

# Local Government Intervention in the Agricultural Initiatives of Kudumbasree in Kerala: A Review

Dr. Jayasree Paul

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Panampilly Memorial Government College, Chalakudy, Thrissur, Kerala (India)

---

## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 12 June 2019

### Keywords

Gramapanchayat (GP), Local Self Government (LSG), Neighborhood groups (NHGs), SHG (Self-Help Group).

### \*Corresponding Author

Email: jayasreepaul[at]rediffmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

*The local planning envisages opening novel opportunities which are of direct benefit to women and enhances their skill and capabilities. The state of Kerala has ailing agricultural sector. The women collective under Kudumbasree in association with local self-government can play vital role in saving state's agricultural sector from distress. The present study conducted in the selected panchayats of Kerala narrates the story of how the institutions under Local Self Government can instigate women collective endeavors in agriculture. Using the tools of primary survey, women farmers in the selected panchayat of Thrissur district in Kerala were came under the purview of the study. The commendable records of any local body owe largely to the congenial coordination between Kudumbasree and the local government. The study finds that the panchayats, which have wholeheartedly supported the SHG initiatives, can attain good records at the national space. Hence providing a space to the agricultural initiatives of women is ostensibly worthy in value addition as they are more gratified with the creation in the primary sector, simultaneously it is a boon to the alarming agricultural sector in Kerala.*

---

## 1. Introduction

After the introduction of decentralized planning in India (1993), the local government by virtue is to enhance the involvement of the excluded especially women and marginal communities in key sectors of development. It is supposed to increase the capability of 'local actors' and these local actors can contribute good governance and this enhances development process (Helling, Serrane, & Warren, 2005). The women collectives formed under Kudumbasree serve as grassroots local actors who are the agents of change in a civil society. In 1998, the Government of Kerala clubbed many poverty alleviations programme under one roof called Kudumbasree, a state sponsored poverty alleviation programme. The twin targets of Kudumbasree are poverty alleviation and women empowerment. The Local Self Government (LSG) finances productive ventures of women in various fields such as agriculture, animal husbandry and microenterprises. The local bodies allocate plan and non-plan fund towards micro-enterprises of women in agriculture and non-agriculture field. The present study reveals that there are local governments which wholeheartedly support Kudumbasree initiatives in revamping agriculture, simultaneously there are local governments which disparage the latter's ventures. The present study highlights the intervention by the local government in supplementing the efforts of women collective engaged in agricultural production in the selected panchayats.

## 2. Methodology

This panchayat level study was conducted in Thrissur district, which had been recognised many a time in the national platform thanks to a series of rigorous programmes done by various local bodies and grassroots organizations of women. Many panchayats in Thrissur district are well known for achieving good records in implementing local level planning effectively. The panchayats in Thrissur district bagged Swaraj

Trophy in previous years and Kudumbasree in these panchayats has got state wide recognition at the district and state level.

Thrissur district is divided into 17 blocks (Government of Kerala 2014). The study adopts multi-stage random sampling for selecting seven panchayats from 17 blocks. The achievements of panchayats and Kudumbasree units were also other criteria for the final selection of the Gramapanchayats (GPs). Care was taken to include gramapanchayats from seven different blocks. The study narrates how local government support SHGs under the auspices of Kudumbasree and supplement agricultural production. The study investigated among the women farmers who became the beneficiaries of favourable approach of local government. Evidences were collected from Community Development Society (CDS) Members of Kudumbasree and also from the plan documents of local bodies.

## 3. Local Government, NHGs and SHG Network

The local government allocates significant amount towards Kudumbasree for latter's multifarious ventures. The local bodies set apart plan fund, own fund, matching grant and revolving fund towards Kudumbasree. The Community Development Society (CDS), the apex of Kudumbasree in each local body is supposed to distribute these funds towards the SHGs framed under respective NHGs. The three tier system of local governance is replicated in Kudumbasree by installing the NHGs at the bottom of local governance. These NHGs are federated into Area Development Society (ADS) at the ward level and Community Development Society (CDS) at the panchayat level. NHG is the basic pillar of both local governance and Kudumbasree. SHG is a subsystem of NHG. This financial allocation was further strengthened by the state government by way of mandating the local bodies to set apart 10 per cent of the plan fund towards projects directly benefiting women. This came to be known as the Women

Component Plan (WCP) and it encouraged the SHGs to start up new initiatives.

The local bodies distribute revolving fund (RF) to meet the working capital requirements of women engaged in collective micro income generating programme such as agriculture and microenterprises. The beneficiaries belonged to particular NHG are obliged to repay the amount only when the borrowing NHG disburses. RF is a great support of finance extended by the GP for the blooming SHGs, which are starved of funds or working capital. Many SHGs have invested their RF in agricultural production and marketed value added items of agriculture.

#### 4. Neighborhood Groups (NHGs): Meaning

NHG is the lowest tier of LSG and is functioning as grassroots organization in local governance. The NHG is designed to perform as grassroots forum for direct citizen participation in governance (Thomas Isaac, 1999). The gender sensitisation in decentralised planning propounded during the end of nineties, gave rise to NHGs, which consists of 10 to 20 women in a ward. The NHG acts as a mass channel of communication between panchayat and the people. Government utilizes neighborhood groups (NHGs) of women to take up the role of empowered local actors in local planning process. It also describes how they have been envisaged as effective chain of network in implementing grassroots level programmes in a locality.

The NHG network was activated after the inauguration of decentralized planning in 1996. In 1998-99, it was mandated that all the local bodies should set apart 10 per cent of plan funds exclusively for women empowerment projects. This compelled the local bodies to set up women community development societies (CDS) to determine the plan of action. This mandatory allocation of 10 per cent commenced mushrooming of women SHGs. In 1998, these SHGs were integrated with Kudumbasree Mission, which is a large network of SHGs of poor women initiated by the Government of Kerala. Kudumbasree in each local body was brought under the management of concerned local government (Paul, Jayasree 2017). Now Kudumbasree was set up in all the 978 GPs, 60 municipalities and 5 corporations of the state. Thus, now there are 2.91 lakh NHGs, in Kerala, as on March 2019 (Kudumbasree Mission).

#### 5. Local Government Intervention in Agriculture

Agriculture was the predominant occupation of women in Kerala. The setbacks in agriculture and diversion to cash crop cultivation considerably reduced the employment opportunities of women who had been engaged in agriculture. Kudumbasree Mission has formed Joint Labour Groups (JLGs) among the NHGs and they receive financial help from the Mission. The institutions of local government can motivate this cheap and surplus labour to contribute to the ailing primary sector. During the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan, Nadathara panchayat spends `3,00,000 for mechanization of paddy cultivation and it made easier the harvesting for the JLGs engaged in paddy cultivation. JLGs engaged in bittergourd cultivation at large scale, are funded by gramapanchayat for meeting the infrastructure cost. NHGs always face the issue of marketing of their produce due to poor infrastructure and weak marketing strategies. Adat and

Kodakara gramapanchayats had tried to resolve this problem by setting up marketing centers for the sale of vegetables cereals, pulses and other value added items. Proximity to the nearest city is an added advantage to these panchayats.

In Mullurkara gramapanchayat, the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan allocated considerable amount of fund towards animal husbandry, mainly goat farming. The panchayat scheme of goat village (*Aadugramam*) was implemented in Mullurkara and NHG women availed this benefit. At least two goats could be seen in the household of any NHG women. Mullurkara is an agricultural village and natives were engaged in paddy cultivation. There were JLG groups actively involved in the paddy cultivation, however, the panchayat had not allocated any amount from WCP towards cultivation. There was a shift in the focus of expenditure from house repair/construction during 11<sup>th</sup> plan to cow/goat farming during 12<sup>th</sup> Plan. Despite, having vast agricultural land, the local government hardly showed any interest in coordinating the JLGs to increase its agricultural wealth. However, some JLGs engaged in paddy production, however, Mullookara failed to market their produce, despite, railway station lies in close proximity to the panchayat building.

The coastal terrain is not friendly to agricultural operation in the coastal panchayats like Kadappuram and Engandiyoor. Kadappuram is a fine example depicting how Agricultural officer under LSG can inspire the natives to start cultivation in an unfriendly terrain. Kadappuram panchaya is a coastal area which is inimical to land cultivation allocated considerable amount to paddy and vegetable cultivation. In 2013, the then agricultural officer successfully coordinated all the NHGs in this coastal panchayat and cultivated paddy and other vegetables in this hostile terrain. For the first time in their life, the natives of Kadappuram experienced paddy cultivation. The success of vegetable cultivation is a model for illustrating how local self-government institutions (LSGIs) can supplement new ventures undertaken by the women collective. The GP provided Rs. 40,000 to each NHG involved in cultivation for this purpose. Being a coastal land, cultivation might be a tedious task for the natives of Engandiyoor Panchayat and in this context, the local government set apart 18.6 per cent of WCP for supplying cows, goats and hen during the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan.

The 'Kodakara Block Sustainable Development Programme' introduced GALASA method of group farming cultivation and it gave a push to the agricultural production of the local bodies under Kodakara block panchayat. Kodakara gramapanchayat benefitted greatly from this programme. The Kudumbasree had a good launch in Kodakara and benefitted much from Sustainable Development Programme during 2005-10. The programme targeted NHG women who had been engaged in agricultural initiatives and group farming and it connected Kudumbasree with local government in various enterprises including agriculture run by women. Evidently, the local government played significant role in building up the NHG network in the area. Kudumbasree had a fertile ground in Kodakara because the local government showed genuine interest in implementing block level development programme during 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plans. This programme activated JLGs subsequently. The block panchayat and Kodakara GP supported the agricultural initiatives of women

engaged in paddy and vegetable cultivation. The Kodakara panchayat promoted mechanized cultivation by supplying weeding machines to the JLGs.

Poomangalam panchayat has never supported JLGs or cultivation of women collective during the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. During the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan the GP diverted one fourth of the expenditure towards goat supply and vegetable cultivation.

#### 6. Nadathara Goat Farming Project (Ajagramapadhathi):

In Nadathara, the goat farming project (*Ajagramapadhathi*) was a fine model for depicting how local government can pool resources through the interaction with the grassroots level institutions. The gramapanchayat, government and NHGs were involved in the evolution of the plan. The gramapanchayat allocated `2,00,000 from the plan fund towards the distribution of revolving fund. The CDS-NHG network identified four families per ward as beneficiaries. The panchayat distributed six months old lamb to the NHG members based on the condition that the after one and half year, the beneficiaries must return a lamb or remit `2,000. The gramapanchayat distributed these new lambs to the next 100 families based on the same condition (Nadathara Gramapanchayat (2007).

The exclusive features of Nadathara goat farming project (*Ajagramapadhathi*):

- It was treated as one time investment
- The project started in 2006 and continued upto 2016. At the continuous and does not drop as the beneficiaries are obliged to return either the lamp or amount.
- Convergence of Community Development Society–NHG network with the LSG
- Monitoring of plan in every NHG level meetings

#### References

1. Government of Kerala (2014). District Census Handbook Thrissur. Thiruvananthapuram: Directorate of Census Operations Kerala.
2. Helling, L., Serrane, R., & Warren, D. (2005). Linking Community, Empowerment, Decentralised Governance and Public Service Provision through Local Development Framework. Discussion Paper (535) . World Bank 4-5
3. Isaac, T. (1999). People's Plan and Neighbourhood Group Experience-Lessons from Experience. Ayalkootamsangamam. State Planning Board, Kerala.
4. Kudumbasree Mission. Data and Progress. Kudumbasree available at <http://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/518> accessed on 25.4.2019
5. Nadathara Gramapanchayat (2007, 2010, 2015). Plan Documents. Nadathara, Kerala
6. Paul, Jayasree (2018). NHG Women Linkage with Local Planning: Understanding and Practice in Kerala, IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. February 2018; 23: P 63-69.
7. Rajan J B (2012). Innovative Projects Nadathara Model. KILA available at <http://dspace.kila.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/187/innovative%20projects%20%Nadatahara20Model.pdf> accessed on 18.7.2018

#### 7. Benefits

- Each beneficiary is rearing five or six goats after 6 years, and there are families having 10 to 15 goats.
- Around 600 families earned income from milk and meat. The consumption of milk and sale of milk and goat might have resulted in the reduction in the poverty level of beneficiaries.
- The panchayat claimed significant increase in the stock of livestock.
- Its proximity to the nearest corporation Thrissur was an added advantage. The elastic demand for goat meat in the Thrissur meat market benefitted the goat farmers.
- The panchayat was awarded many times level for the best local body at the district and state level and finally at the national level,

#### 8. Conclusion

The basic unit of local governance and Kudumbasree is the same i.e. NHG. Kudumbasree is a state sponsored SHG rooted in NHGs, the bottom pillar of local governance. The Kudumbasree Mission, in association with local bodies brought up number of popular programmes in the district. The present study looks into what are the initiatives of panchayats in the agricultural sphere for the economic empowerment of NHG women. The association between Kudumbasree Mission and local open immense opportunities to women to exploit the locally available surplus resources. The present study shows the steps taken up by the local bodies in association with the Kudumbasree for revamping agriculture. Since women have alienation towards primary sector, the LSGs can utilise this NHG network productively for supplementing Kerala's feeble primary sector. The guidance of LSG institutions such as Departments of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Irrigation is essential to them. NHG is a collective strength and it is a perennial source of energy to act as agent of change in every society.