



**GENDER SELF LEARNING PROGRAM**  
**MODULE IV: GENDER EQUALITY AND JUSTICE**

Submitted before

**KUDUMBASHREE**

KERALA STATE POVERTY ERADICATION MISSION

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Report by

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## INTRODUCTION

“We cannot change what we are not aware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change.”- Sheryl Sandberg.

We can always bring change by reforming the system (by working within it) or by transforming the system (dismantling/ overthrowing the current system). Patriarchy, the overarching oppressive hierarchy which is engrained in our rigid mindset, has always defined the way we act or the way we think. We all are in the process of reforming the system; of unequal power structures and its manifestations and thus in long run transforming the system.

Kudumbashree started as a poverty alleviation program intended to give small loans for the women in the household for employment, family crisis and needs, health issue and so on. ‘Prosperity of the family’ (literal translation of the word Kudumbashree) is achieved not only with economic prosperity but also when women in the family are treated with equal respect and dignity that she deserves. It was understood that significant economic improvement in a women’s life did not bring a change to her status (in the household), was not included in the decision making process, lack of freedom of mobility, independence. Constitutionally promised political rights should not be just restricted to casting votes, political participation becomes an important indicator to assess the level of women empowerment (politically). These political rights and economic security did not translate into social right and wellbeing of women. Thus this collective of NHG (Neighborhood group) should not be limited to just credit creation but also knowledge sharing space where issues penetrating domestic violence, employment, power sharing, ownership of assets could be discussed and resolved.

Gender Self Learning Program (GSLP) is a flagship program based on participatory education under Kudumbashree. They launched this project in 2007. The fourth phase of GSLP was officially launched by Shri.A.C.Moideen, Minister, Local Self Government Department, Government of Kerala on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019. It tries to bring women in the forefront as active participants and recognizes the importance of self-learning in realizing the rights and entitlements of women.

GSLP envisaged self-realization of their right for their own growth, where women themselves take a hand (with the help of Kudumbashree) to deal with their problems. Topics for discussions are delivered through story line, poem or press cuttings that reflect their life and livelihood. Module has various questions that are related to the theme, points that help them to conduct discussions and stories that are related to their life which is consolidated into a handbook which is in turn distributed to the NHFs (Neighborhood Facilitators). It helps them to think and learn their living situations, possibilities to grow, solve problems and opportunities. Its objective is to make themselves examine their attitudes and beliefs towards gender and stereotyping. Also make them realize their right to be treated equally and respectfully and in the long run fight against the oppressive system of patriarchy. Thus equips them to question the existing social control, discrimination, domination and power structure in families/society. These discussions and debates are not only documented but also shared with the larger community through SreeSakthi web portal. “Vulnerability mapping, Crime Mapping, Neetham campaign, Pusthaka yatra were the activities implemented by Kudumbashree as the after effect of GSLP.” ( 2019)

The three modules of GSLP have already being implemented and assessed. The three modules are;

1. Women and Employment
2. Women and Health
3. Women and Mobility

The fourth module is ‘Gender Justice and Equality’ which is currently implementing in the field.

## **METHODOLOGY**

- Orientation on GSLP was given by Ms. Anitha Kumari, counselor of Snehitha Gender Helpdesk located in Trivandrum. Visited Snehitha centre in Peroorkada and talked to the staffs there.

- Attended the review meeting of DPM (District Program Manager) with community counselors in order get the dates and places of GSPL training classes conducted by these community counselors. Visited 4 training classes (due to time constrain). Understood how classes are conducted, how members responded and what all they agree to, they don't agree to (reasons for the same), answers given by DLF (District level Facilitator) to the questions that they posed, their perception about different topics.
- From the GSLP classes, dates and places of few NHG (Neighborhood groups) were selected and visited. Visited 6 NHGs. Different NHGs varied in their seriousness to take up the session. A close interactive session with the members of NHS was possible where discussions (even outside the chapters) was carried out – on how they feel certain things should

## **OBSERVATION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

“Unlike conventional women empowerment programs that adhere to awareness classes, GSLP aims at facilitating neighborhood group on discussions that reflect on discrimination, violence and inequality. Each women represented in the network is regarded as participant, information provider and knowledge creator.” (2015). When the modules talk about such topics and stories, women could not only relate to these but also help them to open up similar experiences. It gave them the platform to talk about issues that were hushed down in public. Thus most of the violence and discrimination that remained within four walls were openly discussed. They also address various vulnerabilities that are faced by women. In one of the NHG, members discussed why such issues happen, what all they could do, possible alternatives for a given problem. Even when there were conflicting views the NHF (Neighborhood Facilitator) insisted that their answers should do gender justice.

In many GSLP classes gender related queries of the NHF were not properly addressed. Thus these NHFs had weak arguments when they were opposed with proper gender related

questions. For example; almost all the DLFs and NHFs have attributed violence and abuse faced by women and children as a result of (men being) intoxicated from drugs and alcohol or because of curiosity of what female body is or because of elder men not being able to meet their sexual desires (due of gratification of sexual desire of their wife and thus the blame could be put upon them). These notions are not only faulty but the last justification (was the popular notion and) shift the burden of responsibility to their wife (who is nowhere in the picture). Thus this would help the predator deny responsibility of violence and present non-violent self-identities. This justification nullifies bodily autonomy of married women and in one way supports marital rape too.

There were confused agreements regarding who does the household chores. Even though members agreed that household chores were not specifically women's work and men could also do it, they were extremely critical of women who did not do household chores. Even when DLF told them that both boys and girls should help them in their household chores however they were extremely concerned about their girl child learning how to run a house and do chore since she has to go to a new family. Thus in almost all the places emphasis and importance was given for a girl's marriage and married life whereas her education and career was secondary, 'if possible' aspects.

In many places whenever examples of subtle forms of control and domination are given, members tries to divert the topic and talk about the effects of women being dominant and their divergence from socially expected 'good behavior'. Many NHFs repeatedly says that they live in villages and unlike cities it's difficult to question control and domination. It should be told that patriarchy affects everybody in varying degrees and thus it is a joint venture to smash down patriarchy.

Many a times these gender classes seem like moral lessons. This happened because many of the DLFs could not join the dots and relate it to the larger picture (patriarchy) and could not give well-structured arguments. Most of the members were active in responding and taking part in discussion (it differed according to places).

## ANECDOTES

Some of the interesting thoughts and opinions of NHG members are taken as such from the visit. Unlike all the NHGs that I have visited, 1 particular NHGs was very open in expressing how they felt about this module. They felt that the module talks about some important things like how use of mobile phones affects children, relationship with yours in-laws etc. They disagreed with a lot of things that was said in the textbook. Going out without asking permission from the male members of the family seems wrong for them. Women have to ask permission because it is basic morality. They added that, if we go out without taking permission then we won't have a house to get back in; our husbands won't let us in (they laughed).

The members constantly kept on saying how and why women are weak, and in most cases they need help from men. "E.g. moving a heavy stone from our backyard, if we need to go to the hospital at night we have rely on the male members of our family"

"Thus we ourselves are weak and cannot be put in equal social position; men deserve to get that kind of superior status that they are born with."

"Men are head of the family and all the decisions should go through them"

"Equality is a something that will break a family"

Another woman said how notions of equality, gender justices and all are topics you could talk about in stage and it's not practical in real life. A common understanding was that even if we talk about these things to our husband they won't listen. In fact if they get to know that we are attending workshops of GSLP they won't let us go. Another woman told how her son asks her not to talk to some aunties because he doesn't like them. And she apparently has to listen to him because otherwise he will not listen to whatever she asks him to do.

They also expressed their contempt over Sabarimala verdict and printing ration card on women's name. Few elderly members of two other NHG also openly expressed their disagreement with equality and equal status for men and women

"If woman starts asking for equal rights and respect, the household will never be peaceful and their marital life will be at risk"

“Woman should always be one step below her husband”

## SUGGESTIONS

- Training young men who are pro feminist to conduct rallies and public forum in order to sensitize men about existing power hierarchies and the manifestations of the same.
- These learning programs should also target adolescent girls and boys as they are the growing future generations. To bring significant change for a married woman will be difficult since her husband or other family members might not listen to her. However a gender sensitive socialization for the adolescents can alter their way of thinking which could be thus reflected upon their actions.
- One of NHF suggested keeping classes in some 5-10 wards levels together and all the NGHs members could attend the training. This would give better result as the DLF could better address the members more efficiently and could commit justice to the goal of the project.
- More FAQs that addresses basic queries should be included in the book like why women should have equal status and how to implement it, women enjoying equal rights and respect , important role of socialization in gendering children the way they are. Documentation team can help in noting down important gender queries that go unanswered.
- Introduction of not just transgender but other members of LGBTQ community in the discussion to make feminism inclusive. Less attention is given to intersectional feminism. Every part of our identity (caste, class, gender, religion, sexuality, disability) comes with its own set of problems (that might sometimes overlap) thus challenges faced by different rungs of women are different. Recognizing this intersectionality is important for feminism to survive.
- Recognizing violence and equipping women to fight for themselves is one of the most important part of this project. Special attention to these topics would help them to not have flawed and dangerous understanding.



- Topics like their right to family planning, bodily autonomy and abortion should be included.
- Family related crimes like dowry, incest, bride burning, rape etc should be discussed.
- As Carol Hanisch has said 'The personal is political'. Inclusion of controversial topics that questions the existing status quo which has always been discriminatory.

GSLP is a first major step solely aimed towards gender sensitization through innovative methods. Regular follow ups are made to ensure effective implementation. This also gives us insights on how people think of different issues, why they don't want certain things to not change, what all challenges are faced etc. The goal of gender justice is not to be realized overnight; it's a relentless effort. It definitely will be hard to break their old age believes that has structured their mind but they will slowly realize it. As we all believe that human being always grow to be better of what they were of yesterday.

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## APPENDICES

1.

DATE	NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE INSTIUTION/PLACES VISITED
7 <sup>th</sup> May	Kudumbashree Main office, near Medical College, Snehitha Gender Help Desk, Peroorkada
8 <sup>th</sup> May	Kudumbashree Main office, near Medical College, Snehitha Gender Help Desk, Peroorkada
9 <sup>th</sup> May	Attended class on GSLP training by DLF in Kulapeda
10 <sup>th</sup> May	Snehitha Gender Help Desk, Peroorkada- Review meeting
14 <sup>th</sup> May	Kudumbashree Main office,near Medical College- Made a report on Snehitha
15 <sup>th</sup> May	Visited a NHG in Aryanad Name of the NHG-Darshna
16 <sup>th</sup> May	Attended class on GSLP training by DLF in Aryanad
17 <sup>th</sup> May	Attended class on GSLP training by DLF in Perunkadavilla
22 <sup>nd</sup> May	Attended class on GSLP training by DLF in Maranellor
26 <sup>th</sup> May	Visited 3 NHGs in Aryanad Name of the NHGs- Karunya, Kaveri, Bhadra
27 <sup>th</sup> May	Visited a NHG in Aryanad Name of the NHG-Samdhakochutham
29 <sup>th</sup> May	Visited a NHG in Thunganpara Name of the NHG- Sangamam

## 2. PHOTO GALLERY



Fig 1: NHG meeting in Aryanad : Darshna Kudumbashree



Fig 2: GSLP training in Perunkadavilla



Fig 3: NHG meeting in Thunganpara; Sangamam Kudumbashree