

Dairy Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment: A Pathway to Sustainable Rural Development

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ABSTRACT

In Rajasthan dairy farming has become an important way to improve the lives of rural women and support the overall progress of villages. Since Rajasthan is a dry state and farming alone often cannot provide enough income in dry areas, dairy farming gives families a steady source of livelihood. Women, who were earlier seen mainly as helpers in cattle care and milk collection, are now slowly moving towards becoming entrepreneurs and small business owners. It provides them a platform to improve their social and economic status. Government schemes, self-help groups, and milk societies have supported this change, but many problems are faced by women animal breeders. Rural women still face issues like lack of education, difficulty in getting easy credit, less participation in decision-making, and poor access to markets. This study, based on secondary sources such as government reports and dairy development data, highlights both the contributions of women in the dairy sector and the challenges they face. It concludes that if funds are properly used, training and credit facilities are improved, and women are given leadership opportunities, dairy entrepreneurship can become a strong path for women's empowerment and lasting rural development.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Social and Economic Status, Cooperative Milk Societies, Livelihood, Animal Care, Easy Credit.

Introduction

In India, agriculture and allied sectors shape the backbone of the rural economy, and dairy farming is a crucial component of this system. Among the various players in the dairy sector, women of rural area play a significant role though it is quite under recognized yet. Traditionally women were majorly engaged in cattle rearing, milk production, and household-level dairy activities. In current scenario women have begun to transition from mere participants to active entrepreneurs, leveraging dairy as a means of livelihood and empowerment. This improves their economic well-being as well as the status in the society and connect them to the mainstream.

Dairy entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative tool for enhancing women's socio-economic status in rural areas. Through small-scale dairy enterprises, women are gaining financial independence, improving household nutrition, and participating more actively in community decision-making. This shift has not only contributed to poverty alleviation but also challenged prevailing gender norms in rural India.

The Indian government has created a strong policy framework for the support of dairy entrepreneurs. FDI policies, tax incentives, NABARD funding, and the Mega Food Park Scheme are few of them. These efforts have laid a solid groundwork for innovation, capital infusion, and international growth in the dairy industry. Support from government schemes, microfinance agencies, self-help groups (SHGs), and cooperative frameworks has played a vital role in advancing this entrepreneurial path. Nonetheless, in spite of these supportive measures, they continue to face significant challenges along the way, including limited access to credit, lack of training, unavailability of organised markets, and technology backwardness. Understanding the real impact of dairy entrepreneurship on women's lives requires a detailed analysis of both their economic gains and social mobility.

This paper aims to examine how engagement in dairy entrepreneurship influences rural women's income levels, decision-making power, education, health, and overall social status. By highlighting both the progress and the barriers, the study contributes to the discourse on gender-inclusive rural development and offers insights for policymakers, NGOs, and grassroots development agencies.

Significance of Agriculture and Dairy in Rural Rajasthan's Economy

Farming and livestock rearing form the backbone of Rajasthan's countryside economy. Although the state is characterized by arid and semi-arid regions, a substantial segment of the rural population relies on cultivation as their primary means of livelihood. The agricultural sector is largely dominated by small and marginal landholders who grow crops such as wheat, pearl millet (bajra), mustard, and lentils. However, due to inconsistent rainfall patterns and scarce irrigation resources, agriculture alone often proves insufficient for sustaining rural incomes.

In this scenario, dairy farming emerges as a crucial supplementary source of livelihood. It ensures a steady income stream, improves food security, and generates employment—especially for rural women. Native cattle breeds like Tharparkar and Rathii are well-suited to Rajasthan's climatic conditions and are essential to local milk production. The growth of dairy cooperatives and women's self-help groups has further enabled villagers to commercialize milk-related activities and connect with broader markets.

For women in particular, dairy enterprises provide a practical means to contribute economically while managing domestic responsibilities. Together, agriculture and dairy activities not only uphold rural sustenance but also enhance economic stability, especially during agricultural downturns. Their combined impact is vital to the resilience and inclusive growth of Rajasthan's rural regions.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess social and economic empowerment of rural women through dairy cooperatives
- To know about the challenges for women in dairy cooperatives
- To analyse the schemes available for dairy cooperatives available in Rajasthan.

Research Methodology

Descriptive Research: This is the most common type of research using secondary data. It involves:

- Analysing existing records, such as census data, government reports, government publications, research articles, etc.
- Describing trends, demographics, or relationships based on already collected data.

Data Collection

This research is primarily based on secondary data collected from credible and authoritative sources. Key sources include government reports, publications from the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), and the Agriculture Census of India. These sources have provided valuable insights into the participation of women in the dairy industry, their entrepreneurial roles, and the socio-economic factors influencing their involvement. The data has been used to analyze trends, regional variations, and the effectiveness of policies supporting women entrepreneurs in this sector.

Scope of the Study

The present study is limited to study the role of Dairy sector in the socio-economic development of women entrepreneurs in Rajasthan. The scope of the study is to analyse the socio-economic

development made through livestock sector. Though socio economic development is a very broad concept and it depends upon various factors, the present study aims only to explore the main socio-economic development through livestock.

The study is confined to the evaluation of India's national as well as some state level programs, and the success of these programmes. Although it does not contain the detail of case studies of individual sectors or region-specific projects, it is based on the secondary data including government reports and policy papers to provide a national perspective. The paper also draws attention to the policy lacunae, and suggests measures to improve the socio-economic welfare of rural women.

Contribution of Women in Animal Husbandry and Dairy-Associated Tasks

Women hold a crucial yet frequently overlooked position in the sphere of animal husbandry and dairy-based occupations, especially in rural parts of India. In regions such as Rajasthan—where agricultural productivity is often hindered by harsh climatic conditions—livestock rearing and dairy enterprises provide a dependable and enduring source of income. Within this sector, women are actively involved in multiple aspects of care, production, and maintenance.

Their routine duties generally encompass feeding livestock, providing water, cleaning animal shelters, milking, preparing feed, and attending to the health needs of the animals. Additionally, many women participate in the conversion of raw milk into value-added products such as yogurt, butter, and clarified butter (ghee), which are either consumed at home or sold in local marketplaces. Despite playing such an extensive role, women are commonly regarded as assistants rather than primary contributors or entrepreneurs.

In recent times, this perception has started to evolve. With the assistance of self-help collectives, cooperatives, dairy federations, and government-sponsored initiatives, a growing number of women are being acknowledged as independent dairy business owners. These programs have facilitated access to skill development, financial support, and marketing networks, empowering women to improve both output and earnings. Furthermore, their involvement in decision-making related to livestock management has seen a noticeable increase, contributing to greater autonomy and social recognition.

The involvement of women in dairy and livestock-related work is very important as it maintains household stability and also paves the way for rural economic progress. Strengthening rural women's role and offering them institutional support can promote inclusive development, enhance family livelihoods, living standards, and ensure long-term viability of the sector.

Historical Emergence and Relevance of Dairy Cooperatives

In India, the dairy cooperative movement gained significant momentum with the start of the Anand Model in Gujarat during the 1940s, under the leadership of Dr. Verghese Kurien. This model became the foundation of the White Revolution in the 1970s. It transformed India from a milk-deficient country to the largest milk producer of the world. With the help of cooperative structure, farmers were able to own and manage livestock activities like milk production, processing, and marketing of the product. It helped to ensure fair and timely payments, and access to veterinary care, feed, and training. Over time, dairy cooperatives have not only contributed to rural livelihoods and food security but have also improved social welfare of marginalized groups, especially women and small & marginal farmers. In the present context, dairy cooperatives continue to be relevant as they contribute to inclusive growth. Livestock activities not only strengthen local economies, but also offer a resilient model to face the market fluctuations and private-sector dominance.

Review of Literature

"To awaken the people, it is the women who shall be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru.

Women accounted for 93% of total employment in dairy production. Depending upon the economic status, women perform the tasks of collecting fodder, collecting and processing dung. Women undertake dung composting and carrying to the fields. Women also prepare cooking fuel by mixing dung with twigs and crop residues. Though women play a significant role in livestock management and production, women's control over livestock and its products is negligible. Men, leaving only 14% to women, assume the vast majority of the dairy cooperative membership.

India has the largest cattle and buffalo population in the world. Dairying has become an important secondary source of income for millions of rural families in India. Dairy farming is one of the important enterprises which dominate the economic activities of the woman in the rural areas of India. Increasing demand for milk and milk products in recent years intensifies dairy farming as profitable enterprise for rural. Women are well aware of each animal's behaviour and production characteristics. Women are knowledgeable about local feed resources. Participation of women in indoor feeding activities such as providing water to animals, mixing ration and preparing feed is very high. The participation of rural women in processing activities is found higher than in marketing related activities is found higher than in marketing related activities. -Dr. Sonali D.Borkar, Ijsrm Volume 5 Issue 01 January 2017 [www.ijssrm.in].

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), increasing women's empowerment is essential for women's well-being (Women for Women's problems) and has a positive impact on agricultural production, food security, diets and child nutrition.

Women's empowerment equips and allows women to make life-determining decisions through the different societal problems-Bayeh, Endalcachew (January 2016). "The role of empowering women and achieving gender equality to the sustainable development of Ethiopia".

Women's empowerment has become a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. Economic empowerment allows women to control and benefit from resources, assets, and income. It also aids in the ability to manage risks and improve women's well-being-Oxfam (*Forthcoming*), *"Women's Economic Empowerment Conceptual Framework"*

Challenges Faced

- Gender bias in leadership roles: women are treated more as a helper in these activities than a decision maker. They are doing dairy activities as a part of household job and not considered as a financial help. They have other household burden like daily activities including rearing up children. This reduces their concentration on dairy activities as entrepreneurial activity.
- Moving out of homes: in rural areas there are still restriction on movement of women out of their homes without any male companion. This restricts women to go for training or markets and other essential jobs for improvement in their skills and knowledge related to dairy activities.
- Skills and knowledge incompetence: amongst today's technologically advanced practices in every sector, rural women generally rely on traditional and inherited knowledge related to breeding, feeding and other related activities. This directly have an impact over the productivity.
- Lack of financial knowledge: most of the women in rural areas are not educated. They lack training and required skills of financial management necessary for any entrepreneurial activities. They often don't have knowledge of record keeping, and cost and profit analysis.
- Limited insurance coverage: in rural areas animals are treated as family members. They are not treated as a source of income. Livestock insurance is a complicated process. So women bear heavy financial and psychological losses when cattle die due to any reason.

There are many other constraints that are faced by women cattle breeders like high borrowing cost from local lenders, lack of awareness about govt. schemes, middlemen exploitation, price fluctuations and many more.

Policy Framework and Institutional Support

Rajasthan Dairy Development Programmes: Rajasthan state govt. has initiated many programmes for dairy development. Under are few of dairy development programmes run by Rajasthan state govt.:

- **Chief Minister Mangala Pashu Bima Yojana (2024–2025)**

The Purpose of this programme is to provide financial security to the owners of livestock. It targets a huge coverage of up to 5 lakh milch buffaloes and cows & sheep/goats and 1 lakh camels. In case of accidental death of insured animals, the owner can get a compensation up to Rs. 40,000.

- **Chief Minister Kamdhenu Dairy Scheme (2024)**

Govt. of Rajasthan has initiated this scheme to promote establishment and development of dairy sector. This scheme focuses on indigenous breeds of cows. Dairy enterprises are eligible to get a 30% subsidy on the cost of establishing a dairy unit, with up to 90% of the cost covered by bank loans. Under this scheme training related to animal care, animal hygiene is also provided to livestock owners as this contributes to better animal care and increase in productivity.

Rajasthan govt. has declared a budget of ₹540 for dairy enterprises. It has been also proposed with a cost of ₹ 225 crore, establishment of new milk processing plants in Alwar, Banswara, Bharatpur and Sawaimadhopur will be done. 200 new veterinary sub-centers will be also established in Gram Panchayats.

Role of the Rajasthan Cooperative Dairy Federation (RCDF)

In Rajasthan, village level cooperative societies and other local dairy societies play crucial role in execution and enactment of plans for dairy development. On its 50th anniversary RCDF began new plans for empowerment of women dairy entrepreneurs. RCDF focuses on expanding its distribution strategy. It is planning to expand its distributors reach within and outside Rajasthan for Saras products.

Central Schemes

Department of animal husbandry and dairying is also implemented many schemes that has benefited Rajasthan animal owners. Programmes like national programme for dairy development provides financial help to dairy cooperative federations to improve the infrastructure. Another programme Rashtriya Gokul Mission is working on conserving and improving the productivity of the indigenous cattle breeds. Central govt. is also running programme to make available soft working capital loans to farmer organisations during any natural calamities.

Gaps in Dairy Policy implementation and Women Empowerment

- Financial dependence: women dairy entrepreneurs are working in the field of animal care, production and processing activities but they are not having financial independence and still depends on male family members for decision making.
- Lack of education and training: Due to the lack of education and training women are not able to perform these activities more effectively and in an efficient way.
- Not included in decision making: even in dairy cooperatives and other farmer organizations women are limited to milk production and animal care activities. They are least involved in decision making processes.
- Difficulty in receiving credit: women face many problems in receiving credit facility due to strict credit policy and documents requirements.
- Lack of awareness: lack of awareness about govt. initiatives and programmes results in low productivity and high cost.
- Lack of market and Infrastructure: women who do not have access to transport are getting less price for their products due to lack of access to market.

Suggestions for Improvements

- Women Dairy Cooperatives must be converted into business hubs rather than just collection centres.
- Proper utilisation of funds for women. Funds must be utilised fully and on time.
- Women entrepreneurs must be provided collateral free and easy credit facility.
- In dairy cooperatives reservation must be given to women and they must be provided proper training for leadership roles.
- Childcare facilities must be made available to women so that they may take training and other educational programmes without any stress.
- At Regular intervals data must be collected related to women empowerment (economic and social) to analyse the effectiveness of the policies.
- Training and educational programmes must be initiated exclusively for women.

Conclusion

Dairy entrepreneurship has emerged as one of the most effective ways to empower rural women in Rajasthan. It not only provides them with a steady source of income but also contributes in strengthening their role in household decision-making, improving family nutrition, and enhancing their social status. Despite these positive impacts, women are still treated as only animal care takers and house hold worker. They still face many barriers such as lack of education, limited access to credit, weak participation in cooperatives, and poor market linkages.

Government policies and cooperative structures have worked as a supportive base, but there are many gaps in proper fund utilization, training, infrastructure, and leadership opportunities for women in cooperatives and other farmer organizations. To make dairy entrepreneurship a real pathway to sustainable rural development, it is essential to ensure that women are not just participants but leaders and decision-makers in the dairy sector.

Strengthening women's cooperatives, providing easy credit and training, improving awareness among women about schemes, and building market linkages will not only empower rural women but also make Rajasthan's dairy sector more inclusive, resilient, and productive. This will ensure empowering women in rural areas and enhance their social and economic recognition.

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