

**KUDUMBASHREE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
POVERTY ERADICATION, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND LOCAL SELF-
GOVERNMENT**

August 20, 2021

An international conference organised by Kudumbashree, the State Poverty Eradication Mission of Kerala focusing on how the model and similar development initiatives led by women had transformed the development debate by transforming these women from “targets” to “subjects” of the growth paradigm.

Women are increasingly seen as an important part of the international development agenda. Empowering women and promoting gender equality are enshrined as global development objectives within the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is widely agreed that poverty and disempowerment go hand-in-hand.

Keeping this in focus, Kudumbashree, the State Poverty Eradication Mission, Government of Kerala organised its first International Conference on "**Poverty Eradication, Women's Empowerment and Local Self-governments**" on **August 20-21, 2015** in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

The conference brought together approximately 250 national and international practitioners including government officials, international agencies, academicians and members of Kudumbashree to discuss the broad themes of: Women Collectivization and Poverty Eradication, Poverty Eradication and Natural resource management and Poverty Alleviation- Socio economic interventions.

The conference began with a welcome note by Dr Valsalakumari (Executive Director, Kudumbashree) who stated that the conference was a red letter day in the history of Kudumbashree and was a time to reflect on the successes made by the mission and more importantly initiate a discussion on the way forward. Dr Valsalakumari extended a warm welcome to Ms Zenebu Tadesse Woldetsadik (Minister of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Ethiopia) and acknowledged the role of Knowledge Partnership Programme (KPP) of IPE Global supported by Government of UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to facilitate the adaptation of Kudumbashree in Ethiopia.

The Chairperson, Dr MK Muneer (Minister for Panchayats and Social Justice, Government of Kerala) in his opening remarks spoke about the genesis of Kudumbashree, its development as a platform where women fought for the rights and dignity of their brethren and how the model has grown into an example of how women can collectively participate to remove the barrier to economic and political growth.



The inaugural address was delivered by Her Excellency, Ms Zenebu Tadesse Woldetsadik (Minister of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Ethiopia). Her Excellency spoke of the existing cultural and economic ties between India and Ethiopia and how she hoped that the two nations would further strengthen these ties by collaborating on women's issues. She also spoke about the visit of the Indian delegation to Ethiopia in April 2014, the development in terms of signing an MOU between the government of Kerala and Ethiopia for adapting Kudumbashree in Ethiopia. The minister thanked Kudumbashree for not just the technical support for also for the partnership for women's empowerment.

Distinguished speakers such as Professor Mary Hawkesworth (Distinguished Professor, Rutgers University, USA) were also a part of the conference. Prof. Hawkesworth

critiqued the move towards market fundamentalism and the conditionality's imposed by the World Bank and IMF regime of macro finance. Her talk focused on how the Kudumbashree model which was embedded in women led SHGs and microcredit and economic empowerment combined with socio-political awareness and increased participation of women, was an example of an economic model which was a preferred alternative to the market model. She asserted that microfinance which focused on the basic needs of people had proved that women being empowered financially at the local levels was far superior at combating poverty than loans taken by nations which came in the form of 'tied' aid. She applauded the efforts of the Kerala government to persist with this grassroots based model despite international pressure to conform to the Bretton's Wood system.

The technical sessions of the conference focused on themes such as collectivisation, Indian initiatives of women's empowerment and natural resource management. Speaking of the Kudumbashree model, Professor KP Kannan (Chairman, Laurie Baker Centre for Habitat Studies) highlighted how the 'neighbourhood groups' concept led to joint liability, collective care and a safety net for the women who derived strength from their groups and also found a way to overcome socio-political barriers. Having a sense of identity, a changed social perception towards their work, dignity of labour and the ability to demand rights were put forth as some of the benefits of collectivisation as observed in different initiatives. Emphasis was also put on how women union members also achieved bargaining power based on collectivisation, both in their homes and in the society.

The plenary session of the second day was graced by Sri SM Vijayanad (Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India). Speaking on NRLM and Kudumbashree he brought out the salient features of Kudumbashree that could serve as best practices for other models. He listed the unique features of the model:

- Organic relationship between the SHGs and the local government/ panchayats
- Prudence of the government to not pit SHGs against PRIs
- Move to implement NREGS in Kerala through the SHG model and focusing on gender sensitive work, engendering NREGS through association with Kudumbashree
- Success of NREGS in the state and 92% NREGS workers in Kerala being women under Kudumbashree
- Kudumbashree members mapping gender crimes in districts and combatting VAW
- Kudumbashree functioning as a NRO for other states and imparting training throughout the country

**KUDUMBASHREE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
POVERTY ERADICATION, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND LOCAL SELF-
GOVERNMENT**

August 20, 2021



Special Address being delivered by UNDP Country Director, Jaco Cilliers

The conference also included a special address by Mr Jaco Cilliers (Country Director, UNDP) who spoke about development sustainability and gender inequality in the new era of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mr Cilliers highlighted that women have a key role to play in shaping the future and that he had faith that development led by women would have TLC (Transparency, Longevity and Credibility) at its core.

Other key speakers included Prof. Daniel Schugurensky (Department of Public Affairs, Arizona State University, USA), Prof Robert Chambers (Institute of Development Studies, UK), Mr. P Sainath (Journalist and Founder Editor, PARI) and Dr Seema Bhaskar (COO, NRLM, Attapadi Special project)

The two day conference spanned the various themes of women empowerment, and keeping Kudumbashree as the central theme underscored how grassroots models led by women could bring socio-economic and political change in nations. The conference was of particular importance given that the move towards SDGs shifts the responsibility of inclusive growth on nations that invest in the participation of marginalised communities, particularly women. As described by Dr Muneer his hopes from the Kudumbashree model was encapsulated in UN Secretary General Ban Ki- moon's words "The world will never realize 100 per cent of its goals if 50 per cent of its people cannot realize their full potential. When we unleash the power of women, we can secure the future for all."



Supported by

