



A road to progress

The achievements of women dairy farmers in contributing to India's 'White Revolution' are perhaps the greatest cause for celebrating Women's History. That this has happened despite around a majority of dairy farmers owning only small landholdings — typically households with two to five cows — is also a testament to the success of the dairy cooperatives models that were at the heart of Operation Flood.

Highlights:

1. The approach made it possible to enhance backward and forward linkages in the dairy value chain, paving the way for freeing small farmers from the clutches of middlemen, and guaranteed minimum procurement price for milk.
2. A study by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) indicates that 93% of women farmers who receive training alongside financial support succeed in their ventures, compared to the 57% success rate of those who receive financial aid alone.
3. Institutionalising such inputs, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) now organises farmer's orientation programmes across the country, under which women farmers are trained in scientific best practices on animal health, fodder quality, clean milk production, and accounts management.

Enhanced incomes and Women Empowerment

1. According to the latest data, there are more than 1,90,000 dairy cooperative societies across the country, with approximately 6 million women members.
2. A study conducted on Women Dairy Cooperative Society (WDCS) members across Rajasthan showed that with the income generated through dairying, 31% of the women had converted their mud houses to cement structures, while 39% had constructed concrete sheds for their cattle.
3. Importantly, women-led cooperatives also provide fertile ground for grooming women from rural areas for leadership positions. In many instances, this becomes the first step for women in breaking free from traditional practices.



Challenges

1. Major challenge in this sector is information asymmetry among farmers. Statistics indicate that small and marginal farmers have access to only 50-70% of the resources that large and medium farmers have.
2. Once again, the presence of collectives in the form of cooperatives and milk unions plays a significant role in enhancing the knowledge and bargaining power of women.

Women-led companies and Power of Collectives

1. Recent years have seen the rise of women-led dairy unions and companies. To this end, the NDDDB has played a proactive role in setting up women-led producer enterprises like Shreeja Mahila Milk Producer Company, which was started with 24 women and now has more than 90,000 members, with an annual turnover of approximately ₹450 crores.
2. Last year, Amul Dairy released a list of 10 women dairy farmers who became millionaires by selling milk to the company.
3. These testimonials of individual women dairy farmers are all the more remarkable for the fact that many of them have not had a formal education, but through the process of dairying and working with larger collectives, such as milk unions and cooperatives, they have mastered the nuances of finance and marketing.

Good neighbours

Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the war of liberation and the centenary year of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina showcased the deep history the two nations share, their future plans and the challenges ahead.

Highlights:

1. India's role in the creation of Bangladesh was highlighted by Ms. Hasina as she thanked India for its aid.
2. The two leaders built on their December 2020 (virtual) meet by bolstering plans for connectivity and infrastructure projects with a framework for



cooperation on trade, along with other MoUs on sports, education and disaster management.

3. India-Bangladesh ties in the past 15 years, since Ms. Hasina was elected, have been marked by new areas of cooperation and an ability to resolve specific differences. Ms. Hasina's decision, beginning 2009, to shut down anti-India terror camps and to hand over nearly two dozen of India's "most wanted", reversed mistrust.
4. Mr. Modi's push to conclude the long-pending Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, and to accept an international tribunal verdict in favour of Bangladesh that resolved a 40-year-old maritime dispute, built confidence as well. Other issues, if unresolved, could pose challenges.
5. The joint statement noted the need to resolve the dispute over Teesta water sharing, and six other rivers. The problem of Bangladeshi civilians being killed at the border has dented relations.
6. The Modi government's concerns over the treatment of Hindus, an impetus for the CAA, were highlighted as the PM performed two temple poojas and addressed a rally of minority Matua Hindus.
7. The visits raised eyebrows in India as they took place even as West Bengal went to vote, but it became clear they will have repercussions in Bangladesh as well: protests against Mr. Modi's visit turned violent, with at least 11 members of the Hefazat-e-Islam shot dead by police, and reprisal violence against the Hindu minority by Islamist mobs.
8. The events only underline the need for a deeper understanding on both sides of the sensitivities of the India-Bangladesh relationship, even as its many successes are counted and celebrated.