

Project Atmapratistha - an Inspiring Public Private Partnership in Assam

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Introduction

Implications of WTO have provided new dimensions to farmers' needs, which are changing and diversifying from the age old need for food. Traditional public extension system suffers from many limitations and is not fully capable of keeping pace with the changing scenario. The gaps are expanding day by day and need to be bridged by participation of private sector in the extension process. Therefore, Public-Private Partnership is gaining momentum in agricultural development.

In this paper, it is intended to present a successful case of public-private partnership in the context of milk production in a village 'Sunderpukhuri' near Nazira, a sub divisional headquarter under Sivasagar district of Assam. The project is named 'Project Atmapratistha' (self dependence). While not on the scale of 'Amul' project in Gujarat, at present it is already showing potential of a speedy rise.

Objectives

The project was conceived with the following objectives

- i) to develop Model Milk Villages and take up dairy farming as a business
- ii) to protect dairy farmers' interests through formation of their own organization.
- iii) to generate self employment opportunities for rural youth and
- iv) to supply good quality milk to consumers.

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Background of the Project

It is a dream project of Dr. Jagadish Barman, Veterinary Assistant Surgeon, State Veterinary Dispensary, Nazira. The traditional dairy farmers of the Sunderpukhuri village were rearing local cows, which had a very poor productivity level.

The milk was sold to traditional vendors but this dealing had many limitations (Table 3). The farmers were exploited due to lack of their own organization. However, there was interest among the villagers particularly the youth to undertake dairy as a main means of livelihood.

The project was initiated in 2004 with the formation of Sunderpukhuri Milk Cooperative Society on 13th July, 2004 and made operational from August 1, 2004 constituting a steering committee with : Dr.Hemoprabha Saikia, Hon'ble Minister, Govt. of Assam as the Chief Patron; C.E.O., Zila Parishad, Sivasagar as President and Dr.Jagadish Barman, VAS, Nazira as Member Secretary.

Guiding principles

It is a three tier project emphasizing on three major requirements in milk production- i) Promotion of crossbred cows for more milk production. ii) cultivation of high yielding fodder for cattle and iii) marketing of milk.

Operation and Achievements

i) Promotion of Crossbred Cows

Increasing milk production is possible only by increasing the number of crossbred high yielding cows. But it is not easy for the poor villagers to purchase crossbred high yielding cows due to their exorbitant cost. Therefore, initially it was aimed in the project to provide such cows to the villagers with loans and government assistance. Later on three localities were identified and free artificial insemination of the local cows is being done under three schemes viz. 'Reboti-Kapahua.-Bakul Adarsha Dugdha Gaon Achani'. 'Adarsha Dugdha Gaon Achani -Rajapool and Brihattar Sanbasa Adarsha Dugdha Gaon Achani' sponsored by District Rural Development Agency (D.R.D.A.), Sivasagar and Zila Parishad, Sivasagar. The people are responding well and cooperating in implementation

of the schemes. More than 300 Artificial Inseminations have already been done free of cost in these localities and more than 100 cross breed calves are already bred. It is expected that these crossbred calves will start producing milk by the year 2008 and these villages will turn into 'Adarsha Dugdha Gaon' (Model Milk Village) in reality. All concerned parties are very enthusiastic about the success of these schemes.

ii) Cultivation of High Yielding Fodder for Cattle

The dairy farmers are mainly dependent on natural sources of green fodder which is generally insufficient and scarce particularly during lean period. Moreover, this natural green fodder is not sufficiently nutritious and palatable. The farmers have been motivated by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nazira towards cultivation of high yielding, fast growing and nutritious perennial forage crops particularly Setaria grass. Already 70 bighas plot have been planted with this grass. Good quality saplings were purchased from Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat. It is planned to extend fodder cultivation to more areas in the near future.

iii) Marketing of milk

The first milk cooperative society in Sivasagar district- 'Sunderpukhuri Milk Cooperative Society' was formed by a public meeting for pure milk production and self employment generation to meet the immediate demand for milk in the area as well as to establish dairy farming as one of the best way for self employment. The society started distribution of milk at Nazira town with only 56 litres of production daily on 1st August. 2004 and with only 22 members. Within 6 months of its formation, it could increase the production to around 500 litres per day. Besides distributing its milk in Nazira town, marketing was extended to Sivasagar town from 22nd February. 2005. As on 1st January, 2006, a daily production level of 900 liters has been reached with 155 members in the Society (Table-1).

Table 1. Growth in production, breeders and employees of the society

Date	Production	No. of breeders	No. of employees
01-08-2004	56	22	2
01-01-2006	900	155	30

The Society has also generated direct employment opportunities for unemployed youth and at present it is employing 30 persons, for collection and distribution of milk ,with a salary up to Rs.2500/- per month.

Although major thrust has been on breeding cross bred cows locally, emphasis has also been on purchasing improved cows from external sources within the state or outside as a short term measure. Table-2 presents the total number of milch cows purchased and source of fund for the purpose during 1st August. 2004 to 1st January. 2006.

Table 2. Total milch cows purchased and source of fund

Source of fund	No. of milch cows purchased
Loan from SBI, Nazira	110
S.C.Milk Village Scheme (Dairy Deptt)	20
S.T.Milk Village Scheme (Dairy Deptt)	10
Help from the Society	30
Total	170

The recovery of loans is also satisfactory. Out of 110 members provided bank loans, 20 members have completely returned their loans within a short time. The Society has been contacted by 100 more youth for arrangement of loans.

Project Atmapratistha has already benefited the cow breeders/dairy farmers in many ways (Table 3). The comparison of benefits, item wise, from traditional vendors and Sunderpukhuri Milk Society as presented in Table-3 clearly depicts the benefits to the dairy farmers from the Society.

Roles of Stakeholders in the Partnership

It is a multi stakeholder project where different agencies are working hand in hand to fulfill its objectives. The organizations which are playing an important supportive role are members in this venture.

Table 3. Direct benefits for cow breeders of the Sunderpukhuri Milk Society

Item	Traditional Vendor	Milk Society
1. Milk price (per lit.)	Rs.13-14	Up to Rs.18
2. Mode of payment	Irregular	Regular, first week of the month
3. Advance payment	Very rare	Common
4. Cattle feed supply	Nil	Regular home delivery at wholesale rate
5. Feed supplement	Nil	Supplied at around 40% lesser price
6. Bank loan arrangement	Nil	Instant from SBI, Nazira
7. Training	Nil	Regular training on important aspects from K.V.K., Sivasagar, Dairy and Veterinary Dept.

1. Sunder Pukhuri Cooperative Society
2. The Department of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry, Nazira
3. The Department of Dairy, Jorhat
4. District Rural Development Agency (D.R.D.A.), Sivasagar
5. Zila Parishad, Sivasagar
6. Oil and Natural Gas Company Ltd., Nazira
7. Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nazira
8. The State Bank of India, Nazira

The Department of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry took the first initiative to organize the farmers to form the Society. The Veterinary Assistant Surgeon, Nazira is rendering technical services and advice to the members on a day to day basis. He is helping the office bearers in coordinating various activities of the society.

The Society was registered under the Department of Dairy, Jorhat. The Dairy Department is extending various benefits under its schemes to the member farmers to purchase improved cows, milk cans etc. They have received 30 cows and 13 milk cans (40 lits capacity) from the Dairy Department.

The D.R.D.A. and Zila Parishad, Sivasagar have been sponsoring different crossbreeding schemes in the area. They are also providing administrative support to the Society.

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Nazira), Sivasagar was established in May 2003 and since inception it has been involved in the activities of the Society. It has primarily concentrated on capacity building of the functionaries and members of the Society. The K.V.K. has conducted training programmes on cattle management, fodder cultivation etc. It also arranged *Setaria* seedlings which the Society purchased from Assam Agricultural University.

The eastern headquarters of Oil and Natural Gas Company Ltd. is located at Nazira. Its residential colony has been benefited by the supply of good quality milk from the Society. Taking it as a social welfare project, the O.N.G.C. is supporting it with financial help for purchasing various equipment and transporting vehicles. With their financial help, the Society has already purchased a milk van, a deep freeze, seven bicycles and a computer.

Besides the media including various news papers, All India Radio and Doordarshan have given wide coverage of this successfully growing venture.

The society enrolls the members on payment of Rs. 110/- per membership and the office bearers are elected democratically in the annual general meeting. The accounts are maintained in a transparent way and submitted in the general meeting.

Caselet

Dimbeswar Baruah, a farmer of Sunder Pukhuri village was having three indigenous cows with a small amount of milk production of 2-3 lit/day to meet own milk requirement. After forming the Cooperative Society in the year 2004, he sold all his local breeds and bought 2 cross breed cows from Tinsukia district which could produce 15-16 lit/day. This ensured a net profit of Rs.3000/- per month after meeting all the expenses. Subsequently, he bought another 2 cross breed cows in the year 2005. As a result his milk production increased to 20-25 litres per day with a proportionate net return of Rs.5000-Rs.6000 per month.

Challenges ahead of him are : i) to produce 500 lit of milk with at least 50 self employment opportunities in first six months and ii) to produce 1000 lit. of milk daily with 100 employment opportunities in the next one year.

Impact of the Project

The initial success of this project has started showing some changes in the socio economic conditions of the members of the Society. A significant impact is generation of self employment for the rural youth. However, these changes have to be quantified. Due to abundance of cow dung, farmers are mostly adopting organic farming.

In the line of this first milk society in the district, four other such societies have already come into existence. These are Kalyani Dugdha Unnayan Samiti at Khatpar Satra, Surabhi Dugdha Unnayan Samiti at Sonari, Dhai Ali Dugdha Unnayan Samiti at Sivasagar and Surajmukhi Dugdha Unnayan Samiti at Namti. These societies have also achieved a production level of 500 - 900 litres of milk per day. It is expected that in the near future these societies will contribute in a big way to the economy of the state.

To sum up, the key points of success are –

- To begin with, it is good to have a small run rather than venturing into a big enterprise under partnership
- Cooperatives to succeed need to acquire a bit of tendency of corporates like sound knowledge base, professional enterprise management and continuous exploration of innovations and their implementation
- ‘Success breeds Success’ has the significant demonstrative impact for extension of the concept
- Necessary skill set with the stakeholders and the study of economic viability of the enterprise are necessary ingredients for partnership to succeed.