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MKSP Scheme: An Effective Approach for Uplifting 'Kudumbashree' Farm Women in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the perceived effectiveness of Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), a women empowerment scheme, in Thrissur district of Kerala. The beneficiary farm women of the scheme were cultivating vegetables and banana mostly on leased land under the supervision of Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission (Kudumbasree mission). Dimensions of effectiveness were categorized in terms of socio economic development, agricultural input supply, institutional support, knowledge and capacity building and empowerment perspective. The respondents included farm women, mission coordinators and facilitators. Majority of banana farmers mission coordinators and facilitators perceived the effectiveness as good while majority of vegetable farmers, rated it as excellent. Empowerment perspective and socio economic development were the most effective outcomes of the scheme.

Keywords: Farm women ; Poverty eradication ; Women empowerment ; Kerala

Agricultural sector engages about 52 per cent of overall manpower of India. Based on the 2011 census, 37 per cent of the total number of agricultural workers in the country is women and by 2020, this figure is expected to be about 45 per cent. It is a known fact that women contribute significantly to agriculture. The migration of male workers to urban areas in search of remunerative jobs is one of the factors contributing to the feminization of farm activities. The Government of India launched the *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP) in 2011

under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) with the major objectives including empowerment of women in agriculture by enhancing productive participation of women in agriculture, creating sustainable agricultural livelihood opportunities, improving skills and capabilities of women to support farm and nonfarm based activities and ensure food and nutrition security at household and community level. Moreover, the scheme aims to provide better access to inputs and services of government and other agencies, improve capabilities to be able to access

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resources of other institutions and schemes and also enhance managerial capabilities for better management of bio-diversity. Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) Govt. of India provides funding support of up to 75 per cent of the project cost submitted by the Programme Implementing Agency (PIA) or State govt. The balance is funded by the state government or other agencies. Agarwal (2010) has highlighted that, where small and marginal farmers predominate, there could be gains in productivity as well as bargaining power in acting jointly rather than individually. *Kudumbashree* became the programme implementing agency (PIA) for MKSP in Kerala. Studies have found that effective planning, production and marketing aspects of vegetables among these groups had resulted in an increased income (Chandran and Sreedaya, 2018). This study was conducted with an objective to analyze the effectiveness of MKSP Scheme as perceived by the beneficiary farm women, mission coordinators and facilitators.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Thrissur district where MKSP was first launched in Kerala. The units of analysis of the study were exclusive farm women who were beneficiaries of MKSP and a group of mission coordinators and facilitators. Thirty farm women representing vegetable and banana farmers each and thirty mission coordinators and facilitators constituted the sample. Personal interview with structured interview schedule was used for collection of primary data.

Effectiveness of MKSP scheme was assessed through perception index. In this study, perception on effectiveness on MKSP scheme is operationally defined as the meaningful interpretation of the effectiveness of the programme as sensed by the beneficiary farmers, mission coordinators and facilitators. Scale developed by Seby (2018) was used for the study, with slight modification.

Perception of the respondents on effectiveness of MKSP scheme was studied under five dimensions namely socio-economic development, input supply, institutional support, knowledge and capacity building and empowerment, as discussed below.

Socio-economic development: It was operationalised as a process of economic and social transformation based on cultural and environmental factors.

Input supply: Input supply refers to various inputs and input related services provided through the scheme.

Institutional support: Institutional support is defined as the support services provided for beneficiaries under the scheme including market and financial support.

Knowledge and capacity building: Knowledge and capacity building refers to the extent to which beneficiary farm women have knowledge and skill for problem solving and to undertake various farm activities.

Empowerment: Empowerment was operationalised as the process of equipping with the required capacity, skill or power

to perform various activities and decision making.

Each dimension was represented by a set of statements and every statement was evaluated by using a five-point continuum scale - strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. Each agreement was then assigned scores as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Perception index was calculated for each dimension using the following equation:

$$\text{Perception index} = \frac{\text{Total score obtained on each parameter} \times 100}{\text{Total possible score}}$$

Overall perception index and dimension-wise perception indices were found out for beneficiaries, mission coordinators and facilitators.

Perception indices of beneficiary farm women, mission coordinators and facilitators

together were categorized as very low, low, average, good and excellent according to the score range less than 20, 20 to 39, 40 to 59, 60 to 79 and '80 and above' respectively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of MKSP scheme was studied using the perception index developed and percentage analysis was done to understand the overall effectiveness of scheme as perceived by the beneficiary farm women and mission coordinators and facilitators together. Five dimensions were considered and mean scores of all the dimensions are presented in the Table 1.

Perception index mean score was calculated and ranked accordingly. The results revealed that vegetable farmers had more overall mean perception score compared to mission coordinators and facilitators followed by banana farmers.

Table 1
Mean scores obtained by the Respondents on the Dimensions of Perception Index (n= 30)

Sl. No.	Dimension	Mean perception score		
		Vegetable farmer	Banana farmer	Mission coordinators and facilitators
1	Socio-economic development	84.13	84.26	81.6
2	Agricultural input supply	66.8	63.2	73.8
3	Institutional support	79.8	78.9	75.9
4	Knowledge and capacity building	81.1	78.3	75.14
5	Empowerment perspective	88.4	82.4	85.8
	Overall perception	80.12	76.64	78.19

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While comparing the dimensions among vegetable farmers, it found that empowerment perspective scored more followed by socio economic development, knowledge & capacity building, institutional support and agricultural input supply. Among banana farmers, socio economic development was ranked first followed by empowerment perspective, institutional support, knowledge & capacity building and agricultural input supply. Banana farmers also had high perception mean score on each dimension which indicated their satisfactory opinion about MKSP scheme. Dimension wise mean scores were also compared for mission coordinators and facilitators and it was found that empowerment perspective was perceived as most effective among the dimensions followed by socio economic development, institutional support, knowledge & capacity building and agricultural input supply. It is also evident that all other dimensions had index score more than 75 except agricultural input supply.

The beneficiaries showed increased interest towards self employment and group farming activities due to various operational supports to JLGs (Joint Liability Groups). There was also increased access of women for inputs & services and asset generation. Through this scheme they were able to generate various assets for common usage by members of JLG like knapsack sprayers, tillers, conoweeder and brush cutters. All these factors might have contributed to high empowerment score.

The mean score of socio economic dimension was also high. The beneficiaries

had perceived that, there was a considerable increase in production and productivity as a result of the schemes, which might have resulted in increase in the income of farm women. Incentives have helped the beneficiaries to meet the immediate needs while skills obtained through trainings helped in reducing the cost of cultivation. Through various training programmes conducted, beneficiaries have perceived considerable increase in the knowledge of farming specifically on organic farming and they also experienced improvement in attitude towards natural resource management especially in converting fallow land and waste land. This contributed in obtaining high mean score for knowledge & capacity building.

Credit support through loan issuance and monitoring was perceived as most effective among the institutional support. Through JLG bank linkage, farmers were able to avail loan easily which was a laborious task before. Women master farmer as community resource person was introduced for knowledge transfer under MKSP scheme. And these master farmers under MKSP scheme made it even easier through helping the farmers by timely assistance in renewal process. Support to organic farming and value addition also had high impact on beneficiaries. They responded that even though some delays were there in receiving payments, incentives and bank subsidy had a huge impact on their cultivation. Market interventions were perceived as less effective among the institutional support. During seasons due to huge quantity of produce from many farmers, all the farmers were not able to sell their produce through fairs

and exhibitions organized by Kudumbashree. Majority of the beneficiaries were depending on local markets for selling their produce. Sajesh (2013) observed that coordination with other agencies and institutions like co-operative banks, line departments as well as convergence with various programmes of central and state governments played an important role in realizing the potential of group mobilization.

Compared to other dimensions, agriculture input supply had low mean perception score. MKSP scheme had not many components for input supply other than providing machines through farmer facilitation centre. Seed bank which was meant for input supply as a part of MKSP was also not successful. Bio pharmacy was helpful for farmers in providing non chemical inputs. They agreed that machines available were useful and had helped in cultivation.

Unlike vegetable farmers, socio economic development scored more than empowerment perspective among banana beneficiaries. It might be due to the reduced score of banana farmers on empowerment perspective. Banana farmers had less access to inputs and services compared to vegetable farmers. Similarly, they also perceived institutional support more effective than knowledge & capacity building even though there was not much difference in the mean scores of these two dimensions. Majority farmers of Ollukkara block were vegetable farmers. Hence, more inputs, trainings and other services might have been available for vegetable farmers. That might be the probable

reason for difference in the mean index score of different dimensions between vegetable and banana farmers.

A percentage analysis was also employed and results revealed that majority of the vegetable farmers (53.33%) had perceived the effectiveness of MKSP scheme as excellent followed by 46.67 per cent as good. But majority of banana farmers (53.33%) perceived it as good followed by 46.67 per cent rated as excellent category. There was only slight difference between good and excellent categories of both the respondent groups. Similarly, majority of the mission coordinators and facilitators (77.00 %) had perceived the effectiveness of MKSP scheme as good and 23 percent had rated the effectiveness as excellent.

It is evident that no respondent had rated the scheme as average, low and very low categories. This result shows that activities under MKSP scheme were highly effective and had a positive response among the respondent categories in Thrissur district.

To conclude, the performance of *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* scheme had been effective in Thrissur district and it had enhanced the capacities of women in collective farming. However, need for further development still exists especially in components like input supply and market interventions in Kerala.

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