

Headline : MARG Karaikal Port – Creating sustainable livelihoods for Womenfolk **Publication : DIMABHOOMI**

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MARG Karaikal Port through its CSR arm 'MARG Parivarthan' has been taking several measures to usher social & economic prosperity for the greater benefit of the people living around the Port neighbourhood. Since empowerment can be ensured only with better quality of life, more income and overall happiness, MARG Karaikal Port has taken up the Self Help Group (SHG) initiative and started promoting the Self Help Groups in the region. Self help groups have proved to be the most effective approach to make women economically self reliant.

Although, commissioning of MARG Karaikal port has spurred lot of economic activities in the region both directly and indirectly, the rural women folk in the vicinity stayed away from economic activities, partly due to lack of education, employable skills matching the market demands and most importantly lack of self-confidence to play an active role in the vibrant economy. These women were dependent on their husbands for their day to day expenses. Gender and development issues have revealed that wherever women have had equitable access to education, economic opportunity and social support system, family and societies have benefited and MARG Karaikal port strongly believes in this philosophy.

The CSR team of the port has conceived a concept called 'Uzhaikum Karangal' to help the rural women to become self-reliant and economically independent, through promotion of SHGs. Launched in June 2010, with 22 members, the Uzhaikum Karangal project has gained momentum and been an inspiration in forming 4 more SHGs covering 107 rural women overall from the villages, near the Port. SHGs have been instrumental in promoting domestic savings allows the members to take projects that generate supplementary income for their families.

The project also aims to ensure the economic & social benefits that the Port generates percolates to reach the disadvantaged section of the community particularly the women folks. Self Help Group (SHG) formation and encouraging women to access alternative means of livelihood is one of the prime objectives of the project.

The first venture by this women group was a Coffee kiosk at MARG Karaikal Port started during August 2010 by installing 4 vending machines at a monthly lease rental of Rs.400/machine. The working capital met from SHGs savings and income generation from the Coffee kiosk. Then SHG started mobile recharging business to the employees, contractors

and workers in the port.

The Xerox copying service to the general public, workers, truck drivers, vendors of the port was another income avenue started by the SHGs. The Xerox machine was taken on monthly lease rental of Rs.3500. The Port provided the place and electricity at free of cost besides one CSR personnel to assist them on a continuous basis on micro-enterprises management, book keeping and also to scale-up their activities further.