

The Impact of Dairy Cooperative on Women Empowerment —A Case of *KISHAN* Dairy Coop in West Bengal, India—

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Abstract:

India produces only five percent of the total quantity of milk produced this amount is too inadequate to meet the country's demand. As a result, many dairy cooperatives have been formed to meet local demand and to develop dairy industry. It has been noticed that for small farmers, livestock production is a family operation and most of the livestock management is carried out by women. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on the role of dairy cooperatives on women's empowerment or the role of women in dairy farming in rural areas. This paper examines how dairy activities can empower rural women by analyzing dairy activities of *KISHAN* cooperative in India. Focusing on the three dimensions of women's empowerment, this paper measures the extent of women's empowerment. This paper also analyses the factors contribute to women empowerment.

Key Words: Dairy Cooperative, Women Empowerment, India

1. Introduction:

India is a densely populated country and maximum people live in villages. Majority of them are involved in agriculture. The cattle animal is correlated with agriculture in India, and the old method of cultivation is still vogue there. Rearing of cattle animal is also an additional source of income of the villagers of this country. From the ancient Indian history, it is said that domestication of the cow and the buffalo dates back to nearly 4000 years (Manob 1996). Scriptures of India refer to the wealth through the word 'Goddhan'ⁱ. Maximum proportion of cows and buffaloes of the world are seen in India. However, India produces only five percent of the total quantity of milk produced in the world. This amount is too inadequate to meet the country's demand. The supply of milk in some parts of India is higher than the local demand. On the other hand, supply of milk in the rest of the country as well as in urban areas is much lower than the demand. As a result, many dairy cooperatives have been formed to meet local demand and to develop dairy industry. A huge amount of money has been spent on the creation of infrastructure and provision of facilities for the dairy cooperatives. In India, the cooperative dairy has three tier of structure which consists of, State level federations, District milk unions, and dairy cooperative societies at village level, respectively. The dairy cooperatives at village level are the main focus of this study. Livestock production in India is not a specialized commercial operation as it is in developed countries; a mixed crop-livestock farming system is generally practiced. Farmers in rain-fed, semi-arid areas heavily depend on livestock, particularly when the monsoon fails. Livestock have a socio-religious importance and are regarded as

indicators of status and wealth. The statistics show that women's participation in cooperatives is low in South Asian countries, especially in rural cooperatives. This is perhaps more difficult to explain in the case of developed countries where gender discrimination has, in principle, been overcome. In developing countries, such as in India or Bangladesh, socio-cultural and religious factors are often evoked: illiteracy, women's inside role, discretion, not speaking in front of men, traditions of men negotiating and handling money matters, supposed inferior abilities, and social pressures make it difficult for women to play an active and visible role. The types of business cooperatives dealt in, particularly cash crops which tend to be male precincts, is another factor, and male resistance to women's participation also goes a long way to keeping them out. Absolute lack of time to join up with other women seems to be a major factor everywhere.

During the last decade, the gender issue has attracted the attention of many researchers, as well as that of government agencies. There is a sudden emphasis on the need to study the role or position of women in agricultural production and special programs for this purpose are being designed. Recent researches on dairy cooperatives in India show that dairy cooperatives are playing a prominent role in the development of dairy industry as well as to increase the income of rural people. It has also been noticed that for small farmers, livestock production is a family operation. While it is recognized that most of the livestock management is carried out by women (Shing & Viitanen, 1987). Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on the role of dairy cooperatives on women's empowerment or the role of women in dairy farming in rural areas. Some studies reported, however, observations are recorded mainly on the type and amount of work performed by women (Banu, 1987). Thus, this study has selected a village from a very remote area from West Bengal, India and intends to assess the impact of cooperative dairy farming on women's empowerment and how actually cooperative dairy farming empowers women.

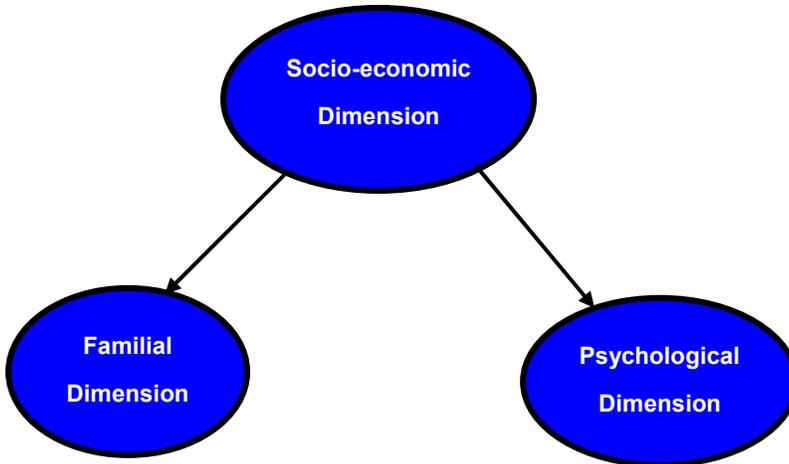
2. Data Collection and Methodological Issues:

This study was conducted mainly on the basis of primary data, and poor families with dairy animals were chosen from an underdeveloped village of West Bengal, India. A field survey was conducted from October to November, 2005. First, I gained permission from the authority of *kishan* cooperative to carry out a field survey. The questionnaire (open-ended) was prepared in advance, and the women members were interviewed in the districts of *Nadia*, West Bengal, India, at the grass roots level. A village named *Madanpur* was selected to carry out the field survey. In all, there were about 440 cooperative farmers under three societies. Of them two societies are female and another one is male. A total of 100 dairy farmers from Modumoti village milk producing societies (female) were chosen randomly for this study.

3. Conceptual Framework:

For analyzing the impact of dairy-coop on women's empowerment, this study has divided women's empowerment into three dimensions: socio-economic, familial, and physiological, as Malhotra (2002: 13) did in his conceptual framework. Women's empowerment is a process of moving from marginalization to the mainstream within the household and the community as well. These dimensions are dynamic, interlinked and mutually reinforcing at the household level and recognize the fact that the level of gender equality and development are directly proportional. These dimensions are as follows:

Diagram 3-1 Dimensions of women's empowerment



Note: Arrow indicates influence by another dimension

Familial dimension: In this dimension, women's participation in domestic decision-making, their freedom of movement without having permission from male counterparts, and their freedom from the domination by the family and domestic violence has been measured considering individual or household level. In rural areas, women's presence in public sphere is often constrained due to religious belief. In some circumstances, freedom of movement could be seen as an empowerment source, an enabling factor for women's agency in other areas of life.

Socio-economic dimension: In this dimension, women's control over income and assets as well as control over income-generating activities has been measured considering at individual or household level. Within the domestic domain, for example, the relative value of a woman's economic contribution is used much less often than the simple fact that she brings in an income or has