

Kudumbashree keeps the info flowing

The self-help group has been using its nearly two lakh WhatsApp groups to disseminate authentic information



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KOCHI: In the age of social media, fake news is one battle that the world persistently fights, especially during testing times. Fabricated pieces of news with photoshopped images, fraudulent health remedies, false narratives and bogus forwards have left us bewildered over distinguishing wheat from the chaff. In such a phase, the Kudumbashree Mission has converted their network of WhatsApp groups, divided into Area Development Societies (ADS), Community Development Societies (CDS) and Neighbourhood Groups (NHG), into Covid-19 awareness platforms that disseminate immediate, authentic information and updates on the outbreak and precautionary measures from the Chief Minister’s Office, Health Department, district authorities and on various activities one can engage in, during the lockdown.



Whatsapp groups

Kudumbashree members and officials function across all levels in the state. While Ernakulam is host to 20,381 Whatsapp groups combined across all levels, comprising 2,55,710 members, the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram has altogether 18,291 Whatsapp groups at all three levels consisting of 1,16,396 members. While membership is restricted to Kudumbashree members, the outreach is rather

large considering every member conveying the messages to others within their family or friend circle.

As per Nishad C C, state programme manager, Kudumbashree formerly had a network of WhatsApp groups for their purposes. “However, around the second week of March, these groups were converted into mediums for spreading awareness and encouraging positive communication. It starts at the state-level wherein there exists two WhatsApp groups comprising our executive director, district-level coordinators and the principal secretary. Then on, you have 152 district-level groups.

Block-level groups are next in the hierarchy with CDS groups (panchayat-level), ADS groups (ward-level) and NHG groups. Within 20 minutes, every member of these groups would have received pertinent information. We aimed to reach the grassroots level with basic connectivity and communication to the elderly,” he said. While the district-level groups have male officials also as members, CDC and ADS groups are solely confined to women. The updates and advice sent across contain government emblems so as not be confused with fake news.

Assistant Ernakulam district Mission coordinator Renjini S puts all apprehensions about the efficiency and swiftness of these groups at rest. “All the groups across these levels are connected, therefore they function systematically. So, at the lowest level, you have the presidents and secretaries of the NHG groups who’re also part of ADC groups. Such a chain of command is followed at the top. Therefore, the top officials in every group receive information instantly and pass it on to their respective teams. We also review if the messages have reached the people. Forwards and fake articles are banned. Groups are also used to update the members on the essentials needed at the community kitchens,” she said.

Entertainment, along with information

“We have decided to start a programme called ‘WhatsApp Arangu’ for these groups from April 1. The event consists of three sections — ‘Nalla paattukari’, ‘Ente kavitha’ and ‘Chithram vichithram’ where the members should send in eight-line songs and poems as audio clips, along with photographs taken during the time of the lockdown. Such an event is to keep them entertained and refreshed,” said Renjini.

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