Kudumbashree has been able to lend a new direction to Kerala’s developmental ambitions through empowerment of women. All the schemes of Kudumbashree are formulated by giving emphasis to women empowerment and poverty alleviation activities. Kudumbashree is making rapid strides in the fields of various labour sectors and manufacturing sectors.

43 lakh members; Central-State governments’ aid for activities

With 43 lakh women members, Kudumbashree is the largest women’s organization in the Asian continent. The women’s collective is marching ahead with renewed caution to realize the avowed goals of this movement. Out of this 2.5 lakh ayakkottams are active. The state government has earmarked Rs.161 crore in the budget for Kudumbashree activities this financial year. In addition, Rs.25 crore for burs school and rehabilitation centres and Rs.10 crore for micro enterprises has been declared. Rs. 90 crore has also been obtained through the National Rural Livelihood Mission. Therefore, Kudumbashree will be receiving around 300 crore rupees for basic activities. Kudumbashree is the State Nodal Agency for implementing some of the Major Projects of Government of India like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY).

Destitute-free Kerala for social development

Kudumbashree is implementing many new notable schemes this year. It is providing shelter to 1,74,432 destitute families through the Ashraya scheme undertaken with the objective of a destitute-free Kerala. The challenge fund of Ashraya scheme is raised from 40 lakh rupees to 50 lakh rupees.

Vulnerability mapping

Vulnerability mapping is a study undertaken for documenting the main pain points and issues that directly or indirectly affect man and nature in a particular region. The essential information was collected using scientific methods like primary data collection, secondary data collection, institution analysis, analysis of Kudumbashree organization setup, focus group discussion, subject-based discussions, collection of information about atrocities against women and children. Training, announcement rallies and combined meetings of departments were conducted prior to it.

Consolidation of the obtained data is going on in the districts at present. Necessary steps are being taken in the issues identified through mapping that requires immediate intervention. Draft projects are being prepared based on the identified issues and presented at the development seminar.

Snehitha

The need for a centre for women and children in each district was identified. This is to create a safe social environment for women and children, to give support...
for livelihood and sustenance and make possible support and emergency help for women becoming victims of any kind of atrocity. As the first phase helpdesks have started functioning in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Malappuram.

The centre functions as a place that offers support, help and temporary shelter for women and children who are isolated in society, destitute and facing problems. The main objective of the centre is to offer necessary support to women and children who have undergone any form of atrocity or exploitation. Presently Snehiha functions in Idukki, Wayanad and Palakkad districts. Steps are being taken to start Snehiha helpdesks in eight new districts this financial year. Visits are undertaken to Snehiha centres and their working is reviewed. Assurance is given about necessary support and other activities are reviewed based on month-end report.

Community theatre – Rangasree

37 Kudumbashree women were made master trainers by training them in dramatics, scriptwriting, costume and property making. For a start, workers from Ernakulam, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kannur and Malappuram districts have been selected for this. The selected women are trained at CDS level in two CDS each of the districts under the leadership of the master trainers and made members of the Rangasree Dramatics group. Rangasree is right now undertaking and executing several campaigns including the campaign for the Health department.

Study Tour

Kudumbashree members of 14 districts conduct a tour to places in their districts to discover their historical importance and nature. They conduct tours in groups of 30 members. Around 1700 Kudumbashree members have so far been part of this tour. On the basis of this, they got a wonderful opportunity to discover hitherto unknown areas of their own district and gain new knowledge. Everyone prepared travelogues and were collected in book form titled ‘Namukku Keralam Kanam’ and released on International Women’s Day.

Art Camp

An Arts festival and training camp titled ‘Varayude Penna’ was conducted with the cooperation of Kochi Muziris Biennale. The theme was the challenges faced by today’s women. Kudumbashree acts as a stepping stone to ensure the representation of our NHG members in the cultural sphere. The training and art creation took place at the Biennale venue during 13-17 January 2017. The participants were selected from each district by expert artists. The artworks created as part of the training were displayed at the Biennale as well. It has been decided to conduct literate festival at Calicut from 18-20 August 2017.

Community Counseling

A team consisting of experts from the counseling field gave four day training to Kudumbashree women experienced in the counseling field. A Kudumbashree community counselors’ team comprising 320 members was formed. Intervention was made in 829 cases under their leadership. Of these 257 cases were settled. Follow up and counseling sessions are going on in other cases.

Counseling for parents of differently abled children, family meetings centred on various topics and ward level meetings are being held under their guidance. The community counselors’ total participation is imperative in the activities related to Gender Corners, Resource Centers and Snehiha Gender Helpdesk.

Anti Human Traffic

The National Commission for Women has identified Devikulam, Mananthavady and Chittoor blocks in Idukki, Wayand and Palakkad district respectively as the places in Kerala which has the highest incidence of human trafficking which is considered the third largest organized crime in the world. Training has been completed in these districts on the basis of this information. Situational analysis was carried out in selected blocks to identify reasons for trafficking, local peculiarities and victims of trafficking. Support activities for those facing issues are going on in these blocks. Accurate information regarding individuals and agencies registered in the centre will be given to the concerned individuals with the cooperation of migration centre and Snehiha. 1007 members belonging to high risk group were identified and they were given financial aid through Income Generation Scheme and Vulnerability Reduction Fund and help for finding means of livelihood.

Gender Corners

The Gender Corners started by Kudumbashree at CDS level and their activities function based on the idea of a local level exclusive space for women.
The Gender Corner at present serves to create opportunities for women for reading and gaining information, conduct debates and seminars related to such topics, create a venue for women’s creative performance, carry out concerned effort with various institutions working against atrocities against women and children and be a forum for women to openly discuss and share their issues. Alongside this the Gender Corner activities seek to find solutions to women’s issues locally in coordination with vigilante committees. They also take the initiative to take steps for ensuring counseling and legal service arrangements through coordination of Helpdesk activities in necessary circumstances. The Gender Corners function as local level tributaries of the Helpdesks which operate at district level. This arrangement serves to ensure the cooperation of resource persons and Kudumbashree members at local level in Helpdesk activities. Plans are afoot to strengthen Gender Corner activities with the help of Community Counselors and Snehitha officials.

Vigilant group

Avigilant group of at least 5 – 10 security volunteers have been chosen in each ward and under their supervision, discussions are underway on women power becoming a motivating factor for societal change, existing support mechanisms for security and precaution to be taken for safe travel.

A gender based permanent arrangement is inevitable at the local self-governing level for women and teenage girls to confront their issues and seek counseling to boost their self-confidence. The center mainly aims at giving importance to women-centric programmes, thereby increase the skill of Kudumbashree ayalkkoottam members and representatives of local self-governing bodies and develop schemes and activities from a women-centric perspective. Opportunity is given for women facing issues to directly get in touch with Gender Corner and Migration Center workers. The Gender Corners will be able to coordinate the Snehitha Gender Helpdesk activities operating or about to start at district level at local self-governing level.

By opening five model Gender Resource Centers each in all districts, society in general can be made women-friendly by creating opportunities for reading and knowledge gain for all women and children in the area.

The center is also capable of utilizing the services of Community Counselors. Premarital counseling and training required for adolescent children and old people can also be given through the counseling centers.

Special programmes

Kudumbashree celebrated International Women’s Day by conducting ward level meetings and Women’s Day programmes in conjunction with Social Justice and Health departments. Special programmes were held at district level too. A programme to discuss in detail an ayakkottam region, freedom of movement and existing facilities for protection of rights in all wards of Kerala was given shape and put into effect on 11th and 12th of March 2017. This was a concerted effort that brought together members of Ayakkottam, Area Development Societies (ADS) members, Anganwadi workers, committee of Anganwadi mothers, Balasabha workers and people’s representatives.

Women’s only Metro

Cochi Metro means turning a dream into reality in every aspect. Kudumbashree got
the opportunity to do the facility management services for Kochi Metro. As per the agreement with Kochi Metro, all services ranging from parking management to customer facilitation, from ticketing to housekeeping are entrusted with Kudumbashree. Total demand was for 780 staff. In this first phase 530 women are selected and they are serving Kochi Metro now. The present ‘women metro team’ are selected through a rigorous process. More than 40,000 candidates appeared for the written exam, and of them 1,077 were called for a personal interview. Kudumbashree members or their families only were allowed to participate. Yes, when Metro grows, opportunities for poor women also enhances.

For the first time in the history of public transport system in the work, transgenders were given employment opportunities readily. 23 transgenders were selected and they were appointed for various positions (supervisor/ team leader/ cleaning staff/ ticket operator/ customer facilitation staff etc) in Kochi Metro. In the agreement with Kochi Metro for running Facility Management Centre, it was specifically mentioned that transgenders will be trained by selected, trained and will be posted in Kochi Metro through Kudumbashree network.

This project aims at providing an employment opportunity for transgenders who are otherwise not generally employed in similar sectors. As a part of “Disha” campaign (a campaign run by Kudumbashree in November 2016 to strengthen the neighbourhood groups NHG), transgender special NHGs were formed and training for self employment was given to some of them. This is the wage employment opportunity for transgenders, created specifically due to request from Kochi Metro Rail Ltd (KMRL). This initiative will help in mainstreaming and in assisting transgender community.

Kudumbashree has planned various gender development programmes to ensure empowerment of women members in NHG.

The writer is Executive Director, Kudumbashree