
Gender equity and sustainable women empowerment: A case of Kudumbashree

Resmi R.S

Assistant Professor,
Department of Economics,
NSS College, Nilamel, Kollam,
University of Kerala, Kerala, India,
Email Id: resmirs1982@gmail.com

Dr. Mydhili Kurup I,

Assistant Professor,
Department of Economics,
NSS College, Nilamel, Kollam, University of Kerala,
Kerala, India
Email: mydh2004@gmail.com

Abstract

Gender equity is addressed by Kudumbashree, a groundbreaking women-centric program in Kerala, India, using a variety of strategies. Through the provision of skill-development programs and the promotion of microenterprises, this goal empowers women. The program offers instruction in a variety of sectors, including traditional crafts, hospitality, and IT, and boasts a three-tiered women's network. These initiatives increase women's economic independence and social mobility by providing them with skills for self-employment or salaried labour. The neighbourhood groups within the network offer a helpful learning environment that is essential for helping women overcome social obstacles when they enter the workforce. Additionally, Kudumbashree helps microbusinesses by providing training and financial support to female entrepreneurs. There are successful endeavours, yet there are still difficulties. Some businesses are limited to local markets due to inadequate branding and marketing. Furthermore, certain tactics are needed to connect with women from marginalized communities. Potential solutions include forming marketing and sales teams, collaborating with industry experts, and supporting creative company concepts. Kudumbashree women could be further empowered by a state-level business ecosystem. Kudumbashree can continue to empower women and promote socioeconomic change in Kerala by tackling these issues and leveraging its advantages.

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

Keywords: Empowerment; Enterprises; Gender equity; Skill Development; Sustainability; Micro enterprises; Neighbourhood groups

Introduction

The Government of Kerala created and carried out the innovative Kudumbashree Mission as a component of the state's poverty eradication mission (SPEM). With its tailored women-centric approach, the Kudumbashree Mission has been a huge success in the Indian state of Kerala. It has distinguished itself as a pioneering model because of its diversity in introducing equality values and multifarious functional features. In order to achieve gender equality, the program has concentrated on women's empowerment, increased female involvement in the workforce, and poverty alleviation.

The term Kudumbashree, which comes from the state's Malayalam language, means "the prosperity of the family." Currently, Kudumbashree stands for the ambitious project and the network of four to five million workers who are directly or indirectly participating in it (Kudumbashree Mission, n.d.). It was established in 1997 following extensive talks and discussions between the Kerala government and the task group, which was established following the decision to decentralize, share, and transfer the co-administration powers with regional institutional systems like Panchayati Raj. The People's Plan movement, which sought to implement democratic decentralization on three fronts—administrative, fiscal, and political—was going around at the same time (Kudumbashree Mission, n.d.).

The mission's two main goals are to raise women's living standards, especially in rural areas, and assist them in achieving economic security to end poverty by assisting them in establishing microcredit systems and businesses, which will strengthen their means of subsistence and raise their socioeconomic status (Kudumbashree Mission, n.d.). The Mission's network for women is organized at three levels: neighborhood groups (NHGs), area development societies, and community development societies at the local government level. The membership is open to adult women, and the membership limit is one per family. Although it began in a few districts, the initiative was expanded throughout the state in 2015 in a number of distinct phases. The mission was acknowledged as a component of State Rural Livelihoods missions (SRLM) by the Central Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in 2011. In an area where women-led businesses were still relatively new, Kudumbashree shines as a trailblazing project. Its effectiveness is demonstrated by its ongoing success and widespread recognition as a model for women's empowerment. We seek to critically evaluate Kudumbashree's operation and pinpoint areas for development in order to further increase its impact. We can make evidence-based suggestions to improve the program's performance going forward by comprehending its advantages and disadvantages.

Mayoux, L. (1999) investigated the particular processes of women's empowerment, including community organizing, social assistance, and microfinance. These studies examine the theories and strategies of empowerment that support initiatives such as Kudumbashree, such as the role of microfinance in fostering economic independence and the ways in which

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

social support can enhance resilience and mental health. In his research of Kerala's distinct socioeconomic and cultural setting, Heller, P. (2000) examined the state's distinctive features, including its higher literacy rates, matrilineal customs, and political atmosphere, and how these elements interact with initiatives like Kudumbashree. In his analysis of Kudumbashree's shortcomings and criticisms, Shajimon, P. (2012) offered a fair-minded viewpoint by highlighting potential areas for improvement. The role of governmental and nonprofit organizations in women's empowerment in India was examined by Desai, V., and Sivaramakrishnan, K.C. (2012): These assessments examine the broader context of women's empowerment in India, including the initiatives of other organizations and the general setting in which Kudumbashree functions. Natali, L., and N. Kabeer (2013). Studies on the connection between economic progress and women's empowerment: These studies emphasize the broader ramifications of initiatives like Kudumbashree by examining how empowering women can contribute to general economic growth and societal development. Thampi, B. V., and J. Devika (2012). Analyses of Kudumbashree's effect on particular social concerns, including gender inequality or domestic violence: These studies explore how Kudumbashree can support more general social change, such as lowering domestic violence and advancing gender equality.

METHODOLOGY

For the current analysis, descriptive research was conducted. The existing literature and secondary data are the main sources of information used in this report. The secondary data was gathered from Ayalkootams (neighborhood groups or NHGs), Ward Samithy (Area Development Society/ADS), and Panchayat Samithy (Community Development Society/CDS), as well as books, journals, and publications of the Kerala government. Secondary data was gathered with an emphasis on the program's current operations as well as potential future developments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although Kudumbashree has potential, its operations and functioning, especially in micro-enterprises, might be greatly strengthened to support and bring about female development and empowerment. Marketing is one area that needs work. Increasing subsidies for Kudumbashree product production and using brand marketing techniques could improve their competitiveness and market exposure. Additionally, Kudumbashree's skill-development programs might be expanded to give members the tools they need to succeed. This study emphasizes the potential for socioeconomic change through women's entrepreneurship, labour force participation, social inclusion, economic and gender development, and the scalability of income-generating businesses. Let's take a closer look at two important areas that present chances for development.

Kudumbashree's skill-development initiatives support women's economic independence and empowerment. This is crucial to women's attainment of social and economic freedom. Through its many programs, such as Employment through Skill Training and Placement (EST&P), Gender Self Learning Program, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), and Acquiring Resilience and Identity through Sustainable Employment (ARISE Skill Campaign), Kudumbashree empowers women and helps them find employment. Campaigns, workshops, and classes are used to carry out the skill development programs. Following the training sessions, placement is provided through post-placement assistance, migration support centres for individuals placed outside the state, and employment melas (a local fair where commodities are delivered and sold).

These skill-building initiatives help women become more capable, financially independent, and socially mobile. Kudumbashree's focus on gender equality helps families, communities, and individual women. The program's strength is the variety of possibilities for skill development. Kudumbashree offers traditional crafts, hospitality, information technology, and personal development programs to meet a variety of needs and interests. This flexibility guarantees that women can choose programs that suit their objectives, whether they wish to launch their own company, obtain vocational training for salaried occupations, or boost their confidence and life skills. Women's neighbourhood groups (NHGs) are used to deliver the curriculum, fostering a welcoming environment for networking and learning. This is particularly helpful for women who encounter social obstacles in the workplace. In these gatherings, women can conquer their worries, talk about their experiences, and get support from their peers. The NHG acts as a safety net, reducing anxiety and increasing the likelihood of success during the learning process.

However, Kudumbashree has encountered a number of difficulties in carrying out skill-development programs. Effective skill development attempts have been hampered by internal power struggles between ADS and CDS employees as well as disputes among local group members. Due to the program's restricted member autonomy, women are more susceptible to local gender stereotypes and the influence of those in positions of authority. This has limited their capacity to voice their preferences and ideas and to fully engage in skill development programs. Further impeding efforts to improve skills is the politics of Kudumbashree's operations and the overwork of its members. These issues have made it more difficult for the program to give its participants efficient and easily accessible skill training.

Although the variety of programs offered is impressive, long-term success depends on making sure these skills are still applicable to the evolving labor market. By conducting regular study on employment market developments in Kerala and other Indian states, Kudumbashree can broaden its scope. By tailoring curriculum offerings to market demands and trends, the program can significantly increase graduate employability. Giving women entrepreneurial skills is an important first step, but for their firms to succeed, further assistance is needed. Despite its achievements, Kudumbashree still has challenges in reaching out to women from marginalized groups, such as tribal tribes or lower castes (a division of society based on disparities in wealth, hereditary position or privilege, profession, occupation, or ethnicity). These groups often face additional social and economic obstacles that could prevent them from fully engaging in the program.

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

Kudumbashree can develop focused outreach tactics to encourage involvement from a variety of groups, taking into account the unique requirements and difficulties these groups encounter. This entails working with local authorities, providing extra services like childcare or transportation support, and delivering training materials that are sensitive to cultural differences. Collaborations with professionals in the field can also assist in tailoring programs to particular skill sets needed in the workplace. Stakeholders may create a more comprehensive support network for women wishing to enter or return to the employment by working together.

In Kudumbashree, microenterprises empower women by helping them become financially independent. The Kerala government funds entrepreneurial initiatives like Yuvasree and the Rural Micro Enterprises Scheme through Kudumbashree. Production, services, trading, sales, and marketing are just a few of the industries in which Kudumbashree businesses operate. Women can apply alone or in groups to launch microbusinesses by submitting their business proposals to Kudumbashree for funding. To reduce business risks, these women first obtain subsidies. Even though Kerala has a strong network of Kudumbashree business owners, once an enterprise gains traction, it frequently encounters difficulties.

Individual businesses like clothing, homemade toiletries, and handicrafts struggle over time, whereas catering services and restaurants typically prosper. The absence of a long-term client base is the main cause. Due to insufficient branding and marketing efforts, these items frequently only compete in their local communities. Even though Kudumbashree offers training to female entrepreneurs in the beginning, it might not adequately prepare them to comprehend market dynamics and make appropriate company plans. Kudumbashree microenterprises lack consistency and a strong statewide network in terms of product sales. Usually, they sell their goods at Kudumbashree's annual festivals or melas, or they choose to do it at home. Regrettably, neither of these tactics ensures consistent income because they are seasonal.

Although Kudumbashree has made great progress in reducing poverty, a number of obstacles have prevented its microenterprise endeavors from being sustainable and generating revenue. Marketing is one of the main challenges these microbusinesses encounter. Their capacity to contact potential clients has been severely hampered by a lack of effective marketing techniques and restricted market access for items. Their operations have also been further limited by supply chain issues such raw material shortages and challenges in upholding quality standards. For Kudumbashree microenterprises, technological constraints also present serious obstacles. Their productivity and competitiveness are hampered by a lack of access to contemporary technology and equipment. Financial limitations have also been made worse by a lack of finance and growing raw material costs. These elements have made it more difficult for many microbusinesses under Kudumbashree to maintain sustainability and produce steady revenue.

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

Despite its early success, the program now has to adjust to a shifting economic environment and meet the unique requirements of its microbusiness endeavors. The Kudumbashree initiative has not much helped Below Poverty Line (BPL) workers and has failed to reach its intended audience, according to a recent SIDNET research conducted in many panchayats. In many instances, Kudumbashree is restricted to supplying extra income for educated and middle-class women who frequently participate in flexible ways, in contrast to its intended role as the major revenue generation alternative for BPL households (Shihabudheen, 2013). Due to difficulties in drawing clients and recouping their initial investments, many women give up on their enterprises within a few months after launch. Inadequate transportation, processing, and storage facilities impede efficient corporate operations; infrastructure is also crucial. Women frequently turn to loans, which can constitute a financial hardship, because microenterprises need working capital. Women may leave their businesses due to pressure from their families.

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad has released a study emphasizing the necessity of decentralizing the mission to enable local focus and expanding the program's scope to accommodate everyone who wants to participate. According to these suggestions, Kudumbashree might be more successful in meeting the requirements of BPL households if it became more inclusive and contextually sensitive. If efforts are taken at the state level to establish a business environment that supports Kudumbashree women, there is enormous potential. Customized and localized microbusinesses that sell a variety of goods including food, clothing, and handicrafts could represent the genuine culture and customs of particular areas. If such projects were expanded to a pan-India scale, they might even help the tourism industry. Kudumbashree may develop into a brand that embodies Kerala's rich customs and culture.

The new memorandum of agreement (MOU) between Kudumbashree and Amazon Saheli represents an important turning point. Kudumbashree items are now visible on Amazon's website and shopping app thanks to this partnership. However, a number of crucial factors must be taken into consideration in order to maximize achievement. Amazon Saheli's collaboration with Kudumbashree represents a promising step in enhancing market access for rural women entrepreneurs by showcasing their products on a global platform. Critiques of Amazon Saheli, however, draw attention to important issues with sustainability and power disparities. One major problem is the reliance on corporate platforms, which could reduce the negotiating strength of small producers by making them susceptible to changes in policies like commission rates and product visibility algorithms.

Furthermore, the advantages of these partnerships frequently benefit larger, more inventive producer groups, which may marginalize entrepreneurs that find it difficult to satisfy demands for quality or scalability. The monetization of culturally valuable products, which runs the risk of degrading their authenticity to satisfy global market desires, is another issue that critics bring out. Additionally, from an epistemological standpoint, these platforms have the power to impose external knowledge systems that set price and manufacturing

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

standards, eroding regional sovereignty and customs. To ensure that programs like Kudumbashree's collaboration with Amazon Saheli promote genuine empowerment and equitable growth, it is imperative to address these issues. There is room for improvement within the program itself to further increase Kudumbashree's efficacy. Kudumbashree can keep empowering women and promoting social and economic change by tackling specific issues and investigating creative solutions. First, gaining market share requires high-quality products and successful marketing tactics. Women entrepreneurs need assistance from effective marketing and sales teams in order to do this. Second, Kudumbashree need to inspire young people to contribute original ideas that go beyond conventional enterprises. Growth can be accelerated by an inventive cell that oversees social entrepreneurship, marketing, sales, and advertising. Finally, Kudumbashree women will reach new heights if policies are coherent and properly coordinated within the current ecosystem.

There is room for improvement within the program itself to further increase Kudumbashree's efficacy. Kudumbashree can keep empowering women and promoting social and economic change by tackling specific issues and investigating creative solutions. First, gaining market share requires high-quality products and successful marketing tactics. Women entrepreneurs need assistance from effective marketing and sales teams in order to do this. Second, Kudumbashree need to inspire young people to contribute original ideas that go beyond conventional enterprises. Growth can be accelerated by an inventive cell that oversees social entrepreneurship, marketing, sales, and advertising. Finally, Kudumbashree women will reach new heights if policies are coherent and properly coordinated within the current ecosystem. Long-term support after the initial establishment stage is essential for microenterprises. To help entrepreneurs grow their companies, this entails offering continuing mentorship, enhancing infrastructure access, and creating thorough marketing and branding plans. In addition to putting quality control systems and digital marketing strategies into place, increasing e-commerce integration through platforms like Amazon Saheli and other online marketplaces is essential for improving market access. Additionally, grouping companies into enterprise clusters, where female entrepreneurs work together within particular industries, can promote innovation, deeper market ties, and shared resources.

This clustering strategy would boost microenterprises' resilience and promote economies of scale. Lastly, creating a business-friendly environment through public-private partnerships, improved microfinance options, and concerted policy initiatives can greatly increase the long-term sustainability of Kudumbashree enterprises and advance the social and economic empowerment of Kerala women.

These regulations seek to address important issues including preserving the relevance of skills, expanding market access, and guaranteeing the viability of businesses. Kudumbashree can facilitate women's economic independence and upward social mobility by concentrating on market-oriented training, post-launch support, e-commerce expansion, and enterprise clustering. The impact of these initiatives will be increased by a cohesive policy

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

framework that incorporates financial incentives, infrastructure development, childcare services, and strategic alliances, encouraging inclusive growth and more extensive economic development.

Conclusion

To ensure the long-term sustainability of Kudumbashree units, it is essential to promote diversity, innovation, and adaptability in their activities. Members should be encouraged to explore new markets, adopt creative business ideas, and diversify their enterprises to remain competitive and resilient. Continuous monitoring and evaluation must be carried out to assess progress, identify challenges, and implement necessary improvements for sustained growth and impact. At the same time, Kudumbashree units can play a significant role in addressing social issues such as gender inequality and domestic violence. Focused interventions and awareness programmes should be designed to empower women, enabling them to live with dignity, equality, and freedom from discrimination and violence. Furthermore, strengthening social capital among members is crucial. This can be achieved by promoting networking, peer support, and community-building initiatives. Encouraging the formation of strong self-help groups and ensuring women's active participation in collective decision-making will enhance their confidence, leadership skills, and overall empowerment.

Even though Kudumbashree was an ambitious program that was successful, we think that once these implementation issues are resolved, it can further empower women and promote economic progress. Despite its achievements, Kudumbashree still has trouble reaching women from marginalized populations, like as tribal and lower caste groups. These groups frequently face extra economic and social obstacles that prevent them from fully engaging in the program. Kudumbashree can use focused outreach techniques to overcome these obstacles.

These could include working with local leaders, offering extra support services (such child care or transportation help), and developing training materials that are sensitive to cultural differences. The program can customize its endeavours to meet particular skill sets needed in the workplace by collaborating with industry experts. Stakeholders can work together to develop a more complete support network for women looking to enter or reenter the employment. State-level initiatives can establish a business environment that is beneficial to Kudumbashree women. Effective marketing and high-quality products are essential

Gaining market share requires both ensuring product quality and putting effective marketing ideas into practice. Effective marketing and sales teams are essential to the success of female entrepreneurs. Young people should be given the opportunity to contribute original ideas that go beyond conventional enterprises. Growth can be accelerated by creating an inventive cell to manage social entrepreneurship, marketing, advertising, and sales duties. Kudumbashree women will reach new heights through cohesive policies and effective cooperation within the current environment. Socioeconomic transformation, catalyzed development, the scalability of income-generating businesses in key areas and levels of government and administration, social inclusion of diverse communities, such as transgender

The Voice of Creative Research

Vol. 8 & Issue 2 (April 2026)

people, the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, labour force participation, and gender equity are all possible. The program may continue to have a beneficial impact on women's lives and contribute to a more prosperous and inclusive Kerala by identifying its strengths and addressing areas for improvement.

References

- Desai, V., and K. C. Sivaramakrishnan. *Urbanizing Citizenship: Contested Spaces in Indian Cities*. SAGE Publications India, 2012.
- Devika, J., and B. V. Thampi. "Between 'Empowerment' and 'Liberation': The Kudumbashree Initiative in Kerala." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, pp. 33-60.
- Heller, Patrick. "Social Capital and Development: A Kerala Paradox." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2000, pp. 571-585.
- Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1999, pp. 435-464.
- Kabeer, Naila, and Luisa Natali. "Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is There a Win-Win?" *IDS Working Papers*, no. 417, 2013, pp. 1-58.
- Krishna, Anirudh. *Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy*. Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Kudumbashree Mission. "DDUGKY." *Kudumbashree Mission*, <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/36>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2025.
- Kudumbashree Mission. "Kudumbashree Mission." *Kudumbashree Mission*, <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/171>. Accessed 20 May 2025.
- Kudumbashree Mission. "Kudumbashree Mission." *Kudumbashree Mission*, <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/171>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2025.
- Mayoux, Linda. "Questioning Virtuous Spirals: Micro-Finance and Women's Empowerment in Africa." *Journal of International Development*, vol. 11, no. 7, 1999, pp. 957-984.
- Shihabudheen, N. "What Is Right and Wrong with Kudumbashree: The Field Experiences." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol. 2, no. 5, 2013, pp. 9-21.
- Thelekkatte, A., R. Anusree, and T. V. Anagha. "Gender Equity and Women Empowerment: A Case Study of Kudumbashree in Kerala, India." *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2025, pp. 51-61.