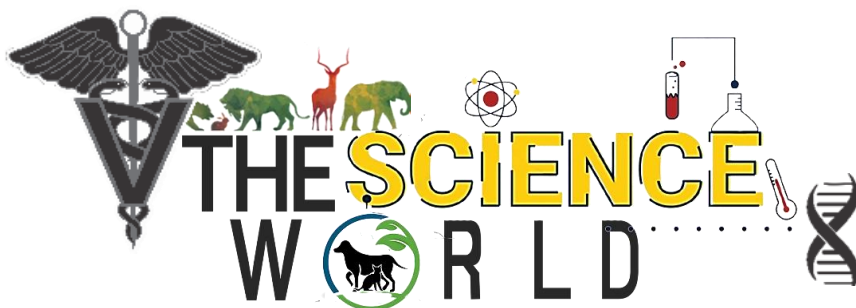




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Role and Contribution of Women in the Livestock Sector

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Abstract

Livestock is an important livelihood asset for rural households in India and provides a major space for women's participation, income support and household nutrition. Women contribute substantially to animal husbandry through fodder collection, feeding, watering, shed cleaning, milking, calf care, animal health care, preparation of dung-based manure and household-level processing of milk products. However, their labour is often under-recognised because ownership of land and animals, access to credit, participation in producer organisations, exposure to extension services and control over income frequently remain limited. Evidence from different studies indicates that women's participation is high in routine dairy and livestock management activities but comparatively lower in formal marketing, farm record maintenance, loan access and institutional decision-making. The major constraints include socio-cultural restrictions, limited mobility, inadequate women-oriented training, poor access to technology and weak representation in cooperatives and producer groups. Strengthening women-centred extension services, improving access to credit and markets, encouraging membership and leadership in livestock organisations and recognising women's work in official data can enhance productivity, household welfare and inclusive livestock development.

KEY WORDS: Livestock Sector, Women, Role, Contribution, Constraints

Introduction

Livestock has immense potential for providing non-farm employment and income in rural areas and thus it is considered a sector for women's empowerment and equity. Women can manage livestock and livestock products more easily than other assets such as land and other agricultural activities or small industries (Vijayalakshmy *et al.*, 2023). In developing



countries it is noticed that women have less access to technology, extension services all other activities in livestock sector than men. Supporting the empowerment of women involved in the livestock sector is an important end in itself and a promising instrumental pathway to reduce household poverty and to enhance household nutrition. In the present situation, women's potential and contribution to national development are more important. Although the level of participation fluctuates periodically and by location, it is undeniable that Indian women are involved in national advancement at all levels (Jadav *et al.*, 2014). In agricultural development and related industries such as crop and livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, social forestry, fisheries, etc., women are playing an important and vital role (Chayal and Dhaka, 2010).

Women's contribution in Livestock Management

Although women are actively involved in the livestock industry, it is challenging to determine the precise amount of their involvement, which varies greatly between and within nations. In India, women make up 69% of the labour in the cattle industry (Patel, 2016) and devote roughly 32% of their time to farming (Singh and Sengupta, 2009).

Every day, more women are employed in the animal husbandry sector. Women make up 10% of the population, 70% of rural labourers, and 80% of meal producers. They also handle 60–90% of the marketing and advertising for agricultural products. The wellbeing of the household is positively impacted by management, control, and access to resources such as feed sources and small ruminant grazing areas, which empowers the women. (Saini and Saini 2017). According to Thirunavukkarasu and Christy (2002), women typically dedicate 294.34 minutes a day to various dairy farm tasks, including feeding, watering, milking, housing, breeding, animal health care, and marketing. Cleaning animals and their sheds, milking, and making dung cake are only a few of the general livestock management tasks that women carry out and greatly contribute to. Women are mostly responsible for tasks like caring for sick animals, providing care during pregnancy, and providing traditional medical treatment. Kour (2015) studied in Punjab that about 98.6% rural women were involved in health care of pregnant animals, 55.30% involved in deworming, 52% were taking animals for treatment (52.0%) and 30.60% were involved in vaccination.

Role of women in processing and marketing

Rural women engage in more processing-related tasks than marketing-related ones, such as buying and selling animals, producing value-added goods from milk, and selling milk. According to the Social Assessment Report (2010), women in Rajasthan labour an average of 9.4 hours each day, of which 3.8 hours are spent on household chores, 1.5 hours are spent



caring for animals, and 4.1 hours are spent spinning. According to Mishra *et al.* (2008), the percentage of women involved in animal breeding and sales was zero. However, Kaur (2015) found that only 64.60% of women engaged in small-scale processing, such as turning milk into household milk products, and 74% of women sold milk. The participation of women was found least in financial related activities like farm record maintenance (52.50%) and getting loans or credits from the banks (49.16 %) (Kathiriya *et al.*, 2013) because in rural areas these activities are considered as men's venture.

Women in Dairy Cooperatives and Livestock Organisations

India is the largest producer of milk in the world, contributing 23 percent of global milk production. In India's dairy sector, women are the true decision-makers. The majority of workers in the nation's dairy industry are female producers. The industry contributes significantly to employment, particularly for women, and is a key player in the empowerment of women. In 2015–2016, there were five million female members of dairy cooperatives; by 2020–2021, that number had risen to 5.4 million, or 31 percent of all members. It is necessary to reproduce women's success in dairying in other livestock species such as goats, pigs and poultry. Women can accomplish this by forming cooperatives, women-producer organisations, and self-help groups (Chander, 2023).

Table 1: Women Contribution in animal husbandry activities

Activity	Reported contribution (%)	Source(s)
Construction of animal sheds	75.83	Rathod et al. (2011)
Care of newborn calves	100; 89.16; 65.30	Chayal et al. (2010); Kathiriya et al. (2013); Kaur (2015)
Washing and grooming of animals	70.83	Kathiriya et al. (2013)
Cleaning of utensils	100	Chayal et al. (2009)
Cleaning of animal sheds	100; 89.16	Chayal et al. (2009); Rathod et al. (2011); Kathiriya et al. (2013)
Disposal of cow dung	86.66	Rathod et al. (2011); Kathiriya et al. (2013)
Milking of animals	70.00; 90.00	Rathod et al. (2011); Kathiriya et al. (2013)



pregnancy-related care	90.83	Kathiriya et al. (2013)
Weaning and calf management	66.66	Lahoti et al. (2012)
Maintaining farm and dairy records	52.50	Rathod et al. (2011)

Constraints faced by women farmers in livestock sector

Traditional norms limit women's access to markets, training programs, and extension services. Cultural taboos and undervaluation of women's work lead to invisibility in official data and policy planning, perpetuating gender inequality in livestock-based livelihoods (Kathiriya *et al.*, 2010) .

Lack of Access to Resources

Women's access to loans, inputs, and subsidies linked to land titles is restricted because just 13% of them own land (NABARD, 2020). Women who do not own land have less access to loans, government programs and productive assets, which limits their capacity to make livestock investments. It prevents individuals from actively and independently participating in livestock growth and income creation by undermining their ability to make decisions, decreasing their financial stability, and keeping them out of formal institutions (Saini and Saini, 2021).

Socio-cultural Constraints

Women's access to loans, inputs, and subsidies linked to land titles is restricted because just 13% of them own land (NABARD, 2020). Women's access to markets, training programs, and extension services is restricted by traditional conventions. Gender disparity in livestock-based livelihoods is sustained by cultural taboos and the undervaluation of women's labour, which make them invisible in official data and policy planning (Kathiriya *et al.*, 2010).

Inadequate Training and Capacity Building

Women's ability to increase productivity and innovation in the livestock industry is limited by inadequate training and chances for capacity building. The majority of training programs are focused on men and ignore the schedules, literacy levels, and mobility limitations of women. Women consequently lack important information in several fields. Their capacity to use contemporary methods, enhance animal health, or manage successful businesses is hampered by this knowledge gap.

Women's abilities, confidence, and leadership can be greatly increased by strengthening gender-sensitive training, employing participatory techniques, and hiring them as trainers and extension agents. This will result in more inclusive and effective livestock development (Dudi *et al.*, 2019).



Lack of Recognition and Data

In the livestock industry, women's access to collective resources, decision-making, and market opportunities is restricted due to their under-representation in cooperatives and producer groups. These platforms usually provide as entry points to profitable markets, training, credit, and bulk input procurement; yet, cultural norms and gender prejudices often prevent women from joining or taking on leadership roles. Women continue to be marginalised as a result, having little control over value chain operations and little negotiating power. The sector's productivity and inclusive growth are hampered by this. Encouraging women to actively participate in these groups can boost efficiency, increase equity, and fully realise the potential of women's contributions to livestock-based livelihoods (Rewani and Tochhawng, 2014).

Conclusion

The majority of workers in agriculture and related fields are rural women. They produce a variety of goods, including crops, cattle and cottage industries from moving water, fuel, and grain to performing household and family upkeep tasks. Her importance and dignity have not yet been acknowledged despite her enormous involvement. By all social, economic, and political measures, women's status is low. Despite their lack of technical expertise, women contribute significantly to the Indian livestock industry. It is generally said that poverty has a woman's face. Considering the participation and lack in knowledge about livestock sector, if women is empowered than this will certainly contribute in doubling farmer's income and prosperity. There is a need of extensive study to document the role of women in livestock husbandry and household organization, to improve their decision making, women empowerment, education level to enhance women's literacy rates, livestock/land ownership, credit facilities, women's participation in social gatherings like 'kisan gosthi', 'village chaupal' etc. should be encouraged. Trainings must be arranged especially for women at community level through female extension workers extensively.

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