

Women Empowerment through Livestock Farming

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INTRODUCTION

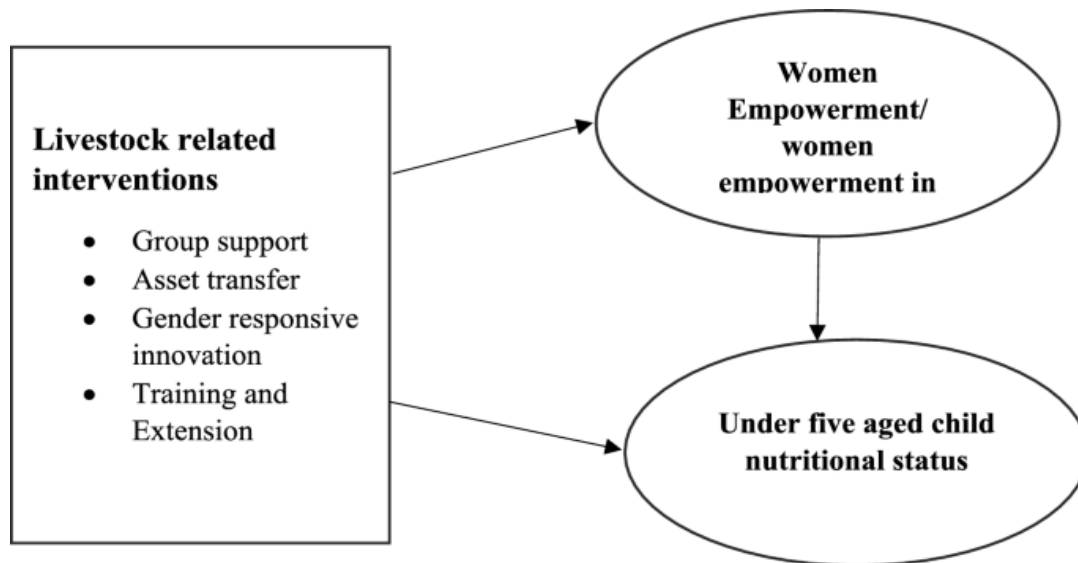
Women empowerment is a crucial component of sustainable rural development and poverty alleviation. In many developing countries, especially in agrarian economies like India, women play a significant role in agriculture and allied sectors. Among these, livestock farming stands out as one of the most accessible and impactful avenues for empowering rural women. Livestock farming includes activities such as dairy production, poultry keeping, goat rearing, sheep farming, piggery, and backyard animal husbandry. These activities not only contribute to household nutrition but also provide a steady source of income, employment, and socio-economic independence for women. Women empowerment through livestock farming refers to enhancing women's access to resources, decision-making power, income generation, and social status by actively involving them in livestock-based enterprises.

2. Role of Women in Livestock Farming

Women are the backbone of livestock management in rural households, contributing significantly to both subsistence and commercial activities. Their involvement spans a wide range of tasks that are essential for the successful operation of livestock enterprises.

2.1 Daily Management Activities

Women are primarily responsible for routine animal care and management. This includes feeding and watering animals, ensuring proper hygiene by cleaning animal sheds, and maintaining overall health and sanitation conditions. They are actively involved in milking operations and handling post-milking processes such as filtering and storage. Additionally, women provide special care to young animals, including feeding, protection from diseases, and monitoring their growth. These daily tasks ensure the productivity and well-being of livestock.



Source: <https://link.springer.com/>

2.2 Production Activities

Women play a central role in various livestock production systems. In dairy farming, they contribute significantly to milk production and handling. In poultry farming, they manage egg production and bird care efficiently. Women are also engaged in meat production through goat rearing, poultry, and piggery, which are important sources of income. In sheep farming, they assist in wool production and animal maintenance. Their continuous involvement ensures higher productivity and sustainability of livestock enterprises.

2.3 Processing and Marketing

Beyond production, women actively participate in processing and marketing of livestock products. They prepare value-added dairy products such as curd, butter, and ghee, which enhance income opportunities. Women often take responsibility for selling milk, eggs, and other animal products in local markets, thereby contributing directly to household earnings. Small-scale processing and value

addition further strengthen their economic role.

3. Importance of Livestock Farming in Women Empowerment

Livestock farming plays a transformative role in empowering women, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, by providing economic stability, social recognition, and improved living standards. It serves as a reliable and sustainable livelihood option, especially for women with limited access to land and other resources.

3.1 Economic Empowerment

Livestock farming ensures a regular and continuous source of income through the sale of milk, eggs, meat, and manure. Unlike seasonal crops, it provides daily or weekly cash flow, which enhances financial stability. This steady income enables women to contribute to household expenses, save money for future needs, and invest in their children's education and well-being. As a result, women gain greater financial independence and control over resources.



3.2 Employment Generation

Livestock farming generates year-round employment opportunities, reducing dependency on seasonal agricultural work. It promotes self-employment and offers scope for developing small-scale enterprises such as dairy units, poultry farms, and goat rearing businesses. These opportunities are particularly beneficial for landless and marginal women farmers, as livestock requires relatively low initial investment and can be managed within the household.

3.3 Nutritional Security

Livestock products such as milk, eggs, and meat significantly enhance household nutrition. They are rich sources of protein, vitamins, and minerals, which improve the overall health status of women and children. Regular consumption of these products helps in reducing malnutrition and ensuring food security at the family level.

3.4 Social Empowerment

Engagement in livestock farming improves women's social status and confidence. It enhances their decision-making ability within the household and encourages active participation in community and group activities. Women involved in income-generating livestock enterprises often emerge

as leaders in self-help groups and local organizations.

3.5 Asset Ownership

Livestock serves as a valuable movable asset for women. It can be easily sold during financial emergencies, providing immediate cash support. Often referred to as a "living bank," livestock offers financial security and stability, strengthening women's resilience against economic shocks.

4. Types of Livestock Enterprises Suitable for Women

Livestock enterprises provide flexible, low-cost, and income-generating opportunities that are highly suitable for rural women. These activities can be easily integrated with household responsibilities and require relatively less land and capital.

4.1 Dairy Farming

Dairy farming is one of the most popular and profitable enterprises among women. It offers a regular source of income through the sale of milk and milk products. Women are mainly responsible for feeding, milking, and caring for dairy animals, making it a dependable livelihood option.

4.2 Poultry Farming

Poultry farming is ideal for women due to its low investment and quick returns. It can be

practiced in backyard systems, allowing women to manage birds along with daily household work. It provides both eggs and meat, contributing to income and family nutrition.

4.3 Goat Rearing

Goat rearing is widely known as the “poor man’s cow” because of its affordability and ease of management. Goats require less space and feed, and their high reproductive rate ensures continuous income. It is especially suitable for small and marginal farmers.

4.4 Sheep Farming

Sheep farming is well-suited for dryland regions. It provides wool, meat, and manure, contributing to both income and soil fertility. Women can manage small flocks efficiently with minimal inputs.

4.5 Piggery

Piggery is a profitable enterprise due to high feed efficiency and rapid growth of pigs. It generates quick returns and helps improve the economic condition of rural households.

4.6 Backyard Livestock Systems

Backyard livestock systems integrate livestock with crop farming. They utilize household waste as feed, reduce input costs, and support sustainable farming, making them ideal for women.

5. Government Schemes and Support

Governments and various institutions play a crucial role in promoting women empowerment through livestock farming by providing financial, technical, and institutional support. These initiatives aim to enhance women’s participation, productivity, and income in livestock-based activities.

5.1 Financial Assistance

Financial support is one of the key drivers for encouraging women to adopt livestock enterprises. Governments provide subsidies for the purchase of animals such as cows, goats, and poultry birds, reducing the initial investment burden. Low-interest loans through banks and rural financial institutions make it easier for women to start or expand their livestock businesses. Additionally,

microfinance support through self-help groups and non-governmental organizations ensures access to small-scale credit, especially for rural and landless women.

5.2 Training and Skill Development

Capacity building is essential for improving the efficiency and sustainability of livestock farming. Various training programs are organized on animal husbandry practices, including feeding, breeding, and disease management. Dairy management training helps women improve milk production and handling techniques, while entrepreneurship development programs equip them with skills for running livestock-based enterprises successfully.

5.3 Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a significant role in empowering women socially and economically. These groups encourage collective participation in livestock farming, promote savings habits, and provide access to credit facilities. SHGs also strengthen women’s bargaining power in input purchase and product marketing, leading to better income opportunities.

5.4 Veterinary and Extension Services

Access to veterinary and extension services ensures the health and productivity of livestock. Governments provide vaccination and disease control programs to reduce mortality and improve animal health. Artificial insemination services help in breed improvement and higher productivity. Extension services offer technical guidance, advisory support, and awareness about modern livestock practices, enabling women to adopt improved technologies effectively.

6. Challenges Faced by Women in Livestock Farming

Despite their active and indispensable role in livestock farming, women face numerous challenges that limit their productivity, income, and overall empowerment. These constraints are socio-economic, technical, and institutional in nature.

6.1 Lack of Access to Resources

One of the major challenges is limited access to essential resources. Many women do not have ownership of land or livestock, which restricts their ability to access institutional credit and government benefits. They often face difficulties in obtaining quality inputs such as improved breeds, feed, and veterinary medicines, which negatively affects productivity.

6.2 Limited Technical Knowledge

Women frequently lack access to proper training and extension services. Due to limited exposure and educational opportunities, they are often unaware of modern livestock management practices, improved breeding techniques, and disease control measures. This knowledge gap reduces the efficiency and profitability of their enterprises.

6.3 Workload and Drudgery

Women bear a dual burden of managing household responsibilities along with livestock farming activities. Tasks such as feeding, cleaning, milking, and caregiving are labor-intensive and time-consuming. This heavy workload leads to physical strain and limits their ability to engage in income-enhancing activities or skill development programs.

6.4 Social Barriers

Social and cultural norms often restrict women's mobility and participation in decision-making processes. Gender discrimination limits their control over resources, income, and enterprise management. As a result, their contributions remain undervalued and under-recognized.

6.5 Market Constraints

Women also face challenges in accessing markets and securing fair prices for their products. Limited market information, poor transportation facilities, and dependence on middlemen often lead to exploitation and low price realization. This reduces their overall income and economic empowerment.

7. Strategies to Enhance Women Empowerment through Livestock

Empowering women through livestock farming requires a comprehensive approach that addresses economic, technical, and social barriers. The following strategies can significantly enhance women's participation and benefits in this sector.

7.1 Capacity Building

Capacity building is essential to improve women's skills and knowledge in livestock management. Regular training programs on feeding, breeding, and disease management should be organized. Exposure visits to successful farms and institutions can help women learn practical approaches and innovative practices. Skill development initiatives also promote entrepreneurship, enabling women to manage livestock enterprises more efficiently.

7.2 Access to Credit and Inputs

Ensuring easy access to financial resources is crucial for expanding livestock activities. Women should be provided with easy loan facilities through banks and microfinance institutions. Availability of subsidized inputs such as quality feed, veterinary medicines, and improved breeds can enhance productivity. Livestock insurance schemes are also important to protect women from financial losses due to animal diseases or mortality.

7.3 Strengthening SHGs and Cooperatives

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperatives play a key role in collective empowerment. Promoting women-led dairy cooperatives and livestock groups can enhance access to resources, training, and markets. Collective marketing helps women secure better prices and reduces dependence on middlemen, thereby increasing their income.

7.4 Use of Technology

The adoption of modern technology can greatly improve efficiency and reduce drudgery. Mobile-based advisory services provide timely information on animal health and management. Digital platforms enable women to access wider markets and improve

product sales. Mechanization of tasks such as feeding and milking reduces physical workload and saves time.

7.5 Policy Support

Strong policy support is necessary to ensure long-term empowerment. Governments should implement gender-sensitive policies that recognize women's contributions in livestock farming. Inclusion of women in decision-making processes and ensuring equal access to resources, training, and benefits are essential for achieving sustainable empowerment.

8. Case Studies and Success Stories

Practical experiences and success stories highlight the transformative impact of livestock farming on women's empowerment across rural areas.

8.1 Dairy Cooperatives

Women-led dairy cooperatives have emerged as powerful platforms for economic and social upliftment. By organizing women into cooperative groups, these initiatives enable collective milk production, processing, and marketing. As a result, women gain better access to markets and fair prices for their products. Participation in such cooperatives has significantly increased women's income levels, allowing them to contribute more effectively to household needs. Moreover, their involvement enhances social status and recognition within the family and community. It also encourages active participation in local decision-making processes and community development activities.

8.2 Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) engaged in livestock activities such as goat rearing and poultry farming have shown remarkable success in reducing rural poverty. These groups promote regular savings and provide access to credit, enabling women to start and expand small livestock enterprises. SHGs also foster financial discipline and collective responsibility. Through income generation and savings, women achieve greater financial independence and security. Additionally,

SHGs enhance confidence, leadership skills, and social bonding among members.

9. Impact on Sustainable Development

Women empowerment through livestock farming plays a significant role in achieving sustainable development. It directly contributes to poverty reduction by providing a stable and continuous source of income. It also promotes gender equality by enhancing women's access to resources, decision-making power, and economic opportunities.

Livestock farming improves food and nutritional security by ensuring the availability of protein-rich foods such as milk, eggs, and meat. It supports sustainable agriculture through integrated farming systems, efficient resource utilization, and organic manure use. Furthermore, it strengthens rural development by generating employment, improving livelihoods, and reducing migration.

These contributions align closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), highlighting the importance of livestock farming as a tool for inclusive and sustainable growth.

CONCLUSION

Livestock farming is a powerful tool for women empowerment, particularly in rural areas. It provides economic independence, improves nutritional security, and enhances social status. By addressing existing challenges and promoting supportive policies, training, and financial inclusion, livestock farming can significantly uplift women and contribute to sustainable rural development. Empowering women through livestock is not just about improving livelihoods—it is about building resilient communities, ensuring food security, and fostering inclusive growth.

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