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Livestock sector: A tool for women empowerment

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Abstract

India is an agriculture dependent country and livestock sector is an integral component of it. In India, livestock sector is mostly look after by women as most of the animal husbandry activities like fodder collection, chaffing, feeding, watering, health care, milking, household-level processing, value addition and other management practices are performed by women. But the share of women in income from livestock sector is considered negligible. Women have less access to technology, extension services and less women farmer's organizations; hence efforts are needed to increase the capacity of women in terms of skills to meet their strategic needs and to document systematically their inputs and outputs with respect to livestock sector. The decision making, self-esteem, social support, access to knowledge, credit facility, livestock services, market accessibility and asset ownership are the important pillars for the women empowerment in livestock sector. Exclusive trainings for women farmers should be organized to remove their knowledge gaps regarding specific animal husbandry activities.

Keywords: Agriculture, Empowerment, Knowledge, Livestock, Women

Introduction

India is an agriculture dependent country and livestock sector is an integral component of it. Livestock sector is considered as an important asset for rural livelihoods. The livestock sector contributes significantly in total agriculture sector and country's GDP that is 25.8% and 4.6% respectively. In India, livestock production is largely looking after by women. Women make significant contribution to food production sector particularly in horticulture and small ruminants' production (FAO, 1997; Arshad *et al.*, 2010) ^[7, 3]. In fact animal husbandry is getting feminized and dairying is mainly look after by female as they have great command over this enterprise (Jadav *et al.*, 2014) ^[14]. Approximately 5 times that is 75 million women are actively involved in dairying in India as against 15 million men (Thakur and Chander, 2006) ^[25]. In India, most of the animal husbandry activities like fodder collection, chaffing, feeding, watering, health care, milking, household-level processing, value addition and other management practices are performed by women. Despite the significant contribution of women in livestock farming, the share of women in income from livestock sector is considered negligible. They always find as invisible workers (Chayal *et al.*, 2009) ^[4] and considerable gender inequalities also exist in access to technologies, credit facility, information, inputs and services due to various reasons.

The rapidly increasing demand for livestock products due to decrease in land holdings and increase in population creates opportunities for empowerment of women (Taneja, 2013) ^[24] by using livestock sector as a tool. Therefore, there is urgent need to correct gender inequalities in livestock sector, veterinary education, research, service delivery systems, credit facility and knowledge by organizing exclusive trainings for women farmers to remove their knowledge gaps regarding specific animal husbandry activities (Anonymous, 2012-17) ^[2]. This review paper presents a brief overview about the role of women in livestock sector and importance of livestock sector as a tool for women empowerment.

Role of Women in Livestock Management

Women are actively involved in the livestock sector but it is difficult to assess the exact magnitude of contribution of women in livestock activities and shows a great degree of variation across and within countries. Women in India contribute 69% of workforce in livestock sector (Patel, 2016) ^[21] and about 32% of their time to agricultural activities (Singh and Sengupta, 2009) ^[23]. However, women workforce in livestock sector varies within country as it is less than 10% for West Bengal and more than 40% for Rajasthan women (Jain, 1996) ^[15]. Younger women devote more time in agriculture activities than older women.

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India is producing highest milk (198.40 MT) in the world growing steadily at a compound annual growth rate of about 5.68 per cent and per capita availability of milk was 407 gm/day (Economic Survey, 2019-20), this considerable change is the fruit of large number of rural women dairy farmer's hard work (Patel, 1998) ^[21]. The ability of livestock sector to provide protein rich food, generation of income and employment lead to provide livelihood opportunities to millions of livestock keepers (ILRI, 2012) ^[13] makes livestock production system, an appealing vehicle for pro-poor development. Increased consumption of livestock products due to increase in population and decrease in land holding, particularly in the developing world, is an important determinant for deciding prices of meat and milk (Delgado *et al.*, 1999; Delgado, 2003) ^[5, 6]. The increased demand result into price surge and provide new opportunities to come out of poverty due to the multiple benefits that they get as a reward for multiple roles in different production systems (Rangnekar, 1998; Aklilu *et al.*, 2008) ^[22, 1]. Livestock farming provide employment, food and nutrition security to the rural poor along with generation of income across different production systems and along different value chains. The vulnerable section, particularly women and the landless farmers who are more frequently engage in livestock production, highlighting the multiple benefits of livestock farming as a tool to come out of poverty (Heffernan and Misturelli, 2000) ^[11]. It happens through various pathways: (i) During shortages of food, households can sell their livestock to purchase other food items like cereals and legumes; (ii) regular income from livestock farming can be used to buy food in order to maintain balance diet in their food basket and to diversify diets; (iii) livestock and livestock products can be consumed in form of milk and meat and provide a protein diet for households. Approximately 70 million rural households (majority of small and marginal farmers and landless labourers) own livestock of one species or the other.

The sustainable development of the livestock activities will definitely lead to more inclusive development and empowerment of women (Anonymous, 2012-17) ^[2]. The role of women within a livestock production system is different from region to region, and the distribution of ownership of livestock between men and women is strongly related to social, cultural and economic factors. Women are usually responsible for collection of fodder, chaffing of fodder, watering of animals, milking, processing, selling milk products, caring for newborn lambs/kids and sick animals. Women primarily spent about 294.34 minutes daily in different dairy farm's activities like feeding, watering, milking, housing, breeding, animal health care and marketing (Thirunavukkarasu and Christy, 2002) ^[26]. Young girls are also involved in the grazing of small ruminants whereas married and young women are responsible for household activities (Lo, 2007) ^[19]. At the household level, most of the work and decision-making related to livestock farming is taken by women; however some important decisions are taken jointly by both the man and woman heading the household. These decisions mainly include which animal need to purchase and to sell and at what price, processing of milk, sale price of milk and milk products, disease diagnosis and treatment of sick animals. Only 64.60% women looked up the processing of livestock product on small scale like conversion of milk into milk products for household consumption (Kaur, 2015) ^[18] and 74% women were involved in selling of milk. The involvement of women were reported least in finance

related activities like farm record maintenance (52.5%) and getting loans from the banks (49.16%) (Kathiriya *et al.*, 2013) because in rural areas men were considered suitable for these activities. Kaur (2015) ^[18] studied that about 98.6% rural women were involved in health care of pregnant animals, 52% were taking animals for treatment, 55.30% involved in deworming, and 30.60% were involved in vaccination of animals. Kathiriya *et al.* (2013) found that 80.83% women involved in fodder collection, 75% in chaffing of fodder, 86.66% in feeding of animals, 77.50% in storage of feed/fodder and 85% in watering of animals. The attitudes of the women themselves and paternalistic bias society result in to gender-blindness which may be conditioned by their culture and society to underestimate the value of their work (Niamir, 1994) ^[20]. The management, access and control of resources like small ruminants, grazing areas and feed resources have a positive impact on the welfare of the household and thus empower the women. Women face constraints like gender disparity, accessing natural resources, differences in wages, social and mobility issues, extension services, marketing opportunities and financial services as well as in exercising their decision-making powers. Females devoted more than double time than the men in animal husbandry activities but face far greater time constraints than men and always juggle due to gender-based division of their working hours into child care, household responsibilities and unpaid work of livestock farm (Mehra and Rojas, 2008). These constraints often prevent women from reaching their full potential within the livestock sector, and thus compromise food and nutrition security, financial inclusion of household and vision of women empowerment. Women have a primary role in determining the nutritional status of the household particularly for children as they manage household meals. So, when rural women will get control over the livestock or livestock products household coping strategies may be affected, resulting in a positive impact on overall household well-being and particular in nutrition (IFAD, 1999; FAO, 2012) ^[12, 10]. The constraints of gender disparities have negative impact on women's ability to earn a stable income and on overall household income. Women and men perform work within the livestock sector expose to various health and safety related concerns, such as heightened exposure to zoonotic diseases (WHO, 2009) ^[29]. Female workers are more health risk in livestock farming than men (Tripathi *et al.*, 2017) ^[27]. So, women should be trained about correct postures, use of technical help for heavy load works in livestock farming. The development of small scale livestock enterprises is an important tool to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in rural areas (FAO, 2010) ^[8]. Rural women perform multiple activities that include a reproductive role, encompassing child bearing, child rearing, housework, engaging in paid labour activities outside the house and in charge of a number of tasks related to household farming activities, including livestock management. Women contribute to 43 percent of the agricultural labour force and contribute substantially to the livestock management (FAO, 2011) ^[9].

Need for Mainstreaming of Women in Livestock Sector

The mainstreaming of women in livestock sector will definitely empower the women as well as help in improving the economic, social and nutritional condition of the concerned rural household. Some key benefits that can be gained from mainstreaming of women in livestock sector are

given as below:

1. Women are typically responsible for collection and bringing of fodder, chaffing of fodder, watering of animals, milking, processing, caring for newborn lambs/kids and sick animals but all the women do not have decision making authority for control of sale of milk and milk products. If the livestock rearing households will identify and support women's roles as livestock owners, processors, users and marketer of livestock products while strengthening their decision-making power and capabilities, then it will certainly promote women's economic and social empowerment and consequently provides a way to enable rural women to break the cycle of poverty.
2. Today, livestock ownership is increasing women's decision-making and economic power within both the household and the community. It can open up access to credit facility for the women as well as livestock is also a source of cash in urgency.
3. Animals provide wool, skins, and dung which can be used by women to make clothes, or as fuel for home consumption and for sale. Processing of these materials can be an additional employment and income generation source for poor rural women.
4. The management, processing and marketing of livestock products generate more income than most of the other activities in which women are generally involved, and bring benefits for the whole family in terms of increasing food security at the household level.
5. Women's self-esteem will definitely increase when they will own, control the livestock production and it will surely strengthen their role as producers and income generators within the household and in the community.

Key Women Issues in Livestock Sector

Women are facing certain constraints in livestock farming; these issues need to be addressed for the real empowerment of women in the livestock sector. Some of the issues are enumerated as follows:

Ownership of land and Livestock

The ownership of land in rural areas is mainly tailored by the context of the region and society and mainly in the hand of men for taking decision over use of land. So, there must be defined tenure with the aim of guaranteeing and expanding women's access to and control over, land. For women, purchase or receipt of a cow does not necessarily describe their ownership. There is need for complete control over livestock production, processing, marketing and selling of livestock product and livestock itself.

Access to capital and knowledge

Women have generally less access to resources like land, water, credit funds, technology, less asset ownership, less awareness to extension services, less information about market trends, prices. Ensuring women's access to extension services, knowledge, credit and technologies is very important for their empowerment in the livestock sector.

Limited decision making freedom

Women have limited decision making freedom to exercise various activities in livestock farming due to traditional patriarchal type Indian culture, the decision regarding economics aspects has been dominated by men. Women are

not confident in decision making related to marketing because they have less contact with progressive farmers, officials and banks, less women farmer's organizations (Upadhyay and Desai, 2011) ^[28].

Responsibilities and division of labour

Women engaged in livestock sector are also associated with household work, care of children and old age persons. So, generally women end up in overwork when proper analysis of labour work is carried out due to other associated responsibilities in households and community.

Role of livestock in household nutrition

The increased earning of men from livestock related activities may not be necessarily resulting into improved household nutrition, whereas women tend to prioritize household well-being. If women are not empowered in livestock sector then nutritional and social needs of vulnerable groups will be compromised.

Role of farmers' organizations

The farmers organizations are always considered the interests of their members. But the participation of women in such organizations is less and there is less number of women specific farmer organizations.

Other Gender issues

- Measures to improve productivity and production will only succeed if additional income can be generated by selling products outside the home. Women's access to markets, control over the processing and sale of livestock and their products are important considerations in this respect.
- To increase livestock production, women should receive special training that is tailored to their specific needs and constraints.
- Efforts to introduce new technology that does not take into account traditional practices by men and women will not be successful.
- As income-earning opportunities in areas of livestock production traditionally handled by women increase, control of these areas may be taken over by men. An arrangement must be made so as to protect the women's position in livestock sector.
- The role of women and their empowerment in the local and regional livestock production initiatives should receive special attention. The local practices at the basis of livestock production initiative are generally focused on the participation of men.
- Efforts are needed to increase the capacity of women to negotiate with confidence and meet their strategic needs.

Recommendation for Women Empowerment in Livestock Sector

The demand for livestock products is continuously increasing due to increase in population and decrease in land holding for agriculture throughout the world which eventually results into increasing scope and opportunities for empowerment of women through dairy farming (Taneja, 2013) ^[24]. The output of women-oriented livestock development programs will definitely be positive. If we will remove gender disparity in livestock sector, veterinary allied field, research, change in attitude of extension functionaries and extension service delivery systems. The decision making, self-esteem, social

support, access to knowledge, credit facility, livestock services, market accessibility and asset ownership are the important pillars for the women empowerment in livestock sector. To make women farmers as effective livestock entrepreneurs, the following suggestions need to be considered on priority basis-

- a) There is a need of in depth analysis to document the role of women in livestock husbandry, households and community.
- b) Women must be motivated and promoted to start livestock rearing as commercial enterprise to generate more income from it.
- c) Farmer organizations exclusive for women should be started which can help in their building for improving their contribution in livestock sector economically.
- d) The women education, livestock/land ownership, credit facilities, women's participation in social gatherings like 'kisan gosthi', 'village chaupal' etc. should be promoted to empower women in the livestock sector.
- e) Special trainings for women at community level after assessing their specific training needs should be organized through female extension workers and their outcomes should also be analyzed.

Conclusion

Women play a primary role for animal care. Income from the livestock sector is an important component of household incomes for a large number of rural households. Therefore women make a significant contribution to Indian livestock sector's economy but lacks in technical knowledge and skills. The economic, social and nutritional condition of that household certainly improves, if a woman becomes empowered in the livestock rearing. A depth study is needed to understand constraints for women farmers and explore possibilities of empowering women in different parts of India. Considering the participation and lack in knowledge about livestock sector, if women are empowered through trainings and farmer producer organizations then it will definitely contribute in doubling farmer's income and prosperity.

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