

RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Rural areas play an active role in enhancing living standards and the overall economy, especially in countries such as India, where agricultural activities engage two-thirds of the population. This provides them with a source of revenue, food security, and social status, as livestock is important in this case. In India, 69% of livestock labour is provided by women, who make significant contributions to these activities despite their economic and social identities. Women can benefit from policies aimed at self-help groups (SHGs) and gender-smart training, as these help them achieve enhanced productivity and economic decision-making. The case of Smt. Abboju Jyothi is a perfect example of how women can change the livestock sector, especially in India, where livestock is of herding importance. By addressing issues such as land ownership, access to financial institutions, and fair employment for different genders, rural development can be achieved. Since female managers of livestock herds play a crucial role, such practices enable rural development and assist women in attaining economic growth.

KEYWORDS: *Rural development, livestock, women's empowerment, SHG, animal husbandry*

INTRODUCTION

Rural development is essential for improving the economic security and quality of life of individuals living in remote areas. India's rural development requires concerted efforts because agriculture employs more than two-thirds of the country's population, and one-fifth of the population lives in poverty. Livestock is critical to this endeavour because it provides a long-term source of revenue, financial security, and social upliftment (Birthal *et al.*, 2005).

ROLE OF LIVESTOCK IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Livestock is a significant contributor to rural income through the sale of milk, meat, eggs, and other animal products. Beyond income, animals act as economic assets, providing immediate financial relief during emergencies (Nandi *et al.*, 2015). For example, manure-producing animals support

agriculture, and some serve as transportation assets. Women, in particular, find livestock management feasible alongside household responsibilities, such as raising chickens or goats, which require minimal additional labour (FAO, 2012).

WOMEN IN ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

In India, women comprise 69% of the livestock sector's workforce. In the dairy sector, 75 million women are engaged compared to only 15 million men (NSSO 2019). Despite their indispensable role, women often face economic and social marginalisation. Empowering them through targeted policies is critical for poverty alleviation and economic growth (Patil *et al.*, 2021).

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS (SHGS)

SHGs are transformative platforms that empower rural women by encouraging savings, providing loans, and addressing shared challenges among them. Women participating in SHGs report improved household well-being, enhanced food security, and greater contributions to economic productivity (Kumar *et al.*, 2018).

CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL WOMEN

Rural women face persistent challenges, including restricted access to credit, healthcare, and education. These barriers are compounded by global challenges, such as climate change and economic instability. Women undertake labour-intensive tasks such as milking, fodder collection, and preparing dung cakes; however, they often lack decision-making power (Deka *et al.*, 2020).

KEY GENDER ISSUES IN LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

To ensure rural development and success in livestock programs, the following gender-specific issues require attention.

- **Land Ownership:** Securing land ownership is crucial for women's economic independence (Agarwal, 1994).
- **Access to Credit and Training:** Women require greater access to loans, training, and technology to improve productivity (FAO, 2011).
- **Livestock Ownership:** Women's ownership of livestock requires institutional support.
- **Division of Labour:** Equitable distribution of labour ensures that women benefit from livestock initiatives.
- **Household Nutrition:** Women-managed livestock income often improves family nutrition (Njuki *et al.*, 2013).

- **Processing and Marketing:** Women's roles in these areas should be acknowledged and supported.

MEASURES TO BOOST WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LIVESTOCK SECTOR

To maximise women's potential in animal husbandry, the following measures are recommended:

- Design gender-sensitive training that considers women's constraints.
- Introduction of technologies that align with traditional practices.
- Address seasonal labour changes that affect women's workloads.
- Safeguard women's control over income-generating livestock activities.
- Integrate local practices into development initiatives to ensure sustainability (Kumar *et al.* 2020).

BENEFITS OF RECOGNISING WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Empowering women in livestock management yields multifaceted benefits.

- **Decision-Making Power:** Livestock ownership enhances women's economic independence and decision-making abilities (Patil *et al.*, 2021).
- **Household Well-Being:** Women-managed livestock improves food security and family nutrition through protein-rich foods, such as milk and meat.
- **Income Generation:** Livestock offers materials such as wool and manure, which women can sell for additional income (Nandi *et al.* 2015).
- **Self-Esteem:** Managing livestock boosts women's confidence and strengthens their societal roles.
- **Access to Credit:** Livestock ownership increases women's access to financial services, helping them secure loans for emergencies or investments.

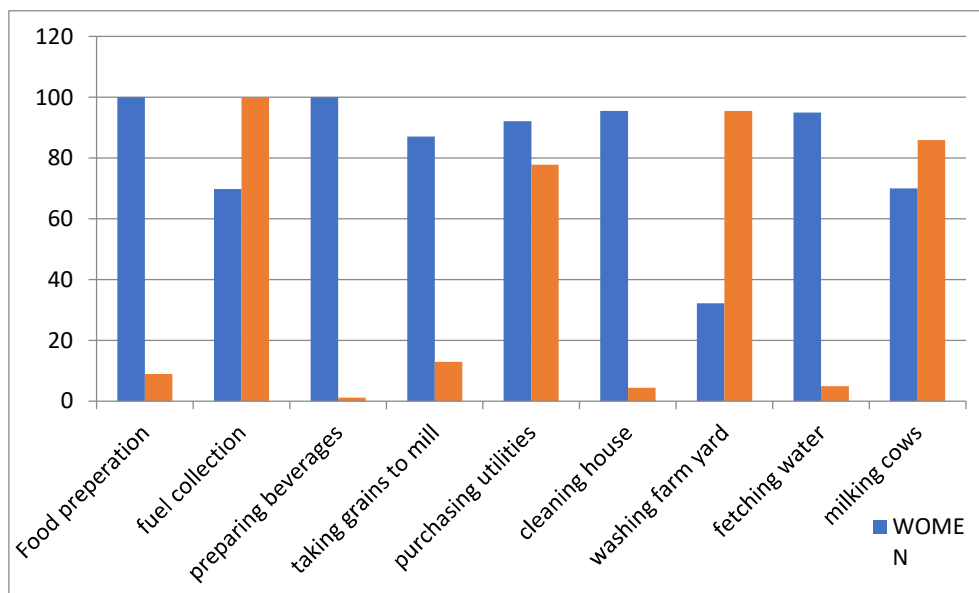


Fig. 1: Participation of men and women in some households’ work

SUCCESS STORY OF A DAIRY WOMAN

Smt. Abboju Jyothi is a small and traditional farmer from the small village of Perikavedu, Block: Rajparthy, District: Warangal Rural, State: Telangana. Approximately ten years ago, she started a dairy farm on two acres with one buffalo and climbed the success ladder. She had bought a buffalo by borrowing a loan of rupees fifty thousand from Mahila Sangam. The buffaloes yielded approximately six litres of milk per day. Later, she bought two buffaloes and seven cows. Subsequently, the shed was constructed by an NGO. There is a sorghum fodder field around the farm for harvesting. She bought a chaffer machine and a grading mill, which cost twenty thousand Indian rupees. She mostly uses fodder from her own farm, but occasionally purchases it from other farmers. In addition to dairy farms, she started fisheries and poultry farms, and waste from these farms is used for Gober gas. To monitor the farm, she employed one labourer with a salary of thirty-five thousand Indian rupees per annum. She now runs a dairy farm with three buffaloes and seven cows, as well as a poultry and fishery farm in her backyard. She earns about six lakhs Indian rupees per annum, with only two lakhs fifty thousand Indian rupees in expenditure.

- She has been certified by All India Radio as the best progressive farmer and certified by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).
- Smt. Abboju Jyothi accomplished the Dairy farmer/Entrepreneur assessment (QP No. AGR/Q4101) at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at Mamnoor, Warangal, as per the National Skill Qualifications Framework Level-4 issued by Dr. R. S. Prasanna Kumar.
- She has also received the DD Kisan Award from Delhi.

CONCLUSION

Rural development relies heavily on livestock as a source of income, food security, and economic resilience (especially for women). Achieving economic independence and societal roles for women can be achieved by providing them with specific policies, credit, training, and support groups. Success stories resembling women’s involvement in livestock management are a transformative initiative, as highlighted by Smt. Abboju Jyothi. Addressing gender-based obstacles in this sector is crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable rural development, providing equal opportunities, and driving progress in India.

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