

# New media in Organisational Communication of Kudumbashree

Communication & Journalism Research  
4 (1&2) p 151 - 157  
©The Author(s) 2015  
Reprints and Permissions:  
masscomhod@uoc.ac.in  
ISSN 2348 – 5663

**Luqman Thazhathe Peedikakkal**

Assistant Professor, Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

## Abstract

Implementing fruitful collaborative neighbourhood ventures through the well acclaimed Kudumbashree project, the Government of Kerala has succeeded to a greater extent in eradicating poverty in rural and urban settings in the State. With its novel participatory projects aiming at empowering women, the Kudumbashree has bagged more than ten national awards for best projects and the title of Asia's largest poverty alleviation programme. This Government sponsored women centred poverty alleviation programme now makes its presence in almost all walks of life ranging from media to local self-governance. The study tries to find out the role of new media technologies in organisational communication of Kudumbashree. The data elicited through a survey among the members of Kudumbashree in Malappuram district of northern Kerala, reveals that majority of the members are e-illiterates and face various communication barriers. And the findings indicate the significance of clubbing the Akshaya Project (a state sponsored programme to popularize IT-enabled services) with the Kudumbashree to harness the benefits of new technology to eradicate poverty.

## Keywords

New media, organisational communication, kudumbashree.

## Introduction

Kudumbashree, which means the prosperity of the family, is a women-centred development project initiated by the government of Kerala to eradicate poverty. The project was inaugurated on 18th may 1998 by the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at Malappuram. Kudumbashree started functioning on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1999. Now, after sixteen years of continuous running, Kudumbashree became one of the world's successful development projects. Unlike many other developmental projects, Kudumbashree focuses on economic empowerment of the

---

**Correspondence:** Email:luqmanmcj@gmail.com

Kerala women. For several reasons, women are a vulnerable section of our society. So, empowering women leads to the empowerment of their family and it will lead to the empowerment of the entire state.

To achieve its goal, Kudumbashree plans various programs mainly through participatory strategies. The development programmes will be more effective if it happens in a participatory way. Kudumbashree tries to change the role of women from passive recipients to active leaders. Women empowerment is a best strategy for poverty eradication.

### **Background of Kudumbashree**

Kudumbashree is formally registered as the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM), a society registered under the Travancore-Kochi Literacy, scientific and charitable societies act 1955. It has a governing body chaired by the state minister of Local Self Governance (LSG). It was during the 1980s that the concept of Self Help Group (SHG) introduced in Kerala. The Alappuzha model in 1993 and Malappuram model in 1994 lead to the formation of Kudumbashree.

As a participatory program, Kudumbashree has a unique organisational structure to fulfil its objectives. Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) are the basic level unit of the Kudumbashree. NHG is the association of 20 to 40 women members, belonging to high risk families. The NHG members used to meet once in a week in one of the member's house. The members, who meet together, discuss their problems and make joint effort to find solutions to their grievances with the support of the functional volunteers.

Area Development Societies are the second tier in Kudumbashree which is formed at ward level by federating all the NHGs in the ward. The ADS has a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson and seven other members. The ADS meet monthly. It evaluates the performance of NHGs and set guidelines for them.

The Community Development Society (CDS) is formed at panchayat or municipal level. It is the apex body and is the coordinating agency for programme implementation. ADS Chairpersons, Vice chairpersons and Members of all the ADSs form the General body of the Community Development Society. The Community Development Society has a President, Vice President and seven other members elected from the General body of the CDS. The CDS meet once in every three months. It evaluates all activities done in panchayat/municipality level under Kudumbashree.

Above the state mission, there is a governing body of the mission under the chairmanship of Minister for Local Administration to take all decisions on the administration and the management of the State Poverty Eradication Mission to achieve the objectives. The policy level decisions of the mission are taken in the governing body, which also reviews the performance of the mission. The Governing

body meets once in every three months. Kerala state poverty Eradication Mission Advisory Council is the state level advisory council under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister for policy guidance, overall monitoring of the Poverty Eradication Mission Programmes to achieve the desired objectives.

### **Major communication tools used in Kudumbashree**

The communication tools used in Kudumbashree can be broadly classified into

- 1) Meetings and training programmes.
- 2) Campaigns.
- 3) Printed tools.
- 4) New media tools.

### **Meetings and training programmes**

This tool is more effective in the functioning of Kudumbashree. That is, the group communication plays a significant role in Kudumbashree.

#### **NHG meetings (Ayalkkootams)**

NHG meetings conduct on every week at one of the members' house.

#### **ADS meetings**

ADS meetings conduct on every month. It evaluates the functioning of NHGs.

#### **CDS meetings**

The CDS meets on every three months. It evaluates the working of ADS and NHG.

### **Training programmes**

Various training programmes are conducted by CDS, District mission and the State mission. It is stated that the empowerment of women is the prime motto of Kudumbashree. Therefore, the decision making power must rest solely in the hands of the poor women. In order to exercise this power, they need proper orientation and training. To achieve this objective a number of specially designed training programmes are being conducted with focus on community structures, leadership, roles and responsibilities, thrift and credit operation, community financial management and accounting. These training programmes are organized with the support of UNICEF, NABARD and other institutions.

### **Awareness classes and seminars**

Awareness classes and seminars are conducted to create awareness among the members of Kudumbashree on various issues.

### **Campaigns**

Kudumbashree conduct campaigns related to health care, sanitation, etc. They often conduct exhibitions in public places in order to sell the Kudumbashree products. In every major towns of Malappuram district, Kudumbashree units conduct exhibitions to sell their products occasionally. The district mission gives opportunity for the units to exhibit their products in front of the Malappuram civil station around three-four days in every month. Made stalls in festival fairs and conducted several trade fairs.

### **Printed and other communication tools**

#### **Kudumbashree publications**

The mission brings a fortnightly named 'Kudumbashree Vartha Pathrika'. It includes news and articles related to Kudumbashree. The distribution of the publication is through NHGs. The varthapathrika is intended mainly to the members of Kudumbashree. 'Kudumbashree trimonthly' is another publication which is mainly intended to the stake holders of Kudumbashree. The mission publishes several hand books to give training to the members of Kudumbashree.

#### **Other printed materials**

The mission brought out notices, brochures, pamphlets, etc.

#### **New media tools**

The mission uses various new media tools like social media, website, etc. Screening of slide shows in theatres, multimedia presentations used by the resource persons for training are some other new media tools.

### **Review of literature**

Many studies have been conducted on the basis of the socio, economic aspects of Kudumbashree.

Jacob John (2009) in his study, sponsored by the Planning Commission of India and titled as 'A Study on Kudumbashree Project: A Poverty Eradication Programme in Kerala' revealed that Kudumbashree created a strong women network throughout the state. He states that Kudumbashree members have acquired skills, knowledge, and confidence and leadership qualities substantially. The status of women in families has been also improved. The study also reveals that the poor women who had very limited role in decision making and inadequate freedom of

expression have started a new way of life by acquiring skills and enjoying freedom of expression and decision making.

K. B. Nidheesh's (2009) 'Study on the changing process of Kerala Women through Kudumbashree in Kerala' found that woman empowerment was the best strategy for poverty eradication. He argued that the women of the state became active participants in the planning and implementation process of various anti-poverty programmes. The study also reveals that the Kudumbashree brought a tremendous expansion for women, through both an enormous and rapid increase of knowledge, awareness and skills in new areas, as well as the expansion of institutional space, which has opened up a new and hitherto unknown world to women.

Damayanthi's (1999) study, 'Encourage Self Help Groups', throws light into the importance of the SHGs as traditional groups which provides as organizational frame work and facilitate self reliance in access to credit. He also emphasis the role played by NGOs as facilitators of SHGs. He gives basic difference between NGOs and SHGs. He also emphasis the role of NGOs in securing external support in providing much seated training inputs.

Oommen (1999) conducted a study on the 'Self Help Groups in Kerala'. The study covers all the districts in the state, in which the urban community development societies are functioning. The study reviews the progress of the programme under the heads: impact on poverty, income generation programmes and thrift and credit societies and women empowerment.

## **Objectives**

1. To find out the reach of new media technologies among Kudumbashree members.
2. To study the use of new media as a communication strategy among Kudumbashree members.
3. To find out the major barriers of Kudumbashree members in using new media.

## **Methodology**

The aim of the study is to find out the influence of new media among Kudumbashree members in Malappuram district. The study area was very vast and wide. To achieve the objectives, a survey was conducted among the members of Kudumbashree in Malappuram district. To understand the communication strategies, the researcher held interaction with the Kudumbashree authorities in Malappuram.

### Sampling procedure

Stratified random sampling was used for this study. The researcher selected three Taluks namely Tirur, Ponnani and Thirurangadi from the total seven taluks in Malappuram district. The researcher selected six panchayats from these three taluks: Valavannur and Nirmaruthur panchayats from Tirur taluk, Thavanur and Vattamkulam panchayats from Ponnani taluk and Thirurangadi and Edarikkode panchayats from Thirurangadi taluk. Forty questionnaires were distributed in each taluk and a total of 120 questionnaires were distributed in the three taluks.

### Results

The Researcher Analyzed the data collected through the survey from 120 respondents and exposes the findings. Analysis was done by simple percentage method.

**Table 1: Demographic details of the respondents**

Variables	Parameter	Frequency (%)
Age	25 and below	6 (5.0)
	26-35	32 (26.67)
	36-45	50 (41.67)
	46-55	27 (22.50)
	56 and above	5 (4.17)
	Total	120 (100.00)
Education	LP	20 (16.67)
	UP	16 (13.33)
	High School (8,9)	13 (10.83)
	SSLC	63 (52.50)
	PDC/PLUS TWO	7 (5.83)
	DEGREE	1 (0.83)
	Total	120 (100.00)
Financial Status	BPL	87 (72.5)
	APL	33 (27.5)
	Total	120 (100.00)

Women in the age group of 36-45 constitute half of the Kudumbashree members. 26.67 percent of the respondents belong to the age group of 26-35. Women in the age group of below 25 and above 56 are very less in Kudumbashree. More than half of the respondents (52.5) have qualified SSLC. Only one respondent has degree qualification. Similarly, 72.5 percent of the respondents belong to BPL families.

**Table 2: Communication among Kudumbashree members**

Variables	Methods	Frequency (%)
About meetings	From previous meeting	61 (50.83)
	Face to face communication	39 (32.5)
	Through phone	20 (16.67)
	Through Whats app	0
	Through SNS	0
	Total	120 (100)
Other than meetings	Face to face communication	83 (69.16)
	Through phone	21(17.5)
	Through Whats app	2 (1.66)
	Through SNS	0
	Through a mediator	14 (11.67)
	Total	120 (100)

No member of Kudumbashree relies on Whats app and social networking sites to know about their meetings. More than half (50.83%) of the respondents get information about meetings related to Kudumbashree from previous meetings. 32.5% gets the information through face to face communication with co-workers in Kudumbashree. The remaining 16.67% respondents get information through phones.

Majority (69.16%) of the respondents avail interpersonal communication method to communicate among Kudumbashree members other than meetings. 1.66 percent of the respondents use Whats app and no one use social networking sites.

**Table 3: Mobile phone and computer accessibility of the respondents**

Variables	Frequency (%)
Mobile phones	94 (78.33)
Smart phones	11 (9.16)
Computer/laptop/tab	44 (36.67)

Large majority (78.33%) of the respondents have mobile phones of their own and only 9.16 respondents have a smart phone. 36.67 percent of the respondents have access to computer/laptop or tab.

**Table 4: Usage of social media of the respondents**

Social media	Frequency (%)
WhatsApp	7 (5.83)

SNS	13 (10.83)
-----	------------

5.83 percent of the respondents use WhatsApp and the percentage of the Kudumbashree members who have a social media account is 10.83, all of them have account in facebook. No one uses any other social networking sites.

**Table 5: Communication of the respondents about Kudumbashree through Whats app and SNS**

Social media	Frequency (%)
WhatsApp	7 (5.83)
SNS	10 (8.33)

Only 5.83 percent of the respondents communicated through WhatsApp about Kudumbashree to someone else and the percentage of the respondents who participated in any type of social media discussions (like, share, comment, etc in facebook) is 8.33.

**Table 6: Usage of internet to know about Kudumbashree**

Websites	Frequency (%)
Official website of Kudumbashree	14 (11.67)
Other websites	6 (5)

Only 11.67 percent of the respondents used official website of Kudumbashree at least once to know more about Kudumbashree. Only five percent of the respondents used other websites to know about Kudumbashree.

**Table 7: Barriers of Digital communication**

Barrier	Frequency (%)
Lack of knowledge on ICTs	94 (78.33)
Lack of communication facilities	21 (17.5)
Financial difficulties	5 (4.17)
Total	120 (100.00)

More than two third of the respondents (78.33 percent) opined that the major barrier for their digital communication is the lack of knowledge in Information and Communication Technologies. 21 percent opined that they lack enough communication facilities.

## Discussion and conclusion

Basically, Kudumbashree is a poverty alleviation program implemented by the Govt of Kerala through women empowerment. Though the aim of the programme is to eradicate poverty from Kerala, many women belong to Above Poverty Line (APL) also part of Kudumbashree. It would be better to organize the women from APL and BPL families separately in poverty alleviation programmes like Kudumbashree.



The study also found that majority of the Kudumbashree members are e-illiterate (unaware about the new communication media tools). The numbers of e-literate Kudumbashree members are very less. The role of new media is very less in communication of Kudumbashree members. Very few members visited the official website of Kudumbashree because of their e-illiteracy. The lack of knowledge in Information and Communication Technologies is playing as major a barrier among the members.

It would be better, if the government of Kerala merge the Akshaya programme (a programme intended to spread the computer education) with Kudumbashree to eradicate the e-illiteracy. Many Kudumbashree offices are computerized, but most of the members are e-illiterate. The actual empowerment in this mediated world is the empowerment through new media education. Let Kudumbashree project be a starting of such an attempt.

### References

- Ahuja, B. N., & Chhabra, S. S. (1992). *Development Communication*. New Delhi: Surjeet Publications.
- Bordenave, J. (1994). *Participative Communication as a part of building the Participative Society*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Chamberlin, J. (n.d.). *A working definition of empowerment*. Lawrence, Massachusetts: The National Empowerment Centre.
- John, J. (2009). *A Study on Kudumbashree Project: A Poverty Eradication Programme in Kerala*. Planning Commission of India.
- Kudumbashree. *Annual Administration Report: 2008-09*.
- Kumar, K. J. (1987). *Mass Communication in India*. Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2002). *Theories of Human Communication*. USA: Thomson Learning.
- Mefalopulos, P. (2003). *The Case of the FAO Project: Communication for Development in Southern Africa*. The World Bank.
- Melkote, S. R. (1991). *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Nair, K. S., & White, A. S. (1994). *Participatory Message Development: A Conceptual Framework*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Nidheesh, K. B. (August, 2009). Study on the changing process of Kerala women through Kudumbashree in Kerala. *International NGO Journal*.
- Oommen, M. A. (1999). *Report on SHGs in Kerala*. Thiruvananthapuram.

White, A. S. (1994). *Participatory Communication: Working for change and development*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

[www.kudumbashree.org](http://www.kudumbashree.org)