



Kochi's innovative and inclusive management in response to the pandemic

Travelling to Kochi, Kerala amidst the lockdown



Image for representational purpose

Amidst the nation-wide lockdown announced as result of the pandemic situation, migrants across the country were stranded in cities outside their native states or villages. However, after flight travel was reinitiated, the migrant labour force started travelling back to their home cities or villages across India. The procedure followed in the cities in Kerala is noted to be quite innovative with close monitoring and management. When one applies for an e-pass to travel to Kerala or has a flight to the city, the local councillor is

informed about this. Post this, the councillor along with the administration, visit the house of the person arriving and check if the house is fit for the purpose of home quarantine or if there is a need to undergo institutional quarantine. Kerala has leveraged the role of the local councillors in this front, as their grassroot reach to better administer and monitor the migrants returning to their respective wards during this COVID crisis is recognised in high regard.

City coming together to support the Community Kitchen Initiative

The wards have combined community kitchens operating throughout the day and providing meals three times a day during the crisis. For example, 10-11 wards have one combined community kitchen. Food from one community kitchen feeds an average of 600-700 people. The prepared and cooked food is distributed by councillors and the corporators. Each planning committee's chair is given the charge of one community kitchen. Many people from the film industry are also running community kitchens across the city, which is independent from the corporation, but councillors are supporting them. The MLAs and mayors are providing their support as well. Community participation is also on display as many common citizens are giving the necessary items to cook and prepare the food as well. Nearly 3000 food packets were prepared and supplied by them to the public. However, the kitchen is not supposed to give free food packets to anyone who isn't quarantined, sick, poor or are from old-age homes, hence the kitchens are giving large food packets to others and charging a nominal rate. Some of these kitchens are also run by people residing in the neighbourhoods.

Key role played by Kudumbashree

Kudumbashree is the poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala. The Kudumbashree is running most of the community kitchens and they are playing a major role in handling and managing the community kitchen initiative. Only 1-2 kitchens are being run by the corporations and are supported by the chairpersons. One of the community kitchens is supported and sponsored by the general public. The common masses are lending a hand in sponsoring some community kitchens, preparing the food and distributing it so that all the burden does not fall upon the government and Kudumbashree.

Challenges in maintaining continuous food supply



Image for representational purpose

The management effort also includes making sure that there is no duplication of supplies. Councillors, through the support of donors, are distributing rice, dal, sugar etc. and all of this taking place independently from the activities of the government. There is no scarcity of food supply being provided by the government, as families are being provided with 15kgs of rice. However, the people who are from other states and are stranded in Kerala don't have this opportunity, as they are helpless and have no one to support

them. However, the government can issue food for them without ration cards which, currently it is being done via the Aadhar card system. Apart from this, the general populace is also coming together and helping these migrant workers sustain their livelihood. The government plans on issuing essential kits for about 8000 families, this hasn't been finalised yet, and proper permission needs to be taken from the state authorities.

One of the major issues is that Kerala is a huge consumer state, so most of the food grains and vegetables are brought into Kerala from the surrounding states. In spite of having fertile lands and great climatic conditions, many essential crops and vegetables come into Kerala from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Due to the implementation of the nation-wide lockdown, all the transportation has stopped, hence the grains and food cannot enter Kerala.

Involvement of Municipal Corporation and Community Participation

The major takeaway noted is the involvement of KMC in various interventions and management in the city jurisdiction. It is a learning that we see in terms of effective localised management by involving the Mayor and councillors with larger responsibilities. The city has witnessed continuous floods two years in a row prior to the COVID crisis, and this has in a way strengthened the community's voluntary spirits that have been extensively mentioned above. This needs to be channelised into a sustainable characteristic in the city in order to further strengthen the community engagement in city governance.