Abstract

Poverty is a major concern in all developing societies. The primary focus of Governmental agencies in most welfare States is the alleviation of poverty and human sufferings and Government of Kerala is no exception. For several years various Government departments have been implementing different schemes both in urban and rural segments. But studies have concluded that the positive outcomes of such schemes have not been able to make an impact on the lives of the deserving beneficiaries. As poverty primarily affects women and children we need programmes for uplifting these groups, especially women. The participation of women in economic activities is often considered an important factor in the empowerment of women.

In Kerala Kudumbashree Mission, a State Government sponsored poverty eradication mission views micro enterprise development as an opportunity for providing gainful employment to the people below poverty line. The Mission targets the poor women and assists them in establishing micro enterprises. The Mission imparts need based training and services to Neighbourhood and Self Help Group (NHG/SHG) members that facilitate overall growth and development.

The major objective of this study is to examine the perception of women entrepreneurs regarding motivations, reasons for selection of activity and the role of Kudumbashree Mission in their development and to assess the extent of empowerment that have brought to the women entrepreneurs through their entrepreneurial activities.

The study is descriptive in nature. Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. 472 respondents from 118 group micro enterprises in three districts, namely Alappuzha, Kozhikode and Malappuram were selected. The whole data were analysed age wise, education wise, marital status wise and activity wise. The role of Kudumbashree Mission in micro enterprise development
is reflected in all these cases. While 52 per cent responded that the Kudumbashree Mission arranges the financial requirements, 12 per cent reported product selection, but only eight per cent reported that they get better marketing support. It is reported that financial support is highest in the case of restaurant and catering entrepreneurs, training support is highest in food processing units and marketing support is highest in the case of service entrepreneurs.

Most of the respondents opined that the single window system introduced by the Mission helps to build confidence and motivate them to go for innovative programme. The entrepreneurs responded that the training and financial support given by Mission helped them to take up entrepreneurial activities. The spirit of entrepreneurship is inculcated through the training programmes and the mission enables them to views micro enterprise development as a group approach to empower women. The study also proved that there is significant difference in the extent of economic empowerment. Based on the analysis, it is found that the women micro enterprises possess a moderate level of economic as well as social empowerment.

While analysing the major problems faced by women micro entrepreneurs, under financing was the major bottleneck as reported by most of the respondents. Lack of marketing support, production related problems, managerial lapses, lack of technical knowhow and personal constraints were the other major issues as reported in the study. Despite the constraints, the study confirms that the Kudumbashree Mission is one of the most effective schemes for the upliftment of rural masses especially women micro entrepreneurs of Kerala.