

Progressing in partnerships- NROs journey so far and the way forward

Kudumbashree NRO started its journey of supporting states in the year 2013, when the first set of MoUs were signed with states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, Jharkhand and Assam under the convergence domain. In the same year, partnerships were also developed with Jharkhand and Bihar for supporting enterprise promotion initiatives in these states. Since then the partnerships have steadily increased and at present, Kudumbashree NRO has been working in more than sixteen states and one union territory, providing support in developing proof of concept under both the domains.

The growth and expansion of Kudumbashree NROs work over the period of time can be attributed to the success that Kudumbashree has been able to achieve within Kerala. The model designed by Kudumbashree NRO to address poverty and livelihood issues of the poor has been based on the experiences of Kudumbashree's activities in Kerala. Although Kudumbashree was designated as the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) by Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) only in the year 2011, the mission was already functioning as the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala. The people's plan campaign and the decentralization of powers to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) led to the formation of Kudumbashree Mission. It created a form of social energy that fuelled the change which has lasted more than twenty years. The model identifies community, especially women as equal players in the process of development planning and implementation. Women have been seen as the agents of change and the model has been widely appreciated at national and international platforms as a movement that has altered the lives of hundreds of thousands of women.

It is based on these experiences and the basic premise that people desire change and has the ability to improve their circumstances and environment that the model has found its success in. Currently it is being implemented in states with varied presence of structural mechanisms like the existence of SHGs and primary federations, trained professional staff of the SRLMs, availability of community professionals who can be trained to become reliable service providers and the presence of other key stakeholders. These factors are taken into consideration before finalizing partnerships with states. A detailed plan of action also is also worked upon that includes conducting a scoping study, identification and training a pool of community resource persons, developing proof of concept and local specific approaches, implementing sustainable monitoring mechanisms, scaling up interventions and exit strategy. The project has been able to create both qualitative and quantitative footprints and is executed in such a way that each partner state eventually takes over the implementation of the project from Kudumbashree NRO. Under PRI-CBO convergence, the work is being carried out in 615 panchayaths across 6 states with more than 880 community resource persons known as Local Resource Group (LRGs) active on field, and around 350 internal mentors trained as part of scaling up interventions. Apart from the above, KS NRO has also set up institutional platforms for convergence at the panchayath level like VOCC* and GPCC** ensuring continued collaborations between SHGs and PRIs. These have been designed as per the existing structures of Gram Panchayats and NRLM community institutions. In the area of enterprise promotion, the work is being carried out in 17 districts across 6 states with more than 680 Micro Enterprise Consultants (MEC) trained and around 13,500 micro enterprises supported. A web based MIS and app based performance tracking system (PTS) is also put in place for monitoring the performance of the

enterprises. Moreover, based on relevant policy support from the respective SRLMs, it is ensured that MEC groups provide continuous support for enterprise development activities to the CBOs.

By systematically investing in human and social capital, the intention is to help the neediest in increasing livelihood opportunities and increasing their access to social security pensions/schemes meant for them. All these efforts have certainly paved way for a larger acceptance of NRO's work at the national level. This has led to more states inviting KS NRO for implementing the model.

In the larger context of development agenda, the issue of poverty and inequality is becoming part of domestic politics and has been increasing up in the agenda of political parties. Although there can be several solutions to the issue of poverty and inequality, creation of productive employment and social protection programs are widely adopted strategies. In the light of these facts, Kudumbashree NRO foresees a wider role in working with more states for providing technical support in these areas. Countries like Ethiopia, South Africa and Azerbaijan have also shown interest in taking the support of Kudumbashree NRO in implementing the model in their respective countries. It's just a matter of time Kudumbashree NRO takes the plunge at the international front and plays a larger role of advocating policies targeted to alleviation of poverty and creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities for the rural poor.

The health of any country or state can be measured by looking at its growth indicated by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and development indicated by an increase in the citizens' quality of life. When it comes to conventional economics, most economies have been able to register impressive growth rates, but it is to be seen whether these have been translated into address the real issue of poverty and inequality. There is no doubt that, in the light of the above facts, the issue of poverty and inequality is becoming part of domestic politics and it has been increasing up in the agenda of political parties. Although there can be several solutions to the issue of poverty and inequality, creation of productive employment and social protection programs are widely adopted strategies. In India, the divide between the rich and poor is high not only in terms of income but also in case of non-income indicators like health and education.