

Kudumbashree Mission and COVID-19: A Success Story from the State of Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Background: Economic activities in most of the sectors have adversely affected during the lockdown period. It adversely affected the growth prospects in the key sectors like households, businesses, educational sectors, hospitality, entertainment, recreational amenities, public and private sector engagements, as well as sporting activities all over the world. Rural development usually relates to the method of enhancing the quality of life, financial well-being, development of rural areas to improve the living standards of people in the village economy. As a poverty eradication mission, Kudumbashree has peculiar roots in Kerala's development history.

Aim: The present study has been undertaken to evaluate the key activities undertaken by Kudumbashree mission in the state of Kerala during the pandemic. 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. What is commonly referred to as 'Kudumbashree' could mean either the Kudumbashree Community Network, or the Kudumbashree Mission, or both.

Results: The Government of Kerala together with Kudumbashree Mission has undertaken different activities to face the COVID 19 pandemic. It is understood that the driving force behind the successful implementation of all these activities is the women in Kerala. The main force which stands as a support to all activities is the members of Kudumbashree. The major activities undertaken during this

pandemic includes break the chain campaign, WhatsApp Communication, Special care for elderly people, KSFE Kudumbashree Vidhya Shree Scheme, Mask Making and Sanitizer Production, Nutrimix Production, Sahayahastham- Loan Scheme, Community Kitchen, Buds Activities, Balasabha Activities, Agricultural Activities, SannadhaSena, Snehitha Gender Help Desk and Immini Balya Onnu. Kudumbashree Women of Kerala gives a new message to the entire world that if you are willing to empower your women, then they will act as a protecting shield to you, your family and to your nation.

Keywords: Covid-19, Kudumbashree, Information Education and Communication Programme (IEC), Area Development Societies (ADS), Community Development Societies (CDS), Neighbour Hood Groups (NHG), Kerala State Financial Enterprises (KSFE), Take Home Ration (THR), State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM)

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 shocks are proving to be especially challenging for fragile countries. Fiscal revenues were low in such countries and governments were struggling to raise them. Now, COVID-19 is hitting them hard, their fiscal revenues are falling and it widens the disparities between the rich and poor¹. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the world economies in a similar way of the Asian flu, the first and second world wars, the world economic depression and global economic recession. India, the second-most populous country may become the worst COVID-affected

nation in coming weeks and the country's 1.3 billion citizens, more than 966 million are aged 10 or above, according to the government's 2011 census data. The present situation is such that With 508 fresh deaths, India's Covid-19 toll went up to 1, 20,010. on October 28th 2020.

The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kerala (which was also the first in all of India) was confirmed in Thrissur on 30 January 2020. State governments incurred huge losses to the extent of having to cut capital expenses as well as government plans in the near future and finding alternate ways to pay salaries. Rural development is the process of ensuring the social and economic development of the rural communities. Rural development usually relates to the method of enhancing the quality of life, financial well-being, development of rural areas to improve the living standards of people in the village economy.

Kudumbashree, as a social, economic and women empowerment model from the state of Kerala, have different meaning to different people. For some, it is the poverty eradication project of the State government of Kerala. Some others view it as an exclusive domain of women engaged in social work. To some others, the term Kudumbashree evokes the image of the women in uniform who come to collect waste from their door steps. Kudumbashree is like a blessing; a God-send. It appears as food to the hungry, as medicine to the sick, as a helping hand to the ailing. As a poverty eradication mission, Kudumbashree has peculiar roots in Kerala's development history. This programme was evolved from the community mobilisation experiments in Alappuzha and Malappuram districts of Kerala.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Biju (2020)¹ revealed that Kudumbashree women of Kerala taught a new lesson to other parts of the nation and even to the world during this pandemic. The study pointed out that empowered woman

could be able to protect themselves, their families, and also the entire nation by strengthening the local economy.

Asma Ayesha (2020)² observed that political commitment coupled with decentralized governance, transparency, and governmental accountability prevented the State from going into the stage of "denial" that other States suffered from. The study also revealed that a high rate of literacy played a major role in the populace behaving responsibly, cooperating with authorities and seeking prompt treatment, thereby limiting community transmission.

Kumar (2016)³ found that Kudumbashree was a massive anti-poverty program of the Government of Kerala aimed at eradicating poverty and salvages the destitute from the wretches of extreme deprivation. The family-friendly work practice encouraged more educated women to enter into entrepreneurial activities. The study also pointed out that, with the support from government through the training programs, financial subsidies and infrastructures, these centers would be developed as female-owned start-up centers and women business incubators for livelihood options for women, particularly newly educated girls.

Significance of the Study

The Pandemic has not only lead to the loss of an innumerable number of lives all over the world, it also results in the global economic distress. Poor healthcare infrastructure, coupled with a substantial population living in extreme poverty, has further added fuel to the fire. The Government of Kerala must soon combat the challenges of unprecedented loss in employment, income and output coupled with severe shortfalls in government revenues to find the funds to fight corona virus and keep the economy alive. Today, rural development still remains the core of the overall development of the country. It has become more than two-thirds of the country's people is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and one-third of rural

India is still below the poverty line. Therefore, it is important for the government to be productive and provide enough facility to upgrade their standard of living. Through 'Kudumbashree' a poverty eradication Program model from the state of Kerala can adopt the strategy to obtain improved rural creation and productivity, higher socio-economic equality. Through these types of endeavours the entire world can ensure stability in social and economic development during the period of this pandemic. In this context, the present study titled "Kudumbashree Mission and COVID 19 – A Success Story from the State of Kerala" assumes greater significance.

Scope of the study

The present study has been undertaken to analyse the key activities undertaken by Kudumbashree mission in the State of Kerala during the pandemic. Kerala is the southern state of India formed on 11 November 1956 and it is the 21st largest Indian State by area. It is bordered by Karnataka to the north, Tamil Nadu to the east and Lakshadweep to the west. The assessment has been made by evaluating the activities initiated by the Kudumbashree Mission together with the Government of Kerala. The details were collected from the official website of Kudumbashree mission, official websites of Government of Kerala and also from various press releases.

Objective of the Study

To study the key activities undertaken by the Kudumbashree Mission in the state of Kerala to fight against COVID -19.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For analysing the activities undertaken by Kudumbashree Mission for fighting against the pandemic, secondary data were used. The secondary data were collected from books, journal and various websites.

FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19: INITIATIVES BY THE KUDUMBASHREE MISSION OF KERALA

BREAK THE CHAIN CAMPAIGN

In a bid to contain the spread of Covid-19 virus across the state, the Government of Kerala has launched a massive campaign to educate people about the importance of public and personal hygiene. Kudumbashree also partnering with the "Break the Chain" campaign and circulated a special note amongst Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) with an aim to create awareness among the general public regarding the importance of social distancing and personal hygiene to prevent the Covid-19 pandemic. The campaign was very effective to create awareness among families about the care and vigilance needed to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

WHATSAPP COMMUNICATION

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, and district authorities. Kudumbashree has formed 3 lakh WhatsApp groups with 22 lakh NHG members to educate them about government instructions during lockdown. Currently, information is being sent to NHGs through this platform.

SPECIAL CARE FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE

The Kudumbashree mission has launched a special initiative to ensure the well-being of elderly people in the state during Covid-19, by reaching out to families with a string of confidence building measures. As a part of this, Kudumbashree mission in collaboration with Dooradarshan

conducted a Covid-19 pandemic education programme named 'Athijeevanam' with a focus on elderly community. In convergence with UNICEF, Kudumbashree has enlisted 2176 resource persons for the special care of elderly members above sixty years of age. There are 1,54,858 destitute families in Kerala with 1,14,719 elderly members. All the NHGs were instructed to take care of the mental health of the elderly and boost their confidence through Information, Education and Communication (IEC) programme.

KSFE KUDUMBASHREE VIDHYASHREE SCHEME

In the wake of continuing threat of Covid-19, the Government of Kerala has launched online education programme for school children. In order to support member families to avail laptops and to ensure online education to their children, Kudumbashree introduced a scheme named 'vidhyashree' in collaboration with KSFE. 'Vidhyashree' is a micro chitty of Rs. 15,000 with a monthly instalment of Rs.500 for 30 months. As per the scheme, after the payment of the third instalment, all in need can own a laptop as the laptop will be provided by KSFE. Through this, Kudumbashree helping the newer generation to get in tune with the changing time where laptops are becoming inevitable for enabling online education.

MASK MAKING AND SANITIZER PRODUCTION

The Kudumbashree mission has stepped up efforts to manufacture masks and sanitizers in the wake of the recent surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in the state. Kudumbashree has identified 306 potential units out of 3,680 tailoring units for producing cloth mask with an estimated production capacity of 1,26,000 masks per day. 21toiletry making units also involving in the production of sanitizer. In addition to this, Kudumbashree initiated the production

of face shields, a protective gear that can be used by medical staffs engaged in the treatment of Covid-19 patients. The face shields are now produced by the Akshayam Enterprise unit from Karakulam Panchayat of Thiruvananthapuram district.

Table No.1.1 Production details (15.03.2020 to 23.09.2020)

Item	Total Production
Mask Production	71,55,301
Sanitizer Production	9322.65 (Liters)
Face Shield Production	2,87,928

Source: Official Website, Kudumbashree Mission

NUTRIMIX PRODUCTION

Children between the ages of six months and three years in all local self-government institutions get the nutrimix food supplement through anganwadis with the support of Women and Child Development Department as a part of the union government's Take Home Ration (THR) strategy. The Kudumbashree network's 241 nutrimix units across the 14 districts have been manufacturing the nutritious supplement for the children in 33,115 anganwadis. Kudumbashree mission ensured that nutrimix units have started functioning in all districts without any disruption despite month-long lock down.

SAHAYAHASTHAM (HELPING HAND) – LOAN SCHEME

'Sahayahastham' is a interest free loan scheme implemented by Government of Kerala via Kudumbashree as a path for a financial setback. The loan amount to an NHG member ranges between Rs. 5,000 to Rs.20,000. The loans are provided through participating banks. Repayment of interest free loans under Sahayahastham scheme starts six months after its sanctioning and has to be completed in three years. Through this scheme, government is reaching out to 22 lakh beneficiaries who are members of 1.95 lakh neighbourhood groups.

Table 1.2 Details of NHGs included in the Sahayastham (Helping Hand) – Loan Scheme

Sl. No.	District	Total No. of NHGs	Total No. of NHGs included in the scheme	Total No. of NHG members	Total No. of NHG members included in the scheme
1	Thiruvananthapuram	29351	20294	450743	263122
2	Kollam	22788	16239	334532	167451
3	Pathanamthitta	9856	6898	165456	90881
4	Alappuzha	21485	19117	337200	248646
5	Kottayam	14625	11722	193966	152423
6	Idukki	11938	10120	156547	117164
7	Ernakulam	26503	16313	353584	185834
8	Thrissur	24809	20671	363633	260764
9	Palakkad	25877	19298	342126	242737
10	Malappuram	28121	22460	439876	319471
11	Kozhikode	27896	24484	461462	301110
12	Wayanad	9735	8393	112292	102454
13	Kannur	19988	16058	318966	194096
14	Kasargod	10931	9299	175043	115741
	Total	283903	221366	4205426	2761894

Sources : Official Website, Kudumbashree Mission
 SLBC Minutes dated 30/03/2020 (Ref: Kerala SLBC/ 5C15212020)
 Government Order dated 04/04/2020, (File No. LSGD-IA1/108/2020-LSGD)

COMMUNITY KITCHEN

In support to Covid-19 prevention activities, Kudumbashree in convergence with local self-government started 1144 community kitchens where food will be prepared and home delivered to those under home quarantine and for needy people. Out of these, 379 have been started as budget hotels of Kudumbashree. They provide meals at meagre amount of Rs.20 per meal. Out of which Rs.10 will be reimbursed by the state government as subsidy. Besides, free meals will be given to migrant workers, quarantined people, and the jobless. The expenses of which will be reimbursed by the concerned local bodies. Kudumbashree is also providing food related services to people who are under observation at corona care centres.

BUDS ACTIVITIES

There are 270 BUDS institutions owned by Local Self Government and guided by Kudumbashree. 8,521 differently abled persons of different age groups and their families directly or indirectly depend on these institutions. During this home bound time, with the guidance and direction of Kudumbashree State Mission, all BUDS staffs prepared action plan for the BUDS beneficiaries. The BUDS and Block Resource Centre (BRC) staff had developed an alternative syllabus with ‘challenge based individual care plan’ and Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM).

BALASABHA ACTIVITIES

Balasabha are collectives of children formed under the guidance of Kudumbashree. During lock down period, Kudumbashree conducted various online programmes for Balasabha.

Table 1.3: District Wise Online Programmes for Balasabha.

Sl. No.	District of Kerala	Programme
1	Thiruvananthapuram	Akalathilum Orumayude Avadhikkalam
2	Kollam	Online Competitions
3	Alappuzha	E- Koottu
4	Kottayam	Mamangam
5	Idukki	Akam Puram
6	Ernakulam	Cheriya Idavum Valiya Lokavum
7	Thrissur	Ee Lockdown Kaalath, Balakrishhi
8	Malappuram	Suyip 19
9	Kozhikode	Lock Down Days Experiences
10	Wayanad	21 days Challenge
11	Kannur	Varayum Kuriyum
12	Kasargod	Kuttipencil

Source: Official Website, Kudumbashree Mission of Kerala

AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

To utilise the lockdown period effectively, district mission teams of agriculture has initiated activities to promote vegetable cultivation and related aspects such as kitchen gardens, vegetable gardens, organic farming, seed distribution programmes and agricultural campaigns. The Joint Liability Groups of Kudumbashree across the state have voluntarily stood together for community kitchen and donated products for social cause. The collection, transportation and distribution activities are being coordinated by respective district missions along with Local Self-Government officials and people representatives.

SANNADHA SENA

Sannadha Sena is a community volunteer force formed by Government of Kerala to coordinate various Covid-19 related activities. Though the initial plan was to mobilise around 2.3 lakh abled youth in the age group of 22-40, the registrations received a massive response with more than 3 lakh volunteers from various organisations including NGOs, NCC, NSS, youth commission. Kudumbashree members also partnering in the Sannadha Sena campaign as volunteers.

SNEHITHA GENDER HELP DESK

Kudumbashree Snehitha gender help desk is functioning in all fourteen districts of Kerala which provides short stay facility, counselling and mental support to distressed women and children. Snehitha is focusing on giving mental support to people who are in the threat of domestic violence and also to general public. The professional counsellors and service providers along with community counsellors are giving telephonic counselling and mental support to the people who are in need. The Snehitha help desk number is 1800 425 2573. The theme of the campaign is 'You are not alone, Kudumbashree is with You'.

IMMINI BALYA ONNU

The Kudumbashree Mission comes up with an ambitious 100-day programme to create at least 2,500 micro enterprises and 5,000 jobs by the end of November, 2020. 'Immini Balya Onnu' is a part of state government's larger 100-day project to overcome the economic and livelihood challenges posed by Covid-19. As per this project, each ADS will be encouraged to create enterprises depending on their capabilities and the local demand for suitable income with the help of kudumbashree consultants for micro enterprises. The district mission also plans to run CDS level contests as a part of the campaign to find out the best CDS in terms of employment generation. Contests will be held separately for urban and rural level considering the differences in opportunities and circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Kudumbashree made a significant contribution to fight against the pandemic in the state of Kerala .The Kudumbashree mission in association with the government of Kerala has introduced a lot of programmes and all the programmes got a good impact among the public. Kudumbashree a family based approach reaches the society and family through women and it enhanced entrepreneurship, leadership, and the capacity of women to work and earn together. We can hope that with the power and support of these angles we will definitely get over from this world wide affected pandemic. We can hope that we will have a better tomorrow with prosperity and development.

List of abbreviations

ADS: Area Development Societies (ADS),
CDS: Community Development Societies
COVID 19: Corona Virus Disease 2019
IEC: Information Education and Communication Programme (IEC)

KSFE: Kerala State Financial Enterprises
NHG: Neighbour Hood Groups
THR: Take Home Ration
SPEM: State Poverty Eradication Mission

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