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Strategies for Empowerment of Rural Women through Scientific Interventions in Livestock Sector

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ABSTRACT

India is the world's largest milk producing country with a share of about 16 per cent in world's total milk production. In fact, the major share of the credit for India's position as largest milk producing country in the world and the significant increase in the per capita availability of milk in the country has to go to the largely illiterate rural women dairy farmers. Around 69% of workforces engaged in livestock sector are women's. The capacity of livestock systems to provide protein-rich food to billions of smallholder rural food producers and urban consumers, generate income and employment, reduce vulnerabilities in pastoral systems, intensify small-scale mixed crop-livestock systems and sustain livelihood opportunities to millions of livestock keepers makes them an appealing vehicle for pro-poor development. It is assessed that about 70 million rural households own one or the other species of livestock. The important question is; how we can improve the standards and empower these women's through scientific interventions. Here we have discussed some strategies for empowering women's through scientific methods for sustainable development in the livestock sector.

ABBREVIATIONS

ICT: Information Communication Technology

SHG: Self-help Groups

Introduction:

The majority of livestock resources are owned by resource-poor small and marginal farmers and landless labourers. Hence sustainable development of the livestock sector would lead to more inclusive development and empowerment of women. In this light various government and non-government organizations have taken measures to help rural women to utilize their potential to the fullest extent for development of livestock sector and get empowered. Various strategies such as planned programmes for women farmers, schemes, workshops, trainings, capacity building, financial inclusion etc., are regularly being undertaken to empower women, among all the initiatives the most crucial one is the scientific technological interventions. It is evident from the past research that technology reduces uncertainty in decision making.

How scientific interventions can empower women in livestock farming:

Sci-interventions provide multidimensional help for women in livestock farming by ensuring, food- nutritional security, reduce women domestic and farm level drudgery, enhance their productivity and ensure physical and mental good health, by time and labour saving technologies. Increase rural women participation in livestock market by effective communication technologies. Motivate women participation in scientific livestock farming by being

trained and advised by women scientist and extension personnel.

Status of Current scientific interventions for women in livestock:

Livestock rearing is largely a woman's job. According to estimates, the time devoted by them in livestock related activities range from three to five hours per day. Women take responsibility for cutting fodder, cleaning sheds, milking dairy animals, processing animal products and looking after the health of the herd. Scientific advances such as ergonomically designed fodder harvesting tools and implements, machine milking instrument, small scale milk processing machines, high yielding breeds, ICT tools etc., the list goes on. The crucial issues with scientific interventions for women empowerment are accessibility, affordability and independence in decision making. Rural women have to seek family head permission to participate in scientific intervention based empowerment strategies. Lack of social and economic independency make them inaccessible to scientific interventions. Access to land, credit and education are often pre-requisites for scientific technology uptake. Similarly, scientific intervention such as farm inputs and services are often only available to landowners. As a result, barriers that constrain women's access to key resources also lead to inequalities in access to and adoption of new scientific interventions. When women are involved in the design and field testing of new livestock technologies,

such as fodder varieties, small machinery, and farm tools – these technologies are more likely to work for them, but such provisions are lacking or if present they are poorly implemented due to various social barriers faced by women livestock farmers.

The gap that we need to reduce in tapping the potential of scientific interventions:

The gaps are not only in the scientific interventions but also in other aspects of livestock innovation system. Some of the issue that form the gaps are, Ownership of land, Access to capital and scientific knowledge, Ownership of livestock, Responsibilities and division of labour, livestock production systems and types of animals; crop/livestock linkages; availability and quality of land, availability of inputs; management of natural resources; use of technology; relationship between livestock and other activities; gender disaggregated seasonal occupations and sources of income, etc. Unless and until these gaps are addressed, scientific interventions for women empowerment will be ineffective or sometimes may fail completely.

Strategies for women empowerment through scientific interventions in livestock sector:

Women are the close associates of livestock they need to know each other in order to manage them in a healthy way and gain economic benefits and get empowered. There is a need for understanding the

linkage between the livestock farming activities, women's social, psychological, physical and economical aspects and the scientific interventions.

There are various facets of achieving rural women-empowerment-through-scientific interventions in livestock sector. Strategies will have to be made in whole livestock innovation system and most important are the Human resource, policy, institutions and technology.

Human resource development: Scientific interventions will prove to be effective if it is utilized by the target group that understand its awareness knowledge, how to knowledge and principle knowledge. Every woman irrespective of their demographic background (Rural and Urban) should have access to elementary education to develop self-awareness, sense of enquiry and ability to question and develop scientific temper. In India, female farmers and agricultural workers lag behind their male counterparts at every level of educational attainment, and are between 20.00 and 30.00 % more likely to be illiterate than men. On the other hand the most important more of the female graduates need to be motivated and supported with emoluments for pursuing higher studies and research in agricultural education and research institutes. A women scientist can better understand the issues of farm women and represent them be a voice for them. A women scientist or extension personnel can convince and help rural women break rural stereotypes and embrace science and technology.

Women's participation in livestock research –the cornerstone of successful livestock production strategies – is also a key to ensuring their influence over the science research agenda.

Policy reforms: Policies must endorse research that incorporates rural women's knowledge and that responds to their needs. In many parts of the world, rural women are responsible for housework, child care and other domestic activities. A fixed corpus of fund for taking up women related research and programmes in livestock must be appropriated in every research and extension institutions. Every research and extension institution must have a gender research and extension wing which is lead and managed by women experts and staff. Women scientists and research managers can provide unique perspectives and help research agencies to address topics that affect rural women's well-being and interests. Further Awareness Programmes in rural areas should be organized; and efforts must be made to sensitize the rural women through participatory events and scientific knowledge and by enhancing their access to scientific interventions. A dedicated programme called 'Rural women participatory livestock research programme' with participation incentives can be initiated to encourage rural women participation in livestock research. Women farm schools can be organised on regular basis to make them aware and understand new scientific interventions. A local body called

"Livestock women groups" in line with Self-help group (SHG) need to be formed and a women scientist have to be the mentor for the group and take up all scientific interventions through group approach, for this the government can extend all the benefits provided to SHGs'. The women developmental programmes sponsored by the scientific departments of our country (e.g. ICAR, DST & DBT) should be extended to 5-7 years rather than a year or two for ensuring significant impact of the programmes, for the rural India.

Institutional reform: Women in both urban and rural areas have to overcome various social barriers. Dogmas of gender over different periods of time have resulted in women's exclusion from science for a long time, all over the world. Their participation is still restricted and limited because of widespread discrimination at the basic education level and lack of opportunities for pursuing science as a career, predominantly in rural areas, where the girls find it difficult to participate in science owing to the formidable barriers that stand in their way such as harsh living conditions, religious traditions, negative attitude arising from the orthodox etc. such barriers contain rural women in participating in development programmes. In this light to overcome these barriers all the social institutions mainly the family, marriage and religion need to promote women participation in science and technology interventions. In order to motivate families it is important to support and stimulate young girls and women to

involve in the professional scientific activities and vocational technological courses in livestock farming respectively. They should be made aware of the developments in science; and opportunities for their respectful living. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery' be given special attention. This is possible by stimulating their interest in S&T-related practical skills and providing them with access to science education, training and capacity building.

Technology: The rural women must be made aware and trained to develop cattle feed for their cattle by utilising the natural resources such as plants abundantly available in their areas to meet the nutritional requirement of their cattle to enhance milk production. For development of cattle fodder the standard measurement of the ingredients used in making the feed must be made as per the convenience and knowledge of the rural women. There should be an extensive use of solar energy and effort should be made to reduce the labour of women by developing woman-friendly farming instruments. Mini milk processing centres can do value-addition to milk; and prevent wastage, besides generating employment and ensuring nutrition security, can be promoted. Indigenous-livestock-management techniques should be upgraded for improving socio-economic status of the rural women.

Questions that we need to ask over selves and the society when we think of rural women empowerment and try to find answers.

1. Can women, decide with dignity and without any fear, their own goals and have the freedom and capability to act towards them?
2. Do women have access to means of production to ensure economic independence and physical security outside the house as a precondition to freedom of movement?
3. Do their opinions and desires count at the level of family, the society and the country?
4. How do we provide opportunities to enhance their capabilities?
5. Does she have the right to own and enjoy property?
6. Does a woman have freedom from the drudgeries of the laborious domestic chores and meaningless social restrictions?
7. Is she able to freely participate in the development and status building of the nation?
8. Does she have mastery over vocational, managerial and life-saving farming and medicinal skills?

Conclusion:

Women can be empowered only if they are given education and made aware of their rights and hence they themselves prioritise their lives. Violence has to be completely eradicated from their lives, then and only then can the dream of empowerment becomes a reality. Women have to be given

due respect in a society to have actual empowerment and to empower women financially a lot of initiatives have been undertaken at national and state level like introduction of Self-help Groups (SHG) a plethora of welfare measures but only spending money is not enough to financially empower women. Basic skills and training should be given for the proper utilization of the finances. As unskilled and semiliterate women are exploited everywhere. But the society having developed is still not safe for its female citizens.

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