

# Empowerment of rural women through agriculture and dairy sectors in India

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## ABSTRACT

Efforts have been made in this paper to critically review the women's empowerment endeavours in India. Empowerment is midway in the change processes that benefit women at individual, household, community and broader levels. At the most basic level, innovations can benefit women simply by improving their well-being in terms of health, nutrition, income, life span etc. There is a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development in particular to health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and they are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. Therefore, formation and strengthening of rural women entrepreneur network must be encouraged.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, equality, rural, women, India

The last decade has seen a growing importance of the term 'empowerment.' While the term has been used for the poor and the deprived groups, it has

now been used even more extensively with regard to women's programmes. As a matter of fact, most state governments now consider it desirable to offer women's empowerment programmes in order to alleviate poverty and to bring about women's development. Women's empowerment may be defined as a bottom-up process of transforming gender power relations, through individuals or groups developing awareness of women's subordination and building their capacity to challenge it (Baden and Reeves, 2000; Dejene, 2003; Ogato, 2013). Women's empowerment does not imply

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women taking over control previously held by men, but rather the need to transform the nature of power relations (Baden and Reeves, 2000). Considering the widespread use of the term, it was decided to understand what the term connotes for such government programmes and to understand how the term has got translated into programmes that are run by the government as well as by non-government organizations (NGOs).

The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. The number of women entrepreneurs has grown over a period of time, especially in the 1990s. Women entrepreneurs need to be lauded for their increased utilization of modern technology, increased investments, finding a niche in the export market, creating a sizable employment for others and setting the trend for other women entrepreneurs in the organized sector. While women entrepreneurs have demonstrated their potential, the fact remains that they are capable of contributing much more than what they already are. Women's entrepreneurship needs to be studied separately for two main reasons. The first reason is that women's entrepreneurship has been recognized during the last decade as an important untapped source of economic growth. Women entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and also by being different. They also provide the society with different solutions to management, organization and business problems as well as to the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. The second reason is that the topic of women in entrepreneurship has been largely neglected both in society in general and in the social sciences. Not only have women lower participation rates in entrepreneurship than men but they also generally choose to start and manage firms in different industries than men tend to do.

Development of the society is directly related with the Income Generation Capacity of its members with agriculture, as the key income generation activity the entrepreneurship on farm and home can directly affect the income of a major chunk of our population. The growth of modernization processes such as industrialization, technical change; urbanization and migration further encourage it. Entrepreneurship

on small scale is the only solution to the problems of unemployment and proper utilization of both human and non-human resources and improving the living condition of the poor masses (Singh, 2009). Kuratka and Richard (2001) in their book on entrepreneurship started that entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. This wealth is created by individuals who take the major risks in terms of equity, time and career commitment of providing value to some products or services the product or service itself may or may not be new or unique but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by securing and allocating the necessary skill and resources. The delivery of micro finance to the poor is smooth; effective and less costly if they are organized into SHGs. SHG is promoting micro enterprise through micro-credit intervention. Micro enterprise is an effective instrument of social and economic development.

The micro finance is agenda for empowering poor women. Micro enterprises are an integral part of planned strategy for securing balanced development of the economy of the poor women. Rural women's participation in agro-based activities is much more than what statistics reveal. This is mainly due to the fact that most of the work done by the women at farm and home is disguised as daily chores. Mechanization and easy availability of labour provide more time to energetic women to engage themselves in self-employment or entrepreneur ventures. Rural women are having human and nonhuman resources to take up an enterprise need one an innovative mind and motivation.

Entrepreneurship is the only solution to the growing employment among rural youth. It helps to generate employment for a number of people within their own social system. This is more beneficial for women in rural areas as it enables them to add to the family income while taking care of their own home and livestock oriented task. Rural women possess abundant resources to take up enterprises. She has the benefit of easy availability of arm and livestock based raw materials and other resources. Hence, she can effectively undertake both the production and processing oriented enterprises. Entrepreneurship development among rural women helps to enhance their personal capabilities and increase

decision-making status in the family and society as a whole. Now-a-days economic development is one of the factors that have changed the entire scenario of social and cultural environment within the country especially for the women. The rural women are engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship programme with the help of Self Help Groups. Through that they were economically empowered and attaining status in family and community.

Rural women play a vital role in farm and home system. She contributes substantially in the physical aspect of farming, livestock management, post harvest and allied activities. Her direct and indirect contribution at the farm and home level along with livestock management operation has not only help to save their assets but also led to increase the family income. She performs various farm, livestock, post harvest and allied activities and possesses skills and indigenous knowledge in these areas. The women were empowering themselves technically to cope with the changing times and productively using their free time and existing skills for setting and sustaining enterprises. They were engaged in starting individual or collective income generation programme with the help of self-help group. This will not only generate income for them but also improve the decision-making capabilities that led to overall empowerment. In view of this efforts have been made in this paper to critically review the women's empowerment endeavours in India.

#### **DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY**

The study has been conducted based on thematic review of existing policies and programmes as initiated by government for empowerment of rural women. Various programmes relating to diverse years starting from 1986-87 to 2012-13 have been scrutinised to review the entire gamut of changes in dairy and agricultural sectors in general and women empowerment in particular.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Depending on number of factors ranging from landholdings, subsidiary occupations, agro climatic conditions and socio-personal characteristics of the rural women and her family member the areas of micro-

enterprises also differ from place to place. The micro enterprises are classified under three major heads:

1. Micro Enterprise development related to agriculture and allied agricultural activities like cultivating to organic vegetables, flowers, oil seeds and seed production are some of the areas besides taking up mushroom growing and bee – keeping. Some more areas can be like dehydration of fruits and vegetables, canning or bottling of pickles, chutneys, jams, squashes, dairy and other products that are ready to eat.
2. Micro-Enterprise development related to livestock management activities like dairy farming, poultry farm, livestock feed production and production of vermi composting using the animal waste can be an important area in which women can utilize both her technical skills and raw materials from the farm and livestock to earn substantial income and small scale agro-processing units.
3. Micro-Enterprise development related to household based operations like knitting, stitching, weaving, embroidery, bakery and flour milling, petty shops, food preparation and preservation.

Empowering women particularly rural women is a challenge. Micro enterprises in rural area can help to meet these challenges. Micro-enterprises not only enhance national productivity, generate employment but also help to develop economic independence, personal and social capabilities among rural women. Following are some of the personal and social capabilities, which were developed as result of taking up enterprise among rural women.

- ❖ Economic empowerment
- ❖ Improved standard of living
- ❖ Self confidence
- ❖ Enhance awareness
- ❖ Sense of achievement
- ❖ Increased social interaction
- ❖ Engaged in political activities
- ❖ Increased participation level in gram sabha meeting
- ❖ Improvement in leadership qualities

- ❖ Involvement in solving problems related to women and community
- ❖ Decision making capacity in family and community

Economic empowerment of women by micro entrepreneurship led to the empowerment of women in many things such as socio-economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal right, family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development. Presently, there are two main types of schemes that are operational in India. Mahila Samakhya is a major project of the Government of India, with funding support that is now provided by the Department of International Development (DFID), U.K. The second type consists of state-funded schemes. The first major scheme that was launched by the Central government was the Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality) that owed its genesis to the National Policy on Education (1986) that recognized the empowering potential of education and stated 'education will be used as in agent of basic change in the status of women.... The National Education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women.' Mahila Samakhya as a major programme for bringing about women's development as well as empowerment was launched by the Education Department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, in 1989 on a pilot basis in 6 states of India, with funding from the Netherlands Government.

Women's empowerment schemes are being run by the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development in the each state of India. While the ICDS programme is run by the department, the women's empowerment schemes are being run entirely by NGOs. The main thrust is to form self-help groups (SHGs) of women. Various schemes are thus implemented through the SHGs. In each SHG, members have to make a saving of a fixed amount every month. The NGO facilitates the linkage of the SHG with a bank and ensures access to credit for the SHGs. The Horticulture Department has a special scheme for training women in fruit preservation and for the production of pickles, jams, chutneys, fruit juices, etc. The aim is to give fillip to local production

and to ensure that women become economically self-reliant.

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. Women Dairy Development Scheme originated in 1994-95 and its main aim was to bring about rural women's economic and social development as well as ensure that they assume leadership positions. Presently, the scheme is operational in all the districts of the state and receives funding from the Department of Women and Child Development of the Government of India, as well as from the state government. The scheme envisages 100 per cent participation of women and ensures that the women's milk cooperative would be run and managed entirely by the women themselves.

For the Women's Dairy Development scheme, women are formed into groups at the village level by the department. A milk collection centre is then opened at the village level and it is the responsibility of the women's group to ensure that the milk that is collected at the centre is then sent to the dairy plant. The department arranges for the technical training of the women's group that includes how to measure the fat content in the milk, how to measure the purity of the milk (with the use of Lactometer). Each group has a President and a Secretary and it is their responsibility, in addition to measuring the fat content and the milk purity, to maintain daily accounts and at the end of the month, to submit the accounts to the department. It is they who also make the payment to each member of the group. Since a cattle rearing is an occupation traditionally followed by the hill women, dairying is linked to their traditional occupation to make it economically attractive to women. Aside from dairying, rural women are also provided training in such related issues such as first aid for the cattle, grass cultivation, seed production, setting up kitchen garden, use of smokeless chullah (stove), production of organic

manure, setting up *sulabh sauchalayas* (community toilets), as well as health related issues that are relevant to the lives of women.

## CONCLUSION

Women's entrepreneurship is both about women's position in society *and* about the role of entrepreneurship in the same society. Women entrepreneurs faced many obstacles specifically in market their product (including family responsibilities) that have to be overcome in order to give them access to the same opportunities as men. Increased participation of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self-employed women. Particularly the entry of rural women in micro enterprises will be encouraged and aggravated. Rural women can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage enterprise. More over Formation and strengthening of rural women Entrepreneurs network must be encouraged. Women entrepreneur networks are major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and they are increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for its development and promotion. This network helps to give lectures, printed material imparting first hand technical knowledge in production, processing, procurement, management and marketing among the other women. This will motivate other rural women to engage in micro entrepreneurship with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity.

There should be a free excess to education and training particularly some training modules for women in

packing, grading and value addition activities. There is need to change the cultural taboos which discriminate women. If education and infrastructure facilities are improved in their area then it more women will work in the industry and ultimately economic independence could be achieved.

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