

# Role of women gender in livestock sector: A review

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## Abstract

India is an agriculture based country and livestock sector is an integral component of it where, livestock production is largely in the hands of women. Most of the animal farming activities such as fodder collection, feeding, watering, and health care, management, milking and household-level processing, value addition and marketing are performed by women. Besides, considerable involvement and contribution of women, considerable gender inequalities also exist in Indian villages. Therefore, there is a need to correct gender bias in livestock sector. Efforts are needed to increase the capacity of women to negotiate with confidence and meet their strategic needs.

**Keywords:** Agriculture; Livestock; Gender; Women

## Introduction

India is an agriculture based country and livestock sector is an integral component of it and livestock is generally considered a key asset for rural livelihoods. It offers advantages over other agricultural sectors and is an entry point for promoting gender balance in rural areas. In most societies, all household members have access to livestock and are involved in production as well as livestock production systems offer the potential for introducing a wide range of project activities to both genders. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and status of women and men, girls and boys. It is a set of culturally specific characteristics defining the social behaviour of women and men, and the relationship between them. Gender roles, status and relations vary according to place (countries, regions and villages), groups (class, ethnic, religious and caste), generations and stages of the lifecycle of individuals. Gender relations determine household security, well-being of the family, planning, production and many other aspects of life.

In India, livestock production is largely in the hands of women. In fact animal husbandry is becoming feminized. About 70% of the agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, and 10% of those who process basic foodstuffs are women and they also undertake 60 to 90% of the rural marketing; thus making up more than two-third of the workforce in agricultural production (<http://www.wikigender.org>). Most of the animal farming activities such as fodder collection, feeding, watering, and health care, management, milking and household-level processing, value addition and marketing are performed by women. Despite their considerable involvement and contribution, significant gender inequalities also exist in access to technologies, credit, information, inputs and services probably because of inequities in ownership of productive assets including land and livestock. The rapidly increasing demand for livestock products creates opportunities for empowerment of women (Taneja, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to correct gender bias in livestock sector, veterinary education, research and service delivery systems as to enhance the effectiveness of women-oriented livestock development programs (Anonymous, 2012-17). This review covers the role of women in livestock and dairy sector.

## Role of Women in Entrepreneur Activities in Livestock

Women constitute about 69% of workforce engaged in livestock sector. India is the world's largest milk producing country with a share of about 16 per cent in world's total milk production. India, the current leader in dairy world, rank 1<sup>st</sup> in milk production with a production level of 132.4 million tonnes of milk growing steadily at a compound annual growth rate of about 6.5 per cent (Anonymous, 2013-14). 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 (Patel, 1998). 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 (ILRI, 2012) makes them an appealing vehicle for pro-poor development. Increased consumption of livestock products, particularly in the fast-growing economies of the developing world, has been an important determinant of rising prices for meat and milk (Delgado et al. 1999; Delgado, 2003). These price surges provide new incentives and opportunities for using livestock as an instrument to help poor people escape poverty due to the multiple benefits that they offer and the multiple roles that they play in different production systems (Rangnekar, 1998; Aklilu *et al.*, 2008). Livestock provide income, create employment opportunities and provide food and nutrition security across different production systems and along different value chains. Moreover, vulnerable groups, particularly women and the landless, frequently engage in livestock production, thus highlighting the multifaceted virtues of livestock promotion as a pathway out of poverty (Heffernan and Misturelli, 2000). It also play important roles in securing household food security. This happens through various pathways: (i) in times of food shortages, households sell livestock to purchase other food such as cereals and legumes; (ii) income from regular livestock and livestock product sales is used for food purchases to supplement household food production and to diversify diets; (iii) livestock and livestock products are consumed and provide a protein diet for households.

It is estimated that about 70 million rural households own livestock of one species or the other. The resource-poor small and marginal farmers and landless labourers own majority of the livestock resources. Hence sustainable development of the livestock sector would lead to more inclusive development and empowerment of women (Anonymous, 2012-17). Women's typical role within a livestock production system is different from region to region, and the distribution of ownership of livestock between men and women is strongly related to social, cultural and economic factors.

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 (Lo, 2007). Most of the work and decision-making by women takes place at the household level, in which important decisions are taken jointly by both the man and woman heading the household. These decisions include which animals to sell and at what price, disease diagnosis and treatment of sick animals.

Gender-blindness is the result partly of a paternalistic bias, and partly due to the attitudes of the women themselves, who may be conditioned by their culture and society to underestimate the value of their work. (Niamir, 1994). Access, control and management of such resources as small ruminants, grazing areas and feed resources empower women and lead to an overall positive impact on the welfare of the household. Women face greater constraints than men in accessing natural resources, extension services, marketing opportunities and financial services as well as in exercising their decision-making powers. These constraints often prevent women from reaching their full potential within the agricultural sector, including livestock, and therefore compromise the achievement of overall household food security and nutrition. Since women usually manage household meals, they have a primary role with regard to the nutritional status of the household, especially the children. Because of this traditional role, women have therefore the potential to influence and promote a balanced diet. Thus, when rural women access and control the livestock or livestock products they own or manage, household coping strategies may be affected, resulting in a positive impact on overall household well-being and, in particular, nutrition (IFAD, 1999; FAO, 2012). Gender disparities can also have negative consequences on women's ability to earn a stable income, and have an adverse impact on overall household income earned at the household level from livestock production. In addition, the nature of the work women and men perform within the livestock sector may expose them to various health and safety related concerns, such as heightened exposure to zoonotic diseases (WHO, 2009).

Livestock widens and sustains three major pathways out of poverty: (1) Securing the assets of the poor, (2) Improving smallholder and pastoral productivity and (3) Increasing market participation by the poor (ILRI, 2007). Especially in rural areas, the development of small-scale livestock enterprises must be seen as a key element of any efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (FAO, 2010). Rural women perform a reproductive role, encompassing child bearing, child rearing and housework. At the same time, they also fulfill a productive role, engaging in paid labour activities outside the house and/or being in charge of a number of tasks related to household farming activities, including livestock management. In some developing countries, they make on average up to 43 percent of the agricultural labour force and contribute substantially to the livestock management (FAO, 2011).

### Why Mainstream Gender?

Mainstreaming gender can benefit both beneficiaries and project implementers and other stakeholders. Some of the key benefits that can be gained from mainstreaming gender in livestock initiatives are as follows,

#### Key benefits

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.

#### Other 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/or can open up access to credit (the sale of small ruminants can provide an emergency source of cash for medical treatment or school fees, while daily milk provides a regular flow of cash income often used to purchase food and household items).
- *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 (for instance by increasing food security at the household level: small ruminants provide food products such as milk, butter, cheese and meat, all of which are a source of protein, minerals and vitamins);
- *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.

### Key Gender Women issues

For livestock interventions to be successful, the following issues have to be considered:

- *Ownership of land.* Security of tenure is an important precondition for women's empowerment. Given the complexity of different tenure systems, project strategies should be tailored to the context of the region and society, with the aim of guaranteeing and expanding women's access to, and control over, land.
- *Access to capital and knowledge.* Women generally lack collateral, decision-making power in the household and control over loans. Ensuring women's access to extension services, knowledge, credit and technologies is therefore critical. Project experiences show that special credit lines for women are successful if these are made transparent and adapted to the cultural and social reality of the concerned families.
- *Ownership of livestock.* For women, purchase or receipt of a cow does not necessarily imply ownership. Analysis of the specific conditions of the project area and target households and monitoring of change are important to formulate and achieve realistic project goals.
- *Responsibilities and division of labour.* Including women in project activities does not automatically benefit them. Periodic analysis of labour, with corresponding adjustments to the time spent by women on the different tasks, or introduction of labour-reducing measures could diminish the risk of overwork.
- *Role of livestock in household nutrition.* Due to differences in the ways in which men and women use income, increases in men's earnings from livestock-related activities may not be necessarily translated into improved household nutrition, whereas women tend to prioritize household well-being. Moreover, project designers should be aware that if the project objective is to increase the income of small farmers, the nutritional and social needs of vulnerable groups will need to be met through special programmes.
- *Influence of processing and marketing of livestock products on household economy.* The division of work between men and women in processing and marketing needs to be analysed and project activities adapted accordingly.
- *Role of farmers' organizations.* An important function of well-organized farmers' groups is to represent the interests of their members. Therefore, specific measures should be included at design to guarantee women's participation in such organizations (or create organizations specifically for women if needed).
- *Information and relevant indicators* (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.) should be examined from a gender perspective.

### Other Gender issues

- The function of livestock for the various household members needs to be understood and fully taken into account.
- Measures to improve productivity and production will only succeed if additional income can be generated by selling products outside the home. Women's access to markets, mobility and control over the proceeds of the sale are important considerations in this respect.
- To increase livestock production, women should receive special training that is tailored to their specific needs and constraints (i.e. content of training, timing and social restrictions).
- Efforts to introduce new technology that does not take into account traditional practices by men and women will not be successful.
- Patterns in livestock activities (such as feeding, watering and milking) shift in response to seasonal changes, and affect the labour input of women and men.
- As income-earning opportunities in areas of livestock production traditionally handled by women increase, control of these areas may be taken over by men. An agreement among men and women beneficiaries that protects women's position must be found.
- The role of women and their empowerment in the local and regional livestock production system should receive special attention. The local practices at the basis of livestock production must inform all development initiatives, and proposed technologies should be economically feasible, socially accepted and low risk.
- Although income is not the only factor that determines women's socio-economic position, it greatly influences their status and living conditions. Increasing women's income by boosting livestock production therefore strengthens their position. As men may feel exposed by this process, projects must involve men and women in all negotiations to bring about equitable and sustainable changes.
- Efforts are needed to increase the capacity of women to negotiate with confidence and meet their strategic needs.

### Conclusion

In India, livestock production is largely in the hands of women. Besides, considerable involvement and contribution of women, considerable gender inequalities also exist in Indian villages. Therefore, there is a need to

correct gender unfairness in livestock sector. Efforts are needed to increase the capacity of women to negotiate with confidence and meet their strategic needs.

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