

Inclusive Governance for Women Empowerment: A Case Study of Kudumbhashree, Kerala

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ABSTRACT

A developed society is one in which everybody contributes their share, free to work on their potential and share their opinions openly. The true essence of democracy lies in a system where all citizens equally participate in the formal and informal sectors. From the decision-making process to the implementation of government policies, inclusive governance seeks to include all marginalized groups. Societies practice inclusive governance to achieve development in the social, political, and economic sectors. Modern societies hold together the tribal, the disadvantaged, women, and other communities excluded from the mainstream to achieve sustainable development. It seems messy and confusing but can contribute to the countries' development. Inclusive development measures reduce the level of liability and dependency of a group of people on others for their survival. The government can concentrate more on development rather than maintaining the welfare and survival of the marginalized group. The contribution and involvement of women, who make up half of the population of every society, is significant. Kudumbhashree, the community-based organization in Kerala, undertakes central government programmes and urban development projects. The study is a sincere attempt to analyze the influence of inclusive governance on women's empowerment. It also intends to assess the impact of Kudumbhashree, the government-sponsored self-help group of Kerala, on poverty eradication, women's empowerment, and inclusive governance.

Keywords: Democracy, Women Empowerment, Inclusive Governance, Kudumbhashree, Kerala

Introduction

The World Summit for Social Development, held in 1995 in Copenhagen, derived the new concept of an inclusive society, a society for all, for social development through poverty eradication, full employment, and social integration. Exclusion is a condition where some people cannot enjoy and associate with economic, social, and civic opportunities. Countries' socio-economic and cultural beliefs believe exclusion is natural (en.unesco.org 2017). Poverty and multi-dimensional disadvantages and deprivation result from social and economic exclusion (en.unesco.org, 2017). Inclusive development needs the active participation of people in the developmental process. It also ensures the

inclusion of the disadvantaged through various schemes and welfare measures (I S Sodhi & A Jha, 2021). Disability problems cannot be solved with economic development alone. We need to tackle the social and cultural factors that lead to discrimination (K P Kumaran 2011).

Inclusive governance fosters democratization by ensuring that the people's voice is heard in decision-making and holds governments accountable, transparent, and dependable. Good governance follows the Human Rights-Based Approach, emphasizing equality and respecting the dignity of man (Menocal Alina Rocha 2020). The systematic and structural inclusion of representative groups, including youth, women, and indigenous groups, and the omission creates

marginalization and delegitimizes the system (Werner Karolina 2019). These rights are inalienable to bring integral development. Ethical norms, legal principles, societal goals, and practices that respect individuals' dignity, value, and importance are inevitable for an inclusive society. Social inclusion is an overarching goal and a multi-dimensional process to promote sustainable development (www.un.org 2009). Network-driven public governance that includes a wide range of stakeholders can bring substantively better, stronger, and more innovative support than policy-making and implementation by the state alone (Ansell, Christopher et al., 2020).

Policies, methods, and plans adapted for a distinct and broadening variety of national, cultural, and epistemic circumstances need to account for inclusions and exclusions. Generally, epistemic inclusion empowers the epistemic and ontological worlds by including local and lay communities through converging and diverging effective scientific policy (Macnaghten Phil & Guivant Julia S 2020). The involvement of women is essential for sustainable democracy, and inclusive governance brings success to democracy with the support and service of both men and women (Navaneeta Rath 2015). The active participation of women and the inclusion of their perspectives and experiences with men are necessary to make suitable decisions to maintain equality, sustainable development, and democracy (Mlambo Courage & Kapingura Forget 2019). Annamaria Milazzo and Markus Goldstein, 2019).

Even though collaborative governance provides opportunities to stakeholders, it also contains risks like the loss of time and resources and unpleasant conflicts (Ansell, Christopher et al., 2020). Short- or medium-term elite inclusive policies help avoid conflicts, while long-term policies are good for sustainable development. Other than empowerment, several factors like the nature of political competition, the vibrancy of women's movements, and elite support decide inclusion (Becky Carter 2017). The government of India has taken steps to improve women's social-economic and civic status. Seats reserved for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions are

a giant leap in this regard. The number of women representatives increases in the local government institutions as women can contest one-third of the seats reserved for them other than the general seats.

Kudumbhashree was set up to mobilize the masses as a part of the People's Plan to decentralize power (www.kudumbhashree.org). Good governance is participatory, effective, and efficient, follows the rule of law, and is inclusive because it includes the most vulnerable groups in the decision-making and implementing processes. Participatory governance means the participation of people irrespective of gender, race, or any other physical, social, cultural, or economic differences in the administrative process (un.org 2009).

Unlike many development schemes, the Kudumbhashree mission brings out development goals. Kudumbhashree Mission collaborates with the local self-government and brings development schemes for the members' social, political, and economic welfare (www.niti.gov.in). Citizens' desire to participate in the formulation and implementation of public policies is growing. Inclusive evaluations fail to provide decision-makers with sufficient evidence to inform future engagement processes. External and internal drivers necessitate innovative tools and types of costs and benefits at the policy and project level (Akhmouch Aziza and Clavreu Delphine 2017).

Inclusive Governance and Kudumbhashree

Participatory government is not a novel idea in the administrative setup of Kerala. The period 1996–97 witnessed people's planning of development called the People's Plan Movement, which also included the gender factor. The Women's Component Plan later paved the way for Kudumbhashree (the kudumbhashreestory.info). Participatory planning strengthens local bodies in the planning process and overcomes production stagnation, deterioration of service quality, and loss of assets

in the social sector (J. Chathukulam & M. S. John 2002). Kudumbhashree, the government-catered Self-Help Group of Kerala, aims to eradicate women's empowerment and poverty. It was formed as a part of the People's Plan to ensure community support in implementing the government schemes. Participatory government and women's empowerment are two aims that the government of Kerala tries to achieve through Kudumbhashree. Kudumbhashree, a working example of inclusive governance in Kerala, functions under local self-government in concurrence with other departments. Kudumbhashree was a community-based programme under UNICEF for the welfare of women and children, conducted in the Alapuzha municipality of Kerala.

Kudumbhashree is included as a subsidiary to the local governments to engage the poor in the decentralization process (K P Kannan & G Raveendran 2017). Kudumbhashree's most visible role is participatory planning in the programmes of local self-government institutions via micro-planning that caters for the annual plan of the local self-government (Williams Glyn et al., 2011). Kudumbhashree enables women to become active citizens and reflect their voice in local governments (edepot.wur.nl).

In 2003, the government of Kerala introduced a project called Ashraya to reach out to the poorest of the poor through the State Poverty Eradication Mission—Kudumbhashree, which stands as the best example of the inclusion of community organizations in government programs. Later in 2017, it was revised and made comprehensive as a one-time programme called Destitute Free Kerala—Agathirahitha Keralam. DFK is a unique poverty eradication measure, as it caters to the fundamental, developmental, and psychological aspects of poverty by coordinating various government departments, including health departments and public distribution systems steered by local self-government institutions. The Kudumbhashree Mission identified the beneficiary families using a 9-point scale and ratified them by the Local Self-Governments (www.kudumbhashree.org).

In the 2018 flood in Kerala, Kudumbhashree joined hands with the local governments of Kerala in the rescue measures and reconstruction measures taken by the government. Kudumbhashree's Save the Children programme is responsible for the upkeep of Aganwadies and government schools in flood-affected districts of Kerala (www.kudumbhashree.org). Kudumbhashree members are the frontline workers in the fight against COVID-19 in Kerala, in concurrence with the health department and the local self-government (M Singh & M Divakar 2021).

Good governance requires a creative community that can contribute to the development measures implemented by the government. Kudumbhashree provides training to women to create awareness and information on various social issues like health and wellness, drug abuse, parenting, and vocation necessary for a healthy and enlightened society. Kudumbhashree organizes skill development programmes with the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Koushal Yojana schemes and supports members to get training on skills, including ICT and encourages them to earn a livelihood.

When the government of Kerala decided to find out the beneficiaries of the Social Security Pension, it entrusted Kudumbhashree with the survey. The government and non-government agencies entitle Kudumbhashree on matters related to the poor and deprived, as it includes a majority of the group (www.kudumbhashree.org).

Women from poor backgrounds are encouraged to save from their small income and deposit the pooled savings of the poor members in banks or cooperative societies with the thrift and credit system. The linked financial institutions provide loans to the neighbourhood groups with no security and include them in the financial institutions. Kudumbhashree's microfinance and microcredit facilities help its members initiate economic activities, enabling them to contribute to the national income.

Another notable project of Kudumbhashree that reflects inclusive governance and social

commitment is the BRC-Buds Rehabilitation Centre. The government of Kerala entrusts Kudumbhashree to take care of the mentally challenged above 18 years of age during the daytime and train them in convergence with the local self-government.

Women's participation in the Gram Sabha and membership in the Neighbourhood Group, which discusses and makes decisions on regional development, demonstrate their inclusion in democracy. The local self-government institutions in Kerala reserve 50% of the seats for women. Most of the women contesting in the elections for local self-government are members of Kudumbhashree. Through their day-to-day activities in the mission, members gain experience in administrative, decision-making, and problem-solving areas.

The researcher conducted a study to substantiate the role of Kudumbhashree in inclusive governance. The researcher conducted the study among 50 people, including local self-government members, mates, conveners, and volunteers of MGNREGA; community development society members, including the chairperson; various Area Development Committee members; Neighbourhood Group members; and beneficiaries of Ashraya. The study was a telephonic interview, and most of the members responded actively. The researcher asked the participants about the participation of Kudumbhashree in various central government and state government projects like MGNREGA, Ashraya or DFK, BUDS Rehabilitation Centre, and others.

Statement of Problem

Kudumbhashree, the poverty eradication mission of Kerala, undertakes various programmes of the government of Kerala. The Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission, Kudumbhashree, coordinates various central government programmes like DAY NRLM, Mahila Kisan Sasaktikaran Pariyojana, DDU GKY, and Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme-SVEP for the welfare of women from the socially and economically disadvantaged. It is also entitled to

coordinate urban projects like Prime Minister Awas Yojana, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Awas Yojana National Urban Livelihood Mission, Rajiv Awas Yojana, Basic Service to the Urban Poor & Integrated Housing, Slum Development Programmes in the State, and MGNREGA functions are coordinated. Kudumbhashree ensures the standard of living of the poor with the coordination of various government and non-government institutions. Kudumbhashree is a self-help group of women in Kerala, fostered by the government of Kerala, that functions under the guidance of the Local Self Governments in convergence with other government departments. It is an attempt by the government to reach the community through families and the families through women, through which the government of Kerala executes welfare plans and projects through the Kudumbhashree mission. Apart from a poverty eradication mission, Kudumbhashree ensures the holistic development of the women of Kerala, those from the grassroots level in particular.

Nature and Scope

The government has taken various measures for the empowerment of women and the eradication of poverty. Many of these may not reach the beneficiaries, and some may remain in the newspaper. The Government of Kerala has initiated a novel method for poverty eradication and women's empowerment through a single platform-Kudumbhashree. Kudumbhashree is a stakeholder of the Kerala Government in its welfare programs. It is apt to evaluate the role of Kudumbhashree in the participatory governance of the state.

Limitations

The most important limitation of the study is the lack of literature. The difficulty of obtaining secondary data like the official documents on Kudumbhashree hinders the study. The widespread COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed by the government hindered the data collection.

Research Objectives

The significant objectives of the study to be conducted are:

1. To explore the role of Kudumbhashree in the inclusive governance of the Government of Kerala.
2. To investigate the role of Kudumbhashree in the advancement of women in participatory government.
3. To find out the influence of Kudumbhashree on the role of women in the decision-making and execution of various projects in Kerala.
4. To analyze the role of Kudumbhashree in reaching out to the beneficiaries of various projects from the grassroots level of society.

Research Questions

1. Whether the schemes and policies available under the institution provide ample scope for women to come up?
2. Is the current status of Inclusive Governance in Kerala giving enough opportunity to women?
3. Does Kudumbhashree attain the desired involvement of women in the governance of the state?
4. Does the organization strengthen the women?
5. Does Kudumbhashree enable women from the grassroots level to receive government benevolences?

Review of Literature

Eiman Karar & Inga Jacobs Mata (2016) stated that decentralization helps with bottom-up decision-making, involves many stakeholders, and brings improved solutions. Good citizens accept their obligations and their rights. The authors further point out that better governance is a prerequisite for international development as the collective action of society can face any challenge. Participation of the public in decision-making helps avoid mistrust of the government's expert decisions and provides a suitable decision for the issue's various stakeholders.

Kumar Pankaj 2015. authors further analyze that in the present era, the participation of women in trade and commerce is low. The author shed light on the inclusion of women in science and commerce, enabled them to harvest innovative ideas, and helped them gain intellectual property rights to safeguard their intellectual properties. Self-help groups could improve the status of

women by bringing innovations and commercializing them. The author observed women as creators and innovators to contribute to the country's inclusive growth. The author urges that women's empowerment and inclusiveness should aim at skill development, education, financing, and infrastructure, which will reduce the gender gap.

Rath Navaneetha (2015) opines that the success of democracy lies in the equal participation of men and women in administrative matters. As long as they get equal participation in governance, women get equal recognition in the society. According to the author, inclusive governance demonstrates societal progress and prosperity and is a path to development and women's empowerment. Gender equality and inclusiveness are the inevitable aspects of sustainable democracy, and it is time for countries to replace the namesake participation of women and weaker sections of the government with participation in proportion to their population to strengthen democracy.

Mlambol Courage & Kapingural Forget 2019 studies about the factors affecting women's political participation in the Southern African Development Community region found that women's representation is still 30% and has to go further ahead to reach the 50% target set by the Protocol on Gender and Development 2008. The authors opined that the equal participation of men and women gives accurate political decisions, enhances legitimacy, and makes political activities more democratic and accountable. The authors found out that the levels of participation, functioning of government, and political culture, which show the overall political participation of women in the 14 SADC countries, show women's political participation. At the same time, the civil liberties, human development index, electoral process, and pluralism have not turned up with a better involvement of women.

Eiman Karara & Inga Jacobs-Matab 2016. says that rights and duties, or obligations, go hand in hand for good citizens. The author proves that desirable decisions can be formed through collective action or the participation of the public

good. Decentralization helps solve the more complex regional problems with participation in the regional components. The inclusion of stakeholders in the decision-making process helps to resolve global problems.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted among women who are Kudumbhashree members and handle different capacities like mates of MGNREGA, ward councillors, members of Area Development

Society and Community Development Society, Ashraya or Destitute Free Kerala, and other similar projects, as well as the members of neighbourhood groups. The research population includes 50 respondents from the local bodies of Ernakulam district, Kerala, India. The participants are from the age group of 18–60 and are all married. The educational background of the members ranges from eighth grade to graduation level. All of them were actively associated with Kudumbhashree for not less than five years. Respondents participated actively in the interview and expressed their opinions.

Table:1 Demographic details of the participants

Variables	Response category	No	%
Age	18-28	7	14
	28-38	13	26
	38-48	18	36
	48-58	9	18
	58 above	3	6
Education	VIII th std & below	9	18
	Xth std	17	34
	XII std/ Pree Degree	13	26
	Degree	8	16
	Others	3	6
Category	Municipal Councilors	9	18
	ADS Members	7	14
	CDS Members	2	4
	MGNREGA Mates/ Conveneers/ Volunteers	5	10
	NHG Members	21	42
	Ashraya	6	12

Source: Primary data

Data Analysis and Interpretations.

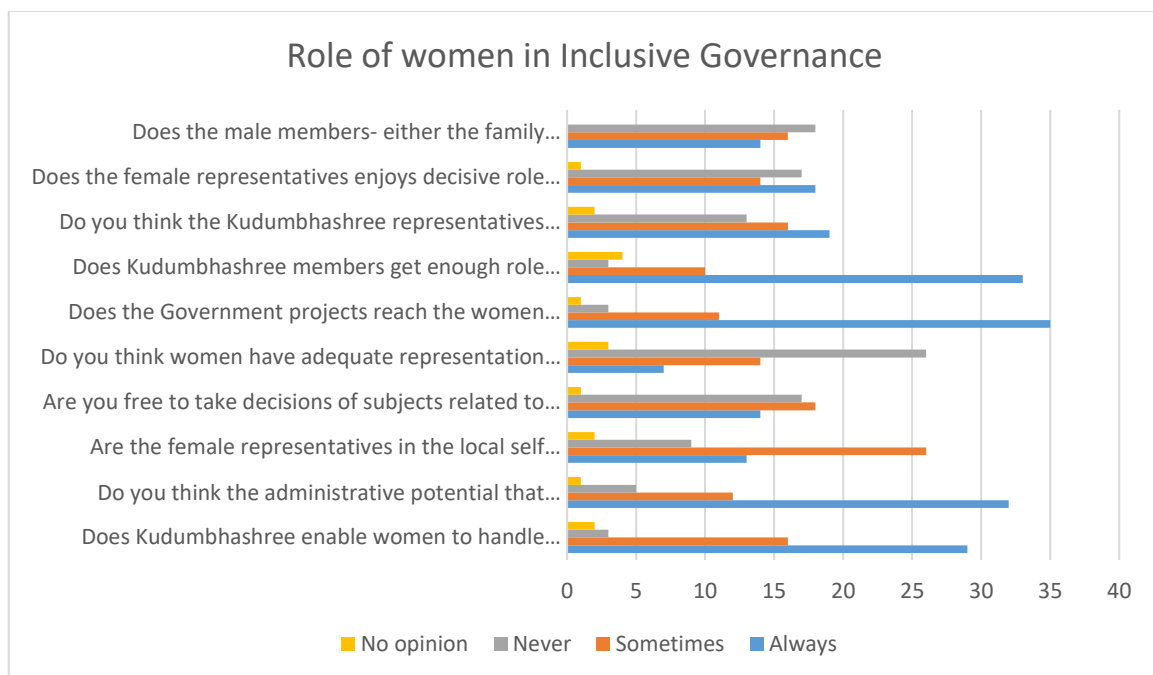
Table:2

Sl. No	Variables	Responses								Total
		Always		Some times		Never		No opinion		
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
1.	Does Kudumbhashree enable women to handle administrative tasks?	29	58	16	32	3	6	2	4	50
2.	Do you think the administrative skills women earn through Kudumbhashree confine to the local level?	32	64	12	24	5	10	1	2	50

3.	Are the female representatives in the local self-government free to take independent decisions?	13	26	26	52	9	18	2	4	50
4	Are you free to make decisions on subjects related to monetary involvement?	14	28	18	36	17	34	1	2	50
5.	Whether women have adequate representation in the judicial system of the country?	7	14	14	28	26	52	3	6	50
6.	Do the Government projects reach the grass-root level through Kudumbhashree?	35	70	11	22	3	6	1	2	50
7.	Do Kudumbhashree members get enough roles in bringing out various government projects in the state?	33	66	10	20	3	6	4	8	50
8.	Do you think the women representatives are taking the decisions independently?	19	38	16	32	13	26	2	4	50
9.	Do the female representatives enjoy a decisive role in making critical decisions?	18	36	14	28	17	34	1	2	50
10.	Do the male members- either the family members or representatives- insist on their opinion through the female representatives?	16	32	14	28	18	36	3	4	50

Source: Primary data

Chart:1 Responses of participants on Inclusive Governance



The above chart (1) shows that women can handle administrative tasks, as they receive enough training and opportunity in Kudumbhashree. 58% of the participants opined that the Kudumbhashree activities enable them to carry out the administration as they manage the neighbourhood units by themselves. 32% of participants said their administrative skills have been satisfactory. 6% of the participants think that Kudumbhashree activities do not help them develop executive skills, and only 4% are not ready to express their opinion.

The above chart (1) shows the opinion of women about the administrative potential of women being limited to the local self-government only. The majority of the participants opined that the potential of women is limited to the local level. No political parties or other government agencies are giving representation to women. The reservation for women is only limited to the local-level elections. Participants responded that representation must be given to women at higher levels of administration. 64% of the participants opined that women perform their newly acquired administrative skills only at the local level. 24.5% of participants believe that women get the opportunity only sometimes. Furthermore, 10% said that women are never allowed to demonstrate their abilities, while 2% said they had no opinion.

Though women are given 50% reservation in the local self-governments of Kerala, the freedom to take decisive decisions on administrative matters is still doubtful. In the survey, the respondents shared their opinions. Twenty-six percent opined that women always get a chance to make free and independent decisions on various matters. 52% of respondents answered “only at times when they are allowed to take decisions independently. 18% of the participants said they had no chance to take an independent decision. Moreover, 4% of them are reluctant to share their opinion.

The above chart (1) shows the role of women in taking decisions on money-related matters. Women’s representatives who were interviewed have responded very positively that there is no discrimination on such matters. Among the

respondents, 28% think they get due representation to decide monetary matters. 36.3% of the participants have opined that sometimes they alone get the right to make decisions on money-related matters. This shows that male representatives mostly make decisions on money-related issues by ignoring women’s rights. Thirty-four percent said they never had an opportunity, and 2 percent of the participants were reluctant to share their opinion.

Concerning the representation of women in the judicial system in the state, 14% of women responded that they are very satisfied. While 28% of the participants responded satisfactorily, 52% opined that the representation of women in the state’s judicial system is inadequate. 6% of the participants are reluctant to answer the question, either due to ignorance or because they do not want to answer it. This shows that the state’s judicial system needs more representation for women.

In response to whether Kudumbhashree can reach the women who belong to the grassroots level of society, the respondents answered very positively. Thirty-five participants, constituting 70% of the population, responded that Kudumbhashree successfully brings government projects and schemes to the people at the grassroots level. Only 11 participants, or 22%, opined it was satisfactory. 3 (6%) people have opined that it is inadequate, and only 1 (2%) has not recorded their opinion on the question.

In answer to the question, “Do Kudumbhashree members get enough role in bringing out various government schemes and projects?” the majority responded positively. 66% of the respondents answered that Kudumbhashree has a substantial role in bringing the projects to the grass-root level of the community. Only 20% replied that sometimes Kudumbhashree gets a chance to bring out the schemes. 6% responded that Kudumbhashree is never given such an opportunity, and 8% of the respondents are reluctant to answer the question.

In decision-making on administrative matters, only 38% responded that the representatives of

Kudumbhashree get a chance to make decisions independently. Among the respondents, 36% of them answered that sometimes they get an opportunity to make decisions on important matters. 24.1% of the members responded that they never get a chance to decide on principal issues, while 2% of the participants marked no opinion.

36% of participants responded that women representatives always enjoy a decisive role in making critical decisions. 28.6% of the participants believe that sometimes only the female representatives get the chance to make a critical decision, and 34% say they never get a chance to take a critical decision. 2% of the participants withdrew from expressing their opinion.

Among the participants, 32% said that male members insist on the decisions made by female members in the family and society. 28.6% of them answered that sometimes only their decision is imposed on the female members. Thirty-six percent of the participants say the male members never insist on their verdict on the female members, and 4 percent have no opinion on this question.

Findings and Suggestions

From the above findings, it is clear that Kudumbhashree played a leading role in the inclusive governance of the state. The participants responded very actively to the questions of the researcher. All the participants are happy to have a share in the participatory governance. From chart 1, it is evident that Kudumbhashree gets a due share in the governance. The women gained skills in administrative matters as they controlled the administrative matters of Kudumbhashree. The confidence level, decision-making capacity, problem-solving ability, and confidence to make critical decisions on all matters, including the money matters approach of women, have improved after participating in Kudumbhashree.

Whereas the attitude of society, especially men, is reluctant to give enough opportunities to

female members. Most of the respondents answered that male members force the female members to obey their opinion while deciding on important issues. The participation of women, who form half of the population, is reduced only to the local self-government in the state. The participation of women in judicial matters is nominal.

Inclusive governance is a means to bring the potential of individuals to the welfare of society. Kudumbhashree, the community-based organization that reaches the community through families, plays a significant role in the participatory governance of Kerala. Local self-government provides Kudumbhashree with the right to reach the disadvantaged section of the community. The government of Kerala incorporates Kudumbhashree in executing community-based programs. The members of Kudumbhashree were the frontline workers in the 2018 flood relief measures and COVID-19 schemes of the government. Various surveys and programmes initiated by Kerala's central and state governments entrust Kudumbhashree with the undertaking.

The public should be aware of the welfare schemes of the government through public awareness programmes and provide training to enable them to participate actively in the policy formation of the government.

More than just representation, opportunities must be made available to female participants. Participatory governance of the state fails to explore the potential of women in the state. The chance to express their opinion should be open to all the representatives. The newly elected members of the local government must be given proper training through the KILA-Kerala Institute of Local Administration. Political parties must provide more opportunities for female members at their booth level of the organization. In judicial matters as well, women must be encouraged to take responsibility.

Conclusion

Inclusive governance is good administrative practice. It helps people contribute their potential to the welfare of society. Women, tribes, and the physically challenged can contribute their share towards national development. People must be provided with the opportunity and include it as part of development. Preparing welfare projects and supporting them fails to bring growth. Reservation is not a solution for the development of the country. Reservation in politics helps only to increase the number of people participating in political activities or the number of representatives in democratic institutions but fails to bring a transition (Carter Becky 2017).

Kudumbhashree, a community-based organization in Kerala, brings women from the socially and economically disadvantaged group to the forefront of society. The mission equips women to make decisive decisions on matters related to the development of society. The government of Kerala set an example of inclusive governance by incorporating the Community Based Organisation, Kudumbhashree's mission to bring out projects related to women and the disadvantaged.

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