 it is observed that 67% of the kudumbasree women showed interest in taking up responsibilities such as coordinating programmes and 33% did not take any responsibility at all.

**Table- 4**

**Showing the Self-Evaluation Capacity of Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Evaluation</th>
<th>Frequency of respondents</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing well</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.1351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fails to do better</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels better after every time</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.8378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-4 shows the self-evaluation capacity of kudumbasree women. 35% reported that they have good capacity to evaluate themselves. 27% of the Kudumbasree women felt that they don’t have that much
capacity to evaluate themselves, but 38% of them felt that they are improving very well in evaluating themselves after attending each and every program. It can be interpreted that they are on the way to success. Many of them improved very well and the rest of them are doing well and changing significantly.

The data obtained through the study was analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. The information collected through the interview method based on the self-developed check list by the researcher, it can be inferred that the study proves that the Kudumbasree program has made a dramatic change in the economic; political and social life of its beneficiaries. Their income expenditure pattern shows a significant developmental structure. They are spending 30-35% of their income for the education of their children and 45% for substitution of food and costumes, 12% for medicine and 15-18% goes to their saving bank accounts. Their participation level in meetings becomes more active. They have got freedom over the money they earned through their self-employment and they are free from the hands of the money lenders.

Industrialization and extraction of natural resources have resulted in large scale women empowerment. The women got freedom of work and favourable working atmosphere especially group activity and they
Division of labour. They got the freedom to spend the money or purchase the things according to their will and wish. They came out of the kitchens and developed a positive attitude towards the society. They have started feeling that they are also an integral part of the society. The feeling of being productive builds confidence, self-esteem and self-worth in these women. This helps them to participate in all social spheres and create self-dependency. They themselves operate their bank accounts and all the members should take the responsibility alternatively, this improved their banking skill and confidence in doing money transactions.

**Focus Group Discussion**

The researcher also conducted focus group discussions with two kudumbasree units on the impact of Kudumbasree members' on communitarian work and how their work enhance for community development in the Kunnamthanam Panchayath. The results of the discussion are as follows:

1. Enrollment of illiterate adults in the Total Literacy Programs and ensuring that every child attends and completes primary school,
2. income-generation schemes for unemployed women,
3. Shelter upgrading,
4. Provision of household sanitary latrines,
5. Provision of safe drinking water,
6. Thrift and credit societies for improving access to credit,
7. Health and nutrition education to improve childcare practices,
8. Better use of existing health and integrated child development services (ICDS) programs,
9. Improving food availability through kitchen gardens and other innovative measures such as foodgrain banks,
10. Activities to address other special problems identified in the communities.
Impacting the Community

Field visit observations

• Awareness about programs and services has increased (as reported by NHG women), resulting in improved access of such programs and services.

• Participatory planning still remains largely a supply-driven, demand-driven process, where planning is limited primarily to availing individual benefits from government programs.

• In active NHGs, women are confident and are capable of articulating their demands. The women have a voice and are appreciative of the platform that the NHGs provides.

• Group activities have led to greater cohesion, serving as a social safety net in times of crisis, reducing the feeling of vulnerability, e.g., women contribute to the treatment of sick members of NHG households.

• Considerable savings are being generated due to TCS, which provide credit both for both consumption smoothing and productive purposes.

• Thrift and credit societies are slowly but surely attracting bank credit facilities, based on the strength of the savings. However, NHGs are still facing constraints in realizing such linkages to the full potential.

• NHG members are undertaking both group and individual microenterprises.

• There have been instances where the NHGs have shown the potential for public action against social and economic injustice, e.g., women took action against illicit liquor brewing and domestic violence.

• If implemented consistently, CDS has great potential to enlarge freedoms and capabilities of poor women.

The following section describes the key achievements of the program to date.

• **Thrift and Credit Societies (TCS).** Kudumbashree promotes TCS at...
the NHG level to facilitate the poor to save and improve their access to credit. Kudumbashree revitalized TCS with almost all NHG members belonging to these groups. A member can borrow up to four times her savings.

**Microenterprise.** Program staff, working with other relevant government departments and NABARD, identifies financially viable opportunities for the poor and promotes them aggressively.

**Participatory planning and implementation.** This activity involves grassroots, bottom-up planning, and implementation of programs. This component is strengthened by efforts to increase the leadership of LGBs without compromising the autonomy and decision making power of the CDS. There is an increased emphasis on encouraging NHG women to actively participate in *grama sabhas*, thus politically scaling up. Active involvement in preparation of antipoverty sub plans and in the *grama sabhas* are expected to improve convergence and empower women. Community contracting is also gaining increasing popularity. Kudumbashree’s upcoming Bhavan Shree programme is an example of implementation by the grassroots population. It is also an example of Kudumbashree trying to bridge the information and skills gaps for effective community contracting. In this program, Kudumbashree aims to motivate and train below-poverty-line (BPL) households to construct their own houses instead of waiting for years to obtain government-subsidized housing. Loans will be provided at subsidized interest rates of 7.8 percent per year. Kudumbashree aims to provide technical training to interested NHG members in building houses. The potential for social marketing application for community mobilization. Kudumbashree came up with the innovative idea of making the production of baby food a micro enterprise activity.

After years of research by Kasargode District’s Central Plantation and Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), the product ‘Nutrimix’ came into
today, and a number of Kudumbashree enterprise groups are involved in its production in the state. In this scheme, the baby food supplement is produced and supplied to ‘anganwadis’ and ‘balwadis’ in specific area under the label ‘AMRUTHAM’ and through this system there is an assured market for their commodities. The product is made out of simple and freely available ingredients like Wheat, Bengal gram, Ground nut etc. and the product has proved to be very successful in the pilot survey when it was supplied to the underweight children in anganwadis of Bedadukka panchayat, and the children were able to gain normal weight within four weeks of the course.

Each nutrimix unit is assigned a particular block and their job is to cater to the demands of all the ‘anganwadis’ in the assigned panchayats in their respective block. Therefore the extent of their work depends on the supervisor of the anganwadis of their assigned block who places the order according to the needs of the children there. The units, according to their need buy the provisions in bulk and gets it transported to their factory. Here they use their machinery to powder, husk and fry the provisions and then they pack and seal them and transport them to their assigned block. In the case of units with no machines they get the provisions powdered elsewhere.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Sustainable economic growth is only possible when the poverty is wiped out from the economy. In fact in the case of our county India the central government has coming up with innovative schemes every year and sufficient fiscal allocation has made in union budget for eradicating poverty from our county and empowering poor women. Economic development is the base for other development. Collective effort has been recognized as tenets of women empowerment. Through women empowerment leads to sustainable social development. Economic development of women leads to better living status in the family,
Educational, nutritional, and the health needs of the children were well satisfied. Economic independence through kudumbasree improved the social participation of its members and the Kudumbashree NHG movement is supporting for social empowerment of poor women flock.

But in reality the statistics shows that the utilization of schemes and central fund for eradicating poverty and empowering women is very limited from the side of various state governments. That means a good central- state relationship is inevitable for eradicating poverty and empowering poor women in our county. In this context it is very important to highlight the Kerala state government initiative and effort for eradicating poverty through empowering poor women flock by setting up “Kudumbashree”, the innovative woman based participatory programme for wiping out absolute poverty from the State through concerted community action under the leadership of Local Self Governments. Today Kudumbashree is the largest women-empowering project in the country and also mighty women’s movements in Asia with a full-time women membership of 3.7 million, engaged in an array of gainful activities covers more than 50% of the households in Kerala. Built around three critical components – micro credit, entrepreneurship and empowerment, the Kudumbashree initiative has today succeeded in addressing the basic needs of the less privileged women, thus providing them a more dignified life and a better future by empowering them socially and economically. The research paper is clearly indicating that the NHGs movement of Kudumbashree is significantly supporting for social and economic empowerment. The notable economic empowerment factors are increase in personal as well as family income, reduction in debt and possession of basic facilities/utilities at house. In the case of social empowerment the notable factors are appreciation by the family members, appreciation in social functions, appreciation by the intermediaries, gripe against social tribulations, appreciation by the society, participation in social activities and team player of any social...
organization. The limitation of this research paper is that it only focuses on two major empowerment factors namely economic and social, even though other empowerment factors are relevant. Even though the sample size for this research paper is very small compared to the population the researcher could not generalize the findings of this research paper in Kerala.

Acronyms

ADS- area development society
APL- above poverty line
BPL- below poverty line
CBO- community-based organization
CDS- community development society
GOI- government of India
GOK -government of Kerala
LSG local self-government
NABARD-National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NHG- neighborhood group
NHGC -neighborhood group committee
TCS- thrift and credit society
SHG-Self help groups

Reference