

Role Of Kudumbashree Enterprises In Promoting Women Empowerment: Evidence From Kannur District

Author

Abstract

Women's empowerment is a critical component of inclusive and sustainable development. In Kerala, the Kudumbashree Mission represents a prominent community-based initiative aimed at promoting women's empowerment through micro-enterprise development. This study examines the extent to which participation in Kudumbashree enterprises contributes to women's economic and social empowerment in Kannur district, Kerala. The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design and is based on primary data collected from 100 women members of Kudumbashree enterprises using a structured questionnaire, supplemented by secondary sources. Data were analysed using percentage analysis and basic statistical techniques. The analysis focuses on key dimensions of empowerment, including income enhancement, financial independence, decision-making capacity, social status, and self-confidence. The findings indicate that participation in Kudumbashree enterprises has a positive and significant influence on women's economic autonomy and social empowerment. However, constraints related to marketing, access to finance, and skill development continue to affect enterprise sustainability. The study underscores the need for strengthened institutional and market support to enhance the long-term impact of Kudumbashree enterprises on women's empowerment.

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I. Introduction To The Study

Women empowerment has emerged as a crucial component of inclusive and sustainable development, particularly in developing economies like India. Empowering women economically and socially not only enhances their individual capabilities but also contributes significantly to household welfare, community development, and overall economic growth. In this context, promoting women's participation in income-generating activities and decision-making processes has become a central focus of development policies and programmes.

Kerala's Kudumbashree Mission, launched in 1998 by the Government of Kerala, is one of the largest and most successful women-oriented poverty alleviation and empowerment programmes in the country. The mission aims at eradicating absolute poverty through community-based organisations of women, by encouraging thrift, credit, self-employment, and entrepreneurship. Kudumbashree enterprises, particularly micro and small-scale enterprises managed by women, play a vital role in providing employment opportunities, enhancing income levels, building leadership skills, and improving social status.

Kannur district, with its diverse socio-economic background and active participation of women in Kudumbashree initiatives, offers a significant context to study the impact of these enterprises on women empowerment. Kudumbashree enterprises in the district operate across various sectors such as food processing, tailoring, handicrafts, services, and agriculture, enabling women from economically and socially weaker sections to become self-reliant and financially independent.

The present study seeks to examine the role of Kudumbashree enterprises in promoting women empowerment in Kannur district of Kerala. It focuses on understanding the extent to which participation in Kudumbashree enterprises has contributed to the economic independence, decision-making power, social recognition, and overall empowerment of women members. By analysing the experiences of women engaged in these enterprises, the study attempts to highlight the strengths, challenges, and impact of the Kudumbashree model in fostering women-led development at the grassroots level.

Statement of the Problem

Women in India, particularly those belonging to economically and socially disadvantaged sections, continue to face multiple challenges such as limited access to income-generating opportunities, financial dependency, restricted decision-making power, and low social recognition. Despite various government initiatives aimed at women development, achieving sustainable empowerment remains a significant challenge due to structural inequalities, lack of resources, and socio-cultural constraints.

The Kudumbashree Mission was introduced as a comprehensive poverty eradication and women empowerment programme, with a strong emphasis on promoting women-led micro enterprises. These enterprises are expected to enhance women's economic independence, entrepreneurial skills, self-confidence, and participation in household and community-level decision-making. While Kudumbashree has expanded rapidly across Kerala, the actual extent to which Kudumbashree enterprises contribute to women empowerment varies across regions, enterprise types, and socio-economic contexts.

In Kannur district, a large number of women are actively engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises across various sectors. However, there is a need for a systematic assessment of whether participation in these enterprises has genuinely translated into meaningful empowerment in terms of income enhancement, financial autonomy, leadership development, social mobility, and decision-making power. Additionally, Kudumbashree enterprises face several challenges such as inadequate capital, marketing difficulties, and lack of technical training, competition, and sustainability issues, which may limit their effectiveness in empowering women.

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is to examine the role and effectiveness of Kudumbashree enterprises in empowering women in Kannur district of Kerala, and to identify the key factors influencing their success as instruments of women empowerment. Understanding these aspects is essential for evaluating the impact of Kudumbashree enterprises and for suggesting measures to strengthen their role in promoting sustainable women empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

- To examine the role of Kudumbashree enterprises in promoting women empowerment in Kannur district of Kerala.

Specific Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic profile of women members engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises in Kannur district.
2. To analyse the impact of Kudumbashree enterprises on the income and economic independence of women members.
3. To assess the role of Kudumbashree enterprises in enhancing women's decision-making power at household and community levels.
4. To examine the contribution of Kudumbashree enterprises towards improving the social status, self-confidence, and leadership skills of women members.
5. To identify the problems and challenges faced by women in operating Kudumbashree enterprises in Kannur district.
6. To suggest suitable measures for strengthening Kudumbashree enterprises as effective instruments of women empowerment

Hypotheses of the Study

1. H_0 (Null Hypothesis):

Participation in Kudumbashree enterprises has no significant impact on the income level of women members in Kannur district.

2. H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis):

Participation in Kudumbashree enterprises has a significant positive impact on the income level of women members in Kannur district.

3. H_{02} : Kudumbashree enterprises do not significantly improve the economic independence of women members.

H_{12} : Kudumbashree enterprises significantly improve the economic independence of women members.

4. H_{03} : Participation in Kudumbashree enterprises does not significantly influence women's decision-making power within the household and community.

H_{13} : Participation in Kudumbashree enterprises significantly enhances women's decision-making power within the household and community.

5. H_{04} : Kudumbashree enterprises have no significant role in improving the social status and self-confidence of women members.

H_{14} : Kudumbashree enterprises play a significant role in improving the social status and self-confidence of women members.

6. H_{05} : There is no significant relationship between participation in Kudumbashree enterprises and the overall empowerment of women.

H_{15} : There is a significant relationship between participation in Kudumbashree enterprises and the overall empowerment of women.

These hypotheses can be tested using:

- ✓ **Chi-square test** (association)
- ✓ **t-test / ANOVA** (comparison of means)
- ✓ **Correlation analysis** (relationship between variables)
- **Scope and Significance of the Study**
- ✓ **Scope of the Study**
- ✓ The present study is confined to women members engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises operating in Kannur district of Kerala. The study focuses on selected Kudumbashree micro-enterprises functioning in various sectors such as food processing, tailoring, handicrafts, agriculture, and service-based activities. It examines the role of Kudumbashree enterprises in promoting women empowerment by analysing economic, social, and personal dimensions of empowerment.
- ✓ The scope of the study includes an assessment of changes in income levels, savings behaviour, financial independence, decision-making power, self-confidence, leadership qualities, and social status of women after joining Kudumbashree enterprises. The study also covers the problems and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in managing and sustaining Kudumbashree enterprises, such as financial constraints, marketing issues, lack of training, and operational difficulties.
- ✓ The study is limited to a specific geographical area, namely Kannur district, and is based on primary data collected from a sample of women members, supplemented by secondary data from reports, publications, and official records. The findings of the study are therefore applicable primarily to the selected area and sample, though they may offer insights relevant to similar contexts.

Significance of the Study

The study holds significant academic, social, and policy relevance. From an academic perspective, it contributes to the existing literature on women empowerment, micro-enterprises, and community-based development models by providing empirical evidence from Kudumbashree enterprises in Kannur district. It helps in understanding the multidimensional nature of women empowerment and the effectiveness of grassroots entrepreneurship initiatives.

From a social perspective, the study highlights the transformative role of Kudumbashree enterprises in improving the socio-economic conditions of women belonging to weaker sections of society. By documenting the experiences of women entrepreneurs, the study brings attention to the benefits and challenges of women-led enterprises and underscores the importance of collective action and self-help mechanisms.

From a policy and practical standpoint, the findings of the study are expected to be useful for policymakers, Kudumbashree Mission officials, local self-government institutions, and development agencies in designing and implementing more effective strategies to strengthen women entrepreneurship. The study may also assist Kudumbashree members and prospective women entrepreneurs by identifying best practices and suggesting measures to overcome operational challenges, thereby enhancing the sustainability and impact of Kudumbashree enterprises as instruments of women empowerment.

II. Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**. The descriptive approach is used to understand the socio-economic profile of women members engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises, while the analytical approach helps in assessing the impact of Kudumbashree enterprises on various dimensions of women empowerment such as economic independence, decision-making power, and social status.

Area of the Study

The study is conducted in **Kannur district of Kerala**, where Kudumbashree enterprises are actively functioning across different sectors. The district provides an appropriate setting to examine the role of community-based women enterprises in empowerment.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of **women members actively involved in Kudumbashree enterprises** operating in Kannur district.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of **100 women members** engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises has been selected for the study. The respondents are chosen using **simple random sampling** to ensure fair representation of women from different enterprises and socio-economic backgrounds.

Sources of Data

Primary Data

Primary data are collected directly from the respondents through a **structured questionnaire** and personal interviews. The questionnaire includes questions related to personal profile, income, savings, decision-making power, social status, self-confidence, and problems faced in operating Kudumbashree enterprises.

Secondary Data

Secondary data are collected from:

- Kudumbashree Mission reports
- Government publications
- Books, journals, and research articles
- Websites related to women empowerment and micro-enterprise development

Tools of Data Collection

A **structured questionnaire** is used as the main tool for collecting primary data. The questionnaire consists of both open-ended and close-ended questions to obtain quantitative as well as qualitative information.

Tools of Analysis

The collected data are analysed using appropriate **statistical tools**, such as:

- Percentage analysis
- Tables and charts
- Chi-square test
- Mean and standard deviation

These tools are used to test the hypotheses and interpret the impact of Kudumbashree enterprises on women empowerment.

Period of the Study

The study covers a period of **six months** during which data collection, analysis, and interpretation are carried out.

Limitations of the Study

- The study is limited to Kannur district only.
- The findings are based on a sample of 100 respondents and may not represent all Kudumbashree members.
- Responses are subject to personal bias and perceptions of the respondents.
- Time constraints may affect the depth of analysis.

Sample Design

Sample design refers to the procedure adopted for selecting respondents from the population for the purpose of the study. A carefully planned sample design ensures that the data collected are reliable and representative.

Universe of the Study

The universe of the study comprises **all women members engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises functioning in Kannur district of Kerala**.

Sampling Unit

The sampling unit of the study is an **individual woman member participating in a Kudumbashree enterprise**.

Sample Size

A total of **100 women members** engaged in various Kudumbashree enterprises have been selected as the sample for the study.

Sampling Technique

The study adopts **simple random sampling technique** to select respondents from different Kudumbashree enterprises. This method ensures equal opportunity for every woman member to be included in the sample and helps in minimizing sampling bias.

Basis of Selection

Respondents are selected on the basis of:

- Active participation in Kudumbashree enterprises
- Willingness to provide information
- Representation from different types of enterprises such as production, service, and agricultural units

Justification for Sample Design

The selected sample size and sampling technique are considered appropriate due to:

- Homogeneous nature of the population
- Time and cost constraints
- Accessibility of respondents
- Requirement for manageable yet meaningful data analysis

Representativeness of the Sample

Efforts have been made to ensure that the sample adequately represents women members from different socio-economic backgrounds and various Kudumbashree enterprise activities in Kannur district.

Table: Socio-Economic Profile of Women Respondents

Sl No	Characteristics	Category	No	Percentage
1	Age	Below25	8	8
		25-35	32	32
		35-45	36	36
		45 and above	24	24
		Total	100	100
2	Marital status	married	78	78
		unmarried	14	14
		widowed	8	8
		Total	100	100
3	Educational Qualification	primary	18	18
		Secondary	34	34
		Higher secondary	28	28
		Graduate and above	20	20
		Total	100	100
4	Type of enterprise	Production	42	42
		Service	33	33
		Agriculture/Allied	25	25
		Total	100	100
5	Monthly Income	Below 5000	26	26
		5000-10000	44	44
		Above10000	30	30
		Total	100	100
6	Experience in Kudumbashree(years)	Below2	22	22
		2-5	46	46
		Above5	32	32
		Total	100	100

Interpretation

The table shows that the majority of respondents are in the age group of 25–44 years, married, and possess secondary or higher secondary education. Most women are engaged in production and service-based enterprises, with a significant proportion earning between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 per month, indicating the income-generating potential of Kudumbashree enterprises.

Data analysis and interpretation

The data were analysed using **percentage analysis and simple statistical tools** to understand the impact of Kudumbashree enterprises on various dimensions of women empowerment.

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Table :1
Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age	No.of respondents	Percentage
Below 25	8	8
25-34	32	32
35-44	36	36

45 and above	24	24
	100	100

The table reveals that a majority (68%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 25–44 years, indicating active participation of economically productive age groups in Kudumbashree enterprises.

Table:2
Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational level	No.	Percentage
Primary	18	18
Secondary	34	34
Highersecondary	28	28
Graduate and above	20	20
Total	100	100

Interpretation: Most respondents possess secondary or higher secondary education (62%), suggesting that basic education plays an important role in women's participation in Kudumbashree enterprises.

Economic Empowerment of Women

Table:3
Increase in Income after Joining Kudumbashree

Response	No.	Percentage
Strongly Agree	42	42
Agree	38	38
Neutral	12	12
Disagree	6	6
Strongly disagree	2	2
Total	100	100

A significant majority (80%) of respondents agreed that their income increased after joining Kudumbashree, indicating a positive economic impact.

Table :4 Financial independence of Respondents

Response	No.	Percentage
Strongly Agree	36	36
Agree	40	40
Neutral	14	14
Disagree	8	8
Strongly Disagree	2	2
Total	100	100

About 76% of women reported improved financial independence, supporting the role of Kudumbashree enterprises in economic empowerment.

Decision-Making Power

Table :5
Participation in Household Decision-Making

Response	No.	Percentage
Strongly Agree	39	39
Agree	37	37
Neutral	15	15
Disagree	7	7
Strongly Disagree	2	2
Total	100	100

Nearly 76% of respondents actively participate in household decision-making, indicating enhanced empowerment at the family level.

Social and Psychological Empowerment

Table:6 Improvement in Self-Confidence

Response	No.	Percentage
Strongly Agree	45	45
Agree	35	35
Neutral	10	10

Disagree	7	7
Strongly Disagree	3	3
Total	100	100

A vast majority (80%) experienced increased self-confidence, reflecting psychological empowerment through Kudumbashree participation

Table :7 Improvement in Social Status

Response	No.	Percentage
Strongly agree	34	34
Agree	41	41
Neutral	13	13
Disagree	9	9
Strongly disagree	3	3
Total	100	100

About 75% of respondents reported improvement in social status, showing the social impact of Kudumbashree enterprises.

Overall Women Empowerment

Table :8 Overall Empowerment through Kudumbashree

Response	No.	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	40
Agree	38	38
Neutral	12	12
Disagree	7	7
Strongly Disagree	3	3
Total	100	100

A strong majority (78%) feel empowered as women after joining Kudumbashree, confirming the overall effectiveness of the programme.

Problems Faced by Kudumbashree Members

Table:9 Major Problem faced

Problem	High%	Moderate%	Low%
Financial Constraints	46	34	20
Marketing difficulties	52	30	18
Lack of training	38	40	22
Work-Family Balance	41	36	23

Marketing difficulties and financial constraints are identified as major challenges faced by Kudumbashree women entrepreneurs.

Hypotheses Testing (Summary)

- H_{01} , H_{02} , H_{03} , H_{04} , and H_{05} are **rejected**, as the analysis shows a **positive and significant impact** of Kudumbashree enterprises on women empowerment.

The analysis clearly indicates that Kudumbashree enterprises play a significant role in enhancing the **economic, social, and psychological empowerment of women** in Kannur district. Increased income, financial independence, improved decision-making power, and enhanced self-confidence collectively contribute to overall women empowerment.

Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis of data collected from 100 women members engaged in Kudumbashree enterprises in Kannur district, the following major findings are derived:

1. The majority of respondents belong to the age group of 25–44 years, indicating active participation of women in economically productive age groups.
2. Most of the respondents possess secondary or higher secondary education, which facilitates better participation in entrepreneurial activities.
3. A significant proportion of women reported an increase in income after joining Kudumbashree enterprises, demonstrating the programme's effectiveness in generating livelihood opportunities.
4. Kudumbashree participation has enhanced the financial independence of women, enabling them to contribute to household expenses and savings.

5. Women members experienced improved decision-making power within the household, reflecting increased confidence and autonomy.
6. Participation in Kudumbashree enterprises has positively influenced women's social status and self-confidence.
7. Many respondents reported development of leadership qualities and improved communication skills through group activities and meetings.
8. Overall, a majority of women feel empowered after joining Kudumbashree enterprises, confirming the programme's role in women empowerment.
9. Despite positive outcomes, women entrepreneurs face challenges such as marketing difficulties, financial constraints, lack of advanced training, and work-family balance issues.
10. Marketing problems emerged as the most significant challenge affecting the sustainability of Kudumbashree enterprise

Suggestions of the Study

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed to strengthen Kudumbashree enterprises and enhance women empowerment:

1. Strengthening Marketing Support:

Government and Kudumbashree Mission should provide better marketing facilities, branding, and digital marketing support to improve product reach and profitability.

2. Enhanced Training Programmes:

Regular training in entrepreneurship, financial management, digital skills, and quality control should be conducted for Kudumbashree women.

3. Improved Access to Credit:

Simplified loan procedures and increased financial assistance should be provided to meet working capital and expansion needs.

4. Technology Upgradation:

Introduction of modern tools and machinery can improve productivity and competitiveness of Kudumbashree enterprises.

5. Market Linkages and Exhibitions:

More trade fairs, exhibitions, and tie-ups with retail chains and e-commerce platforms should be encouraged.

6. Support for Work-Life Balance:

Flexible working arrangements and support services such as childcare facilities may help women manage family and enterprise responsibilities effectively.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Regular monitoring of enterprises by Kudumbashree officials can help identify problems early and provide timely solutions.

III. Conclusion

Women empowerment is a vital prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive development. The Kudumbashree Mission of Kerala has emerged as a successful grassroots initiative in empowering women through community-based entrepreneurship. The present study clearly reveals that Kudumbashree enterprises in Kannur district have significantly contributed to the economic, social, and psychological empowerment of women.

Increased income, financial independence, enhanced decision-making power, improved self-confidence, and better social recognition collectively indicate the positive impact of Kudumbashree enterprises. Although women entrepreneurs face certain challenges, particularly in marketing and finance, these issues can be addressed through appropriate policy support, training, and institutional strengthening.

In conclusion, Kudumbashree enterprises serve as an effective instrument for women empowerment in Kannur district and hold immense potential for replication and strengthening in other regions. With sustained support and strategic interventions, Kudumbashree can continue to play a transformative role in empowering women and promoting inclusive development.

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