

Meet the agro-entrepreneurs of Maval

Tata Power empowers rural women to set up Maharashtra's first fully owned, operated and managed all-women dairy in Maval

BY ESTHER CABRAL

In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder in business, but it is, in fact, the very purpose of its existence — was the guiding philosophy of our Founder, Jamsetji N Tata. Over the years, his thoughts are not just one of those quotable quotes but a guiding principle for all Tata companies. Tata businesses have been so entrenched in nurturing the community, for a better future, that Tata is almost synonymous with public welfare.

It is no different with Tata Power Ltd. As one of India's largest integrated power companies, Tata Power strives for sustainable and clean energy development while rehabilitating local communities. Operations in Maharashtra impelled the company to take action for improving the livelihoods of dairy farmers in the villages of Maval taluka in Maharashtra's Pune district.

"A feasibility study undertaken by our NGO partner, ALC India, in Maval revealed that a key



need was to augment the household income of local women through a livelihood opportunity; and the dairy business, as suggested by the women themselves, could be a worthwhile option towards meeting the objective. Subsequently, the Tata Power Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) team engaged with the village women to develop their community ownership in the Maval dairy through an institutional setup. At a meeting in the village, our team also addressed their concerns and queries, and explained to them their roles and responsibilities, thus paving the way for the project to take off,” says Shalini Singh, chief of corporate communications and sustainability, Tata Power.

In 2015, Tata Power also supported the establishment of the Maval Dairy Farmer Services Producer Company Ltd, Maharashtra’s first all-women dairy enterprise. The business enterprise, which started the Maval Dairy plant in 2018, is today self-sustained with 70% finance from financial institutions and 30% grant support by Tata Power. The company has 1,200 women dairy shareholders on board and 12 Board of Directors

(all women) from the community with equity of ₹12.50 lakh. The plant has a 10,000 litres per day milk processing capacity, and 100+ certified mini dairy entrepreneurs across 26 villages of Maval.

“Through this project we wanted to empower rural women by giving them a platform to run and manage on their own. Towards this, we provided orientation training on clean milk production and animal management, along with a ‘Mini Dairy Entrepreneurship’ certification, to all the women,” says Ashwin G Patil, head, Hydros, Tata Power.

LEADING CHANGE

The Maval region is a hilly terrain, lying on the leeward side of the Western Ghats. Agriculture and livestock rearing are the mainstay of the local inhabitants; women are responsible for more than 90% of the animal husbandry chores, including care of animals and other laborious tasks. Men are involved in the sale of milk, revenue collection, and purchase of livestock and cattle feed.

As women were shouldering the bulk of animal husbandry activities, they now wanted to play a more active role in the value chain. Having made up their minds, there was nothing to stop them. To garner more support for their endeavour, as a first step, they conducted a membership drive across more than 26 villages in Maval and, next, underwent training in dairy management. Their objective was clear — they wanted to supplement their household income and become an economic contributor to the family and community.

Says Shalini, “This first all women dairy enterprise in Maharashtra was possible largely due to the efforts of the women themselves. They believed in themselves and were keen to shoulder the responsibility with support from the Tata Power CSR team and employee volunteers who wholeheartedly supported this initiative right from the beginning. It was evident that the women had in them the entrepreneurial spirit that needed to be channelised in the right direction.”

Future plans

- Develop a viable self-sustaining farmer producer company to cover 3,500 members by 2022
- Develop 50 animal dairy farms to improve the breed and to induct more cattle
- Establish 15 advanced well-equipped milk collection centres across 26 villages with full transparency in quality as well as price realisations for dairy products
- Train rural youth interested in establishing their own mini dairy farms by ensuring development of 100 mini dairy farms in the operational area
- Tie-up with Tata companies, Tetra Pak and large dairies for B2B connects

THE PROJECT KICKS OFF

Maval Dairy's initiation and planning phase involved obtaining permissions from various government authorities, procuring milk from the 26 villages, setting up a milk processing unit, creating market linkages, training and empowering women among others. "The training on mini-dairy enterprise management was very useful for the women members who realised that they could take on the responsibility of making the dairy business gainful and economically viable," says Surekha Shinde, a dairy member.

Initially, a women's collective was formed, and all the women gave an undertaking to invest in a farmer producer company, having at least 1,000 member shareholders. This led to a membership drive across the 26 villages in Maval. For over a year, women members went door-to-door, along with the Tata Power CSR team and the NGO partner, to garner support for the Maval Dairy Farmer Producer Company that was registered with a membership base of 1,200 women members in 2015.

MARKETING PLAN

Today, milk and milk products from Maval dairy are marketed under the brand name Creyo, and the products are accessible to consumers via the Creyo app. With its own distribution channel, Creyo directly supplies to retailers within a 20km radius from Maval. Sales have boosted, with hyperlocal marketing, at housing societies in Wakad, Pimple Saudagar, Hinjewadi, Baner, Pimpri and Chinchwad areas on the outskirts of Pune city. A retail outlet exists at Takwe while another is coming up at Talegaon. To increase margins, women are exploring ways to produce high quality dairy products like cottage cheese, cream and buttermilk.

EXPANSION PLANS

As part of its business growth plans, Maval dairy

Keeping count

- 1,200 women engaged in the initiative
- Additional household income of ₹5,000-15,000 per month
- Business of ₹3.5 crore in the last 4 months
- 70 local youth employed at the dairy plant
- 102 members trained under the mini dairy entrepreneurship programme



is trying to enlist new villages into its fold to scale production. They also plan to install a cattle feed mixing plant of 10 tonne per day capacity, to provide quality fodder at reasonable rates to farmers.

Tata Power is also exploring B2B (business to business) linkages for Creyo products. It is in consultation with Tata Starbucks Ltd and other group companies to market Creyo products, and with Mahananda Dairy and Tetra Pak for ESL (extended shelf life) milk delivery to Pune and Mumbai.

Praveer Sinha, CEO & MD of Tata Power, sums it up aptly, "Maval Dairy is an outcome of our relentless efforts to help the local communities become self-sufficient. The real heroes of this story are the women who took the co-operative route to chart their own destinies and are today a shining example of what self-help can achieve. I would like to thank our partner ALC India for being a bridge between the farmers in Maval and Tata Power's commitment towards our sustainability goals." **TR**

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