Being a lay person in dairying per se I am not making any formal scientific presentation. As a student of rural development, I am sharing certain thoughts and impressions on the potential of dairying as a source of livelihood and the ways of making its benefits reach the unreached. My key focus is on the need to make some of the existing interventions under dairying more inclusive so that we have even better outcomes in terms of growth and equity. The recent five year plans in the country have been emphasizing on attaining an inclusive growth process. Several strategies have been identified for the purpose, albeit with mixed results. I would like to argue here that broad-based dairying in terms of its social composition can definitely serve as one of the more effective measures of attaining growth with inclusion. Let me try and elaborate on this further.

As is well known, unlike in the developed countries, dairying in India is largely a small-holder based avocation. Given the constraints of large scale shifting of labour from farm to non-farm sector, there is a need to continue with the small-holder based dairy farming and make it become even more pro-poor. Such a strategy is imperative for attaining multi-pronged goals of growth, inclusiveness, and sustainable livelihood impact. The theoretically visualized large-scale capitalist development of agriculture including animal husbandry may not emerge in a full-fledged way in the country for some more time to come. Agriculture and dairying will largely remain subsistence and small-holder based.

The past strategies to bring in poorer sections to benefit from agriculture and livestock development have not yielded the desired results. While land reforms failed to ensure distribution of land among the landless, the green revolution programme reached mainly the resourceful farmers. Even Operation Flood (OF) which had reasonable success on the growth front failed to deliver significantly in terms of inclusiveness. OF per se was a growth-oriented programme without any explicit strategy to bring in landless and other poorer sections. By specifying minimum livestock holding as eligibility for cooperative membership exclusion of the poor was inbuilt in its design. Dairy cooperatives even faced the problem of elite-capture which was another factor which kept the poor away from the organized dairying. Programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) did try to reverse the trend by focusing on the landless and other below poverty households to take up dairying and other livestock activities. But the absence of sustained supportive efforts in terms of forward and backward linkages for viable dairying limited the success of such pro-poor initiatives. The National Dairy Plan (NDP) unveiled recently does not appear to be different from OF in terms of inclusive character. The emphasis seems more on growth through technology driven interventions to the neglect of inclusion issues. Only the more recent effort to engender dairying by focusing on women seems a positive and a relevant step towards socially inclusive dairying.

We need to learn a few lessons from the past failures about the inclusion strategy. Probably, one last opportunity exists to make the poor reap the benefits of organized dairying. Given the current political economy and the constraints for any radical land reforms, livestock provides the only potential scope for redistribution of assets in rural areas in favour of the poor. Unlike land, ownership of livestock resources can be more equitable. Apart from the redistributive potential, livestock resources presents...
another viable option for extending their reach to
the very poor given the scope that exists for marketing
of livestock products in general and dairying in
particular.

The milk production in the country has increased
significantly since 1970s, thanks to the contribution
of and other interventions. The estimated production
of milk during 2010-11 was of the order of 122 million
tons. Given the improvement in economic conditions,
the demand for milk is expected to go up further in
the country. The milk production in the country is
estimated to reach nearly 200 million tons by 2022.

The increased demand for milk is visualized as part
of the general increase in the demand for livestock products
(termed as livestock revolution) caused by better income
conditions, especially in urban areas. Thus, dairying
along with other livestock activities can emerge as a
sector with fairly assured demand having potential for
pursuing viable livelihood options by small scale holders
in general and the poor in particular. Not many viable
opportunities exist or can be identified in rural areas
for large scale self-employment generation. It is proven
that dairying generates decent levels of employment
and income for the poor and unemployed provided
the needed linkages are in place.

Increasing milk production in the country is
constrained by several social, economic and institutional
factors. While a significant proportion of farmers
are reluctant to continue in farming given the unviable
and other conditions, a considerable section of the
better-off households are giving up or curtailing their
involvement in agriculture and allied activities in favour
of other better options for upward mobility. These
are the households who have better access to resources
like land, water and fodder. The poor in general are
resorting to distress and seasonal migration to urban
and prosperous areas in search of livelihood subsistence.
The unfolding social change hence has potential to
affect milk production. Some of the established dairies
located in better-off areas have even faced declining
production and collection of milk due to the above
reason. The bovine population overall is declining
though certain changes are occurring in the composition
posing constraint in increasing production. Coupled
with the above changes the benefits of technology
have not reached a wider section of livestock farmers,
more so the small and marginal holders. Fodder
production, an important requirement for viable animal
husbandry has faced constraints due to factors like
division and subdivision of land holdings and crop
diversification. Due to various biotic pressures, common
pool resources (CPRs) and pastures have also come
under stress imposing restrictions on grazing rights
of livestock holders. The growth prospects are also
constrained by failure of commercial dairying to take
off on a large scale. How does one resolve these
challenges? There are several possibilities, including
making dairying more inclusive.

The changing social composition of dairying,
although a threat for increasing milk production, can
also be tapped as a potential. The dairy cooperatives
can shift the focus of their producer membership
towards agricultural labourers, landless, tenants
and such other marginal sections. These households
unlike the better-off are keen to pursue traditional
rural livelihood activities like farming and dairying
at least for one or two more generations given the
poor resource base and limited livelihood options
they have got. Such poor are willing to work and
stay in rural areas for their livelihood subsistence
and consolidation. Dairying can be one of the major
livelihood options that can be promoted for them.

The goal of making dairying inclusive would need
an integrated strategy. The following are some of the
specific initiatives that may be taken in this regard:

- The cooperatives and NGO's must proactively
  identify such poor and promote dairying. Some
  of the exclusionary criteria like minimum pre-
  ownership of livestock need to be relaxed. It would
  be even useful to target the women from these
  groups. This could act as measure of women's
  empowerment especially in the light of feminization
  of rural occupations due to migration and mobility.

- For ensuring linkages, dairy development agencies
  have to tap into programmes like National Rural
  Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and NDP. The NRLM
  is being implemented on a universal basis through
  mobilization of poor women by way of self-help
  groups (SHGs) and their federations having potential
to provide access to credit and various other
  livelihood linkages.

- While there is a growing demand for milk, the
  successful participation of poor would require
effective tapping of the demand potential. This
  would require strengthening and revival of existing
dairy cooperatives in terms of their institutional,
technological and professional capacities. Cooperatives for milk procurement and marketing should continue, there is also need to promote collectives for livestock rearing and production. SHGs and other collectives (formal and informal) may be organized for milk production. This would help reap benefits of scale economies as well overcome any disadvantages faced at individual level for rearing milk animal and obtaining linkages. These production collectives can be given access to uncultivated land and CPRs like waste land, gauchar land, water bodies for supporting grazing and fodder production.

Making dairying inclusive can turn out to be a win-win proposition for the dairy sector and the poor. It can be now or never.