

Development of Women Through Dairy Cooperatives: A Study in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka

V M Rao*

Dairy farming offers an important outlet for women's participation in economic activities. Tending and cleaning animals and their sheds, cutting grass and preparing fodder are some of the activities carried out in such cooperatives. An attempt to inject professionalism, as well as, to provide first lessons in women's empowerment has been made by Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The present study shows that while dairy cooperatives in Karnataka have performed better compared to their counterpart in Andhra, the divergence is more marked in the case of cooperatives benefiting from STEP. This is true in regard to generation of output like supply of milk, value of milk poured everyday and supply of inputs like fodder, cow dung and grass also. Lastly the study shows that STEP helps in improving a non-quantifiable variable namely women's empowerment. Autonomy in decision making increases at both home and professional fronts due to this special training.

Introduction

Employment of women in different areas of farming activity like transplanting, harvesting and husking has been fairly common in India. They have worked in family farms, as well as, outside the family farm in exchange for wages. The seeking of employment in a formal activity where you need to bring some capital on your own has been of a comparatively recent origin. Dairy cooperatives, cooperatives making papads or selling of cooked food through 'mahila udyogs' in urban areas have added a new dimension to the prospect of women's employment. By selling milk to the cooperative on a daily basis women get hold of some liquid cash. They probably spend most of it on household needs and very little goes into saving. But the very fact that they learn how to use money and operate bank accounts if necessary goes a long way in making them self-reliant. It is not only the financial aspect that is important. The sense of responsibility accompanying the supply of a fixed quota of milk everyday, coming to the collection centre on time and making preparations for that the previous night imparts a lot of discipline to women.

Women in Dairying

Dairy farming is a widespread economic activity in India, transcending geographic and economic borders and women are recently beginning to be viewed as important contributors to the milk production system. They are closely involved in tending, cleaning animals and sheds, cutting fodder, fetching grass, preparation of dung cakes, reproduction, milking, preparation of milk products, marketing and representation in organisation of cooperatives.

It is estimated that women contribute as much as 75-85 per cent of the total labour requirement in dairy farming (Rao, 1996, 2000). Due to the efforts taken by the NDDB

* Professor, Department of Research and Publications, Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management, University Road, Pune 411 007.