

UPLIFTING RURAL WOMEN THROUGH KUDUMBASHREE–MGNREGS PARTNERSHIP IN KERALA STATE

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Received: 18 Feb 2019

Accepted: 07 Mar 2019

Published: 16 Mar 2019

ABSTRACT

Kudumbashree has become a synonym of a campaign for women development in the state of Kerala. It has been in the forefront of creating economic development, especially for rural women. Kudumbashree has ventured into many areas which were traditionally reserved for men. Started off with self-help groups and microfinance, the movement is now into maintaining railway stations and bus stands to restaurants to branded food and even in construction. MNREGS scheme launched by the central government added to the strengthening of Kudumbashree mate's scheme implementation. Close to two lakh women were trained to work as 'Mates' in MGNREGS. What started as a cadre, developing knowledge on identification and estimation of works lead to the rejuvenation of the entire structure, and it benefited ADS and Kudumbashree, the most. This study by the researchers aims to understand the reasons for the success, and the factors that contributed to the successful implementation in the state.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGS, NHG's, Social and Economic Upliftment, Wage Guarantee Scheme, Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Kudumbashree was launched by the government of Kerala in 1998, for wiping out absolute poverty from the state through concerted community action under the leadership of local self-governments. Kudumbashree is today one of the largest women empowering project in the country. The programme has 41 lakh members and covers more than 50% of the households in Kerala. The grass root of Kudumbashree is the neighborhood groups (NHG's) that send representatives to the ward level Area Development society (ADS). The ADS send its representatives to the community development society (CDS), which complete the unique three-tier structure of Kudumbashree. Today, there are 2, 98,087 NHGS, 19854 ADS, and 1073 CDS in Kudumbashree.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was introduced by the central government of India in 2005. It was an economic empowering activity for the rural people by guaranteeing employment opportunity with a fixed amount of wage. This programme was effectively introduced in the state of Kerala, mainly because of the influence of Kudumbashree-a state government mission to eradicate poverty. The Neighbor Hood Groups (NHGs) formed by the Kudumbashree undertakes the works of MGNREG Programmes and has been shown a successful

task of the Government of Kerala for the economic upliftment of rural women.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the role of Kudumbashree in MGNREG programme.
- To examine the employment offered to rural women through Kudumbashree-MGNREG Programme.
- To analyze the economic empowerment of rural women through MGNREG programme

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Empowerment of women is seen as one of the most important means of poverty eradication. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act(MGNREGA), 2005 aims at enhancing the livelihood security of the households in the rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household, whose adult member volunteer to do unskilled manual labor. This enactment creates a right based framework for wage employment programmes and makes the government legally accountable for providing employment to those who seek it. In Kerala, the act was notified in Palakkad and Wayanad districts from 2nd February 2006, and then extended to Kasargod and Idukki districts from 1st April 2007. The remaining ten districts were notified under the Act with effect from 1st April 2008. Thus, MGNREGS covered the entire state of Kerala.

Karthika K T(2015)¹in her studies says, presently, the MGNREGA is being implemented in all rural districts of the country.MGNREGA has resulted into major financial inclusion, where in bank/post office accounts have been opened for the families getting employment. Ministry has advised all the states to ensure payment of wages fully through the accounts. The figures from the survey conducted in different states indicate an impressive participation of women in the employment generated through MGNREGA. The highest employment status amongst women in terms of person days can be seen in Kerala(92.75%).

Jai Prakash Pandey (2016)² in his studies stated that Indian government needs to generate 11.5 crore non-farm jobs over the next decade to employ its work force. Various measures have been announced to generate the job opportunity both in skill and unskilled area. 100 model career centers are to be operational by the end of 2016-17. Asset created by this scheme can do the wonders in promotion of agriculture by making check dams, animal husbandry, forestry and other sectors such as cleanliness, transportation, education etc.

The economic survey(2017-18)³states that the MGNREG scheme has received the highest budget share compared to the previous years. The survey analyzed that till January 2018, 4.6 crore of households had received employment in which 54% were women 22%SC and 17% ST received employment.

The Kudumbashree community network played a vital role in implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Kerala. Women account for 90% of the labor groups under MGNREGS, which is the highest in India compared to other states of the country. The neighborhood spirit of collectivization brought about by the Kudumbashree NHGs is one of the key factors contributing to the rallying of women to join in the fold of MGNREGS workers.The researcher is trying to find out the reasons on how the workof MNREGS undertaken by Kudumbashree increased the economic empowerment of rural women.

Mobilization of Women through Kudumbashree and MGNREGS

The Kudumbashree Community network plays a vital role in implementation of MGNREGS. The Area Development Society (ADS) plays the most critical role. They take up the registration of laborers, preparation of the annual plan, and provision for material amenities at the work site. ADS members are chosen to work as mates in MGNREGS. The scheme is also the part of the Kudumbashree Community Development Society (CDS) at the level of local self-government. In Kerala, MGNREGS has transitioned from a poverty alleviation measure into a platform for the enhancement of the economic, social and governance capabilities of women. The three-tier system of Kudumbashree mobilizes the rural women in the following ways.

Neighborhood Groups (NHG's)

The Neighborhood Groups are the real workers. They identify the work and present it before Area Development Society (ADS). The Kudumbashree NHGs work groups for MGNREGS participate in the Grama Panchayath planning and conduct a social audit to identify the work in the Grama Panchayath. The works identified by NHG's are submitted for discussion at village and ward level groups. Finally, the Grama Panchayath committee gives its approval.

Area Development Society (ADS):

Area Development Society (ADS) is the ward level federation and plays the most critical role. ADS members are chosen as MGNREGS mate. In Kerala 100% of MGNREGS mates are women. The consolidation of identified work is done in this ward level ADS. Moreover, ADS leadership undertakes job card filling, supervision of work sites, keeping daily attendance and muster roll.

Community Development Society (CDS):

The Community Development Society interface with Grama Panchayath's for preparation of labor budget. The scheme is also a part of Kudumbashree CDS action plan. In this way, Kudumbashree mobilize rural women for MNREGS. The chart below depicts the model of Kudumbashree and MGNREGS partnership.



Figure 1: Kudumbashree-MNREGS Partnership Model

Source: http://www.kudumbashree.org/storage/files/y8osd_mgnregs%20in%20kerala.pdf

Women Participation in the MGNREGS Programme

MNREGS gained wide spread popularity through active participation of women. It also generated additional gains due to conservation and development of natural resources and building of common property resources. MGNREGS has been sensitive towards women and categorically mentions that while providing employment, priority shall be given to women MGNREGS guidelines have made the following provisions to encourage women participation.

- Women (especially single women and older persons) should be given preference to work on worksites nearer to their residence.
- Equal wage for men and women.
- Child care facilities are provided at the work site.
- In many states, the work site supervision has been assigned to women.
- In the recruitment process of MGNREGS functionaries, the reservation policy of the government for contractual employment should be followed. Priority shall be given to women.
- Preference in the appointment of mates should be given to women workers and differently able persons, who are adequately trained for performing the duties expected for mates.
- Widows, destitute women, pregnant women and lactating women should be treated as special category. Special works which requires less effort and are close to their house should be identified and implemented for them.

Additionally, to increase the women participation in the scheme states have been suggested to open individual bank/post office accounts for all women workers, identified and provide job cards of distinct color to widowed, deserted and destitute women, who qualify as a house hold under the Act.

Employment Opportunity in Kerala through NHGs

Kudumbashree was recognized as a national resource organization by the ministry of rural Development. It is considered as one of the largest women movements in Asia. MGNREG Act has been sensitive towards women and categorically mentions that while providing employment, priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under the scheme. The role of community-based organization and Neighbor Hood Groups (NHGs) formed under Kudumbashree in enabling MGNREGS is well recognized. The following table shows the number of NHGs formed in Kerala and total Household (HH) employed under MGNREGs i.e. the district wise number of NHGs and House Hold employed in 2018

Table 1: District Wise Number of NHG's in Kerala, 2018

SL No.	Districts	No: of NHGs Formed	Total Household Employed through NHG
1	Thiruvananthapuram	57516	1,63958
2	Kollam	24137	139130
3	Pathanamthitta	9588	49242
4	Alappuzha	20420	139432
5	Kottayam	14592	55368
6	Idukki	12455	97178
7	Ernakulam	21094	75028
8	Thrissur	22698	77927
9	Palakkad	22593	154724
10	Malappuram	27298	79564
11	Kozhikode	27170	131982
12	Wayanad	9679	57191
13	Kannur	19045	74982
14	Kasargod	10316	59877
	Total	2,98,087	13,55,583

Source: www.nrega.nic.in as on July 2018

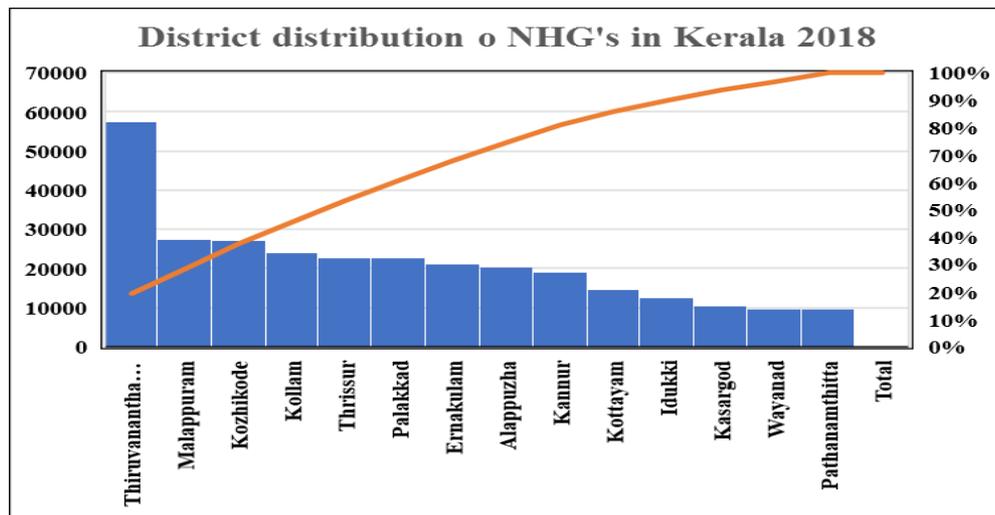


Figure 2: District Wise Number of NHG's in Kerala, 2018

From the above table and chart, we can analyze that in Kerala there are 2, 98,087 NHGs formed and they engaged in MGNREGS work. The highest number of NHG's has been formed in Trivandrum district (57516), and highest number of Households employed is also in Trivandrum District (1, 63,958). Palakkad district is just behind it (154724). The huge employment opportunity of unskilled labor in the rural area, especially rural women makes tremendous change in the rural development of India. MGNREGS is not just 100 days of guaranteed wage employment, but a unique space in the community to engage in a dialogue with each other, share meals, articulate demands and upgrade skills.

Objective 2: To examine the employment offered to rural women through Kudumbashree-MGNREGS scheme.

During the year 2017-18 (till January 2018), total employment of 179.44 crore person days were reported to have been generated in the country. The employment generated for women were reported as 96.77 crore person days, which is 53.93% of total employment generated under this programme (Source: Annual report, Ministry of rural development 2017-

18). The following table shows the person days created for women in Kerala during the period from 2014-15 to 2018-19.

Table 2: Percentage of Women Employed State Wise in Kerala from 2014 to 2018 through Kudumbashree-MNREGS Scheme

Sl no	Year- Wise	Work particulars (in lakhs)		
		Total Person Days Generated	Women Person days out of Total	% of Women Person Days
1	2014-15	588.72	542.56	92.16
2	2015-16	741.74	676.89	91.27
3	2016-17	684.62	623.55	91.08
4	2017-18	619.59	562.33	90.76
5	2018-19	649.55	587.26	90.41

Source: www.nrega.nic.in Kerala state at a glance, accessed as on 12/01/2019

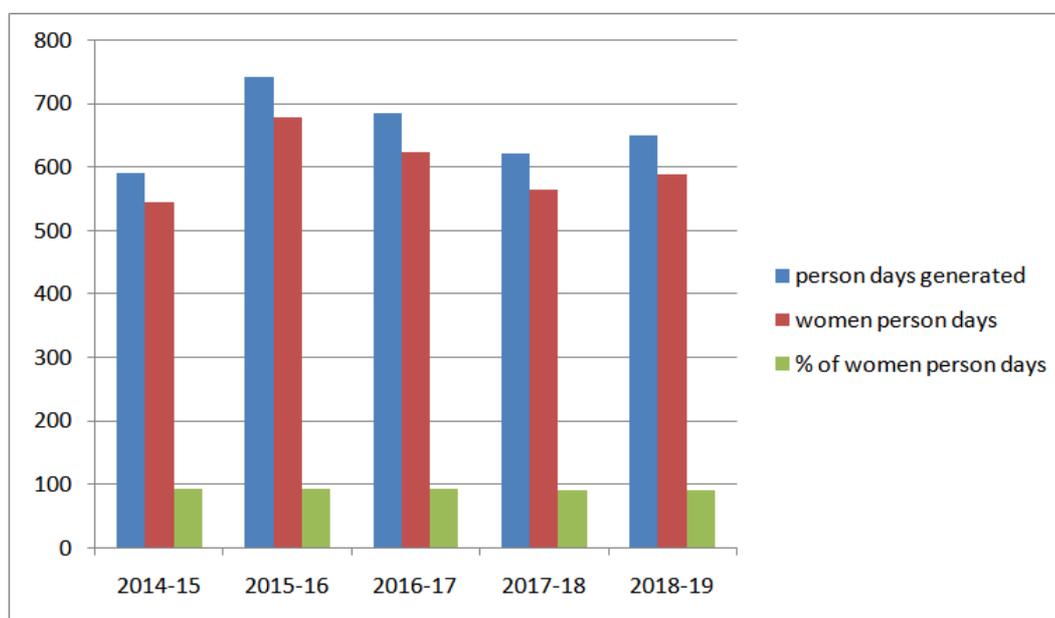


Figure 3: Percentage of Women Employed State Wise in Kerala from 2014 to 2018 through Kudumbashree-MNREGS Scheme

Finding 2 (1): The table shows that the percentage of women participation is high in each year; it is above 90% in almost all years. If we take the interstate performance, Kerala is the only state where the average number of employment days has been progressing over the years and performing well with great scope and expectations.

The following table shows the district wise performance of women in different years.

Table 3: Women Person Days Out of Total in Different Years District Wise From 2014-2018(In percentage)

SL. No:	Districts	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
1	Thiruvananthapuram	93.11	92.32	92.02	90.71	90.66
2	Kollam	90.22	89.14	89.63	89.27	88.37
3	Pathanamthitta	93.63	92.52	91.82	91.57	91.35
4	Alappuzha	95.26	95.29	94.93	94.62	94.55
5	Kottayam	95.07	93.36	93.78	94.91	92.91
6	Idukki	76.23	75.42	73.98	73.79	72.69
7	Ernakulam	93.32	91.09	92.51	92.01	91.41
8	Thrissur	95.34	93.75	94.78	94.17	93.45

9	Palakkad	93.48	92.57	92.12	91.82	91.47
10	Malappuram	92.29	90.44	90.62	90.41	89.86
11	Kozhikode	95.38	93.91	93.63	93.41	93.25
12	Wayanad	89.95	88.24	88.05	88.25	86.97
13	Kannur	95.24	94.60	94.62	92.42	95.06
14	Kasargod	93.63	92.86	92.50	92.42	92.37

Source: www.nrega.nic.in Kerala state at a glance, accessed as on 12/01/2019

Finding2(2): From the table it can be inferred that women working days for the last few years in Kerala is more or less same in all districts. A slight decrease in the women participation is mainly because of the increasing women employment opportunity in the micro entrepreneurship activities and business field.

Table 4: The District Wise Data of Women Person Days out of Total Person Days (in lakhs)

SL No:	Name of Districts	Total Number of Workers	Women Person Days out of Total (in %)	Total no: of Women Workers
1	Thiruvananthapuram	6.17	90.12	5.56
2	Kollam	5.54	88.14	4.88
3	Pathanamthitta	2.32	92.59	2.15
4	Alappuzha	4.67	94.76	4.43
5	Kottayam	2.74	93.21	2.55
6	Idukki	3.23	73.22	2.37
7	Ernakulam	3.37	90.42	3.05
8	Thrissur	3.17	93.25	2.96
9	Palakkad	4.47	91.57	4.09
10	Malappuram	4.87	90.34	4.41
11	Kozhikode	4.71	93.27	4.39
12	Wayanad	2.33	86.99	2.03
13	Kannur	3.1	95.83	2.97
14	Kasaragod	2.14	92.76	1.99
Total		52.83	90.54	47.83

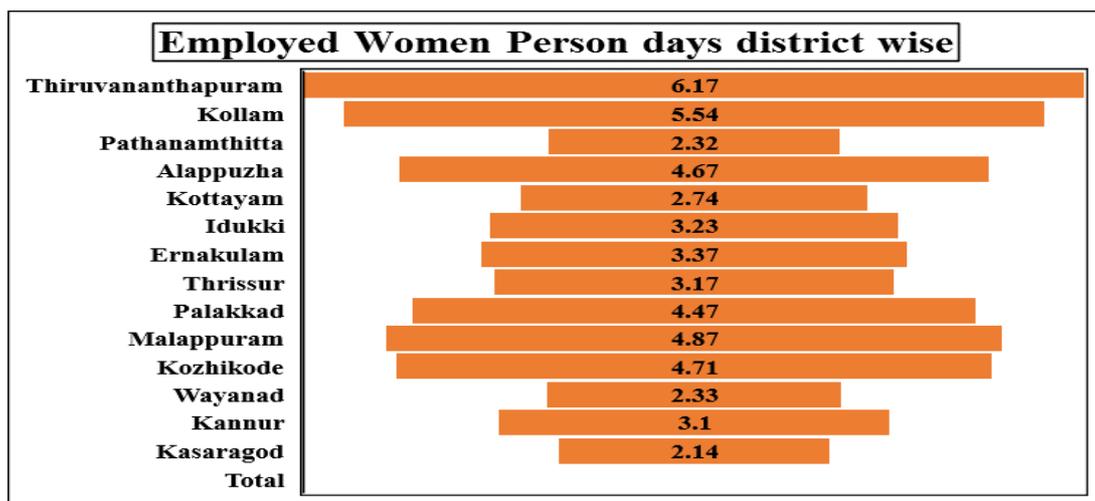


Figure 4: Employed Women Person Days District Wise

Source: www.nrega.nic.in accessed on July 2018

Finding 2 (3): From the table and chart, it can be inferred that the total number of workers in Kerala under MGNREGS is 52.83%. Out of these 90.54%, that is 47.83 lakhs of workers are women. The percentage of women participation has highest in Kannur 95.83% followed by Alappuzha 94.76%, Kozhikode 93.27%, Thrissur 93.25% and Kottayam 93.21%. In Alappuzha district, the total number of women workers is high. The reason is attributed to their traditional coir making works. The new works related to this coir sector, undertaken by the MGNREG programme created continuous job opportunities for women. The works include protection of irrigation canals by paving coir mat, training to make new and attractive coir products, digging ponds for irrigation and fish farming etc. has been included in their work.

The low level of women participation of 73.22% in Idukki is attributed to their employment opportunity in the tea plantations. The wage they get from tea plantation is higher than the wage of MGNREGS. Moreover, tea plantation is their hereditary job, where women are main workers. They are reluctant to give up their jobs. In Wayanad district also the same situation prevails. The tribal women are not ready to work in groups, it is mainly because of their geographical factors and non-awareness about the job profile of Kudumbashree-MNREGS scheme.

Most of the women under MGNREGS in Kerala are new entrants to the labor market. In Kerala, the labor market is facing a severe shortage of persons who are willing to be employed in occupations that involve physical labor. This gap is currently being filled by a large number of migrant workers from other states. The 2011 Census figure shows that the work participation rate among women in Kerala is 18.23%. In this context, 94% of MGNREGs in Kerala are primarily home makers with no previous participation in the labor market.

Objective 3: To analyze the economic empowerment of rural women through MGNREG programme.

Kudumbashree MGNREGS scheme provides women with a sustained opportunity for work, and has created a steady source of income for them; currently the average wage rate of MGNREGS is Rs 274 per day. The strict adherence to the norms of equal wages for men and women, probably for the first time in the history of implementation of wage employment programmes in Kerala, has resulted improving the attractability of the scheme among women. It is an interesting fact that the female work participation rate in general works are below 18% in the state of Kerala. However, in the MGNREG work site their participation is more than 90%.

Table 5: The Average Wage Rate Per day Per Person in the Year and Total Women Wage Expenditure from 2014-15 to 2018-19 in Kerala

SL No	Year	Average Wage Rate	Total Women Wage Expenditure (in lakhs)
1	2014-15	214.28	1,38,025.43
2	2015-16	231.82	1,27,973.15
3	2016-17	243.09	1,94,980.18
4	2017-18	260.90	1,48,009.22
5	2018-19	274.22	1,59,802.33

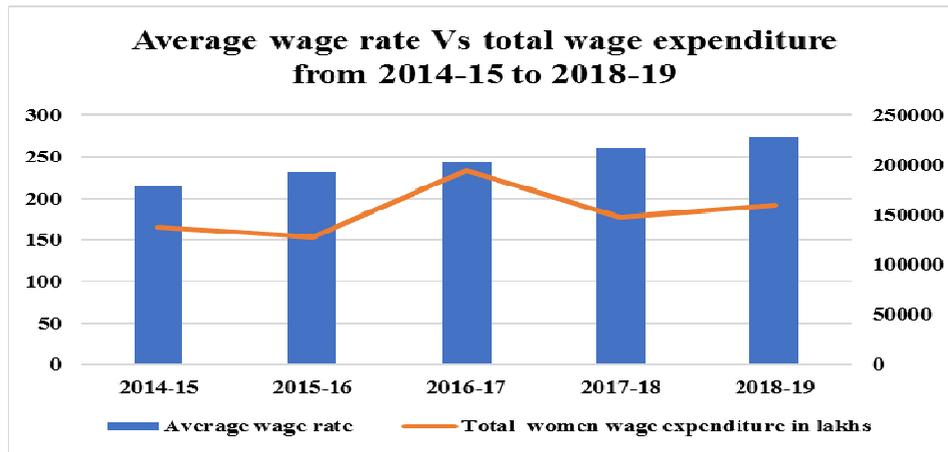


Figure 5: The Average Wage Rate Per day Per person in the Year and Total Women Wage Expenditure from 2014-15 to 2018-19 in Kerala

Source: www.nrega.nic.in Kerala at a glance as on 12/01/2019

Findings 2 (4): The average wage rate shows an increasing tendency because of the rising administration cost and increasing living cost of the economy. The wage expenditure is highest in 2016-17. It is because; in that year, NHGs explored more employment opportunity at Panchayath level. The percentage of fund utilized in 2016-17 was 137.7% When compared to all other years, it was only below 100%. According to the Economic survey 2017-18, MGNREG scheme has received the highest budget share compared to the previous years. The survey analyzed that till Jan 2018, 4.6 crores of Households got employment, in which 54% were women. The amount of wage distributed in Kerala among the MGNREG women workers has shown an increasing earning capacity of the rural women. Every woman needs money for to create an economic support for their family, this scheme provided this financial security. The unskilled women laborers, old age women, uneducated women etc. are the main beneficiaries of the scheme. Moreover, the women in rural area become independent and secured because they earn money. It helped them to pay debt, retrieve the pledged gold, to meet the day to day household expenditure and facilitate them to save money. It is really a supplementary source of income, which help them to create durable assets, improving water facilities, increasing agriculture productivity etc.

CONCLUSIONS

When MGNREGS was introduced in Kerala, many shared a feeling of uncertainty regarding how successful the scheme would turn out to be. It is because of the fact that literacy rates and prevailing market wage rates in Kerala are high, a daily wage scheme for unskilled labor work was not expected to bring about any significant change or evoke enthusiastic participation from the people. However, these assumptions proved false as Kudumbashree MGNREGS emerged to become a unique opportunity for many women in Kerala to experience a world beyond their homes. Kudumbashree played a key role in the mobilization, planning and implementation of MGNREGS in Kerala. The members of NHG organized labor groups in their localities. The women always preferred to work as collective rather than as individuals. This scheme provided the opportunity to work together. Many women, who were home makers earlier, came out of their homes to perform manual labor and earned income for the first time in their life. They engaged various activities and also gained new skills.

We can say that, if we want to empower a woman, first of all you give her an employment opportunity, all other things she can attain through it. The Implementation of MGNREGP has contributed a high level of women empowerment through giving employment opportunity. A special feature of MGNREG work in Kerala is that the work sites are managed by the woman and that most of the women come for works have already being mobilized into NHGs. So, they get a prior experience of working together. For the first time, equal wages are really paid and this has boosted the earnings of women. As the wages are paid through bank account, the habit of thrift and savings which was already practiced in Kudumbashree was further strengthened. When the bank deposit increased, the financial management capability of the women also increased.

There are various explanations for the varying participation of women workers under the scheme. The important factor regarding the women participation in the scheme is that, they will not require special skill and knowledge. The employment opportunity being available at the door step, the provision of equal wages etc. are the reasons for attracting the women participation.

Kudumbashree became the guardian and guidance to many of the poor rural women in Kerala. So that, the women of the state became active participants in the planning and implementation process of various anti-poverty programmes like MGNREGP and income generating cum developmental activities, the morale and confidence of women became very high. Women, who were regarded as voiceless and powerless in the house, and the society identified as powerful decision makers, strong builders of society, strong social workers, strong politicians and took opportunity for their growth and shaping their own destiny. At the level of personal space, both mental and physical, there has been a tremendous expansion for women, through rapid increase of knowledge, awareness and skills in new area as well as expansion of institutional space, which has opened up a new hitherto an unknown world to women.

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