

## **EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN THROUGH MICRO- ENTERPRISE: A SUCCESS STORY OF ORNAMENTAL FISH VILLAGE PROJECT IN SOUTHERN INDIA**

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Despite the global recognition of ornamental fish farming as a women-friendly enterprise and having abundant resources, India's contribution to the global ornamental fish trade valued at USD 341 million remains minimal at 0.4%. The "Ornamental Fish Village" project, initiated in 2008 in T.V. Puram Panchayat, Kottayam district, Kerala, India aimed to empower women through micro-enterprise development in the ornamental fish farming sector. The project, implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission of Kerala: Kudumbashree Mission, sought to harness the region's potential for ornamental fish production and the upliftment of women. Through primary surveys and key informant interviews, a detailed account of the project was conducted, focusing on scaling up, costs, and benefits. Various organizations were involved in the project, with the key player in the initiation and continuation of the project being the Kudumbashree Mission. The project was executed in three phases. Phase I included project incubation and planning, formation of the enterprise and funding. During project incubation and planning 3 stages of training were given to the aspiring entrepreneurs- General Orientation Training, Entrepreneurship Development Programme and Skill training. Phase II consisted of scaling up for consistent supply chain- oriented production for export. Phase III included technological funding. Proper monitoring and timely intervention resulted in the reduction of risk factors. The species cultured included guppy, platy, molly, swordtail, angelfish, beta, shark, moon tail, goldfish, and gourami. Total production cost per cycle (45 days) was USD 416.49. Cost-benefit estimation per culture cycle revealed that the enterprise was profitable, with a net profit of USD 265.33 per cycle, a benefit-cost ratio of 1.64, and a net profit margin of 38.91%. According to Asian Development Bank the monthly income of an individual to be above poverty line should be USD 37.5. Hence, the project has generated significant profits, successfully uplifting rural women from poverty. Future line of research of this project would be, the factors contributing to the project's success, especially in contrast to its limited success in other regions, to provide valuable insights for replicating the model elsewhere need to be analysed for future prospects.