

## **Resurgence of a tribal woman... a tale of excellent perseverance and leadership**

*"... this has been a journey of sorts for me especially for someone who only spoke yes or no previously. Now I can talk to any big union official or government officer without slightest of hesitation. At times, I find it difficult to believe myself that I am the same woman...."*

One cannot think of a better chronicle of transformation of life where dairying played a pivotal role. This is a story of a tribal women belonging to a desolate Chausala village located in Dahod. The village had vast tracks of undulating barren land and it remained parched almost throughout the year sans the generosity from the rain Gods. It rendered whatever little piece of land her family owned virtually useless. Each day brought out a new a tale of tussle between expiration and exhilaration.



Savitaben with a family of five not having much to look forward was used to rue her bleak future. She and her husband had to migrate to urban areas and do odd jobs as laborers to make both ends meet and take care of their family.

One fine day somewhere in the winters of 2001, she along with 14 other women in the village started an SHG and started a small saving scheme in which each member contributed a sum of rupees ten which was slowly increased in the coming years. This played an important role in inculcating good financial habits among them. They were also helped by banks which provided them loans as revolving funds from time to time. As a better livelihood options, Savitaben was quick to understand the long term benefits of dairying as a profession but since none of her family members or forefathers had been in this profession she was little bit apprehensive. She believed in her intuition and purchased a buffalo in 2003 by managing funds from her SHG savings and through a grant under *Integrated Tribal Development Program (ITDP)*. She underwent series of trainings on various aspects of dairying. She could manage about 7 liters of milk to start with, keeping some for household consumption; she started supplying the rest to the DCS though it was about 3 kilometers away in a different village. The DCS in her own village was defunct since long as it had huge outstanding amounts. The proceeds from the milk being sold augmented her income and helped in meeting daily expenses little more

comfortably. This encouraged other women in the village SHG to take up dairying. The group managed about 40 liters of surplus milk per day.

Savitaben purchased another buffalo buoyed by the savings from milk sale in one year combined with the grant from the ITDP. Since the village herd grew over time and the surplus became substantial, Savitaben approached the milk union to revive the village DCS.

With the support of Panchmahal union and the Women Dairy Cooperative Leadership Development Programme (WDCLP) of NDDB, she could establish a women DCS in the village in November 2006. Savitaben impressed everyone with her leadership quality and was unanimously chosen as the DCS chairman - a post she has been successfully handling since then. This was a huge achievement for a woman who barely spoke few years back. She can now confidently negotiate with officials, chairs meetings and disseminates information to fellow women DCS members.



**Standing tall : Savitaben's Pucca abode**

Today she has a herd size of 6 consisting of 2 buffalos, 2 cows and 2 calves and it helps her to meet a large chunk of her expenditure, about 70 percent. She no longer needs to migrate and toil under someone as a labourer.

With the help income generated through dairying, Savitaben gradually accumulated assets over a period of time. She now owns a pucca house with durables such as refrigerator, television, mobile phones, DTH and some good furniture which was once a dilapidated mud house with barely any furniture. She was able to afford education for her children; her two sons have completed senior secondary. One son helps her in dairying, while the other has started his business of renting music systems during marriage and parties. She proudly announces that her daughter has gone for higher education and is currently pursuing B.Ed course in a good city college.

Earlier she had to travel 2-3 kilometers just for fetching water and now she has her own bore-well and a water tank. In one of the seminars she learnt about go-bar-gas plant and she built in her own backyard alleviating the need to huff

and puff in the dark soot of firewood during cooking food. She also has managed to buy some gold jewelry and a two-wheeler for commuting to town. The list is unending and she says *"Dairying is everything to me. When I look back it's like a fairy tale and a dream come true. I could never imagine this life."* She leans back and ponders a little says again *"Saheb... earlier my children were so lean and weak, now everyone in the village are envious of their physique. Milk is elixir of life to me, it has given my children nutrition, it has given me wealth and health, it has given me dignity .... I am grateful to Almighty that he sent angels to me in the form of these milch animals."* A proud and emotional Savitaben then took us around her home showing her belongings and vividly remembering the dates of each purchase she made. In a matter of just eleven years, dairying turned around her life which she could have never imagined. She thought of her being trapped perpetually in the quagmire of abjectness. It is a good example of empowerment through dairying, a shy tribal woman turned into a confident chairman of a village institution, enabling others to follow suit.