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## **Assessing the role played by the stakeholders in building Theeramythri groups**

**Shyam. S. Salim\*, Reeja Fernandez and Athira N.R**

### **ABSTRACT**

Society for Assistance to fisherwoman (SAF) was formed focusing on the socio economic upliftment of fisherwomen thereby paving the way for local development. With its flagship programme Theeramythri, Government of Kerala has provided financial assistance to fisherwomen for alternate livelihood. Even though the programme is on track the manpower under SAF rolls is limited. The study analysis the role played by the mission coordinators who are the brand ambassadors of SAF and are responsible for the field level implementation of the programme. The core duties and responsibilities they perform was analyzed and found that they undertake a wide range of activities from the start and end of the programme and identified them as the key stakeholder working with the Theeramythri programme. Therefore there arises a need to redefine their role to make them a part of SAF for the successful implementation of the programme. The results from the study shows that the programme Theeramythri have evolved as model of empowerment of fisherwomen as they depicted marked changes in them after involving in the activity groups. According to the perception of the mission coordinators the economic benefit was the aim while joining the project but the improvement in the skill set of the group members registered a high growth when compared to social and economic empowerment. The study highlights the need for strengthening manpower under SAF rolls for the sustenance and successful implementation of the programme.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Marine fishery sector in Kerala exhibits disparities, both inter-sectoral and intra-sectoral, while existing within the most acclaimed "Kerala Model of Development" with high human development comparable to developed countries not compromising to low per capita income (Kurien, 2000 and Sathiadhas, 2006). Women engage in a wide range of activities in the fisheries and in fishing

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communities which is vital to a community's well-being all around the world. They are mostly engaged in pre- and post-harvest activities like sorting, grading, peeling, gutting, slicing etc. and dominate the seafood processing sector the world over. (Shyam, et.al, 2011; Shyam, 2013)The catastrophic Indian Ocean Tsunami of 26th December 2004 wreaked havoc affected the coastal regions of southern peninsular India ( Shyam et.al,2014). Major damage in Kerala occurred in two narrow strips of land bound on the west by the Arabian Sea and on the east by a network of backwaters. Since 2005, Government of Kerala devised and implemented different programs namely Tsunami Rehabilitation Program (TRP), Tsunami Emergency Assistance Program (TEAP) and Prime Ministers National Relief Fund (PMNRF) to provide relief and rehabilitation to the affected. With a total outlay of Rs. 89 crores around 2000 livelihood initiatives and micro enterprises of tsunami affected population were facilitated. The Society for Assistance to Fisher Women (SAF) came into existence during June 2005 under Department of Fisheries (DoF) immediately after the Tsunami to emancipate the coastal population from havoc resulted from the disaster. SAF mainly aimed at creating livelihood options for the socio economic upliftment of the fisherwomen, igniting the local development. Later, in 2010 various Tsunami relief programs were merged under a new and holistic livelihood program named "Theeramythri". Since then Government of Kerala has entrusted SAF as the nodal agency for implementing Theeramythri project for sustainable development of livelihoods among the fisherfolks of Kerala and to ensure the sustainability of all such units established by department of Fisheries. The major categories of entrepreneurial groups supported under SAF project include garments and textiles, food, fish, coir, supermarket and others. The major stakeholders involved in the Theeramythri project include Nodal officers, mission coordinators and the invited consultancies. This paper assesses the role played by the mission coordinators in facilitating the Theeramythri project and to assess the perception of mission coordinators regarding the Theeramythri groups as a women empowerment model.

## II.Data and Methodolgy

Mission coordinators are an integral part of the Theeramythri programme responsible for organizing and controlling the activities of the program under the direction of SAF. Since the project of SAF is aimed to intervene in the lives of coastal women, the name mission coordinator itself connote the job as a mission to empower the fisherwoman which was suggested by Mr. Sasidharan Pillai, former Assistant Director of Fisheries. They are the persons who have direct contact with the beneficiaries as they empower people to experience the vision on their own. They offer people opportunities to create their own vision, to explore what the vision will mean to their jobs and lives, and to envision their future as part of the vision for the SAF. Since this program is a large

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project and involves multiple sectors such as a fish, food, garments and textiles, provisions, supermarket and others, the coordination issue is even more complex. SAF officials varied role and multiple commitments necessitates the role of a mission coordinator which is considered vital.

The study was conducted among 20 mission coordinators who work under Theeramythri project in nine coastal districts using a well-designed questionnaire during time periods viz. June 2015 and January 2016. On an average one to three mission coordinators are allotted to each district; this is based on the area of the district and the number of activity group functioning in the particular district. The important variables were formulated and the relevant data collected from the field were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics and the perception of the mission coordinators regarding Theeramythri as an empowerment model were expressed based on five point scale on agreement as SA- Strongly Agree, A-Agree, N-No opinion, D-Disagree and SD-Strongly Disagree and was analyzed using the Garrett ranking technique. The ranks assigned by the mission coordinators according to their order of preference on different parameters are converted into scores using the formula:

Percent position =  $100 (R_{ij} - 0.5)$

$N_j$

where,  $R_{ij}$  = Rank given for the  $i$ th attribute by  $j$ th respondent ,  
 $N_j$  = number of attribute ranked by  $j$ th respondents

The factors with highest mean value are considered to be the most important parameter of empowerment.

### **III. Results and Discussions**

#### **General Profile of SAF- Theeramythri groups**

Since the time of its inception SAF started 2500 activity groups with the capital outlay of Rs 32 crores, there exists a good demand for the Theeramythri groups. Nearly one lakh coastal families received assistance through Tsunami Relief Project (TRP) livelihood component and 80% of the income generating activities was initiated by women beneficiary groups. An average of 3 to 4 crores is being sanctioned under Theeramythri project every year. During the year 2015-16 they are giving 5 crores as assistance to the fisherwomen community. The general profile of the SAF activity groups in each district is given below:

Table 1. General profile of SAF - Theeramythri activity groups.

District	TE AP	TRP	PM NRF	VAF PU	DME 2010 -11	DME 2011 -12	TMP		TMP/ VMB		TMP		Sea Food Kitchen	Total
							DME 2012 -13	DME 2013 -14	DME 2012 -13	DME 2013 -14	DME 2014 -15	DME 2014 -15		
Trivandrum	40	66	-	11	-	-	10	-	-	-	13	-	-	140
Kollam	229	65	33	13	-	-	29	22	-	-	30	1	1	422
Alappuzha	75	72	44	20	10	30	-	15	25	11	20	1	1	303
Ernakulam	64	60	53	28	10	21	-	6	14	14	20	-	-	276
Thrissur	50	51	40	8	10	-	8	7	-	-	32	1	1	207
Malappuram	39	45	20	7	-	-	-	6	-	-	7	-	-	124
Kozhikode	50	63	36	6	-	-	10	10	-	-	25	1	1	201
Kannur	42	39	23	6	-	-	-	4	-	-	11	-	-	125
Kasargode	50	0	21	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	84
Kottayam	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	32	-	-	-	-	32
Total	639	461	270	104	30	31	57	70	71	157	4	4	4	1914

Source: SAF Website

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From the above table it is clear that over the years the number of units established by has increased which is a sign of good community response. SAF in general is involved with more number of women. With its good community response of alternate livelihood options the community was also interested in these activities. It started with spending their past time hours now it has become a regular activity and now it is verge on becoming business units.

### **Socio -Economic profile of mission coordinators Education and expertise**

Education plays an important role to articulate the stakeholders in their concerned roles. 63% of the mission coordinators are graduates from various fields and among them majority are commerce graduates and 37% have post graduate degree. A combination of mission coordinator with a degree in social work and a degree in business for each district shall be desirable to support the working of the activity group and to mould them to a business group. There are men and women in equal numbers which shows that there is no gender bias. They have to be chosen based on their ability to successfully lead others as in the past. Therefore having a winning track record is essential and expertise in leadership skills is another dimension in competence. The mean years of experience is four years and 53% have above mean experience. Some of the coordinators have experience in social projects which help them to stand out in their current position.

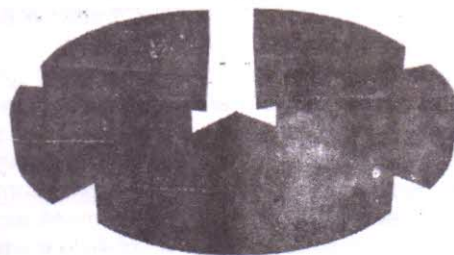
#### *Job Profile*

Implementing the field level activities of SAF is the major duty of the mission coordinators and the wide range of duties start with identifying the beneficiaries, group formation, initiating the activity, facilitating fund by SAF and banks, ensuring the sustainability of groups, providing marketing support, conducting melas, exhibitions, Theeramythri Council (TMC) office work, Coordination, proper monitoring & evaluation of the groups, Conducting motivation & leadership classes for fisherwomen, Organizing Training programmes for TMC units, conflict management etc. They are enrolled with an average of five TMC's in each district and there existed inequality in the number of TMC's handled by different mission coordinators leading to non-uniformity in work distribution. The mean activity groups handled by the mission coordinators are 33 units and 53% of the mission coordinators work above mean number of groups. Handling more number of groups creates difficulty in reaching out to all the groups since the groups are scattered across the coastal belts.

#### *Job satisfaction*

A five point scale ranking method was used to assess the work satisfaction level of mission coordinators regarding their trainings, accomplishments, working environment, career prospects and interaction with the stakeholders. The results show that 68% of the mission coordinators were satisfied with the training and motivational support which they received from SAF for fulfilling their post and 39% percent of the mission coordinators feel that the economic benefits they gain from this job is less when

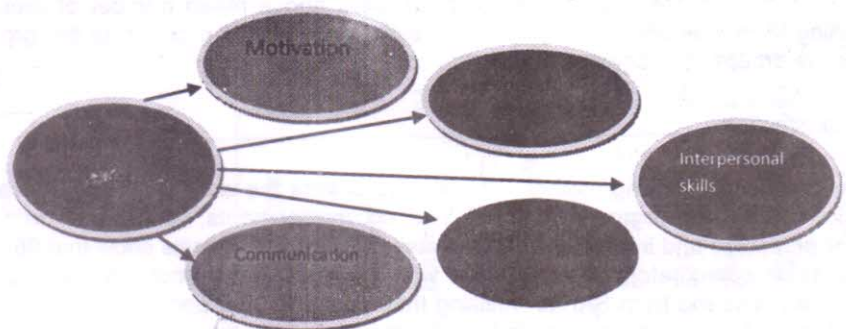
compared to the wide range of duties and responsibilities they undertake, ie, they are dissatisfied with the current work- salary ratio. Since they act as bridge between the SAF and the activity group's interactions with stakeholders form a major part of the duty. 87% of them are satisfied with the interactions while some of them reported the problems with the non-cooperation from the group members and TMC leaders which will create problems in dispensing their duties. Major support services provided by the mission coordinators to activity groups. Since the mission coordinators act as the regulators, promoters, educators and facilitators of the Theeramythri model and are vested with a wide range of duties and services in nurturing the activity groups. The result from the analysis is summarized in



- Team building
- Technical support
- Administration and Management
- Marketing
- Linkages

*Fig: 1. Support services provided by mission coordinators to activity groups*  
Team building

Team building was provided to enhance the social relations, among the allied services motivation has got the maximum and the least support services provided is the adaptation i.e., adaptation to the working environment. These are intended to expose and address interpersonal problems within the group. The major function of the mission coordinators is to provide motivational support for the group members. Being a good ambassador, communication, commitment and group morale are of prime importance for them and they help in acquiring resources for the group, negotiating fair arrangements for them, protecting the group members from constraints. A flow chart on different team building support services is given in figure 1.2.



*Fig: 1.2 Team building support services to activity group members*

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About 79% of the mission coordinators provide these leadership services to the group members of garments and textiles. Whereas in food it is 74% and in fish and others category it is only 63%. They have good communication skills in acting as the liaison between the group members and the SAF and all the mission coordinators perform this task as they assist the individuals to get attached to each other for a healthy inter-personal relationship thereby settling quarrels to share their common goals and objectives.

### *Technical support*

Mission coordinators have offered long companionship and information for the group members coping with the new technological innovations through offering technical knowhow to the members in order to increase their productivity and to accomplish their goals. The flow chart on the technical services provided by mission coordinators is given in figure 1.3.

About 52% of them provide direct technical assistance to group members in all the sectors rather they organize skill training for the group members on behalf of SAF.

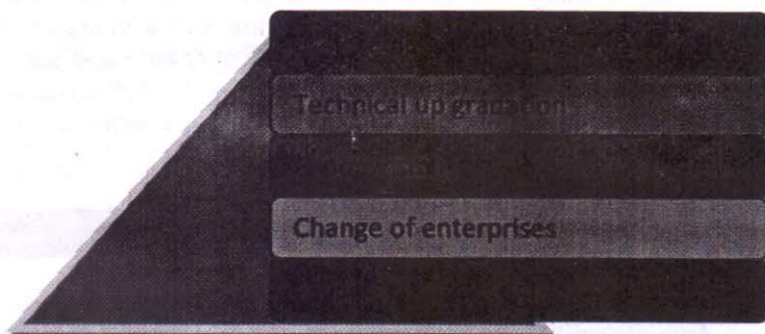
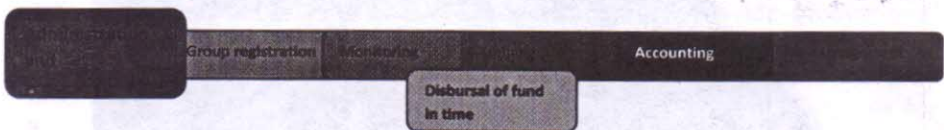


Figure 1.3 Technical support services provided by mission coordinators  
Almost 95% of the mission coordinators organize onsite skill training for garments and textiles sector, and 79% of the mission coordinators identify the training centers and organize skill training with modern recipes and flavors for the food groups. No skill training is provided in the coir sector which was one of the reasons for the high dropout ratio in this sector. About 63% of the coordinators organize skill training to fish and allied groups and for the varied groups in others category. Skill training is provided least to the supermarket. The field visit is an important opportunity to build relationship with the group members and foster an open and trusting relationship. Almost all the mission coordinators regularly visit the activity group sites for the monitoring and

follow-up actions. About 53% of the mission coordinators provide up gradation facilities and which is mainly seen in textiles and garments sector as they are updated with the latest fashion. In case of recurring loss of a particular activity or for the units in saturation stage, they provide timely help by re-organizing the group with new activity and for this they provide financial assistance from shift to appropriate scheme it is the mission coordinators who rate the project proposal and help the group members in enabling them to get the financial assistance.

### *Administration and management*

The mission coordinator contributes essential administrative support to coordinate the group members under the direction of SAF. Duties of a mission coordinator include all aspects of facilitating a project from its registration to the continuous evaluation of the activities of the group. All the mission coordinators invite proposals on behalf of SAF; assist them in preparing project proposal, grading the project proposals and finalizing the activity of the group. Then all the administration work from scheduling the meetings, preparing the correspondence, developing presentations, collection of revolving fund etc. In addition, they help in budget administration, keeping records, of the financial performance of the activity group and balance the SAF's interests and the stakeholder's interests and keep both sides in sync over time and address the changing needs of the activity groups and manage the dynamics of those changes. A flowchart on various administration and management services provided by them are given in figure 1.4



*Figure 1.4 Administration and management services provided by mission coordinators.*

Monitoring is a continuous assessment of the ongoing assessed activities. The major responsibility of the mission coordinators include the daily monitoring of the activity groups which is to determine if the outputs, deliveries and the activities planned have been reached the groups so that action can be taken to correct the deficiencies as quickly as possible. The distribution of revolving fund which the interest free working capital given by SAF for the activity groups forms the other major duty of the mission coordinators. The amount of revolving fund ranges from 10,000 to 60,000 which is usually disbursed in TMC meetings and they takes a record of the fund position and has to ensure its efficient utilization and timely repayment. According to the perception of the mission

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coordinators disbursement of fund in time and an effective mechanism for its implementation is the great success of SAF.

### Marketing

The marketing activities of the activity groups were far below the new standards set by globalization. They only engage in direct marketing where the products are sold locally. 68% of the mission coordinators provide marketing support to garments and textile and the others category whereas the marketing support to fish is only 53% and food is 68%. The support services extended by them is depicted in figure 1.5. Often mission coordinators help in identifying the markets but due to problem of non-adherence of the quality standards the group members may not be able to fulfill the commitments. The support provided for quality control is on the minimum when compared to all other marketing support. The packing of the finished products do not attract the mass as other manufactured products do. The activity groups don't even engage in advertising their products and they don't like to market their products to large unknown customers rather they stick on to the local market which highlights the importance of a good business developer as mission coordinators to promote business of the groups and to provide them with timely support.



Figure 1.5 Marketing services provided by mission coordinators

### Linkages

Activity groups borrow funds from banks once they have accumulated a base of their own capital and have established a track record of regular repayments. For this the activity group members need a good support since they have poor educational background and inefficiency to reach out to the mainstream activities. In this instance mission coordinators extend their valuable support services to the activity group members to develop linkages between bank and activity group members for the financial assistance. 59% of them assist in developing linkages with other institutions for the promotion and marketing of the services and products of the activity group members.



Figure 1.6 Linkages support by mission coordinators

### Perception of mission coordinators on Theeramythri as an empowerment model

The motto of Theeramythri project is to empower the fisherwomen with an all-round development which will increase their standard of living which pave way to the upliftment of their community. Since mission coordinators manages the field level activities they have a better understanding about the women who are involved in this activity groups and they are of the view that considerable changes have happened among these fisherwomen after involving in these activity groups. Figure 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 shows the positive changes among the group members after involving in activity groups. According to them, the reach of SAF to the lower sections of the society is commendable were group of women engaged in economic activity leads to wider movements for social consciousness. It started with spending their past time hours now it has become a regular activity and now most of the group members and their family sustain their lives with the income from the activity groups. According to the perception of the mission coordinators the activity groups have increased their socio-economic abilities coupled with improvement in skills. For detailed analysis they were given different sub parameters in which they ranked on a five point scale according to the relative changes in each parameter. Using Garrett ranking method these were converted to scores and the results shows that about 70% have improved their skills followed by 65% increase in social attributes and 61% have improved economic benefit.

### Social changes in the group members after involving in SAF

In the fisherwomen community, were most of the women have low educational level and lives in the lower strata of society the income generating activities could yield significant impacts. The social impact of the activity group is tremendous which is depicted in Figure 2.1

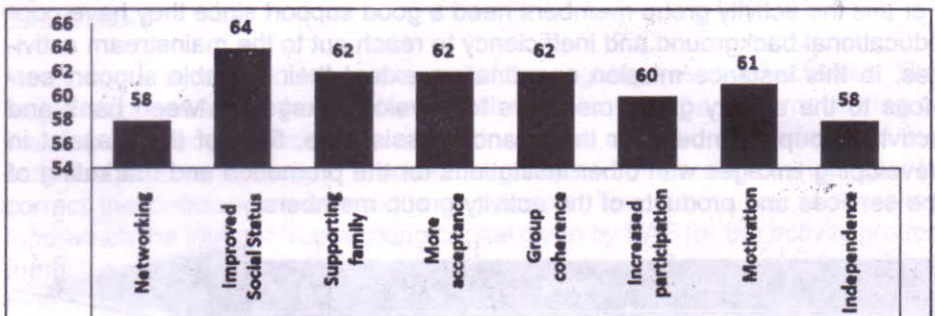


Fig: 2.1 Social changes in the activity group members after involving in activity groups.

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About 64% of the group members have improved their social status which is in the form of raising self-respect to take responsibility and make decisions in all fronts of life. About 62 % of the members are now recognized by their family and have contributed to the family needs after involving in activity groups. Women have long held a subordinate status in society, which often push them to the lower social status. (Shyam.et.al, 2014 ) With the increased participation in the group activities 61% of them are highly motivated which pulls them to the mainstream of the society which increases their networking coupled with group coherence makes them socially independent

### Economic changes in the group members after involving in activity groups

The level of sufficiency of income to meet their own needs is important indicator to measure the economic independency of group members. According to the perception of the mission coordinators the main reason for joining with SAF was to have economic benefit.

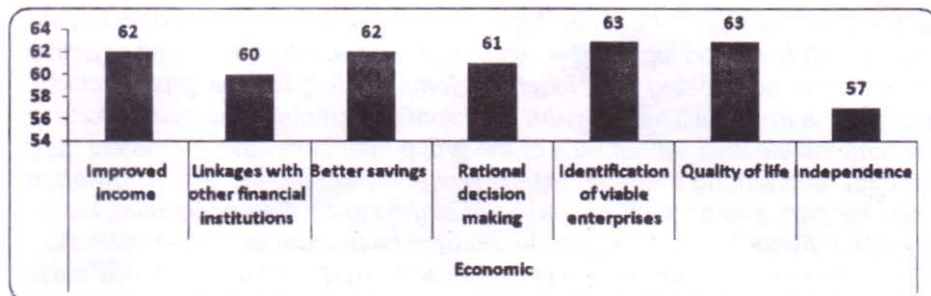


Figure 2.2 Economic changes in the activity group members after involving in activity groups

According to them 63% of the group members have increased their quality of life and have identified viable enterprises for their economic sustain with increased income and savings. So that they can meet their household expenditure which will in turn increase the standard of living of the family. With the increase in income level 61% of them have started participating in the decision making of the family in a rational way and their linkages with the financial institutions like banks have increased which helps to create thrift among the fisher community. Summing up the findings, 51% of the group members from all the sectors are now economically independent i.e., they have the capacity to lead their life in a better way.

### Changes in skills after involving in activity groups

After analyzing the perceptions of the mission coordinators the study reveal that there is considerable change in the skill set of the group members.

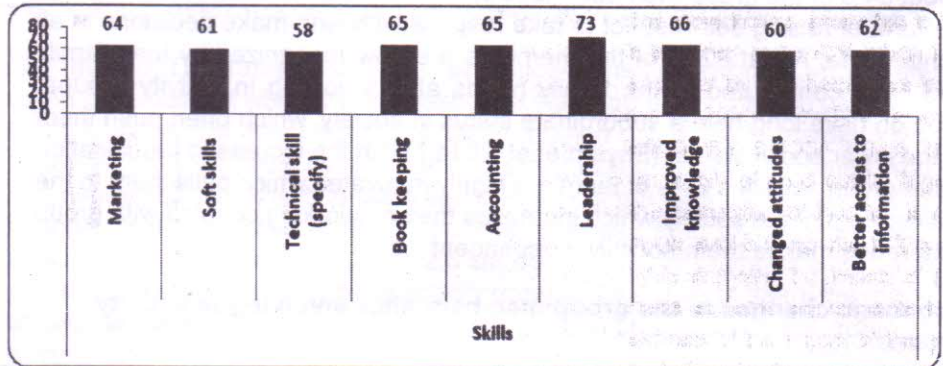


Fig: 2.3 Changes in skills of group members after involving in activity groups

Among the improved skills 73% of them have increased their leadership qualities which is evident from the fact that some of the group members participated in local election process and among them some are elected as local panchayath leaders which is a good sign of their empowerment which is the result of active participation in addressing their local problems relating to their group activity. Therefore it is true that Theeramythri participation acted as a stepping stone in contesting the election. About 66% of the group members have increased their knowledge and among them almost everyone have improved their knowledge in book keeping and accounting and have started to do their accounting works all by them. About 64% of the group members have increased their marketing skills and there was an improvement in their soft skills(61%) and technical skills too (58%).

#### Performance appraisal

*Training:* SAF along with IRTC and other training centers like CIFT, CMFRI etc has provided various trainings for mission coordinators for imbibing the qualities in them. So that they're up skilled to do new and different tasks, which keeps them motivated, fresh and increase their contribution to the work and building their self-esteem. When the mission coordinators are appointed, a three days residential training is provided where they are fully trained and mould themselves to assist the working of the activity groups. Several other interim trainings are also arranged for the mission coordinators in order to improve their working culture. The thematic areas of the programme include training on capacity building programme, leadership training, motivation activities, accounting and book keeping, communication, personality development, project development, how to improve field work etc.

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**Review meetings:** Review meetings are conducted at two levels: First, TMC meetings which are conducted monthly where the leaders of the activity groups meet together for the collection of revolving fund and informing them about the trainings, exhibitions and other activities. All mission coordinators meet monthly at SAF office for reviewing their activities which summarizes the informal conversations and feedback that occurred for the month and providing the financial statement of the activity groups with the SAF officials. They have a quarterly meeting with the nodal officers for discussing their district level activities. This will help the SAF to check whether the programme is under track and will help them to identify the local problems and help in taking prompt actions.

### Problems faced by mission coordinators

Since mission coordinators act as the facilitators of the project and they are engaged in the field level activities it is important to check the major constraints of mission coordinators in dispensing their duties which is depicted in figure 3.

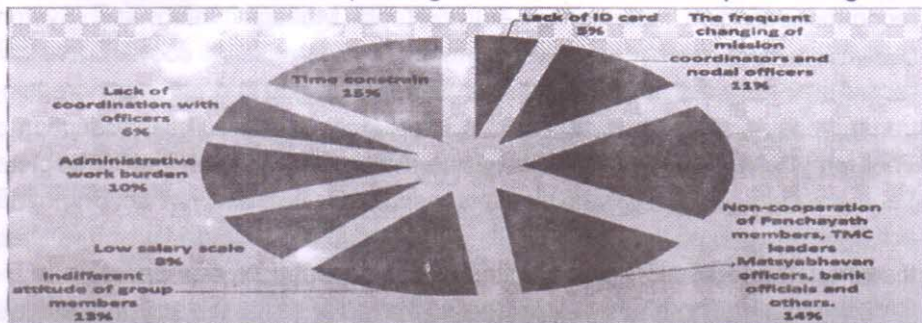


Fig. 3. Problems faced by mission coordinators

As the mission coordinators undertake multitude of activities 18% of them complain about the heavy work schedule which they undergo during the process as they undertake multitude of activities. Lack of ID card creates problems when they act as representatives of SAF to meet the requirements of the activity groups and in turn will create problems in linkages with banks, LSGs and other organizations. 14% are of the view that non-cooperation of the panchayath members and TMC leaders lead to unproductive TMC meetings. The frequent changing of mission coordinators and nodal officers is the other major problem where the new coordinator will take time to study the project and to get fit to the environment. Since mission coordinators undertake field level activities, they need to travel a lot to reach the groups which are in the coastal areas and in turn create a time gap in dispensing their duties. Apart from the heavy work load the disregard from the senior officials will lower their motivation level which affects their work. The salary package which they are receiving now is less compared to their quantum of work.

#### IV. Conclusion

From the study it is worth mentioning that Theeramythri groups have evolved as an empowerment model where the downtrodden fisherwomen community had a commendable momentum in all walks of life. The role of all stakeholders involved in this project is of prime importance and have extended strong hands in supporting them. As the study highlights the mission coordinators as the brand ambassadors of the programme who act as a bridge between SAF and activity group members, thereby narrowing their gap which helps in the successful implementation of the programme. Therefore their role proves high significance in the successful working of the SAF project. Therefore there arises a need for an effective monitoring and evaluation of the mission coordinators through a well-defined system which increases their productivity. The study recommendation on implementing Activity Report Managing Information System (ARMIS) a field level reporting system where the mission coordinators can record their daily activities which reduces their time gap in reporting, increasing transparency and efficiency in working is progressing well. The introduction of Theeramythri Information Monitoring and Evaluation System (TIMES Register ) at the activity group level will also increase the transparency in working of the activity groups as all the transactions of the group are recorded which will help the mission coordinators in collecting the field level data and updating in the SAF database. Therefore monitoring and evaluation at the key stakeholder level and the activity group level increases the overall functioning of the project and the SAF authorities can take off the project to the next level of transforming these activity groups into successful business units.

For any programme to be successful adequate manpower is needed at all stages for the successful implementation of the programme. The study clearly defines the core duties and responsibilities the mission coordinators adhere in the success of the Theeramythri programme and portray them as the key stakeholder involved in the project. Since they are contractual staffs and are normally posted for a tenure of one year, their commitment will always be questioned, and the frequent changes in the mission coordinators will create problems in facilitating in the project, therefore there is a need to review the role of mission coordinators, and there arises a need to include more manpower under SAF rolls so that it can emerge as a pioneer institution focusing of women empowerment in Kerala.

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