



NTLN LEARNING VISIT

**A report of experience sharing and reflections
by visiting member organisations**



8th - 13th December 2019

Kerala

Host Organisation: ARCHANA WOMEN'S CENTRE

Kottayam, Kerala

INTRODUCTION

As the Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network (NTLN) grows in its vision and activities on non-traditional livelihoods for women in India, new learning and doing experiences are unfolding for network members. The year 2019 marked two learning journey's for NTLN members—the first was organised in New Delhi between 5th to 9th August; hosted by five NTLN member organisations and attended by seven participants and the second was organised in Kerala (8th to 12th December 2019), hosted by Archana Women's Centre (AWC) and attended by 10 participants (from seven network member organisations) and one NTLN consultant.

With the objective of informing knowledge and strategies to strengthen the women and work agenda that is central to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing plus 25 review coming up in 2020, the NTLN is advocating and networking for the recognition and promotion of non-traditional livelihoods for women. In this context, the Kerala learning journey was planned as an important learning ground to understand the vision and strategies of AWC in NTL training and livelihood generation over the past three decades. It was also seen as a significant flagpost in AWC's work in the area of non-traditional livelihoods for women in a bid to both consolidate and plan the future focus.

The learning journey helped participants question the beliefs, practices, and policies that contribute to the exclusion of women from certain livelihoods, as they met with women who had made choices to take on non-traditional livelihoods which not only gave them dignity of labour and income but also a 'higher' and more 'respectable' positions in the scheme of women and work. It threw up the urgent need to document the experiences and insights of women breaking traditional male-centred occupations and taking on work in the non-traditional livelihoods space on the one hand, and demystifying gender-based stereotypes on the positions that women can occupy in the construction, transport and business sectors.

Objectives

- To understand the nature and extent of work on non-traditional livelihoods organised and promoted by Archana Women's Centre, Kerala.
- To cross-learn and share needs and challenges faced by AWC and member organisations in NTL work.
- To identify areas of collective or collaborative work as NTLN.

Methodology

Archana Women's Centre has pioneered training resource-poor women as masons, carpenters, with the aim of creating entry and access into these jobs in Kerala for over thirty years. The learning journey was therefore designed to give participants an insight into the lives of women on the ground, while also understanding the strategies and challenges in the process of mobilising, organising and generating employment for women in non-traditional occupations. Network members from states interested in participating in this learning visit volunteered to attend the same—thus making the methodology open and transparent, as a principle of network co-ownership.

The sessions were planned by AWC in consultation with the NTL network secretariat and process documentation consultant, keeping in mind the participant expectations and feedback from the Delhi learning visit.

The participants were given a logistics note, a background note on the organisations being visited, and a draft programme schedule in advance, so that they had all the necessary information on what to expect vis-a-vis arrangements and programme for learning¹.

The learning visit spanned five days (8th to 13th December 2019) and was based on a participatory methodology which provided time and space for observation, interaction, discussion, debrief as well as some time for leisure and experiencing Kerala as a tourist. Each day began with a short review of the day's plan and ended with a debrief session of the day, to allow time for reflection, sharing and analysis of participant learning's and space to gather any feedback for the host organisation.

The host organisation planned all the logistics in advance which made the learning visits efficient time-wise; the accommodation and hospitality was comfortable and took care of everyone's needs and food preferences very well. The AWC team personalised the visit by feeding the participants a range of Kerala cuisine, self-cooked by team members and the women-run canteen services promoted by the organisation. The participants were also able to shop for hand-ground spices and other culinary products made by the women's collectives promoted by AWC, thus contributing to their livelihoods directly.

For the NTL network, the Kerala Learning Journey was a critical coming together, sharing and bonding among network members personally and professionally—some new friendships were forged, some possibilities of member partnerships seeded and a collective commitment to advocate for and build non-traditional livelihood spaces for women across the member states.

LEARNING PROCESS

Day 1: 9th December 2019 @AWC campus

Seventeen participants from nine NTL network member organisations came into Kochi to begin the Kerala Learning Journey from 9th to 13th December 2019, hosted by Archana Women's Centre (AWC). Picked up at the Kochi airport by the AWC team, they travelled by road to the AWC campus on 8th December 2019, marking the beginning of a five-day NTLN learning journey.



Welcome and Introductions

The first day began with a welcome rose given by AWC staff to each participant and was followed by a round of introductions.

Amrita Gupta introduced the Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network (NTLN) which was initiated by Azad Foundation as an outcome of a learning journey to study organisations working on NTL for women in India (2014) and grew over three years into a formal network by 2017. The 32 member network is coordinated via a steering committee that includes Archana, Nirantar, New Delhi; Bandhuji, Indore; Baitali, Jabala, Kolkata; Meenu Vadera, Azad Foundation, New Delhi; Nandita Shah, Akshara, Mumbai; and Thresiamma, Archana Women's Centre, Kerala and has secretariat which is currently hosted at Azad Foundation and held by Amrita Gupta. Amrita informed the participants that her colleague, Padma Pandey would be the go-to person for any logistics related issues during the learning journey and participants were welcome to share any feedback about food or other arrangements with her and Padma.

¹ Please see Annexure

The participants were given a copy of the learning visit agenda, which had been planned as a participative and interactive process for all. A brief introduction of all participants followed, which is documented below.

Padma Pandey - Azad Foundation, New Delhi. Padma is responsible for the training at the Women on Wheels programme in the organisation.



Rajendra Bandhu - Samaan Society, Indore. The organisation has been working on legal justice since 2010 and began collaborating with Azad six years ago and gradually into the domain of socio-economic justice—through a focus on the entry of women in different NTL trades. Bandhuji is the founder of the organisation and member of the NTLN steering committee.

Purnima Gupta - Nirantar, New Delhi. The organisation has, since 1998, been working on women’s literacy and empowerment, and over the last decade began to include girls in its gender and education programmes. Purnima is a member of Azad Foundation’s POSH committee. “For Nirantar, the conversation on women’s work must include how we look at education”.

Niladri Sahoo - CYSD, Odisha. The organisation has reached 1.8 million women across 9000 villages in the state, and works on governance and livelihood issues. Recently, CYSD has partnered with Azad and trained 35 women drivers in Bhubaneswar; it is also planning to introduce other NTL trades for women.

Sheeba - RAASTA, Kerala. The organisation has, over 20 years formed 500 women’s Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and runs a night school for dropout girls and a women’s livelihood project. Sheeba is a Coordinator at the organisation.

Elcy - RAASTA, Kerala. She is a tailoring teacher and member of a SHG.

Anita Singh - Nirantar, New Delhi - She has been working on the women’s literacy programme at the organisation, along with trainings and supporting their resource centre. For the past one year, Anita has been involved in the Gender and enabling digital literacy programme in Nirantar.



Anna Alaman - Open Eyes, New Delhi. The organisation is a social business and has been working on responsible tourism since 2011. Over the past three years, its work has focussed on training women as professional tourist guides. Anna is the founder of Open Eyes and collaborates with Azad Foundation and Sakha cabs to train women as tourist guides in the capital city of India.

Aanchal Kapur - Kriti team, New Delhi and Mumbai. The organisation provides social development support services to grassroots level, national and international not—for-profit organisations. These include process documentation, gender training, organisational development, design, communication and printing, etc. It facilitates documentary film

screenings and sustainable livelihoods for over 1000 women producers and their families across rural and peri-urban India. Aanchal is the founder of Kriti team.

Rahima Khatun - Nari-Shishu-O-Kalyan Kendra. The organisation works on minority women's issues in Kolkata. Rahima is interested to learn about NTL opportunities and challenges.

Baitali Ganguly - Jabala. The organisation works with stigmatised girls who may have gone through sex work, rape and other such forms of violence. One of the challenges faced by the organisation is in the area of rehabilitation of trafficked women, therefore the NTL options are being considered by it. Its work includes advocacy with the government and training girls in the service sector - as Drivers, Police women, Retail service, Construction sector, etc. with the aim of enhancing their status in society.



Aanchal informed the participants that she would be documenting the discussions during the visit and requested for their consent to take up audio-visual recording.

Thresiamma drew participants' attention to the learning visit plan and shared that, based on the Delhi learning visit, this one has been planned with more time to see/ observe and discuss on-site work and experiences; to have interactions with the local women and AWC staff. The AWC team had also planned for the gastronomical needs of the participants which included lunch, dinner and refreshments cooked by AWC staff, local women running small businesses facilitated by the organisation or local cuisine restaurants. Amrita added that, an attempt has been made to match the participant expectations² with the design of this learning visit. Thresiamma also gave some ideas for sightseeing and shopping that could be done by the participants, especially since most were visiting Kerala for the first time.

Thresiamma Mathew - Archana Women's Centre, Kottayam. Thresiamma, who was a Nun but decided to change her life's mission to becoming a woman social worker, founded the AWC, a pioneering women's rights organisation in Kerala. One of the accomplishments of AWC is that its office building in Kottayam has been fully constructed and the carpentry done by women. Over 40 years, AWC has trained 5000 women as masons—with the objective of giving them higher incomes and positions in the construction sector. She mentioned that, while the profile of women coming into the construction sector was of lower class, destitute and widowed women, it is now changing to include educated women from other classes of society as well—this is also because they are able to earn Rs.800 to 1000 per day a construction worker or carpenter. AWC was recently visited by an international delegation of 13 women involved in the construction sector, and the exchange of ideas and experiences for the local and visiting women was amazing. AWC thanked Azad for taking a lead in the NTL sector and welcomed all the NTLN members to the learning visit.

The AWC staff also introduced themselves during this session:

Radhika, Head Mason

Oomana -Head, Carpentry unit and Office Secretary, AWC

Shruthi - AWC Secretary

Aarya- Engineer



² See Annexure

Kesri - Oldest staff member

Getting to know a NTLN member organisation - Open Eyes

One of the objectives of the NTLN learning visit was to use the opportunity to get to know about work being done by different network members, and the visit plan included this agenda. Anna from Open Eyes introduced the work being done by them as a responsible tourism organisation. Run as a social business, they organise holidays in tandem with local communities' being facilitators of the touristic experience.



With the aim of breaking gender barriers, Open Eyes has been focusing on employing blind women in the wellness tours it organises. Over the past three years, it has trained Sakha drivers to become tour guides in Old Delhi. She believes that even though tour guides are freelance workers, they earn Rs.1500/- per day and that can be quite motivating for women to enter this occupation. In January 2020, with the help of a German trainer, Open Eyes will be training 15 more women who will include six Sakha drivers, five women from the Nirantar community and two transgenders—thus placing women in public places that they were until now unseen. The fact is that, foreigners do not mind if tourist guides are transgender and this makes the in-road possible for Open Eyes as also the LGBTQ community being a big tourist market and therefore this strategy could be a win-win for all stakeholders. Anna mentioned that, there is so much competition in the tourism industry, that, in order to reach a professional level of tour guides, it needed a high level of sustainable tourism promotion and this has led Open Eyes to explore new collaborations with tour operators over the next three years.

As a result of the Delhi learning visit, they have also been able to initiate and strengthen collaborations with Nirantar, Etasha, Quest and Sakha and Anna was happy that the NTLN platform is serving as an important bridge between the gender based organisations and Open Eyes as a tourist company. The seven-month journey as a network member has been very fruitful for Open Eyes and they are looking for much more new learning and shared experiences.

Amrita reminded the participants that everyday would begin with a quick review of the day's plan and end with a debrief of the day's learnings.

Overview of Archana Women's Centre

The participants were introduced to the work of AWC, through a presentation. Founded by Ms. Thresiamma Mathew OMMI [Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate], AWC was officially established in 2004 in the Kottayam district of Nalpathimala and in 2009 as Archana Training Institute at Ettumanoor, Vettimukal.

However it was in 1989 that Thresiamma had really made the first efforts (as part of a sanitation programme) in breaking traditional taboos by training 12 women to become skilled masons. came forward to. And since then, there was no looking back for her.

AWC strives to establish an equitable and just order, against social and gender discriminations where everybody can enjoy an inclusive and abundant life in all its beauty and richness. The organisation aims at women empowerment, leading to socio economic equality and harmony in occupational vicissitudes.



AWC has been empanelled as Haritha Sahaya Sthapanam from Kerala Government as well as received accreditation from LSGD (Local Self Government). It is also an empanelled agency of Nabard and Women Development Co-Operation (KSWDC).

The organisation's *focus areas* include non-traditional livelihood skills training and employment such as

- Carpentry and Masonry
- Ferro cement technology
- Bamboo technology
- Housing
- Rain water harvesting
- Plumbing and Electrical
 - Concrete Bricks production and marketing

Current projects being undertaken by AWC include:

- House Construction Training - Over 5000 women and youth in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Orissa have been trained as site supervisors. They have been provided MG university/NIOS certificate.
- Buildtech Carpentry Unit - Training cum production unit with Certification by MG university
- Build Tech Cement Block Production Unit - Training cum production
- Ferro Cement Technology - Ferro-cement tank making for well recharging and rain water harvesting at different local bodies.
- Bamboo Technology - Building Bamboo houses and Carpentry Unit
- Gender Resource Centre - Service Providing Centre (SPC) assisted by Kerala Social Justice Dept & KSSWB, Thiruvananthapuram for handling family problems, cases, counseling etc. It also promotes gender sensitivity, equity and justice through awareness programmes and campaigns - skits, drama, road shows, exhibitions etc
- Child Resource Centre - dealing in Vacation camps to foster capacity and talents of students, Career guidance, gender and life skill education in schools to address the problems of teenage students, school counseling and a library.
- Organic Farming - Bio gas plant, Composting, organic manure and pesticides, Farmers club to facilitate organic farming and Archana Model organic farm.
- Training Institute to Kudumbashree for Skills such as Carpentry, Masonry, Electrical, plumbing and shelter training (goat, cow, chicken).
- Urjakiran: Energy Management Centre (LED Making unit)



Community Action Groups (CAGs) are small homogeneous groups of women, which serve as a social entrepreneur group to realise human and women's basic rights for sustainable livelihood, social equality, economic self-reliance, right to hygienic housing, sanitation, health etc. Each group comprises of 10-20 like-minded women, who are aware and motivated to working together, earning together and pulling together in a patriarchy dominated community to create a non-discriminatory and inclusive social milieu.

Entrepreneurship & Training for CAG members

- Gender education
- Garment designing and Tailoring
- IT for She (basic computer education for women)
- Food processing
- Paper bag/ cloth bag making
- Organic farming
- Banking awareness
- Karatte and self defence
- Umbrella making
- Snacks & cake making training
- Car wash training
- Coconut climbing training
- Grass cutting training
- Mason and carpentry training
- Plumbing and electrical training
- LED bulb making training
- Brick making training / Ferro-cement technology
- Waste management
- Site supervision training

Karunyarchana: AWC is concerned about the number of cancer patients increasing day by day and has come up with a supporting hand - Karunyarchana. This project focuses on the rehabilitation of cancer patients and providing nutritious foods to them. Karunyarchana is functioning in different regions of Archana women's Centre - Keduthuruthy, Ettumanoor, Uzhavoor and Ayarkkunnam.

Life before AWC - Radhika: A case in point: Before becoming a mason, women were engaged in book binding or as agricultural labourers. After coming to AWC, they are now able to educate their children. Radhika constructed her house with her husband. With the help of CAGs and support groups she was able to overcome the challenges and convince her family that this would be staple work and better pay. The trainings are not too difficult since all trainings are with stipend, and all women are often working before joining or are main breadwinners. The trainings are free and paid training for three months.

Her husband helps in cooking and now they do the same work - helping children and the house. The biggest difference is that now her husband thinks they are equal, but that was not when they were working in paddy fields. Once a year, AWC organises a family day where orientation is given on how to support and work together.

Responding to the presentation, participants raised some questions and shared their reflections.

Anna: Along with skill training, we should also include inputs that train the mind and help women challenge socialisation patterns. There is also a need for more and more visible examples and discussions on the context (caste, class, religion, age, etc.) so that women learn to “unlearn” and enter the non-traditional livelihood spaces. She also asked about how the women are trained on social aspects, to which Thresiamma responded that it takes eight months to complete the mason training and even though this is not enough to enable women to change their attitudes and behaviours around gender-biased social norms, it is a beginning.

Purnima: Breaking stereotypes and norms is necessary, therefore the focus on NTL for women is a critical agenda.

In response, Thresiamma shared that, sometimes, people want to pay women constructing their house lesser than they would pay men; however, AWC promotes the principle of pay for equal jobs, and it is training women for equal pay and equal opportunity. Most women involved in construction work have to go back to look after the family everyday so they do not migrate for such work.

Nilandri: What after AWC?

Thresiamma: We don't have them as our workers, the women take on this work through the panchayats in their areas, through CAGs, which makes the women independent after the AWC training is completed.

Purnima: Are there any changes in the architecture of the house where women are constructing it?

Thresiamma: Women construction workers usually undertake improvisations for kitchen cabinets and kitchen slab size and height. Among the carpenters, they try to make women-friendly furniture as most of it is very male centric.

Baitali: How is AWC looking at upscaling its work in these areas?

Thresiamma: AWC began its journey in this area with toilet construction, then moved into house construction, made possible through government funding into Nirmati Kendra and money allotted for training of women as construction sector masons. Talking about Kudumbashree, she mentioned that it is government programme with 25 lakh women members involved in different occupations. AWC trains women masons as part of this programme all over Kerala and has influenced the process of women mason's entry into the construction sector. Further, UNICEF has initiated it in their sanitation programme as also the World Bank and water supply schemes funded through Netherlands—all of the women construction workers and plumbers have been trained by AWC.

Purnima: What are the literacy levels of the women?

Thresiamma: Very few women from remote areas read or write but are extremely good masons—education doesn't come in the way.

Anna: How did you find jobs?

Thresiamma: The women mainly get jobs through the panchayat, and through some advertisements in the newspapers and public display boards. Though AWC has tried to establish links with real estate/ construction companies, the acceptance is low and often they want the women to work at night, which is not possible due to household work burdens and family constraints.

AWC has directly trained 500 women as masons between 1989-2019 and much more indirectly through its training of trainers programme. Many of the earlier women masons have now retired, and 40-45 % are still working depending on job availability

Niladri: How do you follow up after the training?

Thresiamma: We do not follow-up over with all the



trainees, however, meetings are held with those who live nearby.

A short video titled ‘women can, women can’t’ was screened as an end to this session—a video developed through a collaboration between AWC and Greenply—showing the building of a wardrobe by an all-woman carpentry team, right from the first steps to the final product. See video here: <https://youtu.be/uBFMFOXDKa4>

AWC Campus Walk

The participants then went for a walkthrough the AWC building which had been constructed by an all-women team, and saw the ferro-cement making and spice making areas as well as an exhibition of photographs on AWC’s programmes and visitors, a display area of products made by women (decorative items, wooden kitchen use items, cloth bags, etc.; the spice and grain processing unit and the ferro-cement water harvesting structure making space.

Participants identified some products they would like to purchase and the lists were given to the AWC staff for the respective orders. The NTLN secretariat also decided to order some cloth bags made by the AWC women as a giveaway to the learning journey participants.



Visit to the Plumbing site and interaction with women workers

Three women with plumbing tools in hand at work to construct a well-recharging system—an image that seems out of the movies but was witnessed in real time by the participants during the learning visit.

The lead woman was giving instructions to the trainee women and working at par with a male engineer on-site, fixing a pipeline and setting up the filtering structure on the well. As they worked together to dig and get the filtering equipment in place at the well, all the participants were inspired and amazed at the women's skills, their confidence and how they had claimed this non-traditional livelihood and space—reflecting the fact that 'skilling' is one of the keys to empower women in occupations that have until now been male dominated.

The women spoke of how their training began a journey of empowerment, social and economic, wherein their positions in society has been enhanced due to the work they do, their children are studying well and husbands supporting their decisions to break the gender bias in the choice of work women do outside the home.



Visit to the Carpentry Unit and interaction with women workers

The next stop, carpentry shed, with furniture being made and ready for deliveries, the skillful hands with tools to carve their lives and livelihoods—the women carpenters inspired with their stories, creativity and products. It was unsaid but almost every participant wished they could set up such a unit in their areas.

In keeping with their hospitality track, the AWC staff had also cooked some delicious refreshments for the participants—banana fritters, banana chips and tea to go along—giving the participants a taste of local snacks as the day ended in the field of women's work.



DEBRIEF Session

Travelling back and sitting down for the debrief of the day got the participants to work in pairs³ to reflect upon their new learnings, progression of understanding on NTL for women, the field visit process and logistics as well as what participants want to learn about in the coming days. The key points that emerged from this sharing were as below:



- Recognise the importance of skilling women so that they become capable of earning better and break into occupations traditionally closed to them.
- Seeing women as plumbers, carpenters and masons for the first time was inspiring and impressive.
- Publicity and advocacy of women in the NTL occupations like masonry, plumbing and carpentry should be done widely.
- Lent confidence to other organisations for taking on similar NTL occupations for women. For example, Nirantar members shared that they would motivate women in their field locations of Uttar Pradesh to construct the roof which is not allowed due to gender biases; unlike the women in Kerala who are constructing an entire house. Raasta would like to consider training women as plumbers in its field area.
- Potential of one organisation conducting skill training for women in many different NTL trades and occupations.
- Some unique strategies being applied by AWC. Leadership is in women's hands but also have men as construction workers, so that society accepts the women in these 'new' roles and 'traditionally male' occupations.
- Collaboration with the Panchayat helps with placement of women in NTL occupations
- Strategic partnerships of AWC with state government schemes and programmes provides scale, funding and productive use of resources on both sides.
- Lot of potential, pride and sense of belonging/ ownership among AWC staff with what they have accomplished in the NTL space.
- Food and logistics was very good.
- Warm hospitality by AWC, very well-organised and professional logistics.

Further learning needs and questions

- ? Want to learn about the effect of women entering this occupation on the market
- ? Is the model self-sustainable?
- ? Want to know if there is any benchmark for a formal education level
- ? Want to learn about the placement of the women
- ? Want to know more about the selection process and how you are dealing with genders health related trainers
- ? What is the selection process? How do you keep up the motivation?

³ The small group exercise was done in pairs as follows: *Baithali and Anna; Niladri and Rajendra Bandhu; Amrita and Thressimma; Padma and Purnima; Anita and Rahima; AWC and RAASTA*

- ? How are you dealing with gender and health related issues? This is a challenge as some women have left the carpentry work due to dust issues from wood husk sharpening
- ? Do you take any commitment fund from the women? For example, in Delhi, women contribute Rs.500/- during training.

Responding to some of the questions, Thresiamma shared that, motivational sessions are done in its trainings and one full day is spent on discussing gender and social norms. In terms of selection, an aptitude test is done for the women during the initial meetings along with a psychological test to assess which skill area they would be best suited to. The strategy of forming community action groups is critical for success and sustainability as they are important links with society—AWC has formed 345 CAG groups, with a membership of 3600 women.

The **selection** includes women from 20 to 35/40 years, and there is more interest among older women for entering these NTL trades. The minimum educational level for the women is atleast 8th standard, though some exceptions may be made. Women who have some construction experience receive a stipend of Rs.500/- per day for one month of training and untrained women receive Rs.200/- per day. AWC is a social-spiritual, entrepreneurial initiative and is being awarded for its 30 years of service to women’s empowerment by the Governor of Kerala next week.

“All the time we hear that ‘women can’t’ so we train them to believe that ‘women can’.

As part of this reflection, AWC shared some of its challenges and future plans. For example, they stopped making LED bulbs because they were being sold much cheaper and with warranty etc. which wasn’t possible for the organisation. On the positive side, it is creating a labour bank to supply different kinds of services by the women trained in NTL occupations. The state government is also registering all kind of trades in one roster. AWC understands the current need for incubation, social enterprise and incentive based marketing support. Amrita made reference to the AGBM working group on creating markets and shared that these points are linking in—to understand the diverse ways in which organisations are marketing the ‘learnt’ NTL skills and services.

Anna raised the important point about how to link the high potential of the women in these NTL occupations with more business strategies? In order to give more work for the carpenters, it would be useful to get the business perspective from the market; also focus on designing based on customer demands and needs. She also drew attention to the need to visibilise the work being done by AWC and how the NTL network can play an important role in this area.

Day Two: 10th December 2019

The day began with a brief moment to mark International Human Rights Day and reflect on what it means for each participant. Being together in the field to promote women’s rights in non-traditional livelihoods made it apt for such a collective reflection. The national context of violation of human rights in Kashmir and the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in the Lok Sabha, made it even more important to have this conversation.

Purnima shared that women’s rights are human rights and expressed solidarity with the anti-CAA protests in Guwahati, Assam.



Amrita reflected on the reality that “working with most marginalised, we see how we are getting divided every day, minorities are living in fear and we need to constantly ask ourselves what are or what can we do about it

Bandhuji shared that the house arrests of people in Kashmir is bothering him a lot.

For **Anna**, human rights do not have a starting and an end. It’s an ongoing process and we are working with the most marginalised, so seeing these results.

“Har ladai jeetne ke liye nahi ladhi jaati hai (Every fight is not fought to win). History will say you were there.” - Purnima

Bandhuji shared that he is disturbed about the actions of this government every second month where it is doing something that’s breaking democratic traditions.

Baitali expressed anguish about the lack of justice for rape and trafficked girls whom she works with but the answer is to keep making the efforts for protection of their human rights.

Rahima shared that Human Rights Day is the **culmination** of 16 days of activism on violence against women and in Kolkata, their community of young boys and girls are taking part in a rally to raise awareness about ending child marriage. In reference to the CAA, she added that even though between us citizens the divides do not get felt, what is happening in India is a reality. On this day *“I pray that we Indians will stay united.”*

Purnima added that, in the Lok Sabha, the majority is Right wing so no one could stop them. With the Congress government, there was some hope that our voices will be heard. But today, the reality is that *“Ladai jyaada toh hone walli hae, par hum ladhai bandh naheen karne walle hae.”*

Bandhuji shared that even though a lot of people are speaking up today, it is not enough. Fear needs to be reduced and “we need to (negatively) affect the political strength of the current party in power. Where we could put political pressure, we have succeeded, like in movements of the Narmada Bachao Andolan etc. Politics is not a bad work and we should have these discussions in our work.

Amrita went over the schedule for the day and with that, the group set off for the field site visit.

Visit to House Construction site

Welcomed by Nariyal pani (coconut water), in a small village, the participants spent over two hours witnessing women constructing a house for a flood-hit family. The power to build houses that women nurture makes them acquire a new meaning, as they are no longer just load carriers but masons in their own right. Wearing helmets, shoes and a uniform—gear that gives them safety and a professional look, these women have been skilled through training by AWC. Seeing the women work at par with male construction workers was a sight of pride, freedom and empowerment for all the participants.



Purnima, Aanchal, Anna and Anita even climbed the *seedhi* (ladder) to go on top of the roof they were constructing—this was a metaphor and reality of women’s confidence, courage, freedom and the power to break gender barriers as in most parts of India, women are socialised to believe that they cannot roof a house (ironical when they are the homemakers).

That the women were not as yet handling the machinery nor taking on the role of the engineer was a dampner but we know that a beginning has been made by AWC and the women masons of Kerala.



Site visit to Paper bag and Cloth bag units

Although the paper and cloth bag units cannot really be termed as non-traditional livelihoods, they were included in the learning journey agenda as one of the key activities of AWC. The other reason was that these women have been empowered to run the units on their own viz. production and marketing—and it is considered as a new normal for women who otherwise work as subordinates to men.

Through loans and infrastructure support, the women have been given a space in the market to produce and sell paper bags in one unit and cloth bags in another unit. While the paper bag unit women are homemakers who are doing this job part-time and for some pocket money, the women at the cloth bag unit are working full-time and show potential for making a business out of it. Since this was the first visit to the newly opened cloth bag unit, the women organised for a cake cutting ceremony by Thresiamma. Some of the participants also ordered and bought cloth bags from the unit.



Visit to Kudumbashree Nutri-Mix Unit

One of the agendas of the learning visit was to gain exposure to the work being done by Kudumbashree, which is a large scale government run women's empowerment programme in Kerala. The NTLN members visited a nutri-mix unit run by an all women team, which prepares mid-day meals for anganwadis.

The way that the unit was being run, women wearing protective gear, handling the technology and temperature control, cleanliness of the unit to produce and package safe, clean and nutritious mix for children in anganwadis showed their high level skills in managing the unit.

The women spoke with confidence and pride in their knowledge and skills for doing this work, as also their contribution to the health of children in the state.



Visit to Snack bar run by AWC women

The next site for exposure was a women run snack bar, which makes local snacks morning to evening for people on the street, workers, travellers etc. The women have been trained by AWC and make sweet and sour savouries which they also fed the participants. For women who are usually the cooks inside homes, running this snack bar adds respect to their lives and gives them an income too.

The women spoke about the skills they have learnt in managing this snack bar, especially understanding the economy of sales and profits as well as customer needs and feedback on the food being made.



DEBRIEF SESSION

As a principle of co-sharing the learning journey, different network members with training and facilitation skills were invited to design and moderate the debrief process. This session was facilitated by Purnima Gupta from Nirantar. She set the context of the evening by foregrounding the membership of participants in the NTLN and all of our work in breaking gender stereotypes and norms in context of livelihoods. Keeping in mind the AWC field visit of the day wherein participants saw the NTL work being done by women, participants were asked to reflect on the following points in the pairs as of the first day:

- ❖ The linkages with your own organisations' work in terms of breaking gender norms
- ❖ The learning's from AWC's work on non-traditional livelihoods for women
- ❖ Constructive feedback for AWC. Given that they have 30 years of experience in this area, such feedback will enable them to go ahead with some of the suggestions made by network member's e.g. social media, marketing, etc.
- ❖ Inter-networking ideas between NTLN members with the objective of cross-learning for future planning and collaboration between member organisations. This visit is not only an opportunity to be participants in this learning journey but also take some NTL collaborations forward.

Amrita, Purnima and Aanchal highlighted the need to *visibilise women in non-traditional livelihood spaces*. The numbers don't need to be large immediately, but that step by step the women enter into these otherwise male centric occupations like AWC has done over 30 years. Every organisation working on NTL for women is necessary and has its unique strategies and strengths to learn from as well as challenges to counter. For example, Azad

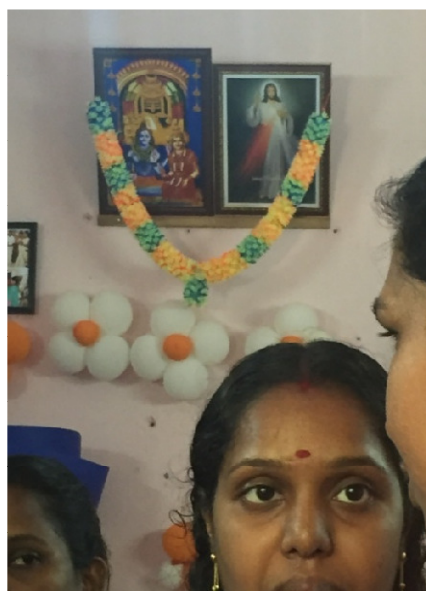
has a strong back-end NTL focus from its initiation and has moved at a faster pace than AWC; Kudumbashree is a large-scale and government funded programme with only women members; male presence is gendered in the work of AWC with women gaining work as masons but the engineers are still men. The next level should be to train women to become engineers and contractors, so the question to be asked is whether the organisation passing forward the same skills or taking those skills to another level of positioning in the construction sector. This would include training the women in leadership skills from a gender perspective along with business skills.

Rahima and Padma shared that they had never seen women constructing houses as they did during the field visit *“Kabhi practical mein nahi dekha ghar banate hue auraton ko”*. In Kolkata, men work in jute factories and women work as helpers in the construction sector; but the photos of women masons will help create motivation to skill-up. Rahima flagged the thought about AWC training women masons in Kolkata or share resource material for Nari-O-Shishu Kalyan Kendra to take up these trainings. As a trainer of drivers at the Azad Foundation, Padma believes that the photos and videos of women masons and carpenters will expose the trainees to other options of NTL occupations for women and help widen their perspectives. To see women and men at same skill level (as masons) which is a lot of hard work, they will be inspired and become confident that “we can drive vehicles when other women are doing such heavy (construction) work. During our mobilisation activities, we often hear that “women can’t drive, but these images can change the narrative.”

Reflecting on the journey, Thresiamma said that, when government officials saw women doing mason work they said that women can do anything as it’s a mix of hard work and intelligence. In response to a comment on women wearing protective gear such helmets, gloves and shoes and a question about them having accidental insurance, Thresiamma shared that AWC and women make a 50:50 contribution. Once the women start working regularly, they have to save 10% in their bank accounts and later, on joining their cooperative they have to put in 10 % there too.

They gave feedback that the ‘Smart Lady’ bag unit was not a non-traditional trade, it was a good initiative and with professional business planning inputs, the women could achieve better results in marketing. The AWC team shared that they were facing some challenges in the unit as the women were not willing to work to the extent it was needed. On the other hand, the ‘Three Star’ bag unit was more professional and the women are more motivated. The exposure to Kudambashree Nutri-Mix and the Women-run snack bar was very good for participants and Raasta is keen to adapt the latter in Kolkata.

Bandhuji and Anita were very impressed by the multiple NTL trades happening under the aegis of AWC, which they would share with their respective women communities. Samaan would like to adapt the AWC training module in Indore so that women can learn technical skills easily. Since Nirantar has worked on MNREGA, maybe “we can think of adapting the mason and plumbing work in Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh”. Both members expressed interest in tapping AWC for its training approaches. “My big learning from AWC’s work is how its set up the collaboration of the women with the Panchayat.”Infact, AWC’s networking capacity with the government has created space for



its work in different fields and this has not been possible for many organisations. This is a strategy that network members should learn about from AWC viz. working with the government. In terms of constructive feedback, it was suggested that AWC should also go to the open market. This is especially important, since “we are working on NTL for women to change the gender narrative in the market not just make women mechanics, masons etc. and project the fact that women can take up diverse and non-traditional trades. 1 + 1 is not equal to 2 but can become 11.” It may also be necessary to consider using social media for mobilisation, documentation and marketing.

Anna, Baitali and Niladri reflected on the huge possibility of making women construction helpers into masons and AWC can be a resource input in Kolkata and Odisha. Challenging gender norms, the boldness and confidence of women in construction is visible as is them “breaking male bastions brick by brick.” Women’s leadership was visible as one of the masons was directing other women, she was in-charge and inspiring. The Kudumbashree run Nutri Mix unit had an excellent environment, and was full of joy and good team spirit—a model worth replicating.

The feedback for AWC came in the form of it taking up business strategies and strengthening the focus on government linkages that it has already established—a strategy that should travel to other governments. There was a lack of business mindedness and cooperation between members at the paper bag unit and something needs to be done to change that for the better. In comparison, the vibe of the ‘Three Star’ unit was innovative and energetic and the age group of all the women was similar and they did not give any sense that they would shirk work.

Anita, Purnima and Aanchal reiterated the idea of making women more visible, mainstreaming them and break the narrative that women can’t be in mason work or transport sector or have education as Nirantar is doing with drop out girls and women. “Leap from impossible to possible”. The feedback to AWC was that it has successfully accomplished the first level of making women masons, carpenters and plumbers; the next step is for them to become leaders in these fields.

Purnima added that it is now time to enter into the open market and think of what skills do the women need to do so—and focus on building their skill sets.

Thresiamma appreciated the observations made by the participants and providing suggestions for perspective/ strategy support which is the need of the hour for AWC. She hoped that something concrete could be planned for AWC by the NTLN post this learning journey. She added that the big question is how we are going ahead in breaking gender stereotypes in each one of us. This implies that there should not be competition amongst us but we should become an open, collaborative and supportive network. It would thus mean that we tap into each other’s resource pool—with some skills in some organisations and some others in other member organisations.

Amrita formally closed the day by thanking AWC for facilitating the learning visit, for the hospitality and exposure to the NTL occupations being done by women in Kottayam, Kerala. She added that through this learning journey, “we are also learning about how to organise such events better.”



Day Three: 11th December 2019

The day began with a brief reflection by some participants of the previous day and a review of the plan for the third day of the learning journey. It was shared that the work being done by women of Kudumbashree was confined indoors, while masonry work was being done by women outdoors (thus exposing them to the elements). It can be said that women are more comfortable in an indoor space, but in the outdoor space they are more visible—and yet they were not the ones handling the machinery, the Engineer was still a man. Bandhuji mentioned that Samaan found a woman mechanical engineer when they were setting up the NTL programme for mobile repairs, etc. at an engineering college. He said that it would be useful to understand the role of Arya as an engineer at AWC and what her journey has been like.

Purnima shared that unlike many other Indian states, in the North East and Kerala women are already seen in public spaces—therefore we need to understand what is the difference in terms of women breaking gender barriers here or is it that working women are visible in more occupational spaces. In order to achieve the former objective, the feedback for AWC is that the organisation should identify women in higher education and push women towards taking on engineering/business roles. She asked for more clarity on AWC's mobilisation strategy—how it is reaching the women and whether it is reaching resource poor women. Aanchal drew attention to the role of the NTLN in supporting AWC to put non-traditional livelihoods for women on a higher pedestal. Anna thought that some of the visits held on day two, especially those to the paper and cloth bag units could have been avoided as they do not typically fit in as NTL trades. The group then set off for the visits planned for this third day.

Visit to Kudumbashree women-run canteen, @Gynecological department, Kottayam Medical College Hospital (KMCH)

The exchange began with Amrita introducing the NTL network as organisations working with marginalised women on education, skills and livelihood options that are non-traditional. She also shared the objective of the learning journey and meeting with Kudumbashree to understand what the organisation is doing to change the lives of its women members. The interaction was held with the Block coordinator, Micro enterprise and marketing coordinator, two members of the local group and the owner of the café run by Kudumbashree at KMCH.

Kudumbashree began in 1998 with a focus on poverty eradication and women's empowerment and is run by the Poverty Eradication Mission of the Government of India. Its structure is as follows:

District Mission Coordinator (DMC)



Assistant District Mission Coordinator (DMC)



Neighbourhood Groups NAC (10-20 members from houses in a neighbourhood)



Area Development Society (ADS) (7 persons) - members are oriented according to their interest areas



Community Development (CDS) - (one person from every ward)



The DMC and ADC are appointed by the government. All others are appointed on a contractual basis and others from the community (ADS and CDS functionaries are elected for a three-year term).

If women want to start a canteen or run a particular business, this information will pass from the CDS upwards to the DMO. Once the approval is received, the women who want to do different kind of enterprises are selected. The women undergo trainings for skill development and are also given gender orientation. Based on an evaluation, financial support is provided after six months of the women starting an enterprise. Any woman over 18 years, across class, caste, religion is eligible to join the organisation, and Kudumbashree aims to reach as many uneducated women as possible (but almost all women are educated in Kerala, infact, Kottayam is the first district of the state where all women are educated). The CDS becomes in-charge of the enterprise in each area. The Monitoring and Evaluation convener does the evaluation of the group and the Micro-Enterprise Consultant supports the women on the ground.

Every micro-enterprise unit run by an individual woman is given Rs.50000/- and based on the annual evaluation of usage and repayment, the next loan is provided to the woman. For a group enterprise, the loan amount is Rs.1.5 lakhs. The average earnings of women running these units is Rs. 15000-20000 per month.

Alongwith the organisational introduction, the participants interacted with the women running the canteen who shared that this work has not only given them enhanced incomes but a position in society and an opportunity to serve those who come to the hospital every day. Some of the women are now being able to send their children for higher education, purchase household goods and make savings with more confidence, especially those who are first time workers outside of the home.



Kudumbashree Canteen @Gynecological department, KMCH

Five women run this canteen, with two in the night shift and three in the day. They received 17 days of training before starting and have appointed eight staff from the NAC to assist in the canteen. In addition, two male staff help with making tea and coffee, due to their fast pace of work which makes it possible to handle the crowd at this hospital canteen.

Being a SC group, the government provided an inception grant of Rs.4.5 lakhs and since there is no repayment, the seed money is theirs to use and expand the business. The space for the canteen is rented at Rs.64000/- per month to the hospital and is paid by the women from their corpus and profits. Their monthly earnings at the canteen is Rs.15 lakhs including a profit of Rs.2 lakhs, which is put into a joint bank account for this group. Due to GST, profits have reduced in the recent months.

The women shared that they are very happy and satisfied running the canteen as they were housewives earlier. They spend their earnings on household expenses and savings in Kudumbashree groups.

The customers who include patients and their families, hospital staff and doctors are also very happy, as they get to eat home-style fresh food here or take away.

In response to Purnima's question to the Block coordinator on the Kudumbashree model and the profile of women approaching Kudumbashree, the group was informed that women from all castes and areas (urban and rural) approach the organisation. However, there is some reservation for special groups of women from STs/ SCs and other castes, for example, this canteen is run by a Scheduled Caste group.

The range of skills and enterprise options that the women can choose from include, production of nutri-mix, tailoring, cooking, masala (spice) production, handicrafts, electrical, plumbing work, LED bulbs production, IT unit, Pots making, multitasking training (e.g. Electrical and plumbing work), well-recharging and construction work, etc. Archana Women's Centre has been conducting training of Kudumbashree women in the construction sector.

Priya shared that Kudumbashree runs four canteens and manages three parking spaces at this hospital campus—a partnership that was initiated by the head office. The women are fully capable and empowered and do not face many challenges from men.

NTLN members discussed that women's literacy levels probably have a lot to do with the level of success that this programme has achieved along with the immense resources and scale at which implementation has been facilitated by the government.



Kudumbashree women-run Pay and Park facility Kottayam Medical College Hospital (KMCH)

Kudumbashree has also trained women to run a pay and park facility at the hospital and though we could not get a chance to interact with the women due to their concentration on the road, it was clear that the women were doing this work with a high level of skill and focus. It was also interesting to see hospital visitors stopping and giving their parking fees to the women attendants without any trouble.

This job was not only indicative of women breaking a male bastion in terms of work but also claiming a public space as women. It also reflected on the potential of women's visibility in such an occupation positively impacting the safety of girls and women drivers and passengers in the city and building respect for such women workers among men and other members of the public.

Taking a break from the 'learning' agenda, after this visit, the participants now proceeded for a boat ride on the backwaters.



Boat Ride on the backwaters

The group went for a contributory boat ride on the backwaters in a Kudumbashree managed boat with lunch cooked and served on the boat. It was a relaxing and beautiful few hours and everyone enjoyed the breeze and the sights, took photos, enjoyed their meal and spent some quiet time with themselves and the sounds of the waters below.



DEBRIEF SESSION

The participants spent some time to discuss their learnings from the Kudumbashree initiatives. Niladri complimented the organisation for this kind of a policy level intervention and the three-tier structure that operationalises the programme. Thresiamma added that since it is the governments own programme they can do anything, but it was the leadership of the first IAS officer heading Kudumbashree that pushed it on the wheel of success and it has further evolved over time. “Being government project once the doors are opened to women, they can take on any enterprise.”

One of the unique aspects of the model is that the elected representative who chairs the community level group is also compensated for her effort which creates ownership and respect for panchayat members putting in time to make the programme implementation smooth and successful. Infact, Kudumbashree is considered a best practice and sustainable model that people from across India and the world are coming to learn about. Baitali reflected that she should speak to the West Bengal government about this model too. Anita shared that she was impressed by the confidence of the women running the canteen, “it was all on their finger tips, they were leading it on their own”. Even at the ‘Pay and Park’ facility run by Kudumbashree, citizens were stopping and paying the women for the parking—showing respect for their work. Rahima mentioned that she was surprised and happy to see individual women earning such high amounts through a self-help group programme, and their sense of ownership towards the canteen was visible. She was also impressed by the collaboration between AWC and Kudumbashree which is friendly, supportive and committed to women’s empowerment.

The fact that 250 Kudumbashree women were employed in the hospital, this number itself was inspiring for Anna—that so many women are claiming work in public spaces. It is interesting to see how a government initiative is scaled up with the ownership of women, and acceptance by authorities and citizens, all together to make it a successful and profitable venture.

Bandhuji reflected that the will power of a government matters when it runs a programme. Clearly, this programme is a trailblazer and one to learn from considering similar government initiatives like the NRLM do not function well as the system is so corrupt. It is also important to recognise that NGOs cannot become the government even if we want to run a programme like this with the correct intentions due to the lack of resources needed at scale.

Referring to a similar success, Purnima mentioned the long-term vision of the Kerala literacy mission towards continuing education which has made the state almost fully literate. Aanchal pointed at the uniqueness of Kerala, wherein the fact that women are educated makes it almost incumbent that they will work outside the home—therefore we see women doing all kinds of work across occupational sectors in the state, both ‘traditionally male and non-traditional’ too.

Facilitating the debrief session as a network member, Bandhuji asked the participants to individually think about the following:

- ❖ Key learning/ takeaway from the Kerala visit
- ❖ Key challenge/s witnessed in the field
- ❖ One action point that each member commits to (discusses with others in the organisation and reports back to the group).

The participant responses are collated below as a summary of outcomes from the Kerala learning journey by members of the NTLN.

KERALA LEARNING JOURNEY: SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Key learnings

Breaking gender norms with Non-traditional livelihoods for women

Very important to mobilise women for NTL—it's the first step of success in women's empowerment. (Baitali)

Women constructing the roof of a house, working together and leading as masons. That women have constructed the AWC building on their own is so inspiring—this can happen! (Rahima)

Working with women and men from a gender perspective—this strategy is effective and inspiring. (Anita)

Men and women at the same skill level (i.e. masons) working together feels more empowering even though women may still be doing women-friendly or stereotypical roles e.g. carrying load while the men are running the machinery. (Purnima)

“Women can do all types of jobs that men can do and they do not need the support of men. Archana Women's Centre is handling so many enterprises under one roof and bringing women into mainstream society.” (Sheba)

Amazing how AWC and Kudumbashree have managed to get women to enter multiple trades and take on different types of livelihoods. The whole process offers them so many opportunities. (Bandhuji)

Promote Non-traditional livelihoods as women's work agenda

From the NTL perspective, AWC should be able to give more visibility to the women working on the ground. We are doing this now, based on Azad's experience. This will also attract more women to take up non-traditional livelihoods. (Amrita)

The network should collectively visibilise women in non-traditional livelihoods. (Amrita)

Skill-building as game-changer

Adapt the quality of machinery being used by the carpentry unit in Kolkata (Rahima)

“Women's entrepreneurship skills are necessary to take their enterprise forward. It is possible to see 250 women entrepreneurs in one place, as we saw at the Kottayam Medical College Hospital. I would like to see 250 tour guides in New Delhi. When women join groups and take their enterprise/job forward - finding markets and scaling businesses becomes a commitment”. (Anna)

Policy advocacy for change

If there is a policy structure and influence, then NTL for women can be sustained. (Niladri)

“Very happy to see that AWC women are able to reach great heights. The government support to Kudumbashree members, especially SCs/STs is very encouraging”. (Elcy)

Collaborate for success

Co-funding model between AWC and government to construct houses is a best practice for replication, as AWC could build more houses with this collaboration. (Purnima)

The Kudumbashree-AWC collaboration builds on each others' strengths in terms of mobilisation of women and skill-building in construction respectively. (Purnima)

The collaborations with Panchayats and state programmes are important learning points from AWC and Kudumbashree's work. Such outreach and advocacy with panchayats would also help us increase numbers and scale for our work. (Purnima)

Innovate and lead to empower

Haven't seen so much variation of livelihood options offered and created by one organisation. (Anita)

The leadership of Thresiamma is very inspiring—including the excellent manner in which AWC planned the learning journey. The team was very enthusiastic and helped our learning process. (Rahima)

Pre-assessment of women's interests and skill potential before involving them in a programme is really important, as it helps in retention. (Padma)

"Training the mind to believe in something leads to success" (Padma)

Putting together all the participant reflections, it is clear that a lot of learning took place during the first day of the Kerala visit with respect to understanding how women are being mobilised and organised around non-traditional livelihoods and micro-enterprises, how to bring women into leadership roles, how to make the process and jobs sustainable through a government driven model (Kudumbashree) and AWC. Each has its own strengths and gaps, and network members can take the best from both.

Key challenges

Male dominance and social norms

- There are some non-traditional livelihoods which are more male dominated and therefore more challenging to enter. The tour guide industry is one such occupation and being in the informal sector makes it doubly challenging. (Anna)
- Making NTL acceptable in society remains a big challenge (Baitali)
- When we train women the degree of dropout is high. Usually, husbands are supportive in Kerala but there are challenges that women face. For example, if the men come home at 4 pm, the women need to come at 3 pm. Women also want to know the immediate benefit of a training workshop when they come for it. Most of them are educated and it's very difficult to keep the group together; often the women go for many trainings and get tired of them. Infact, attending a training is also a job for many of them—they get stipends and project officers have targets to meet. (Elcy)

Between social and business mindsets

"I see the one big challenge in organisations with a charity mindset coming into businesses, which makes it difficult for them to survive and succeed as they lack a business mindset." (Anna)

- All the NGOs started with a development oriented work, so when they move into business, the acceptance will not be immediate unless service and business is balanced. (Sheeba)
- NGOs feel that mutual support and care for each other reduces when business comes in. (Elcy)

Marketing barriers

- Linkages between community and market acceptance of NTL for women is missing in our work. Lack of high level marketing and showcasing of our models in all our institutions is a big challenge. (Niladri)

- Women aren't able to stay on in non-traditional livelihoods even though they come into it, as other stakeholders do not support them (e.g. religious leaders). Placement is also a challenge, especially for women to work far away from home. (Rahima)

Policy barriers

- Lack of advocacy on NTL for women at the policy level (Baitali)
“Collaboration with panchayats and the government is challenging process in India. NTLN should make an advocacy plan with a longer term and bigger vision to advocate on NTL for women at the district, state and national levels”. (Purnima)
- Creating links with the market for women to have sustainable jobs in non-traditional livelihoods is the need of the hour.

Telling women's stories

- Need to document the journey of women who have come into NTLs through AWC—this is currently missing, we don't know the back story of the women, their struggles, the way they are facing up to them—we are not being able to see glimpses into the lives of the women in NTLs. (Anita)

Bandhuji flagged an important point vis-à-vis the Kudumbashree model by asking whether its perspective is about giving women opportunity or empowering them. It is infact linking women into livelihoods but not in NTL; it is generating employment for large numbers of women through government linkages but not necessarily in the open market as the NTLN members are attempting to do. If we look closely, the open market challenges for AWC are similar as for Kudumbashree—the only fact is that they do not operate there!

This point was challenged by Purnima who argued what is meant by an open market? Isn't a government hospital which is yielding Rupees 15 lakhs per month earning from one canteen and a parking facility for lakhs of visitors to the hospital in the market? These discussions show that the network needs to create more dialogue on the concepts of markets and business if it wants to make non-traditional livelihoods for women sustainable and profitable rather than see this work as a women's empowerment and engendering exercise.

Action points

“During this learning journey and seeing all of you, we realised that we lack research to back our success—it would be great if we could get help to write stories about our women in NTL; marketing and sustainability inputs from across the country as well as funding as 2021 marks the end of our current foreign donor cycle”. (Thresiamma)

NIRANTAR (Purnima)

- Strengthen inter-group (NTLN) networking
- Collaborate for curriculum development on NTL of women

NIRANTAR (Anita)

- Stronger networking with NTLN members
- Discuss possibility of some pilot NTL initiatives with the adult women literacy and women's pace group

JABALA (Baitali)

- Connect women masons in our area to get training from AWC
- Dialogue with government to advocate for NTL of women in West Bengal.

CYSD (Niladri)

- Use AWC resources for mason training
- Create a platform to showcase the NTL work at government level.

RAASTA (Rahima)

- Share learnings from Kerala visit with staff
- Share about Kudumbashree's work with our government department in Kolkata.

AZAD FOUNDATION (Padma)

- Share learnings with 25 members of my team and revert back

OPEN EYES (Anna)

Apply business leadership in tour guide work - do it as a group table this learning as they usually do freelance but do it as a collective.

Give gender and NTL training to build capacities of our guides and team. And would like to collaborate to take NTL perspective ahead in NTL.

RAASTA (Sheeba)

- Share learning's with staff
- Access Kudumbashree to train women for a bag unit.

"More sharing of challenges should be done among network members so that we learn from each other's strategies and experiences". (Amrita, Azad Foundation)

With a commitment to build on the learnings from the Kerala exposure and networking on NTL for women, thank you's to Archana Women's Centre and the NTLN Secretariat, the group said their goodbyes and travelled back to Kochi for an evening of leisure, shopping and local food.



Day 4: 12th December 2019

The last day of the Kerala learning journey was planned in Kochi for meetings with SHE Taxi. Amrita Gupta introduced the NTLN and objective of the learning visit with Suraj (Nodal Officer) and Rajesh (Liason officer) from SHE Taxi. The idea of meeting with them was to understand the SHE Taxi model, the challenges and what it takes to sustain.

Suraj explained that the women drivers are called entrepreneurs who use cabs as their enterprise tool. The taxi service has a fleet of only five taxis and runs 24x7 at InfoPark in Kochi and therefore it was difficult for any of the women drivers to come for the meeting. Started in 2013 with five cabs, the number is reaching 70 this year and expected to grow to 130 women by 2020. Recently, the company has received backing from the United Nations which will add fillip to the business.

SHE Taxi is a project under the Ministry of Social Justice, and directly reports to the Minister. The Ministry supports women and children in distress, through legal, shelter or counseling interventions. Its helpline number 1517 attends calls for distressed children. SHE Taxi is a women's empowerment programme of Gender Park (a government entity, part of the Ministry of Social Justice). A campus for this entity is being constructed in Calicut and will be ready in 2021. Actor, Manju Warriar is its brand ambassador. Its fleet of 100 cabs operating all over the state of Kerala suffered when Ola and Uber came in. The conservative thinking among women and society, the fear of women driving at night all became serious challenges that needed to be addressed. Many government programmes have vision challenges and that's what back-fired initially.

The women have been given 17 seater cabs to drive with GPS and panic buttons, and a professional and customised call centre (Malayalam one in Trivandrum and Ernakulum and English one in Coimbatore) with CISCO support to provide backend service. A toll-free number 155245 and a technology based booking app are also being set up. The UN support since 2019 and Smriti Irani's commitment to fund the venture will enable SHE Taxi to launch 130 cabs by March 2020.

SHE Taxi recognises the need to first manage the women's earnings so that they make enough money to stay on, especially since they have to manage domestic work and child care along with work. Through various combinations of number of trips that women drive per day and the rate approved by the RTO and government, SHE Taxi is trying to ensure that women earn Rs.25000-30000/- per month. Some incentives are being given to women as additional income through CSR funds allocated to Gender Park. The company is also accessing CSR funds to brand their uniforms, for example, WIPRO branding and cloth for the uniforms from Raymonds. They recognise that partnerships with corporates will bring in the required revenue, therefore it will create more hop-in and hop-off SHE Taxis in corporate areas; e-scooters at train and bus stations and smart cards/ smart readers to make the travel efficient.

SHE Taxi is a project under the Ministry of Social Justice, and directly reports to the Minister. The Ministry supports women and children in distress, through legal, shelter or counseling interventions. Its helpline number 1517 attends calls for distressed children. SHE Taxi is a women's empowerment programme of Gender Park (a government entity, part of the Ministry of Social Justice). A campus for this entity is being constructed in Calicut and will be ready in 2021. Actor, Manju Warriar is its brand ambassador. Its fleet of 100 cabs operating all over the state of Kerala suffered when Ola and Uber came in. The conservative thinking among women and society, the fear of women driving at night all became serious challenges that needed to be addressed. Many government programmes have vision challenges and that's what back-fired initially. Currently, SHE Taxi is only operating at Info Park because all the security issues are being addressed there.

Going forward, in March 2020, a new phase will begin as She Taxi 2.0. The women are being given 17 seater cabs to drive with GPS and panic buttons, and a professional and

customised call centre(Malayalam one in Trivandrum and Ernakulum and English one in Coimbatore) with CISCO support to provide backend service. A toll-free number 155245 and a technology based booking app are also being set up. The UN support since 2019 and Smriti Irani's commitment to fund the venture will enable SHE Taxi to launch 130 cabs by March 2020.



SHE Taxi recognises the need to first manage the women's earnings so that they make enough money to stay on, especially since they have to manage domestic work and child care along with work. Through various combinations of number of trips that women drive per day and the rate approved by the RTO and government, SHE Taxi is trying to ensure that women earn Rs.25000-30000/- per month. Some incentives are being given to women as additional income through CSR funds allocated to Gender Park. The company is also accessing CSR funds to brand their uniforms, for example, WIPRO branding and cloth for the uniforms from Raymonds. They recognise that partnerships with corporates will bring in the required revenue, therefore it will create more hop-in and hop-off SHE Taxis in corporate areas; e-scooters at train and bus stations and smart cards/ smart readers to make the travel efficient.

Talking about its other partnerships, the Big Bazaar collaboration will enable an advertisement when the cab is reaching near one of its outlets and point the customer to it. This would bring in revenue and enable a customer to shop if she/he wants.

A round of organisational introductions followed, with the aim of sharing the work being done on NTL for women by the network members.

Samaan runs the Women with Wheels programme in partnership with Azad Foundation in Indore—a large city in the state of Madhya Pradesh but a small city of the country. Two hundred women have been trained as professional drivers, of which 100 women have been commercially employed with Sakha Cabs (sister organisation of Azad Foundation) coming into Indore.

Azad Foundation trains women as commercial and private chauffeurs who are employed by Sakha Cabs. The training is module based and 250 women drivers are employed in Delhi-NCR as private and commercial chauffeurs.

Nirantar focuses on adult women's literacy, targeting dropout and never enrolled women; and gender and education from a sexuality perspective. It runs seven centres in Delhi and Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), which provide literacy, digital literacy and technical skills through SHGS. The latter includes training on how to use mobiles, privacy issues, reading SMS to enable and promote women's work and English reading skills. Nirantar also takes up policy and advocacy level interventions in the education sector.

Jabala works with trafficked women and unsafe migration survivors in Kolkata. In one of their projects, women have become farmers from being agricultural labourers earlier. Jabala also provides service sector training, and trained 10 drivers out of which five are employed in motor training institutes.

Raasta has been working for 34 years towards improving the lives of tribal women (especially their financial capability) in Wayanad, Kerala. This includes inculcating the habit of saving money and training women in bag making and such enterprises.

Nari-O-Shishu Kalyan Kendra has been working since 1979 on Health, Education and Livelihoods in Kolkata. From a focus on artisan zari workers rights to training women in

different NTL trades like auto driving, mobile repairing, carpentry, taxi driving, electrician work, to computer and Beautician training, its reach is for 5000 women SHG members. The organisation has also been facilitating identity cards, bank accounts, scholarships etc. for street survivor children and advocacy on minority rights.

CYSD has been working for the past 39 years in Odisha on Governance, Disaster Management and Livelihoods. Its reach is to 1.7 million women in nine districts of the state and has some large-scale projects supported by HP, Google and Tata Trust. One such programme, the 'Internet Saathi' is enabling women to become digitally literate in 8000 villages across six districts. Recently, the organisation has started partnering with Azad Foundation's Women with Wheels programme. CYSD also undertakes budget analysis advocacy at state level and its CEO heads the voluntary sector committee at the Niti Aayog. One of its upcoming initiatives is the 'World on Wheels' programme wherein a mobile van installed with 20 laptops will travel to a district and be parked there for 15-20 days so that women can learn computers and basic digital skills.

Kriti team is a development support organisation that facilitates knowledge and capacity development of grassroots and national non-profits through research, training, design and communication services. Its documentary film club uses films as a tool for social change and its Gestures initiative markets handmade products to enable sustainable livelihoods for women and other community producers.

Archana Women's Centre works for women empowerment in non-traditional livelihoods, such as masonry, carpentry, plumbing, ferro cement technology, etc. It has been working since 2004 in Kottayam district.

"Streets are masculine and women have to be polite and calm on the road".
(Purnima Gupta)

A discussion on the work being done by SHE Taxi followed. In response to a question on how the women are trained, we were informed that women are mentored by a psychological team to be very strong and focused on the road and not be distracted by their domestic issues. With an eye for women's safety on the road, the call centre is to be monitored 24x7, using a GPS device and even a collision is tracked. The panic button and an emergency tab button will allow for live video streaming as well. "Slowly, as we try to address the various challenges, now, the women entrepreneurs are not saying NO to drive anywhere and at any time of the day or night".

According to Suresh, they find that when women earn, they spend a lot; therefore SHE Taxi is trying to bring in Provident Fund and Pension through a tie-up with the state government so that there will be some forced savings by the women. It is also negotiating with banks to address car loan repayment issues faced by the women, so that they are sensitive and supportive to them. Through Gender Park, the government is also giving the women Rs.50000/ once a year, to deal with any financial crisis.

With respect to a question whether SHE Taxi has set up any tie ups with automobile companies, we were informed that, in Bangalore there is a project to empower SC/ST women and the manufacturer gave money for the cars but then women were not serious about the job. The strategy that SHE Taxi is considering is to negotiate for large numbers of cars, as getting subsidy is not easy.

In the Sakha Cabs experience, the company owns the cabs because it realised that women found it difficult to pay the EMIs. This has helped women manage their livelihoods better because they are salaried and the cars owned by Sakha. Unlike SHE Taxi, which is heavily funded by the government, Sakha Cabs still faces the scale up challenge, in terms of fleet size or booking app as it does not have the bandwidth or resources for the same.

On the question of women's selection, the SHE Taxi follows a two-pronged strategy. The first is to form clusters in different areas, and identify and enroll women who have a

passion to drive. These women are then trained for a month and enabled to buy a car (this takes 15 days) and make their driving licence, before they can be commercially ready for the road. SHE Taxi also negotiates with vendors to get some freebies for the women, e.g. registration and such paper work.

The second is to get trained women drivers to apply to SHE Taxi. This is done through advertisements. Then a meeting is conducted with the women who respond and they are sent to a Maruti or Mahindra driving school to test if they are eligible (through stimulator checks) for final selection. Those who do not get selected in the first instance are told to re-apply after training further. From one woman to another, they may become a commercial driver at different timelines based on their confidence to manage road traffic.

Counselors also visit homes of women to convince them to join the industry as well as support them once they take up the job. The positive impact on the lives of the women and their families is beginning to unfold. One of the woman's daughter is studying to become a doctor, another's child has started studying abroad—clearly the financial empowerment is improving the lives of the next generation.

Responding to the training given at driving schools by SHE Taxi, Bandhuji expressed concern that they are okay for practice only but not for a commercial drivers training (which needs several technical skills along with basic driving). Infact a commercial drivers training in the Sakha experience, includes training to get a licence and on-road driving practice as different skill sets are needed to manage traffic and the challenges on the road. He explained that Sakha training in Indore included the following rounds of self-driving practice (initially faculty sitting at the back and later independently) as well as map reading practice. The women are also trained in the mechanics of the car, changing tyres etc.

1st round: In city- low traffic areas (training faculty assesses the driver)

2nd round: In city - high traffic areas (over 60 days, one hour every day)

3rd round: On the highway (over 10 days, at different speeds)

4th round: Night practice - this is particularly important to learn to handle light reflections and managing road traffic at night

5th and final round: Driving along the ghats - deep and sharp turns

This whole process takes six months and it is only after a Sakha test is conducted and a test by an external faculty that the driver is given a go-ahead as a professional driver on the road:

Responding to the above, Suresh shared that nowadays cars are becoming very friendly and easy to drive, and more and more automatic cars coming in, therefore six months is quite a long training period. The family income background of women driving SHE Taxi is Rs. 10000-20000. In case of Sakha drivers, it is the women who feel that they want to become cab drivers from among marginalised communities who come forward and we encourage them to join the transport sector as there are different kinds of driving jobs they can take up—private or corporate and even public transport. The price point for Sakha Cabs is at Rs.350/- in comparison to a Uber cab which is Rs.150/- for a ride from the airport—this makes the open market challenge higher but it is explained as an investment into empowering women and giving them decent livelihoods. In Kochi, SHE Taxi has not been able to get into the airport as there is a very strong trade union of taxi drivers there.

Thanking the SHE Taxi team for their time, Amrita applauded the initiative which (after trying the commercial track) is now going safe with high-tech private cum government supported tie-ups. On the other hand, the NTLN member organisations are working with the most vulnerable at a smaller scale and with limited funding in the open market. Suresh mentioned that SHE Taxi would be happy to help AWC in Kerala in any area that it

needs support and would also welcome ideas from the participants as they go ahead with their plans. info@myshetaxi.in

CLOSING DEBRIEF

As a final ending of the learning journey, a small activity was conducted for participants to share the following among each other. Their responses are collated in the table below.

1. In one word, describe yourself as a person
2. Share a thought on the impact of this learning journey on you
3. Share your feelings as you leave

Name	Who am I	What am I taking back?	How am I feeling today?
Aanchal	Determined	Conceptual clarity is critical for success of our work on the ground - forward and backward linkages Mission to strengthen conceptual and strategic inputs among practitioners and on-ground workers. NTL for women must be contextualised women and work context	Restless
Sheeba	Raasta's woman coordinator	Women are so capable that they can do all jobs that men are doing. Raasta can do different types of NTL trainings	Very good journey.
Elcy		Women are doing all activities in every field.	Very happy and thanks to everybody
Anita	I see myself as a butterfly. After this journey "aur bhi udaan bharna chahti hoon, Anita ki udaan" (I want to fly higher, my own flight)	<i>Sakaratomak soch ki badlav possible hai. Jo field aadmiyon ke liye kaha jaata hai vo mahilaon bhi kar sakti hain.</i> (A positive thought that change is possible. The fields that are considered only for men are also for women to work in)	Mixed feelings - what will I be able to link in my work and how will I imbibe the learnings into my personal journey.
Rahima	I am a good human being, do no harm to anyone as an Indian citizen and a woman	To strengthen the work of my organisation from the learnings gained in this visit.	That the NTL network should become active now and we should make NTL for women more visible.
Bandhuji	I am an activist	A sense of richness gained from this journey.	A feeling of activeness, seeing so many things
Name	Who am I	What am I taking back?	
Niladri	I am a volunteer, a change agent.	First time (in 19 years of my work)experienced an entire journey led by a women's group. Appreciate how it was organised and scheduled Gave me clarity on NTL for women and developed my	

		thought process to take it further.	
Baitali:	I am part of this universe “ <i>Shakti hoon, eternal energy ka part hoon, unbound</i> ”	Cannot do anything alone, but in a collective.	Love and feeling of connectedness
Purnima:	I am seeing myself with an innovation lens “ <i>Khoj been karti rehti hu</i> ”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NTL for women are being explored. Have seen many women doing different NTL trades, only the “Khabar Lahariya” model has been successful but it is still struggling to raise money. See a similarity between AWC and Mahila Samakhya viz. the problem of sustainability. ▪ How are we seeing gender, decision making, and control over resources? How do we advocate and lobby with the government, how do we scale up our boutique type model? ▪ Kerala has high literacy indicators, but it also has a high incidence of violence against women which we haven’t talked about during these four days. For example, we know cases of a woman driver who has been burnt, so the question is how we are seeing gender in NTLs. ▪ How to see NTL as a business model? ▪ How should we tie up with/ leverage CSR based corporate support ▪ Look at fulfilling the need for mental health counseling of women. ▪ While doing the Open Eyes tourism project, thinking about whether we are reaching out to the Ministry of Tourism or the Delhi government to garner their support. 	
Padma:	I see myself as a catalyst. I am unique and I am ME.	<p>This has been a great opportunity for me in my first job - very enriching experience. I am becoming clear about how I can bring these learnings into my work @Sakha.</p> <p>Koshish karoongi ki apni trainees ko samjhau kee vishwaas se kuchh bhi kar sakte hain. (I will try to make my trainees understand that anything can be done if one believes it is possible)</p>	Glad that I became part of this learning journey. For increasing visibility of NTL of women, I will have to read, etc., it’s challenging but I will work on it.
Amrita:	I am in the learner mode (feel like a sponge) - meeting diverse groups of people so learning from others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I feel energised but there is a lot of work to be done in terms of collaborations. We have started the process in Delhi and taken it further through the Kerala journey but to keep it ongoing and goes further towards advocacy on NTL is very important. Am in planning mode ▪ Big thought is the need to collaborate, collaborate, and collaborate. 	

Amrita reminded all participants to complete and send the feedback form so that the same can be collated⁴. She also requested them to report back on the action points and commitment made by everyone at the debrief session on the previous day. Rahima commented that the entire learning journey was very well-designed, all the information shared and communicated from the beginning and these thoughts were seconded by Purnima who said that the logistics and field visit plans were based on realistic planning and therefore resulted in a successful programme. Amrita responded to this by sharing that Aanchal and Meenu both supported her, a lot of time and thinking went into it at the end of AWC and the network secretariat and this together made it possible to execute.



⁴ The responses from the feedback are included in the annexure

ANNEXURE

A. Draft Programme Schedule

NTL LEARNING VISIT PLAN: Kerala 8 th - 13 th December 2019				
Host Organisation: ARCHANA WOMEN'S CENTRE				
Arrivals and Checking-in: 8 th December 2019				
DAY 1: 09.12.2019				
OBJECTIVE: To understand the NTL activities of AWC				
Timings	What we will do	Who will represent AWC/ Facilitator	Expected outcome- What we will learn (add specific to each site visit if different)	Logistic details if any
7.30-9.00 am	Breakfast at hotel	NA		Van for travelling for the day -17 seater booked
10.00 am- 12.30 pm	Introduction to AWC	Thresiamma	Participants get an overview of AWC vision mission and activities- tour of campus Meeting with some women in NTL-brick production, construction	
12.30 - 1.30 pm	Lunch at AWC			Local Malayali Food
2.00 - 4.00 pm	Carpentry and Plumbing sites visit and interaction with women workers	Thresiamma	Witness NTL activities Interactions- understanding of struggles challenges and solutions	Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
4.00-4.30 pm	Travel back to AWC and tea			
4.30-5.30 pm	Participants' debrief meeting at AWC- With AWC team		Harvesting Learnings Giving feedback to organisers on process Rajendra Bandhu- Sharing on Samaan's work on NTL	
7.30-8.00 pm	Dinner			Local Malayali Food
DAY 2: 10.12.2019				
OBJECTIVE: To understand the NTL activities of AWC -Construction and bag units				
7.30-8.30 am	Breakfast at hotel	NA		
9.30- 10.30 am	Travel to visit construction sites			Van for travelling for the day -17 seater

10.30 - 1.00 pm	Visit to house construction sites.	Arya and Shiny	Interaction with women construction workers to understand struggles-challenges Profile of women How is mobilisation done for this and what is their model for sustenance	Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
1.00-2.00 pm	Lunch at restaurant run by women/ other lunch arrangement (TENTATIVE)		Engage with the women and gain an understanding of their experience of running a restaurant	Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
2.00 - 4.00 pm	Site visit paper bag and cloth bag unit		Overview of other activities of AWC- their marketing and sustenance process	Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
4.00-4.30 pm	Travel and Tea			
4.30-5.30 pm	Participants' debrief meeting at AWC		Harvesting Learnings Giving feedback to organisers on process for the day Nirantar to share- videos on Sexuality	
7.30-8.00 pm	Dinner			Local Malayali Food
DAY 3: 11.12.2019				
OBJECTIVE: To understand the activities of Kudumbashree				
7.30-8.30 am	Breakfast at hotel			
9.30- 10.00 am	Travel			Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
10.00 am- 1.00 pm	Visit to Kudumbashree operation+ interaction with women -shop/ canteen etc	Sheela and Arya	Understand how business the model works- partnership with govt and SHG. Their challenges and how these are being sustained	Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
1.00-2.00 pm	Lunch at "MOOPPANS"			
2.00 - 4.00 pm	Free Time- Boat Ride [If interested, visit bamboo house by AWC and 1 hour boat ride in another part.]			Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
4.00-5.00	Travel back to			Van for travelling

pm	hotel			for the day -17 seater
5.30 -6:00 pm	Participants' debrief meeting at AWC		Harvesting Learnings Giving feedback to organisers on process for the day NOSSK to share- Work with marginalised women	Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
7.30-8.00 pm	Dinner at hotel			Local Malayali Food
DAY 4: 12.12.2019				
OBJECTIVE: To visit She Taxi and understand their model of operation				
7.30-8.30 am	Breakfast at hotel			
8.30- 11.00 am	Travel to Ernakulum	Jyothy		Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
11.00 - 1.00 pm	Meeting with She Taxi group.		Understanding the business model- meeting the drivers- challenges and how such a model is sustained in the long run and challenges faced in the market	
1.00-3.30 pm	Group Lunch followed by Debrief Session and feedback			Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
4.00 - 7.00 pm	Local shopping and visits- can be done individually or in a group			Van for travelling for the day -17 seater
7.30-8.00 pm	Dinner at Hotel or nearby place			Van to drop team at hotel
DAY 5: 13.12.2019				
Travel to airport- Taxi's booked from hotel				

B. Background Note

This document was given to the participants of the Kerala Learning Journey in advance as an introduction to the organisations being visited during the visit.

ARCHANA WOMEN'S CENTRE

Archana Women's Centre (AWC) is an NGO working for women Empowerment and development as well as for building a just society ensuring human/ women rights. It was established in 2004 by Ms. Thresiamma Mathew. AWC believes in the actual empowerment of women physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually through intellectual awareness and devolution of skills. While the mastery of skills emancipates women from the clutches of societal servitude, the implementation of these skills empower them to strike at the roots of poverty and its consequent ills. The various training and placement programmes instituted by Archana have also been founded on this principle.

The prime focus of AWC is to train women in unconventional trades like building technology, carpentry, ferro-cement technology, plumbing, electrical, bamboo technology and production of concrete bricks. Skill training leading to entrepreneurship, formation of contractors group, community Action groups and awareness generation campaigns are the focus to generate and sustain a social sensitivity towards gender and women's rights. AWC has been instrumental in training more than 5000 women in to Non-Traditional skills and place them in employment. AWC also works in forming community groups of marginalised women give them training to become entrepreneurs and support them for establishing and developing their enterprises. Thus we have more than 3000 women in 30 panchayats engaged in different NTLs.

KUDUMBASHREE

Kudumbashree is a national level, government funded programme that was launched as part of the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission on 17th May 1998. It has been recognised as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas. The Kudumbashree includes Neighbourhood Groups (NHG) at the community level, that nominate representatives to the ward level, Area Development Societies (ADS). The ADS then sends its representatives to the Community Development Society (CDS), which completes the unique three-tier structure of Kudumbashree. Today, there are 2.77 lakhs NHGs, over 19,854 ADSs and 1073 CDSs in Kudumbashree.

SHE TAXI

SHE Taxi is a fleet of taxicabs, owned and operated by women, for transporting women commuters exclusively. The establishment of the fleet was initiated by Gender Park, an autonomous institution promoted by the Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala State, India. The services of the fleet were launched on 19 November 2013 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala with a fleet of five cars. 'Safe, secure and responsible' travel for women was the main objective of the service. The exclusive taxi network programme for women was initiated to promote entrepreneurship, self-employment and security among women. At present, a fleet of 40 She Taxies are running in Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi in Kerala. Around 45 women work as cabbies under the programme and earn an average of Rs 15,000-25,000 as monthly income.

Gender Park is an autonomous institution promoted by the Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala State, to resolve gender inequity in development. The institution has its headquarters at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala and its Chief Executive Officer is also the Managing Director of Kerala State Women's Development Corporation.

Some of the objectives of the institution are:

- To generate a space exclusively for women development activities, emphasizing entrepreneurship in service and cultural activities.
- To undertake research and documentation of the history and current trends in gender in different spheres of society through the Gender Park's International Institute for Gender

and Development (IIGD). The IIGD is involved in research on gender at the local, national and international level, and aims to provide formal education in gender studies.

- To strengthen women development activities undertaken by various departments/agencies/civil society movements, such as She-Taxi.

The *Kerala State Women's Development Corporation Ltd. (KSWDC)* was incorporated on 22nd February, 1988 with the aim of expanding economic and social opportunities for the women of the State, especially those belonging to the marginalised and downtrodden sections of society. The prime objective of the Corporation is the empowerment of women by helping them overcome the constraints and challenges that hamper their growth and advancement. KSWDC seeks to bring women to the frontline of societal development. They had initially launched She Taxi but She Taxi has been now been handed over to Gender Park.

C. PARTICIPANT EXPECTATIONS

The Kerala learning visit plan was based on a set of expectations and other information received requested from the participants in advance. This process enabled the host organisation and NTLN secretariat assess the participant profile and experience in their respective fields of work, including on non-traditional livelihoods for women. Along with what they wanted to learn about from the Kerala visit to AWC, participants also shared what they could contribute during the learning visit and any challenges they expected during this visit. The programme was therefore designed to include sessions for some organisations to share their work on NTL for women as well as kept time for starting the day with a review of the plan and ending it with a debrief on learnings and feedback. The host organisation ensured that any conversations in the local language were translated in English for the participants and among the participants English to Hindi translations were facilitated by different member.

Looking at the expectations before the learning visit, the experiences during and the feedback post the visit, it can be said that the Kerala learning journey organised by the NTLN managed to create a good match between the participant expectations and takeaways.

I want to learn

From the entire visit:

- about each organisations which will be part of this leaning process.
- explore skill training opportunities with a literacy programme for rural women collectives.
- about how to involve more women in NTL
- about how to sustain the non-traditional livelihoods for women
- new ways of partnership engagements
- about designing and implementing effective women’s leadership programmes
- about various opportunities available for better livelihoods for women

“This learning journey, I believe, would help us internalise the NTL eco-system, to understand the strategic shift from traditional to non-traditional livelihoods and the acceptance. It would be a wonderful platform to learn the mobilisation and linkages process.” (Niladri Bihari Sahoo, CYSD)

From AWC

- Women’s mobilisation strategies and challenges faced
- Women’s testimonials
- Community perceptions vis-à-vis AWC and impact at the community level
- Selection of various non-traditional skill building programmes for women
- Linkages between education specially literacy and skills building programme
- How vocational trainings take into consideration the low levels of literacy of the target groups and perspective on gender regarding the same
- Training processes and challenges therein
- Model of developing employability skills among the youth
- Market approaches

From SHE Taxi

- Journey and sustainability under She Taxi.
- Challenges faced (funding, market access, training, mobilisation, women’s acceptance of the commercial driving profession etc.) and how these were overcome to get women into this NTL occupation
- Women’s testimonials”
- Efforts made to establish this business and growth

- Advocacy with policy makers.

I can contribute

- Experiences from 20 years of work in the area of women's and girls' education and literacy and empowerment with a feminist perspective for Dalit, Adivasi and minority communities (Purnima Gupta, Nirantar)
- My work on adult education/ literacy programme with rural women's collectives and the feminist approach to gender and education (Anita Singh, Nirantar)
- Achievements and Challenges of Socially Excluded communities, especially Muslim Women (Rahima Khatun, Raasta)
- Alternative perspectives of using tourism as tool for development and women market access. (Anna Alaman, Open Eyes)
- NTL work experience in my area (Rajendra Bandhu, Samaan)
- Experience from 19 years of work in different sectors, including HIV-AIDS, Watershed management, Peace building and Livelihoods including skill and entrepreneurship development. (Niladri Sahoo, CYSD)
- My learnings and challenges of working in Non-traditional livelihoods (Padma Pandey, Sakha Consulting Wings Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi)

D. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The participants were requested to submit a feedback on the Kerala Learning Journey, to enable the NTLN secretariat and host organisation understand the impact of the visit as well as take constructive feedback for future such programmes.

All participants of the learning visit gave the highest rating of 1 out of 5, viz. their feelings about the Kerala learning visit, sharing that they went back happy, energetic and contented with what they came to achieve. Such feedback is critical for the NTL network as it provides a glimpse into what can be the dos and don'ts to make such visits empowering as a learning experience and also fun personally.

In terms of the facilitation and debrief process embedded in the Kerala visit design, the majority of participants rated it 1 on a scale of 5. The end of day debrief sessions provided them space for meaningful discussions and brainstorming among each other, thus enhancing the learnings of the day. The facilitators made these sessions participatory and were non-judgemental.

“Starting every day with a recap of the plan and ending it with a debrief and sharing session was a very good idea, and ensured that we did not forget anything which usually happens when such feedback is requested at the end of a training or visit.” (Anita Singh, Nirantar)

Feedback on the logistics of the Kerala learning journey was also very positive as most participants found the scheduling, travel, accommodation, food, backwaters boat ride and all other arrangements very good and rated it 1 on a scale of 5.

“It was very well-planned and organised.” (Sheba, Raasta)

Giving their overall feedback on the visit, the participants shared that they gained a lot from the learning and doing experiences during the five days in Kottayam and Kochi, Kerala. In terms of the way that the learning visit was organised and facilitated logistically, the exposure and sharing time between the participants, they gave it a rating of between 1-2 on a scale of 5. All participants were inspired by the women carpenters, masons, plumbers and the Kudumbashree women and took back new ideas for their own field locations. They were happy to get the time and space to share their personal reflections each day and also had a lot of fun. Despite apprehensions about the effectiveness of field interaction due to language barriers in Kerala, participants went back with a lot of learning due to the translation and interactive process facilitated by the AWC team.

“Thoughtful and well-structured programme. It was very useful, especially including both, NGO initiatives along with Government ones.” (Baitali Ganguly, Jabala)

“Seeing the different NTL work done by AWC, KS and ST and their state level collaborations was very exciting”. (Purnima Singh, Nirantar)

“I got new ideas for our field.” (Rajendra Bandhu, Samaan)

“Meeting other organisations is always a learning experience. I learnt women’s leadership concepts that I could implement at Open Eyes.” (Anna, Open Eyes)

“I was very impressed by AWC and Kudumbashree’s strategy of working with the panchayat and the government at scale, especially since this is not an easy task to accomplish. The visit gave me a kind of creative energy to take back with me.” (Anita Singh, Nirantar)

On the gaps, one of the participants felt that it would have been useful to have some time to discuss further NTLN steps along with the focus on the AWC work; another was sorry that the LED unit could not be visited and SHE Taxi drivers were not able to come for the meeting due to their own commitments.

The participants were also asked to share ideas on what they would do differently if another such visit is organised in the future and they made some important suggestions:

- keep some time for inputs on what we mean by gender and work in terms of NTL and looking at gender diversity.
- Keep some more time for discussing next actions and deadlines of the NTLN, in order to make a greater contribution to the networks’ agenda.
- add some participatory games
- include a cultural programme on one evening

The fact that the participants represented different organisations and had diverse experiences made the networking and cross-learning experience enriching for them. It was suggested that this process should not end with a visit but continue beyond especially since everyone belongs to the NTL network—as it would enable a continued learning and sharing between each other and enable members to incorporate best practices in their respective community locations and spaces.

