

## Kerala poverty alleviation programme spawns event management group

A poverty eradication programme in Kerala has spawned an event management group that manages no high profile functions but organises fairs to market products of self-help neighbourhood groups.

Kudumbashree Mission, the flagship poverty eradication programme of the state, aims at fighting poverty through women's empowerment. The programme has 183,741 women's neighbourhood groups across the state with a total strength of more than 3.6 million members.

The neighbourhood groups run a large number of micro-enterprises and the event management group in Kozhikode district, called SMART (Sustainable Marketing and Responsible Trading) organises the sale of their products.

'Initially it was the Kudumbashree Mission officials who organised the fairs to sell products. However, for us it is physically impossible to organise regular fairs. It was then we thought of an event management group,' Hemalatha C.K., the assistant district coordinator of Kudumbashree mission, told IANS.

SMART puts up temporary markets to promote the Kudumbashree brand, carries out procurement of products, publicity and product pricing. The group has 10 members.

Though Kudumbashree is a women's scheme, SMART is an all male enterprise. All the men are from families taking part in the Kudumbashree scheme. The SMART members are selected by the mission after conducting an interview and are trained for 10 days.

The event management skills of the group will really be put to test this weekend, with eight fairs opening simultaneously at various points in the district as part of the ongoing Onam festival.

SMART's warehouse at Perambra, 70 km from here, is brimming with products for sale. The items range from brooms to garments.

'We have already procured 106 items from various neighbourhood enterprises. For the Onam fairs we are targeting sales worth Rs.2 million,' said Sathyan Kayanna, the secretary of SMART.

The stalls at SMART's fair will be managed by Micro Enterprise Consultants (MECs).

'The MECs are graduates who are trained in retail selling,' said Shajil Kumar, also an assistant district coordinator of Kudumbashree.

'After Onam, the fairs will become a regular feature. The plan is to conduct at least four fairs simultaneously at various places in the district. At any point of time four fairs will be going on in the district,' said Sathyan.

Officials say the fairs are important as this will encourage the micro enterprises to produce more.

'With permanent avenues for sales the units will keep up the production, ramping up capacity utilisation. This will increase their income,' said Kumar.

The mission has plans to expand SMART depending on the success of the fairs during Onam. The income for the group will be the commission they earn from the sales.

*Jeevan Mathew Kurian ( © IANS / India eNews)*