OPERATION FLOOD - A FEW CONSTRAINTS

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The study was undertaken to identify the major constraints faced by the beneficiaries of Operation Flood. Low procurement price of milk, pricing of milk on fat content and poor quality of the feed supplied were a few of the major constraints faced by them which were reported to have vitiated the potential benefits of Operation Flood to them.

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Introduction

No development scheme is without its constraints. Operation Flood, the largest, the most ambitious and the most debated dairy development programme in the world, is also not an exception to it. Despite the high growth and the excellent performance of milk producers' cooperative societies after Operation Flood has gained strategic importance in the planned development era, there are still a few obstacles encountered in the project areas which seldom allow the rural poor to fully enjoy the potential benefits of the development scheme. Nearly 90 per cent of the landless poor were unable to take advantage of the dairy cooperatives and the effectiveness of the dairy development programme in reducing poverty was severely limited even in an ideal village (Baviskar, 1986:30). There were also few chances that the benefits of Operation Flood would reach the landless workers with the poverty line becoming a barrier¹ (Baviskar, 1983) and hence, it was likely that the 'White Revolution' might not touch the poorest (Sambrani, 1980)

Heavy investments have been made under this programme during the past two decades. If there are only scanty opportunities for the poor to enjoy the programme’s benefits, then there is a need to remove the obstacles felt by the beneficiaries which warrants, as a first step in the process, identification of major constraints which vitiate the intended benefits to the beneficiaries. A study was therefore designed to identify the constraints faced by the vulnerable section of the rural society in attaining the benefits of the programme so that the results of the study would help the planners and administrators to modify the strategies, if necessary, to achieve the set goals of the programme.

Methodology

With the above objective, the study was conducted in five milk producers' cooperative societies spread over three taluks of the then North Arcot District of Tamil Nadu. In all, 90 member producers (30 each from scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and upper castes) were interviewed for the same using pre-tested structured questionnaires. The informations collected pertained to the year 1987-88.

Garrett's scoring technique was used to rank the constraints faced by the beneficiaries of Operation Flood. The order of merit given by the respondents were converted into ranks by using the following formula.
The per cent position of each rank thus obtained was converted into scores by referring to the table given by Garrett (Garrett and Woodworth, 1969:329). Then for each factor, the scores of individual respondents were added together and divided by the total number of respondents for whom the scores were added. These mean scores for all the factors were arranged in descending order. Ranks were given and the most important problems were identified.

Results And Discussion

For the purpose of the study, the constraints faced by the beneficiaries of Operation Flood were listed as follows:

i. Poor quality of the feed supplied by the State Milk Producers' Federation
ii. Very low procurement price for milk
iii. Problems in making the milch animals conceive
iv. Higher mortality in crossbred calves
v. Pricing of milk on fat content
vi. Inadequate financial assistance for buying milch animals
vii. Inadequate veterinary service.

The respondents (beneficiaries of Operation Flood) were asked to rank the seven constraints listed and the ranks arrived at by using the Garrett scoring technique are given in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Total Scores</th>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Poor quality of the feed supplied by State Federation</td>
<td>4659</td>
<td>52.35</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Very low procurement price for milk</td>
<td>4880</td>
<td>54.22</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Problems in getting the milch animals to conceive</td>
<td>4857</td>
<td>52.13</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Higher mortality in crossbred calves</td>
<td>4298</td>
<td>50.56</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Pricing of milk on fat content</td>
<td>4485</td>
<td>52.76</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.</td>
<td>Inadequate financial assistance for buying milch animals</td>
<td>3067</td>
<td>46.47</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii.</td>
<td>Inadequate veterinary services</td>
<td>2467</td>
<td>37.52</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 1 that very low procurement price for milk, according to the respondents, was a major constraint which denied them the easily attainable benefits.
procurement price of milk was at such a low level that the milk producers refused to sell milk to the societies and demanded a higher price for their products. The immediate positive response of the Government and the State Federation to the producer’s demands for higher procurement price amply justified their stand. Hence, it is not very surprising that this constraint was ranked first by the beneficiaries. (This study was conducted before the announcement of the price rise.)

The second rank was given to the pricing of milk on fat content. Since the animals (production units) of Operation Flood have to be crossbreds, the importance of the argument also cannot be overstated. Because when crossbreds and their progenies yield milk of lower fat content than that of local breeds, pricing on milk fat content would only go against the producers’ interests. The third ranked constraint-questionable quality of feed supplied—also appears to be a significant complaint. The fact reported by the producers—milk yield increased with the use of other feeds (compounded by private agencies)—strengthens the validity of this statement. The fourth rank was given to the constraint that there were problems in getting the milch animals to conceive. Poor acclimatisation to our Indian agro-climate and higher susceptibility to very many reproductive disorders of the exotics and crossbreds are often responsible for these fertility problems prevailing in the country.

The fifth ranked constraint—higher mortality among crossbred calves—does not need any explanation, as this is common because of the problems concerned mainly with internal parasites. The sixth and seventh ranks were given to the factors that there were inadequate financial assistance for starting a dairy unit and there were inadequate veterinary services respectively. The ever-increasing costs of milch animals and non-recognition of this fact by the concerned officials, evidenced by respondents’ reports, could reinforce this constraint. Though weekly veterinary services had been made available regularly, a week’s gap between two consecutive visits which left the clinically emergent cases needing follow up unattended to, was one of the major problems faced by the beneficiaries. Added to this, the District Milk Producers’ Cooperative Union’s present plan of covering more number of villages with the same number of mobile veterinary routes and making the coverage fortnightly, instead of the already inadequate weekly visits, would further aggravate the problem.

Conclusion

Economic development through increased production in rural areas is of cardinal importance for bringing prosperity to the vulnerable section of the rural community in the country. In addition, any development programme should, at the least, be without any obstacles to achieve this objective. The Operation Flood scheme, which covers about 10 million households 70 per cent of which are landless, who contribute about 65 per cent of the total milk produced in the project areas, must hence be efficient, viable and justifiable economically. Conversely, the gap between the attainable and the attained benefits must be narrowed down by removing the constraints faced by the beneficiaries for whose benefits the scheme was designed and launched.

Framing a suitable price policy for milk which would not stand against the crossbreeding policy which the present policy, based as it is on the fat content of the milk does, must be the foremost step in that direction. However, the fact that enhanced milk prices may conceivably lead to fall in demand from urban areas which would affect the long term potential demand for milk, as milk is a price elastic commodity, must be kept in mind while attempting to raise the milk price. Again, pricing on fat content may also be reconsidered taking into account the crossbreds’ inability to
of high yield milkfat content. Moreover, besides improving the nutritive value of the feeds supplied to the beneficiaries, adequate steps must also be taken to educate the farmers on the importance of improved managemental practices which would remove, at least, a few constraints faced by them (for e.g. poor conception rate). Continuous and systematic research is necessary in our crossbreeding policy so that we evolve a suitable breedstrain which is better not only in milk production but also in draught power, an indispensible input for our agriculture.

In addition, veterinary services must also be made more regular and frequent so that there is no sudden significant drop in milk yield affecting the income of the farmer. Adequate financing also becomes necessary in order to remove corruption at all levels. This would be helpful in directing the benefits fully to the needy. And last, but not least, confidence must be built in the beneficiaries' mind that there are no obstacles for them to fully extract and thoroughly exploit the potential benefits of Operation Flood. The listed suggestions would possibly, if implemented, make a stronger and positive step towards a better 'White Revolution', promising equality and justice with the already enhanced productivity.

NOTES

1. Operation Flood's basic production unit is a cross-bred cow. A cross-bred cow gives more milk but also demands, to reach that production level, a well compounded feed of high nutritive value which costs more than normal feeds. Further, the cost of the cross-bred animal itself is higher compared to local breeds. Naturally, once we decide to resort to cross-breds for enhancing milk output in the country, we should also have the capability to suitably to feed them with high cost rations to extract the said benefits.

On the contrary, the target group of Operation Flood- the rural downtrodden mass- does not seem to be in possession of that much resources, either to acquire or to maintain the cross-breds, rearing of which appears to be capital intensive at least for them. They struggle hard to provide their animals the required high quality feed and veterinary care with meagre resources. Added to the problem are the additional burdens of buying other inputs and repaying the dairy loans. It, hence, appears that Operation Flood was designed only for those endowed with resources and the poverty line becomes the barrier denying the rural poor the potential benefits of the programme.

2. The two main exotic breeds that are used in India for cross-breeding our local, less productive cows are Jersey and Holstein Friesien. The offsprings obtained by incorporating the exotic germplasm into our own native breeds are called cross-breds.

REFERENCES

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