

## **NHG Women Linkage with Local Planning: Understanding and Practice in Kerala**

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**Abstract:** NHG-Local government linkage looks forward to bring about synergistic implementation of programmes in health, agriculture, micro enterprises, social justice and women empowerment. Local government considers the social network of NHGs as the most effective and the cost saving mechanism for making participatory planning process with utmost reliability. Its ground level network envisages decision making bodies more participatory. Kudumbasree implements poverty alleviation programme through NHG women and the latter are the best agents to explore the poor and report their needs to the LG. They conduct multilevel divergent programmes on behalf of the local body in health, sanitation, poverty reduction, child welfare and communication. The formation of NHGs facilitates integration with the plan objectives such as agricultural production, poverty reduction, social equity and women empowerment and eventually revamps the entire system of local governance

**Keywords:** Area Development Society (ADS), Community Development Society (CDS), Local government (LG), Local planning, Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs)

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### **I. Introduction**

Prior to the decentralised planning, women's agency was credited for the impressive performance of Kerala state's social indicators, which unequivocally equated the development experience of the developed countries. In the post-nineties, women's agency materialized a new outlook rooted in the network of women SHGs which animated new vistas of development like associational life, social capital and women empowerment. Local planning contributes to empowerment by increasing the capability of local actors to choose among a broad set of options in pursuit of individual and collective goals [1]. The empowered local actors contribute to governance process and this enriches development process. The present study shows, how the local government utilizes neighborhood groups (NHGs) of women to take up the role of empowered local actors in local planning.

### **II. Analytical Significance**

Formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women was a big step in the economic empowerment of women. Over the time, the mode of operandi of SHGs did not go in tandem with the empowerment objectives, therefore, a paradigm shift in planning was made with the manifold objectives of giving voice with power to the women and transforming them as agents of change. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments introduced decentralized methodology in local planning. The state government of Kerala designed this novel concept by envisaging greater participation of women in planning and preference to projects focusing strategic gender needs. The local planning ensures woman entitled to have her voices heard and influenced decision making units and initiate the growth of Neighbourhood groups under Kudumbasree network which play a vital role in nurturing associational life and social network.

### **III. Objective Of The Study**

*The major objectives of the study are (a) To know the structure and functions of NHGs in Kerala  
(b) To study how NHGs have been utilised as effective chain of network in implementing local planning.*

### **IV. Methodology Of Study**

The population of the present study consists of NHG women who participate in local governance in the panchayats of Thrissur district. The district has the reputation for a series of rigorous programmes done by local bodies and grassroots organizations of women. In this regard, the district has attained many state and national level awards. The survey was conducted among the representatives of NHGs of all 88 gramapanchayatsof