Kudumbashree: an initiative for women empowerment through micro-enterprises in Kerala, India

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Kudumbashree, the State Poverty Eradication Mission, launched by Government of Kerala, a federal state of India, for wiping out absolute poverty from the State is a holistic, participatory, women oriented innovative overarching poverty reduction approach. Through the active involvement in Neighbour Hood Groups (NHGs), the women from poor families are facilitated to learn new lessons to tackle the multiple dimensions of poverty. This learning process leads them to empowerment. Kudumbashree views Micro Enterprise Development as an opportunity for providing gainful employment to the people below poverty line and thereby improving their income and living standard. Micro-enterprises under Kudumbashree take up activities in agriculture sector, industrial sector and services sector.

An empirical study was conducted among selected micro-enterprises run by women in rural areas of Thiruvananthapuram district (capital district of Kerala), to critically examine the role of micro-enterprises in women empowerment. Data were collected from Neighbour Hood Group (NHG) member households and from the secretaries of NHGs. Convenient sampling method was used for the selection of NHGs. 25 NHGs were included in the study. Four sub-variables were considered under empowerment : organisational empowerment, economic empowerment, leadership empowerment and knowledge empowerment. Other variables used for the study were : improvement in housing conditions after joining the NHG, number of people employed in the family before and after joining NHG, nature of and investment in the micro-enterprise, activities carried out by NHGs, and number of persons employed. The study has revealed that micro-enterprises under the Kudumbashree has lead to the empowerment of SHG members. The project has generated a lot of enthusiasm among the women in rural areas, but has to go a long way in delivering intended results to poor families in the state.

Key words: Kudumbashree, Neighbour Hood Group (NHG), Micro-enterprise, Women empowerment, Poverty reduction.

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