

Women Empowerment through Food Processing - a Case Study

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Abstract

A sample of 25 women respondents involved in food processing activities was selected proportionately to study the socio-economic profile before and after the start of an enterprise. The study revealed that 64 per cent of the women food processors had improved their standard of living followed by better saving (60%) and knowledge and attitude (52%). Some of these women trainees have emerged as successful entrepreneurs in food processing and their success stories are further reported in the study. The key issues for development of entrepreneurship in food processing were also identified through a structured schedule by personal interview with the respondents. Further, the identified issues were analysed and their mitigation strategies were also discussed. Mutually beneficial relationship between a processor and producer can solve the problem of poor quality raw material. Cost of production can be reduced by mechanization and economic size of production say the authors.

Key words: women, food processing, key issues, success stories

Introduction

Growth of the food processing sector will lead to employment opportunities, raising agricultural yields, increased productivity and enhanced standard of living of people across the country, especially for those who are in rural areas. India is the second largest producer of food after China in the world and has the potential to become a leader. It can play a vital role in diversification and commercialization, ensure value addition, enhance shelf life of the agriculture produce, create a market for export of processed food, generate employment, enhance income of farmers and overall development of rural areas. There are many opportunities for entrepreneurship in food processing.

Empowerment of women means to have the necessary ability to undertake a number of tasks either individually or in groups, so that they have further access to

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and control of society resources. The World Bank has suggested that empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programmes (Sridhar et al 2013).

Concept of Krishi Vigyan Kendra

It is an innovative institution providing for (i) effective linkage among researchers, farmers and extension workers (ii) practical approach to training through “Learning by doing” (iii) flexible syllabi based on survey and needs of farmers and location specific requirements. By the year 2011, there were 600 KVKs sanctioned under the administrative control of ICAR institutions, State Agricultural Universities and voluntary organizations (NGOs). It is now a policy of the government to establish more KVKs to fulfill the target of two KVKs in each district in Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry. A Krishi Vigyan Kendra is a grass root level village institute for transfer of technology, conducting various programs for socio-economic upliftment of farm women i.e. trainings, demonstrations etc. Keeping the above aspects in consideration, this study was carried out with the following objectives.

- To study the socio economic profile of the rural women before and after the start of enterprise.
- To document success stories of women entrepreneurs in food processing.
- To identify the key issues and mitigation strategies for development of women entrepreneurship in food processing

Materials and Methods

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Patiala of Punjab State had conducted vocational training courses on food processing for farm women continuously from 2013 to 2016. From the 76 participants of these trainings, a sample of 25 women respondents, those involved in food processing activities commercially, was selected to study the socio-economic profile before and after the start of enterprise. A Proforma was developed comprising general information, background of participants such as their age, education, caste, family size and type of activity etc. Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Patiala with its continuous efforts has succeeded in developing some entrepreneurship in food processing. Success stories of some of these women trainees are discussed.

The key issues for development of entrepreneurship in food processing were also identified through a structured schedule by personally interviewing the respondents. Further, the identified issues were analysed and their mitigation strategies were also discussed.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented under the following major heads:

Socio-Economic Profile

Majority of farm women were within the age group of 26-45 years (56%) and illiterate (76%). Most of them were from SC/ST class (44%) and were living in a small family. Their mode of operation was individual (80%)(Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents (n= 25)

S. No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age		
	Young (up to 25)	8	32
	Middle (25-45)	14	56
	Old (above 45)	3	12
2.	Education		
	Illiterate	19	76
	Primary	3	12
	Middle	2	8
	Matriculate	1	4
	Higher secondary	-	-
	Graduation and above	-	-
3.	Caste		
	SC/ST	11	44
	OBC	9	36
	General	5	20
4.	Family size		
	Small	13	52
	Medium	8	32
	Large	4	16
5.	Mode of operation		
	Group (SHG)	5	20
	Individual	20	80

Impact on Socio-Economic Condition of the Respondents after the Enterprise

The impact studies on socio-economic status of respondents showed that 72 per cent of the women food processors had improved their standard of living followed by increase in saving (60%), knowledge and favorable attitude (52%). Improvement in social status was recorded the least (24%).

Table 2. Impact Assessment of Food Processing Enterprise on the Socio-Economic Condition of the Respondents

Parameters	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Improvement in standard of living	16	64	I
Better saving	15	60	II
Improvement in knowledge & attitude	13	52	III
Better food, clothing and shelter	13	52	III
Creation of employment	8	32	IV
Improvement in social status	6	24	V

Success Stories in Food Processing

Smt. Gurdeep Kaur

Smt. Gurdeep Kaur is a 50 year old lady who lives in village Alhoran Kalan, Block Nabha, district Patiala. A humble, God-fearing lady Smt. Gurdeep Kaur has hardly attended school. She is an introvert, mostly homebound with her two daughters and a son. But she was desperate to become self-dependent and educate her daughters. Neither illiteracy nor domestic problems could stop her from making her way to success. After discussion with KVK scientists, it was decided to train her in processing and preservation of fruits and vegetables. First step being learning, she attended various short duration and vocational training courses at KVK Patiala. Over the years, she learned about new products, improved preservation methods and know-how about commercial level processing. She not only learned to express herself at public gatherings but her confidence level also improved through regular interactions with scientists and other trainees. She was also guided in purchase of raw materials, source of equipment, packaging and labelling of products etc. She is regularly preparing different squashes, jams and pickles from seasonal and locally available fruits and vegetables. She established a soy processing plant in 2010 in which soy milk, tofu, soy atta and soy nuts were produced and sold under the brand name of "Protein Shakti". Later her family realized her efforts

and her husband Shri. S. Chamkaur Singh too joined her in this venture. Her unit is registered under FSSAI (Food Safety & Standards Act of India). A sales outlet named “ATMA KISAN HUT” has also been provided to her by the Department of Agriculture at Nabha town, district Patiala which has substantially improved the daily sale of her products. She has successfully prepared natural vinegar from sugarcane and grapes. She has also adopted mushroom cultivation in which her whole family is involved. She earns approximately Rs. 80,000/- per season from cultivation of dhingri and button mushroom. She received “Best Entrepreneur Award” during PAU Kisan Mela in the year 2011. The Government of Punjab has conferred her with “State Award” on 26th January 2013 on the eve of Republic day. She has also delivered many radio talks and is invited as a resource person on several occasions.

Smt. Dhanwanti Devi

Smt. Dhanwantidevi is a 52 year old lady from village Inderpura, Patiala, Punjab. She has formed a Self Help Group named “Kashish SHG”. Her group members are daily wagers so she had to work hard to convince them to form a group. With the help of KVK scientists, she opened a bank account in the name of the group and started food processing activities. She attended a training programme at KVK Patiala way back in 2012, where she got an opportunity to interact with KVK scientists. She expressed her desire to do something fruitful so that she could add to her family income. After gaining the expertise, she prepared bael squash on a commercial scale, as this fruit was underutilized and locally available. Now, she is regularly preparing various squashes, jams and pickles from seasonal and locally available fruits and vegetables. The next step towards her success was marketing of the products. This was taken up by the KVK scientists by providing her sale platforms during regional and State level Kisan Melas organized by PAU, Ludhiana. She got a good response from consumers which increased her confidence. She further widened her basket of products by adding tomato and mango chutneys, moong and mash daalbadis, rice papad, ready to serve beverages (RTS) and hand-made sevian(vermicelli) etc. The regional Kisan Melas held at KVK Patiala earned recognition to her in the area. Now, people have started approaching her directly for purchasing the products. Initially, the average monthly earning was very meagre, approximately Rs. 3000/- per month but her aspirations were high. For Smt. Dhanwanti Devi, learning is a continuous

process. She regularly participated in various Kisan Melas and public gatherings organised by PAU, ATMA, Dept. of Horticulture, NGOs and KVIC etc. Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Patiala also provided her support from NABARD for attending SARAS fairs at Patiala and CII fairs at Chandigarh. Smt. Dhanwanti Devi is a regular participant in various exhibitions and competitions organized by PAU, Ludhiana where she has received many prizes for her quality products. She has received “Best Entrepreneur Award” during PAU Kisan Mela in the year 2015. She has also delivered many radio talks and is invited as a resource person on several occasions.

Key issues and their Mitigation Strategies in Food Processing Entrepreneurship

Traditions in rural areas do not prevent women from engaging with men, working side by side in agricultural activities. However, gender inequality does exist in the social order. Women lack inclusion in decision making. Men tend to dominate the decisions. These social constraints have an impact on the enterprise. Furthermore, women do have domestic responsibilities, in addition to their work in the enterprise.

Rural women entrepreneurs of KVK, Patiala faced many difficulties in marketing their products. They faced difficulty in establishing linkage to the market in cities. Innovation and knowledge on product development, design and quality were not taken into account. Difficulties in getting the business license/registration of food processing units were also crucial bottlenecks for the respondents.

Table 3. Key issues and their Mitigation Strategies in Food Processing Entrepreneurship

Issues	Mitigation Strategies
Poor Quality of Raw Materials	Mutually beneficial relationship between processor and producer can improve the situation
Lack of technical know-how	Communication should be effective between extension/research/academic institutions and rural entrepreneurs
Inability to compete with urban-based industries	Communication of modern technologies & marketing knowledge through seminars and exhibitions.
Cost of Production	Can be reduced by mechanization and economic size of production
Difficulty in borrowing fund	To provide credit facilities on time, there is a need to strengthen the network of the financial institutions.
Designing of Package/Labeling	Knowledge support from institutions regarding labeling and food laws for packaging.

Issues	Mitigation Strategies
Marketing	Direct selling. International trade fairs. Exhibitions. Strengthening linkages between producer, processor and consumer.
Multiple responsibility of entrepreneurs	Delegation of authorities
Lack of Specialized skills among the entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurship Development Programme. Knowledge support from institutions
Long and complicated procedures to avail institutional help	Elimination of unnecessary formalities
Post-harvest losses	Post- harvest facilities. Establishment of semi processing unit in major production area.

Training and education is an important aspect that needs to be addressed to cope up with the problems faced in food processing sector (Awasthi,2011).According to a study conducted by (Shehrawat, 2006), entrepreneurs are encountering a number of constraints in running their food processing units related to technology, marketing, export and finance. The study covered four industrial districts of Haryana State to determine the specific training needs of entrepreneurs, problems encountered by entrepreneurs in setting up of units and challenges in agro processing. Two main challenges that the entrepreneurs face are innovation and opportunity challenges (Shahidi and Smagulova, 2008).

Conclusion

Indian food processing is a growing industry and presents a large opportunity to the entrepreneurs for the development of rural areas. However there are many challenges for women entrepreneurship in food processing. The study indicated that lack of government support, quality and quantity of raw material, seasonality, inadequate infrastructure,access to latest technology, poor access to credit, lack of trained manpower, inadequate training practices, post - harvest losses and cost of production are serious challenges for women entrepreneurship in food processing which are affecting rural development. To overcome these challenges,Government need to adequately address and take necessary steps for development of women entrepreneurs in food processing like training programmes, favorable policies, favorable initiatives/schemes, financial support, infrastructure development in rural areas etc. There should be product development incubation centres for potential women entrepreneurs in food processing in every local government area.

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