

# Role Of Elevated Decentralisation and

The guidelines for the preparation of the eleventh five year plan go even further in carving out a relevance for Kudumbashree in decentralised planning.

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**K**udumbashree developed its form almost simultaneously with the Peoples' Plan Campaign. Although thrift and credit operations and women centric community based organization had precursors in the Alappuzha and Malappuram experiences, the placement of the organization in the heart of the decentralized governance structures, and the subsequent linkages with decentralized planning that have been developed, were all consequent to the formation of the State Poverty Eradication Mission in 1998, and the shift of focus from the generalized male and female neighbourhood groups to the exclusively female community based organization of Kudumbashree.

## **Kudumbashree organizational structure and LSGs**

The structure of the community based organisation itself portends of both the potential strengths and challenges inherent in contextualizing it in the local self government. Neighbourhood groups of women are federated at the ward level as Area Development Societies(ADS) and at the LSG level as Community Development Societies (CDS). The CDS is a registered society under the Travancore Cochin Literary Scientific and Charitable Societies Act. As per the bye law, the panchayat ward member is the patron of the ADS and the gram panchayat President, of the CDS. The governing body of the CDS has the Panchayat President, the Welfare standing committee chairperson, the women panchayat members and other development functionaries of the panchayat as ex officio members. The member secretary of the CDS, who also goes by the name of 'charge officer', is an officer of the panchayat selected by the panchayat in that capacity in addition to his or her existing functions in the panchayat. The welfare standing committee directly monitors the functioning of the CDS.

In urban areas, the format undergoes slight changes – here there is a Monitoring and Advisory Committee at the Municipal level, headed by the Municipal Chairperson, and a similar committee at the ward level. A health officer of the Municipal body is designated as the 'project officer' who functions as the member secretary of the CDS.

PHOTO : RATHEESH

# Women

## Kudumbashree



### Space for Kudumbashree in Decentralised plan formulation

This intricate relationship with the local self governments gives the community based organisation of Kudumbashree a unique opportunity to project community interests in decentralised planning and governance. The decentralised planning guidelines gives the CDS representation in the working groups on women's component plan and the anti poverty sub plan. As far as the anti poverty sub plan is concerned, all levels of the community based organisation are involved in articulating community need assessment and in formulating micro plans which get consolidated at the LSG level.

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planning. Kudumbashree is represented in all working groups and in certain working groups like APSP and WCP, there is representation of more than one member from Kudumbashree in the group. The core objectives of the peoples' plan as enunciated in the guidelines are the revitalisation of agriculture and promotion of local economic development with improvement in public service delivery with focus on the poor.

Separate plans for integrated watershed management, local economic development, governance, integrated ICDS, health, poverty eradication, SC development, tribal development, women development, water supply, energy, connectivity and sports are to be prepared as part of the five year plan. The Ashraya project for destitute rehabilitation is to be

universalised. The take home ration scheme for children of the age group 0-3 is also to be implemented across the state.

Kudumbashree has direct stake in most of the sectoral plans detailed above, and at least an indirect interest as manifestation of the need of the weaker sections of the society. For instance, the anti poverty sub plans are to be prepared based on the consolidation of family data provided through the kudumbashree network. Ashraya project has specific roles



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for Kudumbashree in formulation, implementation and monitoring. For the THRS scheme, the Amrutham food supplement is provided by Kudumbashree micro enterprise groups. The information provided by the network is an invaluable tool for

projection of household water supply, energy, child development, and health needs. As far as governance is concerned, projects would necessarily have components for increasing transparency and accountability and for strengthening community monitoring mechanisms, both of which would call upon the services of Kudumbashree as the largest community based organisation working in tandem with local governments, as a dissemination network as well as a feedback mechanism.

### Planning for local economic development – new horizons

Whereas the connection with watershed management is not immediately discernible, here too Kudumbashree plays a definitive role. In the four districts where the National rural employment guarantee scheme is operational, the ADS of the Kudumbashree are already involved in the execution of projects. Kudumbashree has also been involved in financial inclusion and job card registration. Community participation in formulation of labour intensive projects is an opportunity for the community based organisation of Kudumbashree at the grass roots to propose watershed based works at the micro level, thereby providing a conduit for community involvement in the watershed programme. Employing the agency of kudumbashree for ensuring community participation has an added advantage – that of bringing women to the forefront of the local decision making process, and of addressing concerns of gender equity in participation.

It is the integrated watershed management plan that will be looking at local employment and enterprise opportunities in the agricultural and related sectors. It is possible to look at enterprises in this sector from three angles – one, of poverty alleviation, two, of local economic development, and three, of enhancing productivity. The perspective that is brought into the plan will influence the focus of the interventions proposed. For instance, a focus on technical aspects of production alone may not address commercial aspects of marketability of produce, and a business angle may overlook the poverty dimensions that can make seemingly

viable enterprise opportunities non starters. The challenge in an integrated approach would be to bring in all three perspectives in adequate measure.

### Samagra

This is where the *Samagra* approach newly adopted by Kudumbashree becomes relevant. This approach is product or occupation specific, in that it looks to bring in all backward and forward linkages related to technical components, business planning and capacitation support together on one platform as an integrated project. Intense facilitation by supporting agencies is required, and the leadership on the local self governments



in holding the project together and in coordinating the various departmental and other stake holders is crucial for the success of the project. The space of Kudumbashree network is as beneficiary and participant – the space of the poverty eradication mission is as facilitator. *Samagra* is precisely the kind of project where the detailed planning framework of the five year plan becomes relevant. It is concerned with the participation not only of the grama panchayat, but also of the higher tiers of the block and district, whose involvement and contribution are of immense significance to the scope and success of the project.

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The genesis of *Samagra* was a corollary of the findings of the study on government supported micro enterprises undertaken by Kudumbashree for the Decentralisation Support Programme in 2006. The role of LSGs, facilitating departments and agencies in micro enterprise development, and the status and nature of micro enterprises were assessed as part of the study. Of the 36 lakh families that were part of the NHG network, only around two lakh families were engaged in micro enterprises (totaling 50583). Of these, 79% were in the traditional sector, and nearly two thirds were in agriculture and related activities. The annual turnover was less than Rs. 10000 in over 50 % of the enterprises, and markets were seen across the board as a major problem. Interestingly, the training inputs received were few and far between and hardly any marketing or accounting trainings were given, although they were major areas of concern. The Kudumbashree enterprises compared favourably in the area of training, but even then the gap was substantial. The sustenance of units was also an issue, with older units showing substantial attrition, especially after loan repayment.

### Stakeholder roles for LED

These findings clearly indicated the need for leadership at the local level to take on the challenges faced by micro enterprises in their battle for sustenance. Integration of subsidy support with trainings, technology upgradation, market intervention support, procurement support, quality improvement and standard setting were seen to be necessary for survival and enhanced returns from the enterprise, while reducing the risks borne by the individual entrepreneur to the minimum. These could only be done at the local level, under the leadership of local governments. State agencies at best

could provide professional support and facilitation for product standardisation and development of protocols, associating



technical organisations for quality upgradation, and exploring larger market opportunities.

The day to day facilitation of the enterprise, leveraging trainings, arranging financial support, developing procurement mechanisms, etc are the purview of the local self government. Very often enterprises slip due to the lack of further local level facilitation to overcome teething troubles. Whereas the CDS today plays a role in facilitating these enterprises, it is only befitting that the LSG with its greater human resources, devotes time, energy and said resources, to the continued support of enterprises within its purview. In order to facilitate the LSGs to take on this role, a local employment and enterprise potential register was sought to be developed through the agency of the Kudumbashree network. This register seeks to capture the human resources, skill sets and aptitudes on one side, and the potential for micro enterprise and local economic development on the other. While the registers so far developed are by no means perfect, and need to be improved upon, they are certainly a sounding board for the LSG to undertake local economic development planning to a higher level than is presently being undertaken, and to attempt to have a far more integrated view of the needs of micro enterprise development, calling for convergence of resources of both departments and civil society organisations/individuals.

### **LSG and Kudumbashree – new equations**

Today the CDS is seen by most LSGs

as an agency for execution of their women development and poverty alleviation programmes, and the scope of interface of the community based organisation with the LSG is not clearly understood. The Kudumbashree network has a role to play in facilitating local economic development that pertains to identification of the constraints and challenges facing a particular micro enterprise, resolution of interpersonal issues that crop up in group enterprises, facilitation of bank linkages, following repayment patterns, assessing training needs etc. This is not a role that can be played out in isolation. It requires constant support and redressal on the part of the LSG for effective facilitation. Therefore the capacitation of the CDS and involvement in its programmes in a way beyond assigning implementation and dissemination responsibilities is the responsibility of the LSG.

Capacitation of the CDS is a multi layered phenomenon. No capacitation of the CDS would be worthwhile if the levels of ADS and NHGs have not been addressed. The strength of the community based organisation is the strength of its network – the lakhs of women who meet weekly to disburse thrift and credit. It is already seen that less than 10 % of these women are taken up with economic activity beyond thrift and credit. Mobilising them and their families into viable economic activity would first require strengthening of the thrift and credit mechanism. It is through the network that the clarion call for enhanced economic participation is to reach the community. It is this network that has to develop the necessary gender ‘muscle’ to be able to take gender dimensions into the core of policy planning and governance at the local level. How the network can accomplish that is the subject for another discussion, but it is evident that there has to be a reworking of roles and responsibilities all round for the LSGs to be able to meaningfully take on the myriad functions pertaining to local economic development and for formulating and executing projects that will make a sizeable contribution to improving the quality of life of the people they serve. ■

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### **Plan together and Ensure success**

Peoples’ Plan activities. Though expert advice is needed, decision-making, priority fixing and leadership giving should be done by representatives of the people. There is a situation of delaying projects due to the interference of bureaucratic supremacy. There are a lot of local self government institutions which do not reach even half way of the target. Technicalities and the heap of complex orders are reasons. Attention will be given to avoid such approaches, which would put the panchayat or corporation authorities in a quandary henceforth.

Along with this, attempts to tap maximum benefits of information technology should be continued. Computerisation in local self government institutions is going on. We should view it critically that the activities could not reach anywhere even after the passage of many years since the inception. These lacunae should be redressed. As elucidated in the State IT Policy document, attempts for the implementation of computerisation should be done by giving prominence to free software. There by the public can be bridged with administrative set up and people’s campaign activities can be implemented with utmost transparency and participation.

The Left has a clear vision regarding decentralisation. It is against the vision put forward by the World Bank and imperialist agencies. The World Bank and others envisage decentralisation as a tool to weaken centralised government machinery and make it irresponsible. When the system becomes wobbly it will lead to anarchy. This will not be the decentralisation to be implemented by the Left Democratic Front government. In the decentralisation implemented by us, all levels of governance from gramasabha to the State Government will be given due importance and make them mutually empowered. Hence, based on this notion and rectifying the earlier shortfalls, all are requested to come forward to make the people’s planning a grand success. ■