

# Initiatives undertaken by Kudumbashree to beat Corona Pandemic with respect to Kerala State

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**Abstract** -In India, it is in Kerala state that on 30th January 2020, the 2019-2020 coronavirus pandemic was first confirmed. As of 31st March 2020, there are 241 confirmed cases with 24 recoveries and a couple of deaths, quite 1,63,000 people are still under surveillance within the state. The cases were reported from travelers coming from China and Italy and their contacts. Many precautions are taken by the Govt. to regulate the disease from spreading. High alert was declared in the state, isolation wards were set up in all major hospitals, a helpline number was activated for every district, 215 health care workers were deployed across the state and tele counselling services were conducted to provide psycho-social support to families of those suspected to be infected. On 15th March, a new initiative 'Break the Chain' was introduced by Government of Kerala. The campaign aims to educate people about the importance of public and personal hygiene. It is here that Kudumbashree, a women community network, played a big role by supporting Kerala Govt. in its own way. This paper is an effort to understand the varied initiatives undertaken through Kudumbashree to beat the Corona pandemic.

**Key Words:** Kudumbashree, initiatives, awareness, precautions, utilization, women empowerment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kudumbashree, a platform developed by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala for poverty eradication and women empowerment. It is a women community network with a 3-tier structure - Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the middle and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. Kudumbashree membership is open to all adult women and is limited to atleast one membership per family. In 2011, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Govt. of India recognized Kudumbashree as the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). It is arguably one among the most important women's networks within the world. Though the central theme of the community network is poverty eradication and empowerment of women, democratic leadership and support structures form its core features.

## 2. 1 Review of Literature

**Raghavan, V.P, 2003** in his study highlighted that Kudumbashree offers a platform for women not only for their individual development but also for the development of the society. It is through Kudumbashree, rural women, who were regarded as voiceless and powerless started identifying their inner strength, opportunities for growth and their role in reshaping their own destiny.

**SuneethaKadiyal, 2004** in a comparative study between SHGs of Non- government organizations and Kudumbashree showed that not much difference exists between the two, and the members in it mainly belonged to low income group. She also found that the membership exposed them to various activities and helped in their economic, social and political empowerment to an extent.

**Shylendra, 1998** in her study found out that at times SHGs failed to realize rather utilize the potential of its members. Numerous reasons were identified for the failure which included wrong approach followed in the SHG formation by the team, misconceptions about SHG goals both among the team and the members, and lack of clarity about the concept.

**Jacob Jhon, 2009** revealed in his study that Kudumbashree activities created significant impact on various areas like agriculture, education, health, animal husbandry, child development, small enterprise development, women empowerment, etc.

**Mercy Varghese, 2012** in her PhD. thesis titled "Women empowerment through Kudumbashree-A study in Ernakulum District" has found that NHGs played a significant role in empowering members of rural area. She also highlighted that the empowerment level did not depend on the type or nature of SHG but on the member's ability to tap the opportunities. The primary data were collected from 600 members using multistage random sampling technique and SPSS package was used for analysis.

### Objectives

To study the various initiatives undertaken by Kudumbashree for the Corona pandemic condition.

To analyze the effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken by Kudumbashree.

## 2.2 Research Methodology

The research design used in the study is descriptive design. The data is collected mainly from secondary sources like the official website of Kudumbashree, newspaper, journals, etc.

## 2.3 Kudumbashree Initiatives

### 2.3.1 Community kitchens by Kudumbashree

In the midst of the lock-down notified in Kerala foreseeing the strong possibility of a wide spread outbreak of Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19), community kitchens are opened by Kudumbashree Mission in convergence with Local self-governments in all respective local bodies where food will be prepared and home delivered to those under home quarantine and for needy people. Supplyco is entrusted with delivering essential articles for running the community kitchens. It was targeted to start 1000 community kitchens across the state and as per the statistics till 29.03.2020, 1034 community kitchens have been started all across the state. Government of India has advised to replicate the community kitchen model of Kudumbashree in other states. The meals are provided at Rs 20 per meal. The community kitchens are opened at various locations in the districts viz., auditoriums, community halls, schools, panchayath halls, municipality canteens etc. The Janakeeya Hotels (Hunger free hotels) opened at the LSGIs associating with Kudumbashree had also been turned into community kitchens.

### 2.3.2 Kudumbashree spreading the awareness on Covid-19 to maximum public

Kudumbashree NHGs had been active in spreading the awareness on fighting back the COVID-19 pandemic by maintaining personal hygiene. The message of 'Break the Chain' Campaign of the health Department of Kerala was already discussed among the members through the NHG meetings, and so through Kudumbashree, the message of the 'Break the Chain' Campaign was therefore spread to the 44 lakh families in Kerala. A detailed note was given to every NHGs to discuss and spread the message of the importance of 'Break the Chain' Campaign. The aim was to spread awareness about the precautions to be taken by each family to stay safe from the spread of the corona virus disease.

Instructions were given to the NHGs to start the NHG meetings only after washing the hands. The need and importance of washing hands using soap or sanitizers therefore reached to the NHG members and their families through this. Based on the instructions developed by the Health Department, general awareness about corona virus disease was given to the NHGs and they had been directed to discuss the same. As it was noted that mortality due to corona is relatively high for elderly people and those people who are sick, guidelines for Kudumbashree NHGs about the actions to be taken by the elderly and sick people were also given. Elaborate instructions were given for those who are in quarantine. Also, general instructions for NHG about extending support to the quarantined families was also mentioned. Precautions to be taken by the families to stay safe from the infection of this disease, actions that may be taken by NHGs to ensure the public health were also communicated to the NHGs. Through this Kudumbashree aimed to ensure that there's adequate precaution and that there is no panic.

As lock-down was notified in Kerala foreseeing the strong possibility of a wide spread outbreak of Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) from 24 March 2020, Kudumbashree started identifying new ways to get the awareness reach out to maximum public as public gatherings are restricted in the state. Various ways were identified by the respective districts. The services of the community counsellors were ensured. Regular communication with the people in quarantine, tele counselling through Snehitha Gender Help Desk, spreading awareness among the tribal hamlets, distributing immunity boosters (homoeopathy), spreading notes on awareness to fightback the COVID-19 pandemic among the CDSs, setting up volunteer team for emergency services, making posters to spread the awareness etc were few of the new activities identified by the district teams to make the public aware of the ways to fight back the spread of COVID-19 by maintaining social distancing. Kudumbashree is focusing more on WhatsApp groups to reach out to the information to the NHGs now. Through Kudumbashree's outreach programmes, the messages are reaching to grass root level and Kudumbashree is trying to give leadership to fight back this corona virus disease and address the anxieties of the society.

### 2.3.3 10 lakh cotton masks being produced by Kudumbashree tailoring units

Ten lakh cotton masks are being produced by Kudumbashree tailoring units in the midst of the lock-down notified in Kerala foreseeing the strong possibility of a wide spread outbreak of Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19). The establishments involved in the production and supply of equipment required to contain COVID-19 including masks, sanitizers, drugs, personal protective equipment's (PPE) etc. were excluded from the restrictions. Kudumbashree is having many small and medium tailoring units functioning across the 14 districts in Kerala. Out of these units, 360 units have already started the process of making cotton masks. Kudumbashree units started making cotton masks, as the availability of the masks became too short. Masks are prepared as per the orders received from health department and other governmental and non-governmental departments. Kudumbashree started getting more orders as the information of Kudumbashree units making masks began to spread. Kudumbashree units across the districts have prepared 8,30,423 masks until now and the process is ongoing.

The total production capacity of all the Kudumbashree units put together is approximately 1,30,000 masks per day. Instructions were already given to stitch cotton masks as per the orders received, based on the production capacity of the respective districts when the COVID cases started reporting in Kerala. The units of Kudumbashree then started the process of procuring cloths after receipt of orders and they started production. The process took a couple of days to streamline. The activities are progressing to complete the received orders with utmost quality and to hand over the same on time. The price of the cotton mask is based on the cloth used and the quality ensured. As the need for cotton masks began increasing, directions had been given to the respective District Mission Coordinators to increase the production capacity by increasing the working time and by engaging more units.

### 2.3.4 Kudumbashree units making sanitizers

In addition to the production and supply of the cotton masks, Kudumbashree units are also engaged in the production of the hand sanitizers. Though in small quantities, sanitizers are also produced under the leadership of Kudumbashree units and are distributed as per the order. As the availability of sanitizers became short in the market, the soap and lotion making units started making sanitizers. A total of 21 units across the state were engaged in producing sanitizers. As of now, sanitizers are produced by Kudumbashree units in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Idukki, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod districts. The entrepreneurs with drug license were producing sanitizers and were selling them in the market. Those units manufacturing sanitizers using the spirit received from the Government distribute the manufactured product free of cost (not for sale). Kudumbashree units started to produce sanitizers in small quantities to address the shortage of the sanitizers.

### 2.4 Discussions

Though 1000 community kitchens were targeted the statistics till March 29<sup>th</sup> shows that 1034 community kitchens were started in the state and almost 2,89,689 meals have been served altogether. As meetings were restricted new ways taken by Kudumbashree to spread awareness like regular communication with the people in quarantine, tele counselling through Snehitha, spreading awareness among the tribal hamlets, distributing immunity boosters (homoeopathy), spreading notes on awareness to fightback the COVID-19 pandemic among the CDSs, setting up volunteer team for emergency services, making posters, creating WhatsApp group, etc. deserve special mention. A total of 1341.9 liters of sanitizer was produced through Kudumbashree units all over the state to meet the shortage of sanitizers in the market. Through its 306 tailoring units, a total of 8,30,423 total cotton masks were produced and is on-going.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

From the above initiatives, it can be clearly seen that tremendous effort has been taken by the various Kudumbashree units all over the state to prevent the outbreak of the pandemic. Though the production and distribution of various products manufactured under Kudumbashree are adversely affected but still the members potential were utilized for activities like community kitchen, mask making, creating awareness and manufacturing sanitizers. So, it is very clear that Kudumbashree has played a significant role in spreading the message of Break the Chain among the rural areas and it is appreciable that the model implemented in Kerala is being adapted to other states.

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