

Empowerment of Rural Women Livestock Farmers: Pashu Sakhi (PS) Model

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Introduction

Livestock is vital to the Indian economy as it has a wealth of livestock. A total of 20.5 million people rely on livestock for a living. Livestock provided 16% of small farm households' income, compared to an average of 14% for all rural households. Around two-thirds of rural communities depend upon livestock for a living. It also employs approximately 8.8% of India's population. The livestock sector accounts for 5.1% of GDP during the year 2019-20 (NAS 2019). Diversification in farming with livestock rearing is a better option for the farmers to increase their income. The rural people receive various advantages by keeping small livestock as they serve as a source of earnings, an asset that can be cashed in times of emergency, a source of food (milk and meat), a source of medicine (milk), and as a gift during occasions. But proper maintenance and wellbeing of these animals are much needed as small animals are easily prone to diseases and have high chances of mortality if not well attended and taken care of. In villages, various problems like lack of timely treatment and veterinary first aids to the animals, doorstep veterinary healthcare, low feed availability, genetic degradation, seasonal stress, lack of reasonable pricing system of animals, unskillful trading, low use of technology etc. leads to economic as well social instability of the rural farmers which directly effects upon their livelihoods. Besides these, there is a wide gap of awareness and technical knowledge among the rural farmers regarding livestock farming.

A gradual shift to feminization is seen in agriculture due to the migration of male farmers to urban areas in search for better source of income, rise of women-headed households and growth in the production of cash crops which are labour intensive in nature. It is widely accepted that women in the world are generally the caretaking heads of the children

and elderly in the households. Women are capable of shaping the society and her education is very important to bring out development and sustainability in any community. Women workforce engagement can be seen in nearly every sector while their role is often not given much credit due to the suppression and inequality faced by them and their work treated as an extension of their household work which adds a dual burden of domestic responsibilities while they are dependent on male counterparts as a source of livelihood. Around 60 % of the labour force in agriculture is women and farm women have been considered as the backbone of Indian agriculture, traditionally handling the agricultural operations. Rural women are extensively involved in agricultural activities and do the most tedious back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and household work. In underdeveloped and developing countries like India, rearing of small livestock is a crucial income source for the resource poor rural people and a potential livelihood source for the women in rural areas.

To improve the livestock rearing conditions various livestock extension services are prevailing but are unable to make significant difference in the farming situations due to lacunas in the extension delivery systems such as the fewer number of trained youth personnel for the more farmers in villages where they provides services as a consequence of which they generally focused on treatment, mostly on large animals, rather than preventive practices and awareness building. Due to competing interests, small livestock and poor farmers were neglected. The high expense of travel led in the disregard of close monitoring and first aid treatment, which was not profitable for the youths in itself. The trained youth, who were mostly men, had a social and psychological barrier in reaching out to women who took care of the livestock in the village. To overcome these challenges an alternative livestock extension service was required and the model of *Pashu Sakhis* has been beneficial for improving the deficient livestock rearing system in rural areas as well as empowering the rural women from the grass root level and thereby enhancing their socio-economic and livelihood conditions.

Who are Pashu Sakhis?

Ajeevika Pashu Sakhis (figure 1) are the local community service providers or livestock friends locally known as doctor *didi*, providing their doorsteps services to around 50-100 livestock farmers within their village. Their services include advancing inputs, creating awareness related to livestock, giving advice regarding breeding, feeding and animal



health, assistance in shed construction, training of local farmers, risk mitigation and market linkages etc. These women are selected by the community and their roles and duties are explained by involving their family members and community heads to gain their support and confidence. A participatory training process is provided generally to the semi-literate women of the village to enhance their skills, knowledge and attitude to work as a Pashu Sakhi.

Selection criteria for Pashu Sakhi:

- Farm woman from the same or adjacent village where the service is to be provided to enable timely services and follow ups.
- She should at least be able to read and write.
- Should own animals and other resources for proper livestock intervention and demonstration.
- Interested and willing to adopt her own animal husbandry as demonstration site.
- Has a positive attitude with leadership qualities to learn new things and listen to others.
- Her family members should support her work.
- Should be ready to invest needed time for the community work.

Functions of a Pashu Sakhi:

- Providing veterinary first aid service on the farmer's doorstep.
- Focus mainly on small ruminants like goats, pigs and poultry.
- Regular monitoring and data recording on disease spread.
- Focus on delivering critical knowledge and demonstration regarding the prevention of diseases, suggest improved practices and management of animal rearing.
- Technology demonstration in her own house for her fellow group members to see results.
- Engages in activities like deworming, vaccination, organizing animal health camps, wheat straw urea treatment, azolla pit installation, mineral brick preparation, input sale to animal rearers so that they can buy and feed animals.
- Comprehensive support for productivity enhancement, improving access to markets, training farmer's risk reduction through insurance.



Figure 1: Pashu Sakhi taking care of young goats

Rural women empowerment through APS Model

Pashu sakhi model (figure 2) has not only upgraded the livestock rearing conditions in the villages with improved knowledge, technology adoption and better management practices among the farmers but has also helped these *Pashu Sakhis* in gaining respect among their communities. Majority of the farmers have small and marginal land holdings in the country owning less than one hectare of land and practices subsistence farming, leading to poor income and lack of opportunities for commercial farming. Animal husbandry has the prospects to help these farmers with their earnings round the year. To boost the non-scientific and low income animal rearing situation prevailing in the rural areas, Pashu Sakhi model has come out as a better way of technology dissemination among the farmers. This gender sensitive decentralized extension model has given working opportunity to the society-stricken rural women who are burdened with the household works with additional farming chores and have low social status in their community due to the social norms. Farm women with a basic level literacy can become a Pashu Sakhi through proper technical training programme and skill development. Their capacity building is a solution oriented method to improve the livestock productivity and market access to the farmers as well as empowering these women entrepreneurs selling their services and inputs, earning an income, supporting their family finances and gaining respect in their communities. In many parts of India, women in the villages are wedded at an early age and do not get a chance to complete their education

ending up as housewives which has an impact on their personal growth. Pashu Sakhi model enables these women to gain their own identification, independence as well as respect in their community.

This model was initiated in early 2000's and presently there are more than 15000 Pashu Sakhis across the country. It is adopted in many states, and through projects and agencies but with some modifications in their approach, orientation and roles of these Pashu sakhis. In India majorly three models exists which provide livestock services to the farmers i.e. Traditional model (government veterinary services), Standard model and JOHAR model. In a standard model of Pashu Sakhi (figure.1) the Field coordinators, Livestock assistants and Subject Matter Specialists of the organizations are involved in supporting the pashu sakhis. This alternative innovative extension model has been beneficial in providing grass root level livestock related services, inputs and information in a gender sensitive decentralized technology transfer system.

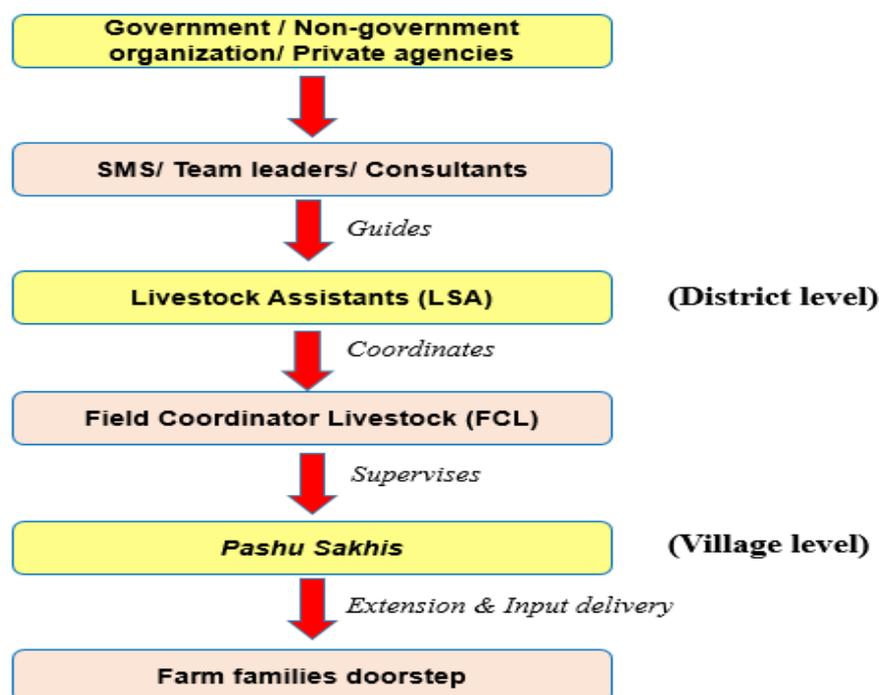


Figure 2: A standard Pashu Sakhi Model

The Pashu Sakhis provides extension and input delivery to the farm families at their doorsteps within the village. She is supervised by the Field Coordinator Livestock (FCL) who is responsible for supervising Pashu Sakhis. And the FCLs are coordinated by the Livestock Assistants (LSA) at district level who are guided by the SMS, consultants and team leaders of



the partner organisations like KVKs, ATMA, NGOs like PRADAN, IBTADA, SRIJAN, Saheli Samiti etc.

Status of Pashu Sakhi model in India

Many states adopted this model for grass root level technology delivery and has been receiving good response from their beneficiaries.

Rajasthan: A study was implemented to understand the effectiveness of pashu sakhis in majorly four districts i.e. Alwar, Dholpur, Tonk and Dausathe (Ponnusamy *et al.*, 2016). Pashu sakhis demonstrated their work in delivering services, carrying out trainings at village level, organized meeting twice a month and communicated knowledge related to livestock. Their clients were found to successfully adopt improved practices like modifying their manger for feeding their animals efficiently which helped in waste reduction, artificial insemination, balanced feeding, clean milk production, deworming, milk product preparation, fodder cultivation etc. Major awareness was observed on the deworming of animals. Calf mortality was reduced and milk and milk products were procured and sold with higher profits with the help of NGOs. This not only helped their clients but also established empowerment among the pashu sakhis as they were able to exhibit their views confidently in the trainings and meetings. After joining the SHGs remarkable change was seen in their behavior and decision making in their families. They felt more independent, strong headed, reduced veils and travelled more to gain information and even intended to wed their daughters only after they had finished college. As compared to past identification by their husbands' names, now they were identified by their own names which gave them confidence and a better way of life.

Maharashtra: A field assessment study in Gondia, Maharashtra revealed that goat farming families have increased their knowledge, technology adoption and improved risk management practices. As a result, goat farmers have been able to negotiate higher prices for their goats and bucks. Pashu Sakhis supplemented their increased income by improving their goat rearing skills and inputs. By working as a pashu sakhis, these women acquired recognition in the household and in the community and also contributed to the family finances. They were being recognized in society as vital service providers. Men's attitudes about women, particularly those from upper castes, shifted significantly for the better. Pashu Sakhis are now addressed with more respect and affection, with people occasionally referring to them as "doctor *didi*" boosting their morale and willingness for the community work.



Jharkhand: The Pashu sakhi model in JOHAR (Jharkhand Opportunities for Harnessing Rural Growth) is considered to be the country's first accredited and potentially most extensive and sustainable model. According to project data, the services provided by Pashu sakhi lowered cattle mortality, which was as higher prior to JOHAR. Master Trainer pashu sakhis were specially trained as trainers and get certified through ASCI (Agriculture Skill Council of India) provided coaching and support in the selection of Pashu sakhis. The advantages of ASCI certification offers a technique to regulate the skill level of Pashu sakhis across the nation and professionalize them and qualifies them to operate anywhere in India as the highest quality professional trainers. More than 1000 women were trained, accredited and equipped through this programme. A remarkable growth in the marketable surplus of meat and eggs with profit for goat, layers, dual purpose poultry (Kuroiler) and pigs was also witnessed.

Challenges faced

In spite of its success and acceptance in many states, this model has some drawbacks which had lead many women to opt out from their role as a Pashu sakhi. These women had to travel from district or block level offices to their client's houses in the villages which make it a tiring job for them in a regular basis apart from their household responsibilities. Also, many times they do not get full support from their family members. The remuneration from their job is also not alluring enough to keep them motivated. Besides, they are unable to provide enough time care for their farm and families. These challenges experienced by them needs to be solved for the sustainability of this women empowerment model among the rural women.

Way Forward

The social capital that has promoted the model has been the most significant and crucial factor in the success of this organizational form. There is a necessity to increase the interaction between the various participants in technology transfer to make this model more effective. Efforts must be made by different agencies to increase the income of the Pashu sakhis to promote the entrepreneurial spirit among the rural farm women. Regular training and evaluation methods must be done to focus more on economic benefits of farmers rather than just daily time devotion. Women are the most valuable resource for balancing rural, social, and capital assets, and livestock farming provides a platform for this development. The Pasu Sakhi Model is a worthwhile strategy to bringing about a revolution through



livestock farming that targets families at the bottom of the social pyramid. Pasu Sakhi establishes strong relationships with development departments and this approach needs to be scaled out across the country in order to meet the skill demands in the animal husbandry industry and sustain livestock operations in the long run in order to empower the socioeconomic status of resource-poor rural women.

References

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