

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO ACHIEVE POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH LIVESTOCK REARING

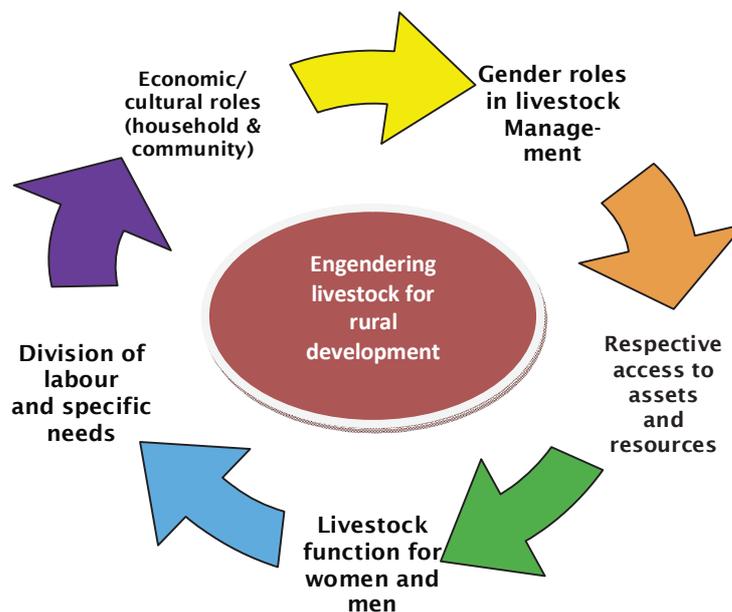
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Abstract: In India livestock production and agriculture are intrinsically linked, each one being dependent on the other and both are crucial for overall food and livelihood security of the people. Livestock is the important source of steady income for the poor rural families and households. Gender equality is the foremost ingredient that determines the overall development of a country. Women play an important role in livestock management, processing and marketing, acting as care providers, feed gatherers, and birth attendants. To bring the women who rear livestock to the mainstream and to reap the benefits accumulated out of development and growth, women participation should be ensured at various development programmes of the government at the state and national level for poverty alleviation.

Keywords: Constraints , Empowerment , Livestock Rearing ,Poverty alleviation.

Introduction: Livestock are important assets for the rural poor. They can be productive assets, financial assets (e.g. storing wealth), can build social and political capital through gifting, and can build natural capital through use of manure as fertiliser. In the Indian context, livestock production and agriculture are intrinsically linked, each one being dependent on the other and both are crucial for overall food and livelihood security of the people. Often livestock is the important

source of steady income for the poor rural families and households located in rainfed agriculture contexts. Gender equality is the foremost ingredient that determines the overall development of a country. To step forward in the path of development, it is imperative to empower the rural women population. Empowerment literally means, 'becoming powerful'. Power can take various forms as 'power to', 'power with' and 'power from within' all of which allow the construction of different meanings for empowerment (Panda, 2000).



Key issues associated with gender and livestock

Women in Livestock Rearing: Women play an important role in livestock management, processing and marketing, acting as care providers, feed gatherers, and birth attendants. They are also involved in milk production, although not all women control the sale of milk and its products. Identifying and supporting

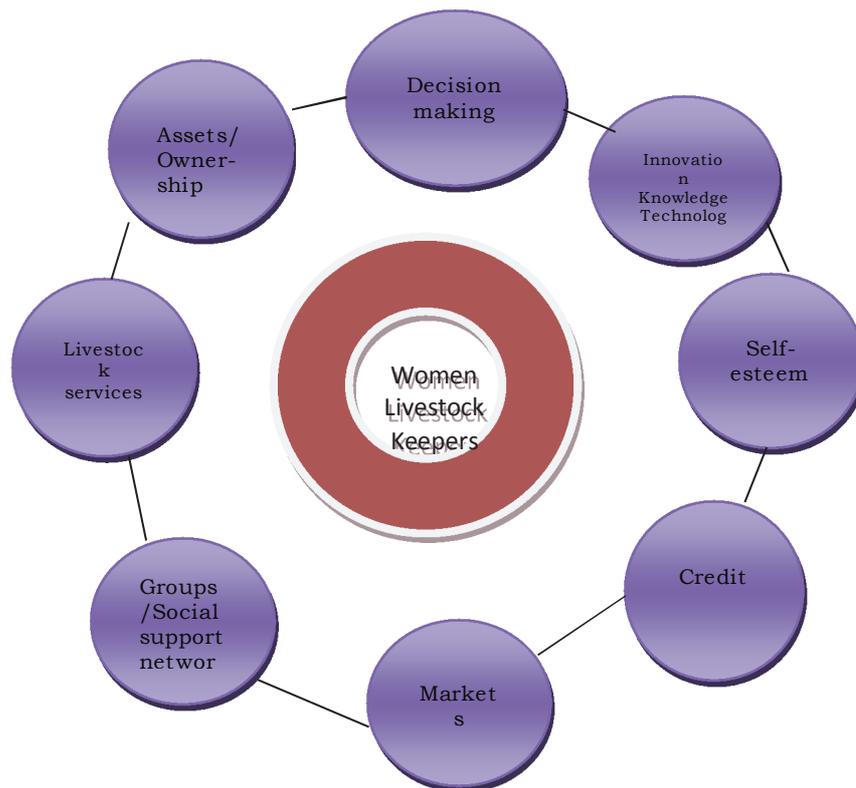
women's roles as livestock owners, processors and users of livestock products while strengthening their decision-making power and capabilities, are key aspects in promoting women's economic and social empowerment and consequently provides a way to enable rural women to break the cycle of poverty. Women are typically

responsible for milking ewes, processing and selling milk products, providing feed/fodder and water, caring for newborn lambs/kids and sick animals. Young girls are also involved in the grazing of goats and sheep, whereas married and young women are responsible for household activities.

For women, income from the sale of small stock and products, such as eggs and milk, enable the purchase of other foods, including grain, health care and basic household sustenance. Livestock interventions are often assumed to promote food security through alleviation of child malnutrition. The only livestock interventions associated with clear improvements in dietary intake and nutritional status are those in which either women played a critical role in the intervention, or the interventions included an explicit nutrition education component. Livestock products controlled by women are more likely to be consumed by the family than products controlled by men: if women do not own the livestock, they may not have decision making authority over the use of products either for home consumption or sale.

Constraints faced by them in livestock activities such as lack of capital and deficiency in access to institutional

credit, poor technical skills and lack of access to improved extension services limit their participation in livestock activities. Hence, they are in dire need of adequate and timely flow of credit to triumph over these problems. To overcome these critical problems, government implemented various credit policies oriented towards specific economic activities including the Self help group Bank linkage programme initiated by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Self help groups (SHGs) are small informal groups those enable women to come together, discuss and analyze their issues and problems and reap mutual benefit out of mutual help, solidarity and joint responsibility (Anand, 2002). This programme not only proved to be successful but also evolved as an important model in delivering credit to rural women who rear livestock. Study on the factors influencing empowerment of women members through SHG's revealed that the variables like membership in SHG, education of women farmer, livestock holding and information seeking behaviour had a significant (at 1 per cent level) and positive relationship with the cumulative empowerment score. Self Help Programme did help the women to move towards the path of empowerment.



Pillars for women’s empowerment in the livestock sector

Main benefits for women:

- Decision-making and empowerment. Livestock ownership is increasing women’s decision-making and

economic power within both the household and the community. It is also a source of cash and can open up access to credit.

- Household welfare. The management, processing and marketing of livestock products generate more income than most of the activities women tend to be involved in, and bring benefits for the whole family.

- Income generation. Animals provide raw material such as wool, skins, and bones used by women to make clothes, or as fuel for home consumption and for sale. Processing of these materials can be an important source of additional employment and income for poor rural women.

- Self-esteem. Owning, controlling and benefiting from livestock production increases women's self-esteem and strengthens their role as producers and income generators within the household and in the community.

- Access to credit. Livestock ownership increases the likelihood of gaining access to credit.

Constraints: Women may contribute a huge amount of labour to household livestock activities, but their control over the income is site and production system specific. Livestock provides a real opportunity for women to increase their income in some situations; in other situations, however, it merely leads to a significant increase in women's workload without affecting their control over the additional resources.

Women have access to fewer productive assets, such as land, tools, water and technology, inputs such as vaccines, medicines and feed, financial services, animal health services, information and time compared to men of the same class and ethnicity.

Extension services have been staffed predominantly by men. In addition, both public and private extension and veterinary services have focused more on large scale and commercial producers, neglecting small-scale producers and women.

Most women have limited mobility: they need to stay near the home to provide child care, animal care and other domestic services.

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Suggestions to empower women for achieving poverty alleviation:

To bring the women who rear livestock to the mainstream and to reap the benefits accumulated out of development and growth, women participation should be ensured at various development programmes of the government at the state and national level.

Women's voices should be heard at all levels in decision-making through their groups and co-operatives, as members of boards of co-operatives, as policy makers, researchers and extension managers in the livestock sector.

Livestock development programs should always start with a gender analysis to understand the specific constraints and opportunities that exist for men and women. Interventions must address these constraints, reduce gender inequalities and ensure equitable and sustainable benefits to men, women and the socially marginalised.

The research agenda should focus on livestock owned by women, in labour saving technology for women, technology for home processing of dairy products, prioritization of small ruminants and poultry, and mechanisms for listening to women's priorities and understanding their context. And livestock training should integrate approaches that reduce gender inequalities and involve women in different aspects of livestock development.

Conclusion: Integrating gender equality goals throughout the livestock value chain will take intentional effort, budget and a willingness to move beyond the sureties of the past. It will, however, give the livestock sector the best opportunity to enhance productivity and food security, and forge collaborations with other sectors to ensure its rightful place in the future.

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