

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH DAIRY FORMING UNDER STEP (SUPPORT TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME) IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Women play an important role in dairy activities in rural areas. Dairy production is an important field for Women's Empowerment in rural Karnataka. STEP provides intensive knowledge to all the members of the society. It ensures women empowerment and effective participation and equal opportunities in various levels of decision making process in economic and public life. This paper tries to analyze how STEP helps in empowering & strengthening rural women through Women Dairy Cooperative Societies (WDCS) in Karnataka.

KEYWORDS: *Economic Empowerment, Dairy Forming, Women, Karnataka, STEP, KMF*

INTRODUCTION

Ministry of Women and Children Development, Government of India has sanctioned the programme of Support to Training and Employment Programme" (STEP) with an objective of Socio-economic upliftment of Women. Exclusive women dairy co-operative societies are organized and women members are trained in Dairy Animal Management and Awareness Programme on Health & Nutrition, Legal Literacy Gender Sensitization at village level.

The Programme of STEP aims to make a significant impact by upgrading skills and providing continuous income generating employment to women on a project basis by mobilizing women in viable groups, improving skills, arranging for productive assets, creating backward and forward linkages, improving/arranging for support services, providing access to credit and awareness generation programmes in gender sensitization health & nutrition education, legal literacy and sensitization of project functionaries. Thus STEP advocates a package of inputs aiming at the integrated development of poor women in traditional sectors. The ultimate endeavor of the project is to develop the group to thrive on a self-sustaining basis in the market place with the minimal governmental support and intervention after the completion of project period.

Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) initiated the STEP Programme in Karnataka from October 1997. Since then, KMF has organized 1000 new Women Dairy Cooperative Societies (WDCS) in I, II, III & V Phases. In IV & VI Phases converted 450 already functioning WDCS in the jurisdiction of Gulbarga Milk Union confined to Bidar District, the Project was later transferred to KMF exclusively to complete the activities. Thus totally 1474 WDCS have been organized. In addition to this, Government of India has approved two more Phases. In Phase VII 200 WDCS and in Phase VIII 250 WDCS for bringing existing societies into the fold of STEP. Thus 1924 WDCS are sanctioned by Government of India at a total outlay of Rs. 5648.08 lakh and has released till March 2011 Rs. 3714.40 lakh. Each WDCS gets a grant of

approximately Rs.2.50 lakh to Rs.3.00 lakh for establishment, management, Training, awareness programmes and for granting interest-free loan for purchasing milch animals. The share of Government of India is 90% and implementing agency i.e. KMF and its Member Milk Unions share is 10%.

Target Group

KMF is implementing STEP Scheme through its 14 Member District Milk Unions form the STEP Core Team which through Benchmark Survey identifies the Target Group Members that include the marginalized, asset less, wage laborers, women-headed households, migrant laborers, tribal and other dispossessed rural women. Thus the beneficiaries in the project will be poor or assetless marginalized women with special focus on SC/ST households, women-headed households and families below poverty line. Thus, main features of the STEP Scheme is Training providing margin money conducting Awareness Generation Programmes at village level and visit to AMUL Anand in Gujarat. The STEP WDCS also carries out programmes for the benefit of rural women, apart from milk procurement, milk marketing and providing technical input for WDCS members. Upto Phase-VI, 74,434 target group members have been enrolled. In Phase VII&'s VIII, 20,000 target group members will be enrolled.

Health & Nutrition Programme

To provide intensive knowledge to all the members of the society for welfare of their family members in terms of health and hygiene, balanced food, mother and child health care, safe drinking water, vaccination, preventive measures for diseases, usage of locally available vegetables, eradication of dogmatic social customs and rituals and prevention of malnutrition and conducting health camps, eye/blood testing, shibira's, demonstration of infant and young child nutritious food preparation from the locally available materials. 3 to 4 one day shibiras are conducted in each WDCS with a financial assistance f Rs. 6000/- to Rs.8000/- Till March 2011, 3949 shibiras have been conducted.

Legal Literacy Programme

Legal Literacy Programme is conducted at village level with the assistance of eminent advocates, particularly lady advocates who are taken to villages to impart awareness on rights of women in property, prevention of dowry, authorities to approach in case of domestic violence/harassment etc. Visits are arranged to Courts, Police Stations, Tahshildar Offices and Banks to acquaint themselves regarding the working of these institutions. 3 one-day shibiras are being conducted in each WDCS. Till March 2011, 5169 shibiras have been-conducted.

Gender Sensitization Programme

This programme is conducted to sensitize women members in gender differences and to promote girl child education on par with male children and widow re-marriages. Know-how regarding agencies working for the welfare of women and the financial assistance available from Government agencies, banks, self help groups & other institution is provided to create self-sustaining ability in women folk.

AMUL Visit

Visit to the world famous AMUL Dairy, Anand in Gujarat is arranged for the Presidents, Directors and Members of the Dairy Co-operatives for emulating the good features from AMUL's Societies into their societies as it is said "seeing is believing". Till March 2011, 2908 women have visited the AMUL Dairy.

Margin Money

Margin money of Rs. 5,000/- is provided to Target Group Members for purchasing milch animals to uplift their economic conditions. Financial institutions demand at least 20% of margin money from each beneficiary. The beneficiary is economically weak and may not afford to pay the margin money. Hence, Rs.5000/- is provided as an interest-free loan to 15 members in Phase VII & VIII which remain as a revolving fund with the dairy cooperatives and enable the society to extend margin money benefit to rest of the Target Group Members of the WDCS on continuous basis. Thus Rs. 60,000 to Rs. 75,000/- from 01-04-2011 in Phases I to IV, the Margin Money provided is increased to Rs. 10,000/- from Rs. 5,000/- Till March 2011, 35563 milch animals have been inducted.

Self-Help Groups

Another important feature of WDCS is promotion of Self Help Groups (SHG) by its Target Group Members. STEP Programme implementation supposes formation of at least one Self-Help Group. March-2011, 1696 SHGs are formed with a savings of Rs. 697.69 lakhs. The Nandini Self-Help Groups which are centers of empowerment are working for the socio-economic development of rural women. To strengthen these SHG's and have close monitoring, SHG's Federations are formed at Unions level. This has a three tier system. SHG's at village level 5 to 25 such SHG's join together to form a MahaSangha at Taluka level and Federation's at Union level. SHG Federations are formed at Dakshina Kannada, Bangalore, Bijapur, Belgaum and Dharwad unions. SHG Federation office bearers are being trained at MYRADA Training Center.

The positive intervention by KMF with the help of Government of India is causing the slow emergence of movement of rural women, who have seen little beyond their immediate work at home, their farm and the village. The aim is to enhance women's bargaining power as members of the society by increasing their access and control over household and community resources.

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