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LEISA INDIA (<http://leisaindia.org>) > [Articles \(http://leisaindia.org/category/articles/\)](http://leisaindia.org/category/articles/) > Gender and policies in livestock production

Gender and policies in livestock production

Issues and opportunities

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Paradigm shifts in the approach from “enhancing productivity and efficiency” to “inclusiveness and equity” has led to change in the perspectives on livestock sector. This can serve as a means to reduce poverty and promote development, only when it is implemented effectively on the ground.

Livestock plays an important role in the national economy contributing to national income and generating foreign exchange earnings. With a total livestock population of 512 million, the sector accounts for 4.11% of the countries' GDP at current prices and 23% of gross valued added by Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry Sector at constant prices. Demand for high value livestock products like milk, meat and egg are projected to increase three-fold by 2020, providing immense opportunity for the growth and expansion of this sector.

Livestock is an important non-land productive asset for the women's livelihoods and support in household food security. More than 70% of the livestock in rural areas are owned by small holders and landless labourers. NSSO (2014) data shows that out of total rural workers in agriculture, 3.5% is engaged in livestock production. Among the agricultural allied activities, livestock production engages the largest share of female workers. 8.8% of the total female rural workers and 1.8% of total male rural workers are engaged in livestock production. Livestock production accounts for a larger share of self employed female workers compared to male workers. Proportion of rural women self employed in livestock production is 14.7%, compared to 2.9% of self employed male workers in the sector, indicating it to be a major household enterprise for the rural women next to crop cultivation. In the context of changing socio, economic and Paradigm shifts in the approach from “enhancing productivity and efficiency” to “inclusiveness and equity” has led to change in the perspectives on livestock sector. This can serve as a means to reduce poverty and promote development, only when it is implemented effectively on the ground. political situations, the rate of men migration to off-farm employment is increasing and ultimately women are managing the farms, including the livestock.

The role in management, labour, knowledge, ownership in livestock sector etc., differ between men and women farmers. Thus, men and women have differential knowledge, engage in specific roles, own different type of livestock and have different rights and control over the products. It is common that women own small livestock like goat, poultry and pigs and have the decision making capacity to sell and right to use the sale proceeds. Inspite of women's predominant role in management and production, their contribution is undervalued and not recognized in national policies and plans. Limited research and studies were carried out on women's role and participation in livestock farming when compared to their role in crop cultivation to recognize the issue and plan for targeted policies and programmes. The report of FAO argues that the agricultural productivity and output will increase to 10–30% and 4% respectively if women have the same level of access to resources as men. Deeper understanding on the context specific gender issues is necessary to provide inputs for research, development and policies.

The key gender issues in livestock sector that needs attention are access to and control over means of production such as livestock, productive resources like land and water, and services like credit, insurance, information, market etc. A striking reflection of the gender blindness of the policy framework is reflected in the membership pattern of diary cooperatives. Although women account for 90% of the labour force in livestock production, less than 25% of the memberships in diary cooperatives are that of women.

In spite of women's predominant role in management and production, their contribution is undervalued and not recognized in national policies and plans.

Gender and livestock policies in India

The analysis of the livestock policies reveal that there is a disconnect between the policies and grassroot realities especially women and men's contribution in livestock production. The policy and programme scenario in the livestock sector in India before the 1990s has been driven by the "productivity enhancement" paradigm, while the post 1990 interventions adopted efficiency approach based on the structural adjustment programme of India. However both these approaches supported neither the small producers nor women. Considering the gap, Government of India, included 'inclusiveness' and 'equity' dimensions in the XI Five Year Plan – 2007-2012, titled as 'Inclusive Growth'. Also, the recent National Livestock Policy, 2013 states that it intends to enhance the productivity and production of livestock in a sustainable manner while ensuring farmers' livelihood. In one of its objectives, specific mention is made about the improvement in productivity especially among women and small farmers. The policy further touts, the promotion of Joint Liability Groups/Self Help groups to access institutional credit by the farmers and farmer producer organizations to facilitate the necessary backward and forward linkages. These paradigm shifts in the approach from "enhancing productivity and efficiency to inclusiveness and equity" led to change in the perspectives on livestock sector and it is seen as a means to reducing poverty and promoting development. However, the institutions and delivery mechanisms which are operating the policies into practice have not changed their perspectives to implement the inclusive growth concurrent to the changes in the livestock policies. Addressing the gaps in meso and microlevel institutions to implement the inclusive policies are mandatory to bring the changes. Then, question arises that whether the inclusive approach alone helps to address prevailing gender issues in livestock sector. The latest initiative of the GOI in livestock sector is launching of National Livestock Mission (NLM) during 2014-15, as part of the 12th Five Year Plan. NLM is formulated by modifying and subsuming 7 Centrally Sponsored and 7 Central Sector Schemes. NLM has made an attempt to include a clause targeting the participation of women farmers in livestock sectors. The operational guidelines of the scheme spell out that 'state wherever possible should strive' to physically cover 30% women beneficiaries under each of the Mission schemes.

In this context, it is essential to integrate the learnings from the number of successful initiatives or models that have been demonstrated by many bi-lateral donor agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) and private agencies in integrating gender perspectives with specific focus to women and poor in livestock sector. More specifically, these initiatives have shown that improvement in access to technologies for higher productivity, financial and health services, active participation in different stages of value chains, collective action to achieve the economy of scale in production and marketing through organizing in to groups etc., have brought positive changes in gender roles and relations at individual, household and society levels. Hence, engendering livestock research for development would help to raise the gender issues and make effort to recognize the contribution of women and poor in livestock production. Such critical inputs are necessary from the research organizations to improve the policies for equitable development.

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